



POLK
C O U N T Y

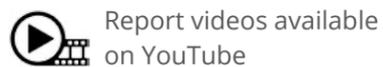
Florida's Crossroads of Opportunity

2014 ANNUAL REPORT

Board of County Commissioners

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BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



Front Row: Melony Bell, District 2; Edwin V. Smith, District 3. **Back Row:** R. Todd Dantzler, District 4; George Lindsey III, District 1 (Chairman); John Hall, District 5 (Vice Chairman).

COUNTY MANAGER

Jim Freeman

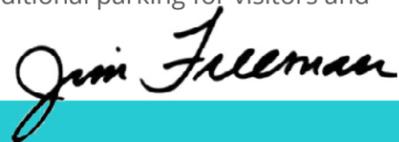
To the residents of Polk County:

Polk County's economy continues to improve and new residential and commercial development is returning, albeit at a rate more consistent with historical averages compared to the rapid growth of the mid-2000s. For the second consecutive year, property values have improved, the number of building permits issued increased and foreclosure filings decreased.

Employment opportunities continue to improve, thanks to investment in the county from Fortune 500 companies such as Amazon, the opening of the CSX logistics center in Winter Haven and growth in Florida's number one industry, tourism.

Polk County's proposed five-year Capital Improvements Plan includes:

- Construction of final phases of Berkley Road/CR 559-A and Ernie Caldwell Boulevard;
- Design, permitting and construction of a new cell at the North Central Landfill;
- Final installment of the Board's three-year, \$10 million commitment to building new roads surrounding the Florida Polytechnic University; and
- Appropriations for debt service for design and construction of a parking garage at the County Government Complex in Bartow to provide additional parking for visitors and employees.



Stacy Butterfield
Clerk of Courts



Marsha Faux
Property Appraiser



Grady Judd
Sheriff



Lori Edwards
Supervisor of Elections



Joe Tedder
Tax Collector

Polk County has a charter government, authorized by the Florida Constitution. Local control, home rule and resident input are enhanced by the charter, or "mini-constitution," for the county. The Constitutional Officers are elected by countywide vote to four-year terms.

CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

"Polk County is a connecting force between people, places and potential in a variety of compelling ways. It offers the ideal combination of access, affordability and untapped opportunity for visitors, residents and prospective businesses."

Connect with or contact Polk County's Constitutional Officers:

[clerk](#)

[ppa](#)

[pcso](#)

[elections](#)

[taxes](#)

GOOD GOVERNMENT

Mission Statement

We enhance the quality of life for people throughout Polk County.

The image of the Polk County Board of County Commissioners received a face lift this year with the help of the Communications and Information Technology divisions.



A new logo was designed and implemented. An expansion and redesign of PGTV's studio and set was completed and the county's website was overhauled.

The results: A clean, modern and professional look that demonstrates a commitment to service in the community.

New Logo

Redesigning the county's logo was no easy task.

For decades, Polk relied on the county's seal, dominated by green and orange imagery, as its logo. But that wasn't the case with neighboring counties. When it came to marketing our region, the seal appeared antiquated, or old fashioned, for today's business climate.

Through months of discussions and design, the logo selected symbolizes what Polk is and where it is going. It is the crossroads of opportunity in Florida.

Polk's roadways, as depicted in the selected logo, are a major component in its connectivity with the rest of the state. The selected colors of blue, green and yellow represent the county's bright future, ties to the agriculture industry and its more than 554 lakes.

The county's seal, a major tie to Polk's heritage, remains the same and will only be used in official county business.

Website Redesign

The second component in the county's face lift was implementing that new logo look with a fresh new website.

For more than 10 months, IT and communications specialists worked together to redesign the county's existing site. Staff came up with a new look and feel for the new site, along with implementing some of the most current technology to make the customer experience easier.

On the website, visitors can learn about Polk's history, find park amenities, see what's going on in social media, watch PGTV programming and learn about news that impacts the community in an easy-to-understand format. A detailed directory also ensures customers get to talk to the person they need, rather than spend time guessing.



Numerous applications were developed by our information technology staff members in this process to make it easier for residents to find what they need. One of those apps is the Residents' Online Assistance and Reporting (ROAR) center, which lets residents report flooded roads, the location of an abandoned vehicle and even farm animals on the loose.

