

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

**WASHINGTON COUNTY, CARYVILLE, EBRO VERNON, AND WAUSAU
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Washington County, Florida**

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**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT
WASHINGTON COUNTY, CARYVILLE, EBRO VERNON, AND WAUSAU
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Section M

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Economic Development Element is to describe current and desired economic conditions in Washington County and its municipalities, Caryville, Chipley, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau. The Element should also present forecasts for the county's economic development, select a preferred course of economic development, advance economic goals, design a set of objectives and policies to achieve preferred economic development, and present a strategy for implementing those policies that is consistent and in concert with the county and cities' growth management plans. The ability to achieve such goals relies partially on state, national, and global economic events and policies. Thus, this element will focus primarily on how the county and its municipalities can support and grow their local economies, work to protect themselves from economic downturns, encourage prosperity during periods of economic growth, and attract new economic development throughout the County.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Economic Development Element is an optional element in both the Washington County and City of Chipley Comprehensive Plans, but is a preferred element for the Comprehensive Plan during the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) process. This preference is based on the unique position of the County for participation in Northwest Florida regional growth. Economic Development Elements are to act as a guide for achieving desirable economic development, which in turn fosters improved commerce and quality of life for all residents throughout the county. Although the County and the City of Chipley have separate Comprehensive Plans and apply separately for grants to aid in the development of their Comprehensive Plans, economic information from the City of Chipley will be included in this element.

Section 125.05, F.S., specifically empowers the Board of County Commissioners with the authority to attract and retain business enterprises. Washington County is in a unique position for the opportunity for growth to build a solid economic foundation for future decades. When using all of the available tools, the County will be able to adequately plan for the future of economic development based on the system's capacity to serve future demand. Those tools are:

- GIS Future Land Use Maps
- Future Land Use Element
- Transportation Element
- Housing Element
- Infrastructure Element
- Conservation Element
- Recreation and Open Space Element

- Intergovernmental and Open Space Element
- Capital Improvements Element
- Concurrency Management Element
- Public School Facilities Element

III. DATA AND ANALYSIS

Basis for the Economic Element is the best available data of measurable economic indicators, trend analysis, and assumptions based on the measurable economic trends. Relevant data from the 2000 Census with projections from the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR), the 2006 and 2007 Florida Statistical Abstract, and additional local and other nationally available data sources will form the basis of the data for this element. The economic goals, objectives, and policies are formulated to provide guidelines for achieving economic development consistent with the Comprehensive Plans and builds on the area's many assets.

A. Population Profile of the County

Like all rural communities in recent years, Washington County and its municipalities are experiencing slow growth in the incorporated towns and cities, while growth continues to climb in unincorporated areas of the county (See Table M-1). The annual growth rate of the unincorporated area of the county is higher than the overall county's annual growth rate, which translates to an out-migration of people from the incorporated areas of the county to the unincorporated land, increased growth in the unincorporated areas, or both. This faster growth in the unincorporated and primarily rural areas will translate into rising costs for utility and community services for the county as growth occurs in previously undeveloped areas.

1. Historical Population Growth for the County. For several decades, the County has experienced steady growth as reflected in Table 1. Currently, the County ranks 53rd in population out of 67 counties in Florida. The population of Washington County in 1990 was 16,918 and in 2000, it was 20,973, representing a 24.0 percent increase. Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) estimates the population in 2007 at 22,368, representing a change of 6.7 percent since 2000.

Table M-1. Washington County Population Growth 1950 – 2000			
Year	Population	% of Increase	Yearly Increase Percentage
1950	11,888		
1960	11,249	-5	-0.05%
1970	11,453	2	0.02%
1980	14,509	27	2.70%
1990	16,919	17	1.7%
2000	20,973	24	2.4%
2007—Estimated	23,700	13	1.9%
2010 – Projected	24,800	5	0.05%
2015 – Projected	26,300	6	0.06%
2020 – Projected	27,700	5	0.05%
2030 – Projected	30,200	9	0.09%

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 2005 Estimate, Florida Estimates of Population, Bureau of Economic & Business Research, University of Florida

2. Historical Population Growth for Municipalities. As shown in Table M-2, the town of Wausau has shown modest growth in recent decades. The decline in growth in Caryville between 1990 and 2000 results from the FEMA buyout program of homes located within the floodplains of Caryville. These property owners relocated outside of the town limits of Ebro. There is little new development within Caryville now and this trend is expected to continue in the future.

Ebro, Caryville, and Chipley experienced a slight decline in population during the same time. Despite the population declines from 1990-2000, these municipalities have all grown since 2000, according to the 2007 estimates presented in Table M-2. It is anticipated that the four-lane expansion of SR 79 in combination with the relocation of the Panama City-Bay County International Airport will influence the increased development of both Ebro and Vernon as well as portions of Washington County between Vernon and Ebro along SR 79.

Table M-2. Washington County Population Growth by Municipalities							
Year	Caryville	Chipley	Ebro	Vernon	Wausau	Unincorp County	Washington County Total
1990	631	3,866	255	778	313		16,918
2000	129	3,592	250	705	398	14,773	20,973
2007 (Est.)	238	3,655	259	767	434	16,818	22,368

Source: U. S. Census Bureau and Center for Affordable Housing Shimberg Center

Jurisdiction	2000	2007	2008	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Caryville Permanent Residents	129	238	242	210	181	151	137	132
Chipley Permanent Residents	3,592	3655	3,614	3,509	3,465	3,413	3,350	3,284
Ebro Permanent Residents	250	259	245	249	252	253	251	251
Vernon Permanent Residents	705	767	744	736	744	747	745	746
Wausau	398	434	443	424	454	481	509	529
Municipalities Sub Total	5,074	5,353	5288	5,128	5,096	5,045	4,992	4,942
Unincorporated County Permanent	14,773	16,818	17,169	16,573	18,107	19,557	20,906	22,157
Washington County Permanent	19,874	22,171	22,457	21,701	23,203	24,602	25,898	27,099

Source: Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing, and Washington County Planning Department -- July 2, 2009

3. Age of Population. In 2000, the percentage of persons under the age of 19 in Washington County was 27 percent, compared to 23 percent for the State and 26 percent nationally. The population between the ages of 20 and 64 was 11,184 or 56 percent of the total population (less the institutionalized). Persons over age 65 comprised 17 percent of the population. Corresponding data from 2007 shows that the population cohorts have a stable growth pattern- there were no significant changes in this 5-year period and population groups can be expected to remain basically unchanged in regards to future growth. Table M-4 summarizes the characteristics of the County by age.

Total	0-17	18-34	35-54	65-79	80 and Over
23, 719	5,157	5,232	6,663	2,753	1,046
% of Total Population	22%	22%	28%	12%	4%

BEER, Florida Statistical Abstract 2008

4. Population by Sex. An examination of the number of males and females of Washington County indicates that the ratio of the two sexes varies only slightly from that of the State. The County male population in 2007 was estimated to be 53 percent. The State's male population is at 49 percent. Female population comprises 47 percent of the County as compared to the State's 51 percent. (Table M-4.a)

	Washington County	%	State of Florida	%
Total Population	23,719	100%	18,486,255	100%
Male	12,400	52%	9,081,814	49%
Female	11,300	48%	9,404,441	51%

Source: BEER, Florida Statistical Abstract 2008

5. Race and Ethnicity. The population composition of Washington County remains predominantly white. The percentage of the population that is white in Washington County (82 percent) exceeds that of the state by approximately 6 percent. The County and state have very similar black populations, 13.5 percent and 15.2 percent, respectively. However, a comparison of ethnicity shows that only 2.5 percent of the County's population is of Hispanic descent, whereas over 20 percent of the state's population is Hispanic. This is a significant difference that indicates the economy of the county may vary from that of the larger state; however, as referenced in the Farm workers section below, it can be difficult to determine an accurate count of farm workers.

