

Central Florida Development Council (CFDC)
Polk County Economic Development Partnership
Fiscal Year 2022/2023 Annual Report

The mission of the CFDC is to grow an economy based on high-skill, high-wage sustainable businesses. Operating under the organizational pillars to:

- Promote Polk County as Florida’s Best Place for Business
- Advocate for Key Business Issues
- Facilitate Collaborative Partnerships
- Advance Strategic Initiatives

In 2022/2023 the CFDC Board of Directors were:

- Chair, Maggie Mariucci, Florida Polytechnic University
- Vice-Chair, Gene Conrad, Aerospace Center for Excellence
- Secretary/Treasurer, Dave Shepp, The Southern Group
- Past Chair, Bart Allen, Peterson & Myers PA
- Talent Pipeline Chair, Dr. Orathai Northern, Polk State College
- Community Stakeholders Chair, Deena Drumgo, City of Lake Wales
- Competitiveness & Advocacy Chair, Kyle Story, The Story Companies
- Investor Relations Chair, Pete Frantzis, Cyndeo Wealth Partners
- Aviation Committee Chair, Rick Garcia, Gulf Coast Avionics
- County Manager Designee, Todd Dantzler, SVN Saunders Ralston Dantzler
- County Commissioner, George Lindsey, Polk County Board of County Commissioners
- Board Member, General Jake Polumbo, Two Blue Aces
- Board Member, Emery Smith, Ben Hill Griffin
- Board Member, Drew Wilcox, Nucor Steel Florida
- Board Member, Randy Knapp, RLK Real Estate & Development

2022|2023 - Job Creation & Investment

- Capital Investment: \$429,000,000
- Total Jobs (New & Retained): 483
- Total New Square Footage: 961,000
- Average Annual Wage of Projects: \$60,429
- Total New Projected Annual Payroll: \$29,187,207

Antares, an aviation and aerospace company, originally founded in Colombia has established a new location for 3 employees at the Elevate Aerospace Incubator at Lakeland Linder International Airport.

Blue Line Aviation, an aviation & aerospace company expanded their flight training services to Florida investing \$15 million in new facilities and equipment to be located at the Winter Haven Airport. The company is adding 35 new jobs with an average annual wage of \$73,000.

Coca-Cola is expanding their logistics and distribution services at their Auburndale location. This \$60 million expansion will add 100 new jobs with an average annual wage of \$43,365.

Kottke Trucking, Inc. is expanding into Lake Alfred investing \$30 million in the construction of a cold storage facility. The company will hire 10 new employees and retain 45 jobs paying an average annual wage of \$48,325.

LowCarbon, a South Korean based company, will build a \$100 million clean hydrogen manufacturing facility in Mulberry to support the state's rapidly growing space program. The company will employ 150 people at this site paying an average annual wage of \$66,000.

Publix Super Markets will build a \$218 million cold storage facility in Lakeland. The company will hire 10 new employees at \$48,325 average annual wage and retain hundreds.

Toll Brothers, a premium home builder, will invest \$6 million to establish a facility to manufacture construction components and building systems in unincorporated Bartow. The company will hire 50 new employees at \$46,763 average annual wage.

Welldyne is expanding their local employment in the Health Sciences industry in Lakeland by adding 80 new jobs at an average wage of \$72,488.

Annual Meeting Highlights

Bank of Central Florida won the George W. Harris Jr. Economic Development Award for Success in Large Business, which is given to companies with at least 100 employees. The award is named for George Harris, a former CFDC chairman and president of Citrus and Chemical Bank.

Paul Noris started Bank of Central Florida 16 years ago. Now, it is crossing the 100-employee threshold and has \$1.03 billion in assets. This is all while continuing to focus on its customers and the business community as a whole.

In its first 15 years, the bank has opened six offices; developed "Vision 2025," which outlines its path for the future; stayed true to its mission to support small businesses and small-business owners; rolled out new features for business-related banking; created educational materials centered on fraud prevention; and more.

The other finalists were Amazon Air, Southeastern University and Lakeland Regional Health. Last year, Tucker Paving won the award.

Gulf Coast Avionics won the Jim Brantley Economic Development Award – Success in Small Business. The award is named after Brantley, the first director of the agency now known as the CFDC. It is given to a business, institution or organization with fewer than 100 employees that champions growth, free enterprise, economic stability and community service.

Rick Garcia, owner of Gulf Coast Avionics, said he was surprised and humbled to win the award.

"It's a tremendous honor to be considered the small business of the year. There is a lot of competition. To be thought of among so many others and to be picked, is an honor," Garcia said. "I want to recognize our team. They've done a great job, and that has allowed us to get this award."

The other finalists were Center State Development, Chastain-Skillman Inc. and RLK Development. Last year, SVN | Saunders Ralston Dantzler Real Estate won the award.