Other apps also make it easier for companies doing business with the county to follow the bid process and to find potential future business opportunities.

Whether you're viewing the site on a cell phone, tablet or a desktop computer, www.polk-county.net will reconfigure itself for the best display. It's part of a new responsive design that was built into the site, eliminating the need for designing separate and expensive mobile apps.

PGTV Studio

With a new logo and refreshed website, Polk's television presence needed an overhaul, as well.



For 10 years, PGTV's small studio limited set design and camera angle options. To get a wide shot, a camera actually had to be positioned outside the studio door.

An expansion of six feet made a world of difference for PGTV's shows this year.

Following a month of knocking down walls, sawing through metal beams and putting up with a little dust, the PGTV studio now has a major network look. The work was kept in-house to reduce costs, including the design of the set. That was done by PGTV crew members. New lighting and

hardwood flooring provides a warm feel for guests and viewers.

Budget Summary

Polk County's FY 2014/2015 budget is \$1.26 billion; a 0.3 percent increase from the previous year. Countywide property value increased 5.27 percent, adding approximately \$8.8 million in revenue to the total budget. Even with this increase, property values are still approximately 29 percent less and ad valorem revenue is nearly \$81.5 million less than the peak in FY 2006/2007.

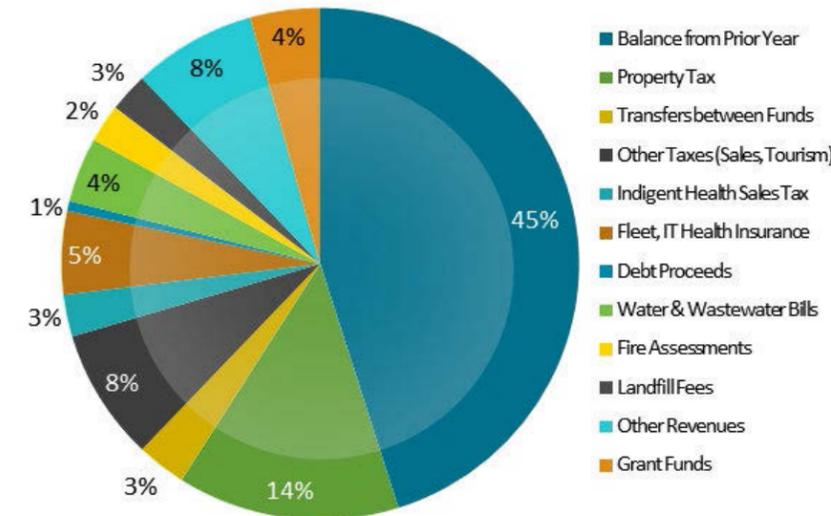
The FY 2014/2015 budget has no major service level reductions and no millage rate or fee increases except in the Rancho Bonito area.

According to recently released U.S. Census Bureau data, more than 623,000 people now reside in Polk County, of which 62 percent live in unincorporated areas. In comparison, the unincorporated population of Polk County is approximately 386,000, which is more people than live in the City of Tampa...Florida's third largest municipality.