Table M-5. Population Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2007			
Characteristics	Total Number	Washington County % of Population	Florida % of Population
Race	23,719	100%	100%
White	19,100	81.0%	76.3%
Black	3,300	14.0%	15.2%
Other	1,319	6.0%	3.2%
Ethnicity			
Hispanic	744	3.0%	20.4%
Non-Hispanic	22,975	97.0%	79.2%
Source: BEBR, Florida Statistical Abstract 2008			

6. Special Facilities/Populations. Although the county has a sizeable agricultural economy, much of the crop produced is poultry, cotton, and truck crops. Poultry is shipped via cages on trucks, primarily to processing facilities in DeFuniak Springs by local labor. Cotton and soybeans are mechanically harvested and transported. Watermelons are picked by hand. Migrant farm laborers, mainly Latinos, provide some of the workforce for watermelon harvest. A firm count of these laborers is difficult to obtain, as there are no migrant farm worker housing facilities in the County, but it estimated to be about two hundred individuals during the peak harvest season.

Washington Correctional Institution (WCI) is a 2,491 inmate facility located near SR 77 at Greenhead about ten miles south of Wausau. WCI and Florida Department of Corrections officials are fully responsible for the safety and well being of inmates. This count comes directly from the Washington County Correctional Facility, includes the correctional facility, the new annex, and the Caryville Work Camp.

7. Population Projections. According to BEBR projections through 2030, shown in Table M-6, no significant change in population is expected to occur in Washington County. Growth is expected to continue at a relatively steady rate around 2 percent per year through 2010, after which time the growth rate will decrease to around 1 percent through 2030. The majority of the growth is expected to be in the southeast and southwest sections of the County. There are some development proposals currently that may have some effect on the BEBR projections.

Should it appear that the current medium rate will be exceeded, DCA will be approached again about changing the BEBR rate.

Year	Population	Numerical Change	Total Percentage Change	Total Annual Change
2000	20,973			
2005 Estimate	23,097	2,124	9.2%	1.84%
2010 Projection	24,800	1,703	7.37%	1.47%
2015 Projection	26300	1,500	6.05%	1.21%
2020 Projection	27700	1,400	5.32%	1.06%
2030 Projection	30,200	2,500	9.03%	0.90%
Source: Bureau of Economic & Business Research, University of Florida				

An analysis of the components of population change in Washington County from 1990 to 2000 reveals that 94 percent of the increase in population is due to migration as opposed to natural increase. A further breakdown of the in-migration reveals that in 2000, 74.3 percent of the population gains came from other Florida counties and the remaining 25.7 percent from other U.S. states (Florida Statistical Abstract). This suggests that certain characteristics of Washington County such as the rural character and environment, lack of overcrowding, commitment to a high quality of life, and lower cost of living are attracting new residents from elsewhere in Florida. Therefore, these are all attributes that should be monitored to ensure continued future in-migration.

B. Income

Household income levels are a good economic indicator as they demonstrate the purchasing power and savings capability of each household that in generates funds for investment. The Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration (EDA) considers the measurement of per capita income when it is determining economic distress. To be considered "distressed," an area must have a per capita income equal to 80 percent or less of the U.S. per capita income

Table M-7 presents the poverty status in 2000, as well as recent per capita income data. Washington County's per capita income level is low within the state and the country, at only 61.4 percent of the state and national averages. High per capita income levels are typically found in the southern coastal areas of the state of Florida, while non-coastal counties and cities in north Florida tend to have higher poverty rates and lower per capita income levels. As seen in Table M-7, close 19 percent of all persons in the county are living below the poverty level. The City of Chipley, which is the county seat and most populous area, historically has the highest median household and family income levels, and the lowest poverty level. According to 2006 estimates in the Florida Statistical Abstract, the county's Median Household Income has increased considerably to \$28,518; however, the percentage of people living in poverty remains close to the 2000 rate.

Table M-7. Washington County Poverty Level and Income	
Poverty Status (2005)	Washington County
All persons determined below poverty level	3,855
percent of persons below poverty level	18.8%
Per Capita Income – 2006	Washington County
Per Capita Income	\$22,541
Percent of: US per capita income (\$36,714)	61.4%
State of Florida (\$36,720)	61.4%
Sources: U. S. Census Small area Income and Poverty Estimates for 2005, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2006 PCI	

C. Labor Force and Employment

From 1990 to 2000, the total population for the county grew by approximately 24 percent. During that same time, the labor force has also increased, with a 38 percent gain since 1990. This labor force increase may be attributed to the fact that the largest segment of the population is made up of those aged 20- 65, which comprise the bulk of the work force.

1. Labor Force. The 2007 unemployment rate was 4.1 percent as shown in Table M-8. County unemployment rates are down substantially from high rates in 2001 (5.6 percent) and 2002 (6.1 percent), and the county rate is also lower than the 4.6 percent U.S. average unemployment rate for 2007, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The reduction in unemployment throughout the county and the Washington County’s lower unemployment rate than the United States are good indicators of a strengthening economy in terms of matching the work force with available jobs. In order to further economic growth, the county will need to enhance the skill level of the work force while enticing higher skilled and higher wage jobs to the area. Unemployment varies widely within the county and its municipalities. Current rates show the city of Chipley with a high unemployment rate of 7.5 percent, while the other municipalities of Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau have rates ranging from 5.4 percent to 9.1 percent.

Table M-8. Labor Force -- 2007 Estimates						
	Washington County	Caryville	Chipley	Ebro	Vernon	Wausau
Labor Force	9,512	99	1,501	167	299	133
Employed	9,126	90	1,389	158	282	124
Unemployed	386	9	112	9	17	9
Unemployment Rate	4.1	9.1	7.5	5.4	5.7	6.8
Source: 2007 Annual Averages, AWI Labor Market Information						

2. Employment. In 2000, the diversity of employment within Washington County was divided among the following sectors: Public (36 percent), Retail (18.3 percent), Service (14.2 percent), Construction (6 percent), Transportation and Public Utilities (5. percent), Finance (1.5 percent), Wholesale (1.2 percent), Agriculture (0.9 percent), and Other (17 percent). The high percentage of "public" employment is due to the location of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 3 office in Chipley and Washington Correctional Institution within central Washington County. Compared to the state averages for each of these categories, Washington County relies on the Public sector more heavily than the state, and has a much smaller percentage of their workforce in the service sector.

During the planning period of 2000 – 2010, the major employers in Washington County include WestPoint Home, Washington County School District, Washington County Rehabilitation & Nursing Center, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Wal-Mart, the Washington Correctional Institution, Northwest Florida Community Hospital, and the Washington County Kennel Club (Table M-9). While the county benefits from such large employers, there are risks involved with the reliance on a select few large employers. Should one of these entities, such as the DOT office or WestPoint Home (see additional notes on this employer), be forced to close or scale back production, a large number of employees in the county could find themselves suddenly unemployed. Economic development and growth that fosters a more diverse employment base would help reduce this reliance on a few large employers.

WestPoint Home (West Point Closed July 2009)	711*
Washington County School District	698
Washington Correctional Institution	495
Wal-Mart	400
Northwest Florida Community Hospital	200
Washington County Kennel Club	175
Washington County Rehabilitation & Nursing Center	165
Florida Department of Transportation, District 3	Not available
Source: Washington County Chamber of Commerce	

Previous reductions at this plant resulted in a total workforce of 345 persons at the time of the closure in July 2009. The impact of the closure was resonant in adjacent counties as well as Washington County. Approximately 145 of the job positions lost were allocated to Jackson County residents, 15 to other counties and 185 to Washington County. thereby reducing the overall impact to Washington County.

3. Wages. Washington County employees receive an average wage that is less than the state average. In 2006, the average county wage in Washington County (\$27,262) paid only 71.3 percent of the overall state average wage (\$38,226), according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. This inequity in wages is likely one cause of out-migration of the young, working age population from the county.

The highest paying sector in proportion to the same industry on a state level is the agricultural sector; however, agricultural wages are relatively low statewide. The county has several other low paying economic sectors in comparison to state averages. For example, the wholesale sector in Washington County pays the lowest wholesale wage of all seven counties in the West Florida region.

The sector paying the highest average wage in Washington County is the Transportation sector. Transportation, along with Construction, Finance, and Public sectors all pay average wages that are higher than the county average wage. In contrast, the Retail sector has the lowest average wage in the county and also provides the second highest number of jobs within the county. This exemplifies the need to strengthen the economy by attracting more jobs with higher wages to Washington County.

D. County Housing Profile

A complete and comprehensive housing profile for the County appears in the Housing Element, Section C of this Plan.