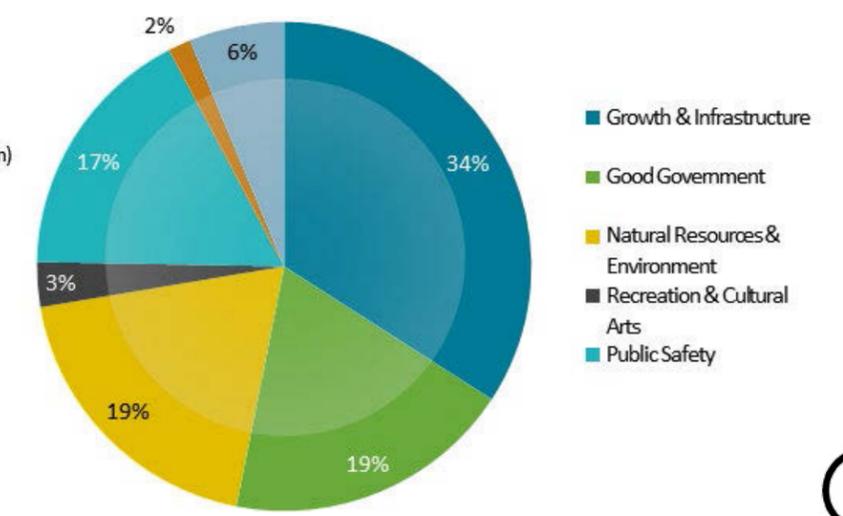
GOOD GOVERNMENT

Exercising Fiscal Responsibility

FY 2014/15 Revenue Summary
\$1,267,695,161



FY 2014/15 Expenses by Result Area



To provide municipal services to unincorporated residents and businesses, the Board levies ad valorem (MSTU) and non-ad valorem (Municipal Services Benefit Units or MSBU) special assessments to unincorporated property owners for services such as fire rescue, residential garbage collection and disposal, parks, libraries and stormwater quality.

PROVIDING BASIC NEEDS

Indigent Health Care & Social Services



Elderly Services

Expansion of the Rohr Home dominated the latter portion of the year as workers broke down walls and erected new ones. Construction on the building began in the summer and is expected to be completed in the spring of 2015. The project will add more open space for its residents and expand the facility's dining area. The Rohr Home had 20,130 total patient days and an average patient count of 55 through the year. Nearly 200,000 meals also were provided by the county's 14 fellowship dining sites during the year.

Healthy Families

Healthy Families received its third national accreditation as a provider of evidence-based home visiting services that prevent child abuse and neglect in Florida's highest-risk families. The Healthy Families leadership team, along with Congressman Daniel Webster, attended the Award Ceremony. But that wasn't all. The Kiwanis Club of Mulberry collected diapers year-round for families that participate in the Healthy Families Program.

Housing

The ongoing Skyview utilities project funded this year by \$1.2 million from Polk County Housing and Neighborhood Development through the Community Development Block Grant program has progressed dramatically in 2014. The project, which has been in the works for more than a decade, is currently replacing substandard water and sewer lines in the Skyview area of the county. The project is expected to be complete in December 2015.





BASIC NEEDS

Indigent Health Care

The Polk County Indigent Health Care division partnered with Central Florida Health Care and the Florida Department of Health to increase the number of offices in Polk offering free or low cost dental maintenance for those who can't afford proper care. Services offered include dental exams, treatment plans, cleanings, fillings, x-rays, extractions and restorative care. Funding for the program comes from the Polk County Board of County Commissioners through their Indigent Health Care division, and is leveraged through the voter approved half-cent sales tax.



Transit

The Jim Erickson Veterans Universal Access Program earned the 2014 Florida Public Transportation Association Creativity and Innovation Award. It also was awarded a national achievement award in the category of Human Services for the implementation of the Jim Erickson Universal Access program. The program provides subsidized public transportation to Polk County's nearly 62,000 veterans. The program is subsidized through \$12,000 of private donations helping veterans who previously may not have been able to go to the grocery store or perform basic tasks.



Veterans Services

The efforts of Polk County Veterans Services, along with other local agencies, brought in \$168,855,993 of VA benefits into Polk, an increase of almost \$19 million over the previous year. Polk is the proud home to more than 60,000 military veterans, including 3,000 to 4,000 Purple Heart recipients. Veteran Services Supervisor Mike Mason took part in Gov. Rick Scott's Veterans Day reception and Walk of Honor ceremony this year, and his team of veteran service officers serve on state boards for various organizations to increase the reach of knowledge to best serve Polk veterans.



Volunteer Polk

Throughout the year, Volunteer Polk provided 3,641 volunteers to Polk County Board of County Commissioners programs, along with another 118 volunteers to programs in the community through its RSVP program. Those volunteers gave more than 53,000 hours of service, which had a value impact of about \$1.2 million. RSVP Coordinator Kathleen Roehm was named as president of the Florida Senior Corps Association president and Volunteer Polk Manager Janet Bartuska was recognized as a community leader by Gov. Rick Scott in Tallahassee.





ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

After several years of slow growth following the great recession, Polk County is rebounding well. No development will probably impact the future of Polk more than the opening of Florida's 12th university; Florida Polytechnic. More than 550 students are in the inaugural class, with projections to double that for 2015-16 and to grow to more than 4,500 students by 2023. As the school's number of students grows, so will the potential financial impact on the local and state economy. CSX opened their new Central Florida Intermodal Logistics Center in Winter Haven, which will process up to 300,000 containers a year. It also brings the promise of 8,500 new jobs to companies who locate on the 930 acres of adjacent commercial space over the next several years.