E. Sales Tax Collection

Sales tax collection in Washington County has slowly grown from 0.10 percent of the State sales tax receipts in the first quarter, to 0.12 percent of receipts in the last quarter (Table M-10). This growth has been constant, except for the months of July and August. Washington County tax receipts for January were up compared to the previous year, with a 27.7 percent increase.

Table M-10. Washington County Local Option Sales Tax Receipts, 2006				
Month	Washington County	% Change	State	% of State
December	81,021		81,877,550	0.10%
January	73,305	-10.5%	71,775,147	0.10%
February	74,197	1.2%	75,373,843	0.10%
March	84,087	13.3%	84,229,737	0.10%
April	83,926	-0.2%	77,539,375	0.11%
May	80,944	-3.7%	75,036,841	0.11%
June	128,233	58.4%	76,675,695	0.17%
July	42,027	-67.2%	75,614,168	0.06%
August	80,328	91.1%	77,332,173	0.10%
September	78,470	-2.4%	69,065,953	0.11%
October	82,431	5.0%	68,844,624	0.12%
November	87,189	5.8%	73,197,201	0.12%
December	103,453	18.7%	83,526,884	0.12%

Source: Florida State Department of Revenue Office of Research and Analysis

Total yearly sales tax receipts show a steady increase in the amount of county sales tax collected over the last five years (Table M-11). In 1999 there was a slight drop, however this followed a boom year in 2000 that was most likely affected by the construction and opening of the new Wal-Mart in the City

of Chipley. The Super Wal-Mart in Chipley had a 2001 market value of almost \$4,000,000.

Table M-11. Washington County Yearly Sales Tax Receipts		
Year	Sales Tax and Receipts	Percent of Change
1997	\$643,742.87	-
1998	\$741,236.58	15.1%
1999	\$786,298.00	6.1%
2000	\$939,819.74	19.5%
2001	\$904,007.00	-4.0%
2002	\$984,628.00	8.9%
2003	\$1,036,663.00	5.3%
Source: Washington County Financial Records		

F. Physical and Location Characteristics of Washington County and Municipalities

One of the most positive assets for future economic development in Washington County is its centralized location within the panhandle region and its accessibility via numerous thoroughfares. Running east/west through the county are Interstate 10 (I-10), U.S. Highway 90, and SR20. Major north/south routes within the county include SR79, SR77, and SR277. Interstate 10, SR77, US Highway 90, and SR277 all pass through or near the county seat of Chipley, connecting the city and its businesses to nearby markets in all directions. Air service is somewhat limited since the county is currently served by commercial air service via the Panama City-Bay County International Airport, or the Dothan Regional Airport, both of which are located approximately 40 miles away. Tri-County Airport is located just inside Holmes County in Bonifay, but offers only general aviation facilities. CSX railway provides for efficient rail transportation for freight to and from the area. Port Panama City and Foreign Trade Zone #65 located to the south in Panama City provide for long distance port access.

The County has two interstate exits, Exit 104 at Caryville and Exit 120 at Chipley; there is one additional exit within 1.5 miles of the Washington County line (Exit 112 at Bonifay). Exit 104 is in a floodplain and little development can be expected in this area due to the potential for flooding and the large amount of public land ownership. Thus, Exit 120 at Chipley is the primary interchange within Washington County where commercial development has been occurring and is most likely to continue occurring in the future.

Washington County Industrial Park is a 220-acre industrial park currently being developed between Highway 90 and SR 273, directly adjacent to the city limits of Chipley. The Industrial Park is located within the State Enterprise Zone, as is the current Chipley Industrial Park, and therefore eligible occupants may qualify for certain incentives for new capital investment and employment opportunities. The CSX railway will also serve the new industrial park.

G. City of Chipley

Chipley is the county seat of Washington County and is located in the northeast quadrant of the county. This gives the city access to markets in both Holmes and Jackson Counties, as well as the remainder of Washington County. The city is served by many of the county transportation alternatives,

including I-10, SR77, which provides a link to the Panama City area, two east/west arterials (US 90 and SR 273), and CR 77A, which acts as a major collector. The CSX rail line also bisects the city. The Chipley Industrial Park (Tommy McDonald), currently the only occupied industrial park in Washington County, is located in southwest Chipley. The Industrial Park is owned by the city and consists of 156 acres which are 60 percent occupied. The current Tommy McDonald Park is located within a State Enterprise Zone, and therefore property tax exemptions may be available for qualified manufacturing projects and distribution facilities. This Industrial Park currently has electric, gas, water, and sewer infrastructure already in place to serve its occupants. It is anticipated that future facilities may require fiber optic services, currently only offered in one Industrial Park in the Northwest Florida EDD. Therefore, providing this service could make the McDonald and Washington County Industrial Parks more attractive to business relocating to the region.

In addition, it was recently announced that the Port of Panama City, Florida has authorized a Foreign Trade Zone encompassing the Tommy McDonald Industrial Park and the Washington County Industrial Park located in Chipley. Authorization is still needed from Washington D.C.; pending that approval, businesses operating or planning to operate in these two industrial parks can now apply for Foreign Trade Zone status.

The Washington County Chamber of Commerce has indicated that the Foreign Trade Zone will enable the area to better compete in the global environment by enhancing the competitiveness of U.S.-based businesses and helping to lower trade-related costs.

IV. COMMUNITY PUBLIC SERVICES

Community services are an important factor affecting decisions related to business and industry location. Education is of particular significance for community economic development today. More and more jobs require good education and a high level of skills. Gains in productivity and maintaining a competitive edge increasingly rely on the availability of a well educated, fully trained and flexible labor force. It is crucial that Washington County maintains high quality educational facilities and resources, including workforce training.

As society becomes more affluent, demands for recreation and security are also increasing. Therefore, the availability of recreational facilities and public protection facilities and services has become an important factor that is considered as part of the economic development process.

A. Quality of Life

Of importance to all residents of Washington County is a high quality of life, which includes both time for work and quality time to spend with family and friends. Washington County is fortunate to be positioned both geographically and economically for such a high quality of life. The unhurried lifestyle gives growing families the opportunity to instill strong values and build spiritual foundations for their children. It also provides for an ideal location for retirees who are ready to leave the hustle and bustle of their working lives. Additionally, Washington County has the gift of great natural beauty. Washington County derives its heritage from the beauty of the land. This fact is reflected in its resilient and resourceful citizens who know the importance of neighbor helping neighbor.

A strong commitment to maintaining a high quality of life by local government provides the vehicle for both economic growth and personal tranquility for all citizens, and be strongly considered in all economic development actions and decisions.

B. Education

Approximately 3,400 K-12 students are enrolled in two elementary, two middle, and two high schools. The schools are located in two towns, Chipley and Vernon. Chipley is located in the northern section and Vernon is located in the center of the county. The Washington County Public School District also serves approximately 600 post-secondary students in one technical center, the Washington-Holmes Technical Center located in Chipley. Education excellence is of paramount importance in Washington County, which currently boasts an 81.8 percent graduation rate with 59.7 percent of students going on to higher education studies.

Washington County has numerous institutions of higher education within easy reach: Chipola Jr. College located in nearby Marianna, Florida State University's Panama City Campus, and Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City are only a short drive away.

The Panhandle Area Education Consortium (PAEC) is headquartered in Washington County. PAEC is a regional resource for school districts; it provides excellent teacher training and other resources for over 20 member and participating school districts throughout northwest Florida. PAEC is currently developing plans for a state-of-the-art teaching academy. The PAEC also has state of the art video and audio studios along with a dedicated online TV access bandwidth to air its teacher training programs.

C. Medical

Northwest Florida Community Hospital is a 59-bed facility comprised of a 25 bed critical access hospital and a 34-bed skilled nursing unit. In addition, the hospital operates 3 primary care clinics, a surgical clinic, a home health agency, 2 physician office buildings, a health and wellness facility, and Washington County Emergency Medical Services (EMS). As part of its critical access program, the hospital has 22 acute care beds banked with the State of Florida for future expansion. Northwest Florida Community Hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations and is certified as both a Medicare and Medicaid provider.

The hospital offers a broad range of services: medical and surgical in-patient care; 24-hour physician staffed emergency room; full-service imaging department; out-patient surgery; rural health clinics; women's health services; physical, occupational and speech therapy; respiratory therapy; cardio-pulmonary services; laboratory services; dialysis unit; short- and long-term care facilities; and home health services.

D. Recreation.

Washington County has a wealth of recreational resources for just about everyone. The numerous lakes and springs in Washington County create a background of natural beauty for all outdoor activities. The Choctawhatchee River and Econfina Creek are excellent canoeing, tubing and rafting sites. Falling Waters State Recreation Area provides excellent opportunities for hiking, bird

watching, swimming and camping. There are numerous other camping and/or boating sites such as N.W. Florida Campground and Pine Log State Forest. Falling Waters Country Club and Sunny Hills Country Club are public golf courses for the serious duffer. For the dog racing enthusiast, Ebro Greyhound Race Track is located in the southwest corner of Washington County. Numerous community parks provide both active and passive recreational activities. Fishing, hiking, swimming, water-skiing, hunting, bird watching, snorkeling and scuba diving all may be enjoyed in Washington County.

A complete and comprehensive housing profile for the County can be found in the Recreational and Open Space Element, Section F of this Plan.

E. Public Safety.

Washington County Sheriff's Department provides law enforcement services for all areas outside the city limits of Chipley; within the city limits of Chipley, the City of Chipley Police Department has jurisdiction. The State Highway Patrol also provides law enforcement services within the county, primarily related to traffic control.

The Chipley Fire Department provides fire protection services for the City of Chipley as well as for the areas immediately surrounding the city. The remaining areas of the county are served by several volunteer fire departments.

F. Public Utilities

1. Washington County and Municipalities. Since Washington County is a rural county, it is not practical for the county to supply utility services to the entire county. Therefore, water and sewer service are not currently provided within the unincorporated portions of the County, except for an area contiguous to the City of Chipley and the Sunny Hills Planned Unit Development. Elsewhere, county residents are primarily required to use septic tanks and well water.

With the exception of Ebro, municipalities are the primary providers of potable water services in Washington County. Within the Sunny Hills area, there is also not a potable water system. Since the availability of potable water services could allow for an increased density of land use, thus facilitating development, the county should carefully plan with the municipalities and private water companies as to how and where water services are installed in the future. This will facilitate orderly development in municipalities and adjacent unincorporated areas.

In regards to wastewater, Vernon is utilizing a new sprayfield as the location for treated effluent from its WWTP with the end product being hay that is utilized in construction projects for the town and the County. The City of Chipley is working to address issues with its WWTP; these are anticipated to be resolved with the completion of the plant upgrade and installation of the city's spray field by 2010.

Three different companies provide electrical service to county residents. These include West Florida Electric Co-op, Gulf Coast Electric Co-op, and Gulf Power Company. AT&T supplies telephone service to residents throughout Washington County. Modernization of

facilities and ensuring that the County has capacity for these services is a key component of economic development programs.

2. City of Chipley. Utility services offered within the City of Chipley include water, sewer, gas, and trash collection services. In 1998, water usage records indicated that the city water system was operating at 53 percent of its permitted annual allocation. Electric and telephone services are provided by the same providers as in the other areas of the county. Further discussion of the city's public facility capacities and Levels of Service is in the Public Facilities and Services section of the Comprehensive Plan.

V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Numerous conditions and opportunities exist in Washington County that will serve to support economic development in Washington County. Generally, within the County, there is a high quality lifestyle combined with a low cost of living. The continuing emergence of the Emerald Coast as a desirable location for housing and economic development serves as factor attracting future growth. A reliable and dependable workforce has the potential of increasing by an ongoing immigration of population to the County. The County is centrally located in the Northwest Florida Region with strong links to national and regional highway systems. The Chipley Industrial Park offers full service sites for manufacturers and light industry. A second industrial park site of 220 acres is under development. The County has successfully blended a rural quality of life with ever-expanding business amenities. Both County and municipal governments have embraced one-stop permitting, property tax abatements, and partial waiver of occupational licenses by the City of Chipley. The County and other municipalities has no occupational licenses. The Economic Development Council for Washington County has been successful in attracting quality businesses and industries and employment opportunities to the County are encouraged to locate in Washington County.

A. Facilities Projected to Affect Economic Growth in Washington County

1. Panama City-Bay County International Airport. The present airport facility is approximately 30 miles to the south. Construction began in 2007 on a new regional airport facility located approximately 12 miles to the south with a completion date of 2010. It is anticipated that this will have a positive effect on growth for Washington County, especially Ebro.
2. Port Panama City. Port Panama City and Foreign Trade Zone #65 is located 46 miles south of Chipley, in Bay County. This is a deepwater terminal in St. Andrew Bay. There is a wide variety of port equipment available, making the handling of freight more efficient. Port Panama City is a licensed Foreign-Trade Zone. (FTZ). This facility will handle more containerized cargo and provide the capacity for shipment to Europe of wood pellets produced in Jackson County. The widening of the Panama Canal in Central America will provide access for Asian trade to the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic ports.
3. West Bay Sector Plan. The West Bay Sector Plan for 75,000 acres in north-central Bay County is the state's largest Optional Sector Plan. The majority of the land (owned by the St. Joe Company) was used for silviculture. The Sector Plan, developed through a series of public forums and approved by the Bay County Board of County Commissioners in 2002, established a future land use overlay zone for the long-range growth of the county for the

next one hundred years. The largest single land use (53 percent) of the planning area was designated as preservation, an area that includes 62.5 square miles of West Bay shoreline and watershed, making it one of the most protected estuarine water bodies in Florida. (Overlay zones are described in the Land Use Planning and Development chapter and Estuarine Plans in the Coastal Planning chapter.) Other land uses include 4,000 acres for the relocation of the Panama City-Bay County International Airport to the north of West Bay, a 3,700-acre Regional Employment Center, an Airport Business Center, and residential uses of varying densities. A 9,608-acre tract of land owned by the St. Joe Company will serve as the mitigation site for wetlands and habitat impacts associated with the airport relocation

4. CSX Railway. The railroad runs through Chipley (one quarter of a mile north of the intersection of SR 77 and US 90) and Caryville (one fifth mile north of the intersection of US 90 and CR 179) in an East-West direction, connecting Washington County to Jacksonville in the east, Bay County to the south, and Pensacola to the west. Other points of connection include Orlando and South Florida via AMTRAK service from Chipley; however, this service was suspended following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This service may be restored in 2008. The location of a industrial development in a second industrial park (Washington County Industrial Park) has the potential to create a rail siding that will allow access from the park, providing the County with a strategic point for which to load/unload freight.
5. Highway Transportation System. One of the more positive assets of Washington County for future economic development is its centralized location within the panhandle region and its accessibility via the numerous thoroughfares serving the area. Running east/west through the county are Interstate 10, U.S. Highway 90, and SR 20. Major north/south routes within the county include SR 79, SR 77, and SR 277. Interstate 10, SR77, US Highway 90, and SR277 all pass through or near the county seat of Chipley, connecting the city and its businesses to nearby markets in all directions. The county has two interstate exits (Exit 104 at Caryville and Exit 120 at Chipley) and one within 1.5 miles of the Washington County line (Exit 112 at Bonifay). Exit 104 is in a floodplain and little development can be expected in this area due to the potential to flood and amount of public land ownership. This leaves Exit 120 at Chipley as the primary interchange where commercial development has been occurring and is also most likely to occur in the future within Washington County.

While the current transportation system generally provides transportation needs for the County, there is a need for additional corridors of travel between the east and west sections of the County. These corridors will serve to discourage future urban sprawl, provide added potential for implementation of energy-efficient land use patterns accounting for existing and future electric power generation and transmission systems, promote greenhouse gas reduction strategies [reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT)] and strengthen economic development thus diversifying the region's economy.

- a. Clayton Road. Clayton Road is a partially paved road that extends from SR 77 to the Jackson County border. The unpaved portion extends about four miles from SR 79 to CR 277. Completing the paving of this road will provide a more efficient means of travel to and from places of employment in the County and a means for quicker evacuation of a heavily populated area in the event of natural disaster.