To meet the need for more higher-paying jobs, the Board continued to approve tax exemptions for

businesses wanting to expand or locate in Polk County. One of the most notable was the opening of a new Amazon fulfillment center in Lakeland and sortation facility in Davenport. The tax exemption program, which began late in 2013, has been extended to 12 companies who are improving the business climate in Polk.

Transitioning economic development responsibilities of the Central Florida Development Council (CFDC) from being a mostly public to a mostly private organization continued in 2014. In May, the Board approved a memorandum of understanding that gives private investor-members more responsibility in steering the actions of this countywide economic development organization.





Tourism & Sports Marketing ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Polk County continued to be a hot destination for tourists and sporting events this year.

Thousands of athletes and fans descended to Polk in nearly two dozen major sporting events this year, like Iron Man, Tough Mudder, the Paintball World Cup and the RussMatt Central Florida Collegiate Baseball Invitational. These events, along with many others, had a nearly \$60 million economic impact in the county's tourism industry.

Tourists also continued to flock to Polk for destinations like Legoland, Bok Tower and the natural beauty of Central Florida. Ticket sales at Polk Outpost 27 sold more than \$1 million in attraction tickets. Nearly a quarter of those tickets were sold for Legoland.

The Tourist Development Council Arts and Cultural Committee program offered funding to nonprofit arts and cultural organizations to produce and market performances, exhibitions and events that attract tourism to Polk County.

In with the New

The county's tourism and sports marketing staff continued to aggressively recruit new events to the area.

Staff succeeded in securing 14 new events for the coming year at the annual National Softball Association Conference, some of which include the

2014 NSA Florida Youth "A" State Championships, the Florida Youth Fall State Championships and the Florida Youth Winter Nationals. These softball events will bring more than 500 adult and youth softball teams from across Florida to Polk County, generating more than \$5 million in economic impact.

The tourism and sports marketing team also recruited the 2015 Mary Kay Career Conference, which is expected to attract more than 2,000 attendees.

In the outdoor world, Polk was selected to host the 2016 Southeastern Outdoor Press Association Conference. This conference will attract some of the top names in the outdoor journalism world.

A new fishing tournament, the Fishers of Men Southeast Regional Championship, will bring nearly 200 anglers to Polk for the five-day event.

Recognition

Polk County Sports Marketing was given the Supporting Agency of the Year Award by the Florida Bicycle Association. The mobile website for Visit Central Florida, which is the county's official destination sales and marketing group, was named one of the South's Best by ConventionSouth Magazine.





GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE

Livable Polk

Improving Water Services through Polk Utilities

Providing municipal services to residents, such as water and wastewater treatment, is a huge portion of Polk County's budget. The county continues to work toward eliminating small, inefficient water facilities by combining them into modern regional plants and improving services to neighborhoods. Through on-going collaboration with our cities and regional partners, we are working diligently to ensure sources of public water supply for our future.



Cooperative Extension Services

In Polk County, as well as all states across the nation, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Smith-Lever Act, which allows the county to have partnership with Florida's land grant universities. Polk's connection to IFAS, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida, offers programs that teach residents in the Indigent Health Care program the benefits of better nutrition, or homeowners how to protect our lakes and streams through proper yard fertilization and invests in youth development programs. In 2014, Polk's Extension Service launched a new series of free Lunch and Learn programs throughout the county that highlighted some of our programs including landscaping, healthy lifestyles and conserving our environment.



Planning & Development

The Building Division continued its upward trend of issuing building permits during the last year. While building levels aren't at a pre-recession level, they are increasing year over year. Last year, the division issued 15,971 permits for all construction in the unincorporated areas of Polk, which also included 1,317 permits for single family homes. That's a 12 percent increase from the 14,246 permits issued the year before. That year, the county issued 1,105 single family home permits.

GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation

Many pioneer families that settled in Polk County in the mid-1800s relied on farming to make a living. Strawberry fields and other row crops, along with cattle and citrus farms, lined the narrow, dusty sand and clay roads used for transporting their homegrown goods.

In 1914, Polk County became the leader of road construction in Florida. By 1919, there were 217 miles of asphalt roads in the county, including roadways in the Kathleen Area.