- b. Elkcam Boulevard Extension. The second such targeted area is the proposed Elkcam Boulevard extension beginning at SR 77 and intersecting SR 231 in Jackson County. This road has the potential of becoming a major connector between the east and central sections of the County. A portion of the roadway from SR 77 to the east is paved, and will be upgraded to meet current levels of service for added growth. In addition to integrating existing sections of the road some new sections will need to be constructed as well.
- c. SR 77 and SR 79 Connector. There is a need for a southern route within the County to provide a direct route between SR 77 and SR 79. With the potential development of the Knight Family Trust property and resulting Sector Plan, this need is more clearly understandable when the potential for resulting economic growth is considered. The approximate location of this roadway will be the midpoint between Vernon and Ebro.

B. Housing Development

A period with economic development opportunities driven by external activities has the potential to open a window of economic development for Washington County, and has significant opportunities already underway within the County. The Economic Development Element includes residential development as an economic stimulus due to the significant up-front investment required for new dwelling construction, new jobs creation that last for a period of years with above county-average wages. New housing development also increases the ad valorem, sales, and gas taxes that make county-provided services more affordable. Washington County land costs are below surrounding counties but the County is well position by the desirable community character, the terrain, natural features as well as reasonable commuting times and road networks to provide housing for people employed outside the County.

C. Knight Family Trust Property – Sector Plan

Located in the southeastern section of Washington County, the Knight Family Trust property consists of 47,431 acres in Washington County and another 900 acres in the Town of Ebro. Immediately south SR 20 is another 7,000 acres in Bay. The resulting sector plan is expected or provide land uses that will attract residential, commercial and industrial development. DCA has approved of the developer and the County pursuing an Authorization Agreement to prepare the Optional Sector Plan that must be approved by DCA.

D. Other Development within the County

Other residential development is pending completion of the approval process. One is a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) on 1,883 acres in the southeast area of the County near the border with Bay, Jackson and Washington counties. Another is an approved mixed use development of 624 homes 2.5 miles south of Vernon west of FL Hwy 79. Construction is to begin in the near future on the rail spur that will support the development of the Washington County Industrial Park (Chipley). The proposed concrete products plant will provide 150 above average pay positions. Infrastructure construction will start on the new Spring Ridge development with 6,000 platted lots

within the existing Sunny Hills platted subdivision following approval. Small businesses continue to open and the currently slowly growing population.

VI. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The economic development strategies employed by Washington County and the municipalities located therein should be directed toward attracting outside capital investment and/or location of new business and industry to the area. This should focus on attracting business and industries that pay wages equal to or above the current average wages paid in the area. Focus should be places on fostering an environment that promotes the investment of capital into the local economy as well as spending by local residents and business owners so that more dollars earned in Washington County remain in Washington County.

A. General Strategic Plan for Economic Development

A strategic plan for economic development must lay out a vision of the county as an emerging economic force. The vision must focus on business development opportunities in green building, profession and business services, and industry. This vision must be supported by the establishment of a countywide public/private development partnership, attraction and development of talent to support targeted sectors, support of local higher education and research opportunities, as well as a continued focus on protecting the county's unique character and sense of place.

1. Improve Competitive Position. The general welfare and competitive position of Washington County must be improved to support economic development while building the financial foundation for the future. This can be done by providing an adequate supply of land for commercial, industrial, and residential uses through the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and the Land Development Code. An adequate supply of land use, development of an infrastructure plan that will support economic development in designated areas of the County, subject to available funding will be needed. Roadways, water, sewer, electricity and technological infrastructure are a must to attract and retain solid economic-based industries. Using the local vocational technical schools and junior colleges, the workforce needs to be enhanced and expanded to accommodate proposed economic development.
2. Economic Diversity and Activity. Traditional economic development focuses on place-based industrial recruiting and job creation as a means to stimulate economic growth. Generally, this has worked, but the County and private partners must enhance and expand the economic diversity and activity (recreational, educational, good quality lifestyle) in Washington County by retaining the existing business base and attracting new businesses that create new employment opportunities in order to provide a stronger, balanced, and stable economy that will be less susceptible to economic cycles.
3. Growth Using State-Level Programs. A positive business environment can be created by active participation in the state-level programs authorized by the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development, with special attention to processes, support, and funding available through the designation as a Rural County of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC).

4. Economic Development Organizations. A team effort involving government entities, civic organizations, businesses and community leadership and private citizens who represent all segments of the population in all aspects of promoting economic development in a coordinated manner should form the main core of economic development. A Economic Development Group for Washington County, generally to be comprised of a representative of the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber's Economic Development Council, the Tourist Development Council, elected representatives representing the Board, the City of Chipley, municipalities with Enterprise Zones, the Washington County Planner, and three (3) members of the general public is recommended to serve general planning group to promote and encourage commercial development in Washington County. The committee will be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners and given a specific mission and time schedule for the initial report and a final report.
 - a. Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce heads the economic development efforts in Washington County. The organization is a proactive, non-political partnership of business, community and government leaders that work toward developing a balanced economy, advance economic development and improve the general quality of life in the County.
 - b. Washington County Economic Development Council. The Washington County Economic Development Council is the economic and industrial development committee of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce. It is composed of chamber members who work steadily for a strong and well funded economic development to support the efforts to create new jobs and payroll. With some success over the past years, funding has been a limited factor in attracting new economic development to the County.
 - c. Tourist Development Council. The Washington County Tourist Development Council (TDC) has an active marketing campaign to attract tourist and residents to the County to attend various events sponsored by the TDC. The Watermelon Festival in Chipley, the Possum Festival in Wausau, and the newest event, the Vernon Bridge Festival in Vernon are a few of the events that receive promotional funding and support from the TDC.

B. Mechanisms to Promote Strategies

Although there are many mechanisms that can be employed to promote economic development strategies, some of the immediate and applicable are as follows:

1. Education and Training. Support the training and education of the local citizens and workforce. Ensure that adequate infrastructure is available to meet the needs of business and industry as well as residents relocating to the area
2. Promotion of Funding. Promote increased funding of local, state and national initiatives directed toward assisting with the economic development of the area and seek to acquire such funds

3. Preservation of Lifestyle. Promote and preserve the positive quality of life factors that currently exist in Washington County
4. Expansion and Retention of Businesses. Strive to enhance and improve intergovernmental coordination with a focus on supporting the expansion and retention of business and industries
5. Appropriate Land Use. Encourage growth to occur in a responsible manner in areas of the County best suited to support economic development while ensuring property rights protection

C. Strategic Economic Support Programs

The following federal, state and local programs are designed to support the implementation of economic development activities.

1. Federal Federal initiatives concerning economic development planning activities occur primarily through the Economic Development Districts designated and funded by the Economic Development Administration. Some planning also occurs through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) via the Consolidated Plan that is required of entitlement communities that receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding directly from HUD. HUD generally requires local governments to prepare a five-year plan and one-year action plans. The focus of CDBG funding for Washington County is housing rehabilitation and down payment assistance.

The Small Business Administration provides a number of financial assistance programs for small businesses and disaster assistance loans.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development division offers several loan and grant programs that are beneficial to communities in the region. Some of these programs, such as Rural Water and Waste Disposal Loans and Grants and Community Facility Loans, can be used for infrastructure projects. Other programs, such as the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program, are intended to help a specific business become established or expand.

2. State. To increase economic diversification, the State of Florida has placed economic development at the local level rather than a state level.
 - a. Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC). The Governor has designated Washington County as a "Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern". By being a RACEC, Washington County has better access to government programs that ultimately benefit the citizens by creating more economic opportunities. The RACEC initiative allows the Governor, through the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), more flexibility in applying criteria requirements or similar provisions of any economic development incentive. REDI is a multi-agency initiative, led and coordinated by the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development (OTTED), which assists rural communities in solving problems that affect their fiscal, economic or community viability.

- b. Rural Job Tax Credit. A Rural Job Tax Credit is an incentive for eligible businesses located in one of Florida's 33 rural counties to create new jobs. The tax credit provides for \$1,000 per qualified job and can only be taken against either the Florida Corporate Income Tax or the Florida Sales and Use Tax. Five million dollars of tax credits may be approved in a calendar year. These tax credits are provided to encourage meaningful employment opportunities that will improve the quality of life of those employed and to encourage economic expansion of new and existing businesses in rural areas of Florida.
 - c. Rural Catalyst Project. The Rural Economic Development Catalyst Project, established in 2004, works to draw new industries to rural areas of critical concern to the state. Since 2004, private- and public-sector entities have been provided the opportunity to work cooperatively on the Rural Economic Development Catalyst Project. With financial backing from state lawmakers, the project's goal is to recruit high-growth, high-wage, capital-intensive industries to Florida's 33 Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC). Catalyst grants help support infrastructure or needs to help get businesses into the area.
 - d. Federal Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Zone. The HUB Zone Empowerment Contracting Program was enacted in 1997 as Title VI of Public Law 105-135 to provide Federal contracting assistance for qualified Small and Minority Owned Business concerns located in historically under-utilized business zones, and non-metropolitan areas which were identified as qualified census tracts. All of Washington County has been designated as a HUB Zone. This program provides for both sole-source and competitive set-asides of Federal contracts to companies that are headquartered and doing business in a geographic area designated as a HUB zone. The law requires that, in addition to being headquartered in a HUB Zone, 35 percent of a contractor's employees must be HUB Zone residents. Firms cannot self-certify HUB Zone status. They must register with and be approved by, the Small Business Administration.
 3. Enterprise Zones. Enterprise Zones are specific geographic areas targeted for economic revitalization. The Florida Enterprise Zone program offers financial incentives to businesses located in designated areas found in urban and rural communities. Portions of Chipley, Vernon and Ebro have received designation as Enterprise Zones (Figures M-1 through M-3). These incentives are offered to encourage private investment in the zones as well as employment opportunities for the area's residents. Businesses locating in the designated Enterprise Zones may qualify for one or more of the following:
 - a. Jobs Creation Tax Credit. Credit available to Corporations Only against corporate income tax for wages paid to new zone resident employees (in new fulltime job) and credit of 30 percent of wages paid to new zone resident employees. If 20 percent or more of permanent fulltime employees are zone residents, the credit is 45 percent. Credit may be available for 24 consecutive months with 5-year carry-forward.

- b. Business Machinery and Equipment Sales Tax Refunds. This is refund on sales tax paid on the purchase of new and used qualified depreciable business property with a minimum sales price of \$5,000 per unit. Credit is possible of the lesser of 97 percent of sales tax paid or \$10,000 if 20 percent or more of employees are zone residents.
- c. Building Materials Sales Tax Refund. The sales tax refund is available to businesses or individuals for sales tax paid on the purchase of building materials used on new construction or to rehabilitate real property located in the Enterprise Zone. Credit of 97 percent of FL sales and use up to a maximum of \$5,000 OR credit of 97 percent of Florida sales & use tax up to a maximum of \$10,000 if 20 percent or more of employees are zone residents.
- d. Property Tax Credit for Jobs Creation. Only eligible new, expanded or rebuilt corporations qualify for the credit. The facility must be located in an Enterprise Zone to allow a credit against Florida corporate income tax equal to 96 percent of ad valorem taxes paid. The maximum is \$25,000 annually or a maximum of \$50,000 annually if 20 percent or more of employees are zone residents.
- e. Electrical Energy Tax Credit. This is a credit of 5 percent of a municipal tax exemption is available to qualified businesses (new, renovated, remodeled, rehabilitated or rebuilt) located in an Enterprise Zone. Exemption of 50 percent of municipal tax paid for electricity or exemption of 100 percent of municipal tax paid for electricity, if 20 percent or more of employees are zone residents and is available for 5 years.
- f. Sales Tax Refund for Jobs Creation. This refund allows businesses a monthly credit against sales tax wages paid to new, fulltime, zone resident employees. Credit of 30 percent of wages paid to new zone resident employees or credit of 45 percent of wages paid to new employees, if 20 percent or more of employees are zone residents and available for 24 months, with no carry-forward.

D. Summary of Economic Growth

In any community, economic development requires coordination with multiple agencies and programs. A working relationship with other organizations and entities is required to accomplish successful economic development. County planning staffs are available to work with the Washington County Development Council who will actively pursue agencies that may be able to support County economic development goals and objective. The Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) and other elements of the Plan should be utilized to ensure that the greatest opportunity will be extended toward the concept of effective economic growth within the County. Other initiatives will include the following.

- 1. Educational and Workforce Programs. Coordination with the Board of Education and state workforce programs can provide education and training opportunities that will add to the sustainability of and effective workforce. This sustainability will serve to increase the capabilities of the local labor resources thereby attracting new industry and creating new jobs.

2. Coordination with Municipal Governments. Coordination with municipal governments in the adoption of new ordinances and regulations that will serve to to implement tax incentive programs that become available. These tax incentives will serve to attract new businesses offering above-average job opportunities and willing to invest in Washington County facilities.
3. Cooperation with Developers. Cooperation with industrial, commercial, and residential developers will encourage new construction and job creation throughout the County. Innovative land use categories that are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and updated planning may also prove to provide a more efficient method of development and life-style.
4. Outreach to Other Economic Resources. Coordination with the Bay County Economic Development Alliance, the Jackson County Development Council, Inc., and other similar regional entities has the potential to maximize the economic opportunities for Washington County. The Port of Panama City Port Authority is an important resource and the County Economic Development Council should serve as the liaison to establishing marketing where possible. The Bay County/Panama City International Airport Authority has the potential to enhance the opportunities for the Enterprise Zones, the County-wide Federal Hub Zone, and the pending Foreign Trade Zone located in Washington County.

E. Economic Development Attractions

Many advantages exist to encourage economic growth in Washington County. The County and interested organizations will continue to promote the County as a unique place to establish roots, both residential and commercial. Using a team effort of government officials, civic organizations, and private citizens, the County will use the following advantages to work with local, regional, national, and world businesses to create a viable economic economy to serve the County for years to come.

- National collegiate sports championships, a competitive cost of living, golf and a warm, sunny climate are just a few of quality of life examples that define Washington County. Miles of pristine beaches to the south and low local tax burdens make for good living, satisfying work, and good conditions to raise a family.
- The area has the infrastructure necessary to support businesses, including Interstate 10 (running east-west across the entire region), a deep water seaport, and commercial airports and public airports strategically spaced across the region ensure that commercial air service is never more than an hour away
- The region has a strong government and military influence that has developed a highly-skilled labor force. In addition, the presence of well-known educational institutions and research centers such as Florida State University, University of West Florida and the University of ensure the presence of a highly qualified talent pool
- An increase in the belief of the general population of Washington County that the County can be or is prepared for economic growth

- The pending agreement of the Knight Family Trust sector plan within the County to plan for the future development of 55,000 acres of land in the southeast adjacent to Bay County
- Status as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern is vital to economic development as is three Enterprise Zones designations. The pending status of the Foreign Trade Zone will improve the overall status of the County once approved.
- The Bay County/Panama City International Airport Authority has the potential to enhance the opportunities for the Enterprise Zones, the County-wide Federal Hub Zone, and the pending Foreign Trade Zone located in Washington County.
- Development interest, such as the new concrete plant in the new Washington County Industrial Park, may serve as a tool to attract further commercial investment in the County.
- Proposed development of regional impacts and other planned unit developments that are pending approval, may offer alternatives to lifestyles that will attract retirees and professional to Washington County.

F. Economic Development Obstacles

While many advantages exist for economic development, obstacles exist to overcome during the future planning horizon. Many of these negative factors can be mitigated with a combined effort on the part of government officials, civic organizations, and private citizens. Some obstacles to overcome are:

- Lack of sufficient centralized water and wastewater treatment services. The lack of these services increases the threat of groundwater pollution thru the use of septic tanks, and currently the absence of a plan that identifies and prioritizes the needs.
- A significant portion of the skilled labor force employed outside of the County makes filling some new positions difficult to fill for new or existing employers, slowing the time to fill vacancies.
- The secondary road transportation infrastructure extends travel time for employees and employers.
- Due to limited funding and the decrease in ad valorem taxes within the County, there are limited provisions of urban services to include water, sewer, fire, emergency medical services, and stormwater management.
- The challenging environment of the housing market, not only in Washington County, but in Florida

- The necessity and desirability of shopping in other locations (Panama City, Dothan or Marianna) for major items not available on the local economy.
- Funding for support of infrastructure to promote economic development is lacking.