Nearly a century later, Polk County's \$39 million widening of Kathleen Road from N. Galloway to Duff Road was opened to traffic. This three-mile section joins a previously widened segment to I-4. Kathleen Road is now a four-lane roadway from downtown Lakeland north to Duff Road.

In 2014, the Transportation Division replaced a pair of 74-year-old bridges with up-to-date structures. The South Lake Reedy Boulevard Bridge and the Old Bartow Lake Wales Road Bridge were both functionally obsolete because they were built at a time when lane widths were narrower than the current standard. Although records do not exist to provide a written history of these old bridges, they are believed to have been part of the "New Deal" program initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1940s.

Old Dixie Highway is another stretch of road built long before retail and residential development, and a new high school that created a pedestrian usage. Sidewalk was only installed along the school's frontages when it opened in 2008. Since then, Polk has invested nearly \$850,000 in sidewalks to connect the surrounding neighborhoods to the campus.

However, a mile-long segment of Old Dixie Highway was left without sidewalk due to narrow roadsides filled with drainage ditches and utilities that left insufficient space for sidewalk. A renewed commitment by the Board led to construction on the first section of a three-phase Old Dixie Highway sidewalk project that began in August.



NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

Keeping Polk Clean and Beautiful



Natural Resources

In FY 2013/2014, a new stormwater assessment was initiated in unincorporated Polk County. Nearly \$1.5 million was collected, however, the county estimates that about \$5 million is needed annually to monitor and improve stormwater as required by the federal government. A Stormwater Technical Advisory Committee was organized to provide advice to the BoCC on how to spend money to improve Polk's impaired waters.

Waste & Recycling

Waste & Recycling division's North Central Landfill has been so successful in meeting the needs of Polk County residents that its Phase III Cell will reach capacity in 2017. To make sure that disposal services to customers remains uninterrupted, the county has begun to design, permit, construct and will eventually operate a new cell. This new cell will provide the greatest disposal-capacity-per-dollar investment in construction and will also help provide uninterrupted disposal service for residents.

Polk County's 20-year commitment to levy a MSTU to fund Environmental Lands ends in 2015. More than 25,000 acres have been purchased to preserve and protect our water and wildlife and provide passive recreational facilities for residents and guests.

Photo: SUMICA, Lake Wales



Polk offers Safe and Diverse Recreational Opportunities

Whether you want a place to launch your boat, need a field for your soccer team to practice, a little exercise for your pooch or a sheltered picnic facility for your family reunion, Polk County offers residents first-class facilities. You may register online at www.polk-county.net and follow Parks and Recreation through Facebook and Instagram.

RECREATION & CULTURAL ARTS

Athletic leagues and sports tournaments continue to be a huge draw to Polk County, mostly due to the outstanding facilities in our parks. Parks and Recreation now maintains more than 120 sports fields over the 2,000-plus square miles of Polk. The newest facilities to come on-line are in Poinciana. Phase I was completed in 2013 and Phase II in 2014.

While construction of the second phase of Poinciana Park was coming to an end in 2014, work continued in two other future recreational areas in Polk, set to open early in 2015. Boat ramps of varying sizes have provided access to Lake Kissimmee at Coleman's Landing for three years. Soon the county will open a campground on the 135-acre site.

Excitement is building among all-terrain vehicle (ATV) enthusiasts for the opening of Bone Valley ATV Park, being constructed on about 200 acres south of Mulberry on Highway 630. Formerly a phosphate mine, the site will feature trails throughout the site. Designed to be a family-friendly environment, this is the first public facility of this nature in Polk County.

While a live performance of railroad tycoon Henry Plant opened this year's exhibits at the Polk County History Center, the real entertainment lay within its expositions that highlighted personal heritage, the county's influence in the Civil War and the journey of our ancestors.

[A Smithsonian Journey](#)

A grant from the Florida Humanities Council helped bring in the Smithsonian's "Journey Stories" exhibit early this year. This traveling exhibit explored how our ancestors came to America and was accompanied by the "Polk County Journeys" exhibit, which focused on influential residents and visitors to Polk who helped shape the community's history and heritage.