VII. CONSIDERATION AND REVIEW OF OTHER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ELEMENTS

A. Background and Overview

State rules require that all elements of the Comprehensive Plan be consistent. Therefore, the goals, objectives, and policies adopted in the Economic Element should be consistent with plan elements that address related issues.

B. Consistency Review

The following presents an analysis of the consistency of the other elements of the Washington County Comprehensive Plan with the impacts created by the Economic Element.

1. **Land Use Element.** This element is the center of the plan as it coordinates and controls the planning efforts and activities that will happen in Washington County. The intent is to direct the growth and development of Washington County consistent with capital improvements and management of natural resources. It is important to address growth issues without compromising quality of life. This element should prevent sprawl and help direct development to the most suitable areas. Future planning strategy should ensure there is an adequate amount of land designated for commercial and industrial use.
2. **Capital Improvements Element.** The element provides guidance on how Washington County will provide public facilities and serves for existing and future residential and commercial development. The element also addresses how the improvements will be funded and provides policy guidance on use of local government revenues, development's proportionate share, grants and other sources. Special emphasis is placed on searching for grants monies as a main source of feasible funding.
3. **Infrastructure Element.** This element provides the basis for better public facilities management and aquifer recharge in part and fosters the increased understanding of the hydrology and geology of Washington County, providing a broad spectrum for which potential economic development can be based. The element furthers aquifer protection, encourages more reuse of treated wastewater, promotes water conservation design and landscaping practices, encourages central potable water and wastewater treatment plants, and promotes cooperation among service providers to maximize efficiency and minimize waste. Expansion of water, sewer, and stormwater management services will be required for proper economic and industrial park development where the facilities will meet the needs of potential occupants. These needs will be planned and included in the Capital Improvements Element as they are identified.

4. Housing Element. The Housing Element notes that the lack of adequate affordable housing is a problem within the county. This issue is due to the limited income of the population rather than a lack of available land or construction. Housing programs such as SHIP, CDBG, and HUD are being employed to make progress towards improving local housing conditions. These efforts, coupled with economic development initiatives that bring businesses to the area, improving the income base, should contribute to an increase in the demand for high quality affordable housing.
5. Transportation Element. The transportation element appears to be generally consistent with the Economic Development Element. In the future, the transportation element should identify, prioritize and provide funding mechanisms such that the improvements to the county's secondary and local roadway system can be expedited.
6. Intergovernmental Coordination Element. The Intergovernmental Coordination Element is consistent with the Economic Element. To ensure future consistency, the county as well as all municipalities, should continue to maintain a joint comprehensive plan as well as a one-stop building permitting process.
7. Public Schools Facilities Element. This element ensures the availability of public schools and the adequacy of school facilities at adopted levels of service (LOS) concurrent with the impacts of development. Ensuring concurrency of the school systems will ultimately serve to support economic development by developing, retaining and attracting talent to the local area.
8. Concurrency Management Element. Application of the policies of this element will ensure the availability of public facilities and the adequacy of those facilities at adopted levels of service (LOS) concurrent with the impacts of economic development. The infrastructure will include improved potable water and wastewater treatment quality, maintained air quality, stormwater treatment, and maintained adequate traffic flow.
9. Recreation and Open Space Element. This element identifies the community's needs and priorities for the acquisition, development, and long-term maintenance of an adequate parks and recreation system. This element also fosters the development of a comprehensive greenway, equestrian, and a bikeways system that protects natural resources, retention of scenic value, greenhouse gas reduction. The existence of these type facilities and the delivery of recreations services, trails and environmental land will attract both visitors and new industry to the County.
10. Conservation Element. The Conservation Element will provide a framework for the ongoing monitoring, management, and use of the County's natural resources. Washington County is committed to protecting its natural resources and recognizes the critical role of the natural environment in maintaining the quality of life enjoyed by Lake County residents. The County's rural atmosphere, beautiful lakes, and woodlands will continue to attract new residents, businesses, and visitors.

VII. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR WASHINGTON COUNTY AND THE MUNICIPALITIES OF CARYVILLE, EBRO, VERNON AND WAUSAU

The Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan is an optional element with the purpose of describing current and desired economic conditions in Washington County and its municipalities of Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau. The following represents the Economic Development Element Goals, Objectives and Policies of Washington County and the municipalities of Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau. The Goals, Objectives, and Policies have been developed in keeping with the character, conditions, both environmental and social, and desires of the community. These goals, objectives and policies address the establishment of a long-term directive for promoting economic development and the courses of actions the County will undertake to meet those expectations.

GOAL 1: To support and promote balanced economic growth by strengthening neighborhoods and communities, expanding the availability of educational and training opportunities, increasing the tax base, improving the opportunities for existing businesses, and promoting and encouraging the participation of all citizens.

Objective 1: The County and municipalities will create and maintain an economic development program with related activities that will strive to achieve diversified economic growth and a balanced economic base.

Policy 1-1: The County will develop and maintain a list of targeted private and public sectors that are most suitable for the current potential assets of the County and municipalities.

Policy 1-2: In attracting new businesses and expanding existing businesses, the County will stress the availability of current residents in the labor market, including semi-retired residents. Where practical, the County will assist in advising residents of job opportunities, including opportunities for job sharing by semi-retired residents.

Policy 1-3: There will be positive efforts to establish an incentive program to redirect new economic development into existing vacant buildings within central business districts (CBD) to hinder commercial sprawl and to maintain an active commercial core and tax base in all municipalities and the other areas in the County in need of redevelopment.

Objective 2: By the end of 2010, the County and municipalities will prepare and maintain an inventory of land (including finished sites) appropriate for development of employment uses, as well as inventory of finished and available building space.

Policy 2-1: The County and municipalities will annually review the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) of the Comprehensive Plan, along with the land development regulations, to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of vacant land available for various types of employment oriented land uses, and that such land is reasonably capable of development in a timely manner. The sufficiency review of available employment-oriented land uses will include light industrial, industrial, commercial, and residential land use designations.

Policy 2-2: Designations for land uses to light industrial, industrial, commercial, and residential land uses will be coordinated with property owners and developers using the amendment process as established in Chapter 163, F. S.

Policy 2-3: Designations for land use shall be made in conjunction with environmental and conservation elements to minimize impacts on designated environmentally sensitive areas, conservation areas, protected springs, or other significant environment resources.

Policy 2-4: All existing land uses, industrial parks, and commercial parks will be protected from encroachment of incompatible adjacent land uses.

Policy 2-5: The County and municipalities will continue to monitor and participate in discussions regarding the extension of transportation facilities and services to the community, including rail transit services, and will maintain the Plan to support the development of such facilities and services.

Policy 2-6: The County and municipalities will continue to provide for the development of a tourist and travel oriented business area adjacent to the I-10/SR 77 interchange.

Policy 2-7: In cooperation with the City of Chipley, the County will work with the City of Chipley to facilitate the preparation and implementation of a development plan for the new 220 acre Washington County Industrial Park, and will seek appropriate funding to support planning, design, infrastructure, and development costs.

Policy 2-8: Commercial land use shall be encouraged in concentrated commercial districts and along the commercial corridors of SR 90, SR 77, SR 79, and SR 20.

Policy 2-9: The County will encourage commercial and industrial development adjacent to existing industrial and commerce parks or commercial areas to further concentrate these land uses within the County.

Policy 2-10: The County will continue to identify large parcels of land that are appropriate for County ownership for development as diverse economic development opportunities.

Objective 3: Provide enhanced opportunities for the County and municipalities workforce to obtain necessary work skills to qualify for higher wage jobs.

Policy 3-1: Provide community-based educational support for potential entrepreneurs to develop business skills.

Policy 3-2: Promote development of a comprehensive program to facilitate market identification, management training, technical assistance, and improve capital access.

Policy 3-3: Facilitate the development of business incubator facilities.

Policy 3-4: Support financial assistance and specialized training programs to encourage the development of small businesses, minority and women-owned businesses and disadvantaged business enterprises.

Policy 3-5: Identify local and special business funding needs and work with appropriate agencies to encourage funding of economically viable businesses and disadvantaged business enterprises.

Policy 3-6: Support childcare programs for single parents pursuing higher education.

Policy 3-7: Provide resident organization information and assistance to complete development corporation applications to encourage revitalization and create job opportunities in the community.

Policy 3-8: Assist neighborhoods in obtaining federal planning grants to stimulate business growth and job creation in neighborhood commercial areas.

Policy 3-9: Promote the evaluation and update of community training programs to meet the current and projected skill needs.

Policy 3.10: Support an incentive program which will include, among other things, in-plant training, rapid response training, job training partnerships and education vouchers to encourage the hiring and upgrading (training) of the local workforce.

Policy 3.11: Facilitate the alignment of the workforce development goals with the long-range plans of the Comprehensive Plan, the State Comprehensive Plan, and the West Florida Strategic Regional Plan.

Objective 4: The County and municipalities will carry out the following policies to achieve its development and redevelopment objectives by directing community facility improvements to serve employment areas and uses.

Policy 4-1: In developing the annual update of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and the adoption of the capital budget, the County and municipalities will consider proposed and developing employment centers and other non-residential uses.

Policy 4-2: The County and municipalities will ensure that streets and roads serving employment areas are constructed to standards sufficient to serve trucks safely. Where necessary, consideration will be given to adequate pavement thickness and width, curves, setbacks to pedestrian areas and landscaping, accessibility to parking and loading areas, and similar issues.

Policy 4-3: The municipalities shall pursue annexation which proves to be cost beneficial for the residents and the city/town itself in terms of tax base versus cost of public services.

Policy 4-4: Where physically and financially feasible, capital facility improvements will be planned and constructed to support the development of employment uses, and to remove potential regulatory level of service deficiencies.

Policy 4-5: The County and municipalities will pursue an active and aggressive grant process, seeking out state, federal, and private funding sources to improve existing public facilities and construct new facilities as approved for new development.

Policy 4-6: Participate in regional planning for infrastructure that may assist in obtaining funding for construction of infrastructure consistent with the long-term plan.

Objective 5: The County and municipalities will carry out a program of activities to facilitate the efficient and effective review of land development proposals for economically beneficial land uses.

Policy 5-1: The County and municipalities will continue to review and monitor the Plan, the Land Development code, and the development review process to identify specific regulations and/or specific regulatory procedures that are detrimental to rapid review and approval of commercial and industrial development proposals, and will revise the regulations and procedures as indicated.

Policy 5-2: The County and municipalities will identify differences in development practices and requirements between residential and non-residential projects and will apply the procedures most appropriate to the type of development proposed.

Policy 5-3: Areas adjacent to industrial or commercial land uses will not be changed to any incompatible residential use.

Policy 5-4: The County and municipalities will consider methods for allowing expedited procedures for review of new development or modifications to existing development in established non-residential areas when appropriate to encourage new economic development.

Policy 5-5: The County and municipalities will facilitate off-site mitigation required for environmental permitting for development of appropriate employment uses through pre-permitting of development, through participation in mitigation parks, and through coordination with permitting agencies.

Policy 5-6: The County will encourage mixed used development that discourages urban sprawl, encourages the development of self-contained residential communities (*i.e.*, residential, recreation, commercial, and associated public facilities provided within the development), and promotes a clustered, innovative design that is sensitive to preserving the rural and environmental character of Washington County.

Objective 6: The County will modernize and continually improve access and communication links to the County and municipalities for economic development by utilization of the Economic Development Group (EDG).

Policy 6-1: The Economic Development Group will generally focus on the coordination of retention, expansion, and relocation of primary and target business and will encourage a more receptive attitude within the County for commercial and industrial development generally adhering to the following guidelines:

- a. The group will be appointed by the Board of County Commissioners and given a specific mission and time schedule for the initial report and a final report.
- b. The Group will promote and encourage commercial development in Washington County. Membership will generally be comprised of one representative from each of the following: Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber's Economic Development Council, Tourist Development Council, one Board of County Commissioners member, each municipality's government body, the Washington County Planner, and three (3) members of the general public is recommended to serve as members of the general

planning group. The Board may also chose to have the County Engineer serve as a member should it be necessary to have engineer advice.

- c. Establish a working relationship with planning departments in adjacent counties and the West Florida Regional Planning Council through the County Planning Department.
- d. The EDG will develop a list and point of contacts for agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals with whom Washington County entities with economic development responsibilities should establish and maintain working relationships.
- e. By September 2010, the EDG will submit a detailed narrative report identifying the entities that will perform the primary missions in support of County economic development and the supporting data and analysis necessary to ensure implementation of the plan no later than January 2011.
- f. The EDG will periodically schedule workshops or appear before the Board of County Commissioners during a regular session to report progress on existing projects, deliver general priorities for new potential projects, and to generally inform the Board about development activities within the region. As a minimum, one workshop should occur in 3rd quarter of the fiscal year to assess budget priorities related to economic development.
- g. The appointed EDG will formulate a work plan that will outline required budget, financial report and accounting procedures using county established accounting procedures.

Policy 6-2: The County will promote fiber optic capability and other technology that will provide access to high-speed electronic internet linkage as an attraction for new industry and business.

Policy 6-3: Review economic development proposals for impacts upon the adopted level of service standards and for consistency of right-of-way needs with the projects listed in the *Five-Year FDOT Plan* and *Florida Intrastate Highway System Plan*.

Objective 7: The County and municipalities will carry out a program of activities to improve the recognition of Washington County throughout the state, the region, and the nation as a community, which is actively interested in development of appropriate economic development.

Policy 7-1: Washington County shall continue to coordinate with and support the the Washington County Economic Development Council (EDC) in the pursuit of a coordinated economic development program that includes the following strategic actions:

- a. Identify the types of businesses that will meet the County's economic development goals (target businesses)
- b. Recruit these businesses to locate within the County (recruiting)

- c. Assist target businesses with start-up or expansion efforts (retention)
- d. Provide the public necessary the data for use to support of economic development (infrastructure)
- e. Provide incentives or remove obstacles to attract companies (County leadership)
- f. Forge partnerships to develop needed workforce skills and innovation innovations (Workforce Development)
- g. Market Washington County as a business location

Policy 7-2: The County and municipalities will encourage advertising by businesses and organizations within the area to include references to their location in the area and the qualities of the area for economic development purposes.

Policy 7-3: The County and municipalities will give special consideration to economic development projects, which create a positive high visibility for the area in a large market area.

Policy 7-4: The County and municipalities will facilitate community identification and community spirit throughout sponsorship and cooperation in festivals, such as the Water Melon Festival, the Possum Festival, and other similar events.

Objective 8: The County and municipalities will seek to actively participate in and coordinate its activities with existing development organizations in the region.

Policy 8-1: Where available and cost-effective, the County will maintain active participation in those groups established to promote economic and tourism development within the region, and will seek to ensure that Washington County and its attractions are prominently displayed in materials.

Policy 8-2: The County and municipalities will prepare and/or assist in the preparation of informational materials regarding the attributes of Washington County and of the benefits for development of employment uses.

Objective 9: Provide enhanced opportunities for the County and municipalities' workforces to obtain necessary work skills to qualify for higher wage jobs.

Policy 9-1: Provide community-based educational support for potential entrepreneurs working to develop business skills.

Polity 9-2: The County will facilitate the development of business incubator facilities.

Policy 9-3: The County will promote and support financial assistance and specialized training programs to encourage the development of small businesses, minority and women-owned businesses and disadvantaged business enterprises.

Policy 9-4: The County will continue to support childcare programs for single parents pursuing higher education.

Policy 9-5: The County will assist in obtaining grants to stimulate business growth and job creation in targeted areas.

Policy 9-6: The County will promote the evaluation and update of community training programs to meet the current and projected skill needs.

Policy 9-7: The County will support an incentive program that will include in-plant training, rapid response training, job training partnerships and education vouchers to encourage the hiring and upgrading (training) of the local workforce. .

Objective 10: The County will support the modernization and improvement of access of communication links to the County and municipalities for economic development purposes.

Policy 10-1: The County and municipalities will use advanced information technology (such as the internet) to ensure that information about the County and opportunities therein reach a worldwide audience in a cost effective manner.

Policy 10-2: The County will promote fiber optic capability and other technology that will provide access to high-speed electronic internet linkage as an attraction for new industry and business.