[Civil War Exhibit Opening](#)

A Civil War exhibit, which coincided with its 150th anniversary, opened this year and will run through April 2015. This exhibit focuses on the histories of the Cow Cavalry, the South Florida Bulldogs, Union troops and other units who lived, fought or settled in Polk. This also was accompanied by "Living on the Edge of Wilderness," which portrayed the lives of women and families on the home front of Polk during the war.

[Celebrating the Heritage Trail](#)

To celebrate Polk's Heritage Trail, the History Center published its new History and Heritage Guide to Polk County and opened a photography exhibit, "Picture Polk History," which featured amateur photography of historic sites. Images were selected from the Picture Polk History Photography Contest. In addition, PGTV produced a series of short videos highlighting historic sites along the trail.



PROTECTING PUBLIC SAFETY

Polk County Fire Rescue found itself in the national spotlight this year. The department was named the nation's 39th largest department and one of its engines was photographed to grace the pages of an upcoming national calendar. In all, it was a headline grabbing year.

Heroics Honored

Firefighter Jordan Caldwell, who also was the firefighter of the year, was given the Medal of Heroism by Gov. Rick Scott in February. The honor was for Caldwell's heroics the morning of June 14, 2013, where he and his partner saved a woman from a burning home.

Makeshift Station

To get faster response times in Polk's southeastern corridor, plans were conceived this year to open a new temporary station in Frostproof. But those plans didn't call for any ordinary station. This one was to be housed in the Sun Ray Motel and planned to include an engine and a booster tank. The plans for the station were both a cost-saving measure and an immediate way to address a need in a growing area.

Drowning Awareness

Paramedic Blaise Dillman ran 90 miles in June to raise awareness about the danger of drowning. His run came following the drowning deaths of two children earlier in the year and coincided with Fire Rescue's 'Take 60 Seconds' Drowning Prevention Campaign.

The 'Take 60 Seconds' campaign began in early spring and was designed to better educate residents and visitors on swimming pool safety. The department worked with PGTV to create a series of 30- and 60-second public service videos that aired on local cable providers, in all of the county's movie theatres and on the county's YouTube page. A rack card also was developed to include pool safety tips, statistics and a QR code that directs viewers to a website with the PSAs and other pool safety tips.

Future Fire Rescuers

With a donation of land from the BoCC, Polk State College broke ground on a new \$30 million Center for Public Safety, which will help educate students about emergency medical services and fire sciences.

Communications

Emergency radio services maintain the 800 MHz radio system used by Fire Rescue, the Polk County Sheriff's Office and municipal fire and police departments. In June, they built a new tower in the Davenport area. The new tower strengthens radio communication signals in the northeast area of the county, which have reach into Osceola, Orange and Lake counties.



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Adult Day Health Care	519-8146	Parks & Recreation	534-4340
Animal Control	499-2600	Polk Government Television (PGTV)	534-5997
Budget Office	534-6594	Polk HealthCare Plan	533-1111
Building Division	534-6080	Property Appraiser	534-4777
Career Source Polk	508-1100	Procurement	534-6757
Clerk of Courts	534-4000	Recycling	284-4319
Code Enforcement	534-6054	Risk Management	534-5689
Communications	534-6090	Roadway Maintenance	535-2200
Cooperative Extension	519-8677	Rohr Nursing Home	519-7579
County Commissioners	534-6000	Sheriff's Office	298-6200
County Jail	534-6300	Small Business Assistance	534-5915
County Manager	534-6444	Social Services	534-5387
County Probation	534-4125	Supervisor of Elections	534-5888
Courthouse	534-4000	Supplier Diversity	534-5959
Economic Development	551-4760	Tax Collector	534-4700
Elderly Services	534-5320	Tourism & Sports Marketing	551-4750
Emergency Management	298-7002	Traffic Court	534-4446
Equal Opportunity	534-5901	Traffic Engineering	535-2200
Fire Rescue	519-7350	Transit Services	534-5500
Hazardous Waste	284-4319	Transportation	535-2200
Healthy Families	534-5315	Transportation Planning	534-6486
Housing & Neighborhood Development	534-5240	Utilities (Water & Sewer)	298-4100
Human Resources	534-6030	Utilities Operations	298-4100
Information Technology	534-7500	Veterans Services	534-5220
Land Development and Planning	534-6792	Volunteer Services	534-5580
Mosquito/Weed Control	534-7377	Waste & Recycling	284-4319
Natural Resources	534-7377		



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