“Both companies showcase pride in Polk County through their support of economic development and their commitment to the community,” said CFDC President & CEO Sean Malott. “We are thrilled to announce them as the winners and honor the other six finalists. All are representative of the many successful companies that call Polk County home.”

During the meeting, Malott updated the audience on the past year.

“As we continue to lead the state and the nation in growth, attracting and retaining quality jobs for Polk citizens remains a critical building block for increasing economic prosperity,” he said. “The presence of high-skill, high-wage opportunities grew in Polk County this past year as the county welcomed a variety of industries from manufacturing and aviation to the New Energy Sector and Hydrogen Production, totaling nearly \$400 million in capital investment. The county also saw a 13% increase in new businesses to the area. The CFDC is committed to promoting Polk as Florida’s best place for business.”

Maggie Mariucci, outgoing chair of the CFDC board and assistant vice president of University Relations at Florida Polytechnic University, discussed “the project” she’s been working on since joining Florida Poly.

Mariucci shared about the collective partnership that continues to be showcased through the Central Florida Innovation District (CFID) she said. “The game-changer here, without question, is the partnership with the Williams Company. Their commitment to the Innovation District and to being at the table for these discussions and planning has been transformational in our efforts to ensure high-tech development throughout the area surrounding Florida Poly.”

The CFDC’s board chair awards one honoree whose work is improving Polk County’s economic prosperity. The honoree is presented with one of the agency’s most prestigious awards. This year, Mariucci presented it to Commissioner Stephanie Madden.

“You’ve heard me talk tonight about our efforts to create the Innovation District five years ago and the subsequent efforts of so many to keep it moving forward. Stephanie was an early adopter of the CFID concept and a staunch advocate for the vision,” Mariucci said. “She is one of the strongest proponents for the research park, for innovation, for progress, for clean energy solutions, for partnerships and collaboration, and basically for making tomorrow a better place for all of us here in Polk County. She continues to leverage her role as an elected official to advance the initiatives she believes in, and her passion for her work, her dedication to our economic growth and her commitment to making a vision come to life is unwavering.”

Mariucci called Madden “a leader who embodies innovative thinking, challenges the status quo, is a convener of creative minds, and a believer in big visions,”

Seth Blackwell, representing the Williams Company, was the keynote speaker. A certified professional landman with extensive knowledge and experience in all facets of land development, he is part of the Corporate Strategic Development team for the Williams Companies (NYSE: WMB), where he focuses on project origination within the New Energy Ventures business unit.

“Hearing about the high-impact opportunities available through new energy projects, especially those grounded in innovation, is exciting for all of us,” Mariucci said.

Malott thanks Blackwell for speaking to attendees. “We appreciate Seth and his willingness to spend time talking about the possibilities that exist right here in Polk County.”

Mariucci turned the chair over to Gene Conrad, who praised her for her work during her term.

“Maggie has been the right leader for the CFDC at the right time,” Conrad said. “She has helped re-energize opportunities available within the Innovation District, and we have been fortunate to have her leadership. She is well known throughout the county and is committed to building Polk’s economic prosperity.”

He also discussed the county’s biggest challenge before outlining his goals for the upcoming year.

“As a county, we need to remain committed to making our infrastructure a priority, especially transportation,” Conrad said. “We are uniquely well-positioned to attract large, high-skill, higher-wage opportunities, but to remain competitive, we must commit and continue to invest in our infrastructure.”

Polk County at a Glance
Prepared by Jim Farrell PH.D., CFA
Florida Southern College

The unemployment rate in Polk County remains healthy at 4.0%, slightly above the rate of 3.5% from August 2022. The labor market is still considered fairly tight as the Federal Reserve continues to fight inflation. In comparison with where we stood at this point in 2019 (pre-pandemic), our Labor Force grew by 16.1%, Employment grew by 16.3% while Unemployment is up by 12.0%. Over the past 12 months, we saw job expansion in most industries, with the largest growth coming from Education and Health Services (7.3% growth). We did see contraction in a couple of industries with Mining, Logging, and Construction and Professional and Business Services each shrinking by 3.9%.

Population

Polk County outpaced the state and nation in population growth between the July 2022 and April 2020 estimates, growing 8.60% as compared to 3.30% and 0.60% for the state and nation, respectively. Within the larger cities (populations greater than 5,000), growth is being led by Davenport (45.3%), Haines City (22.10%), and Auburndale (19.10%) since the last Census.

Age

The county’s age distribution reflects a larger portion of younger people (21.8%, under 18) than the state (19.3%) and a larger population of older people (19.6%, 65 and over) than the nation (17.3%). Both Florida (21.6%) and Polk County have older populations than the national average, and while this had been a growing portion of the population in prior years, that trend reversed during COVID-19 as older populations were disproportionately impacted. The gaps between county and national averages closed a bit over the past year, however.

Households

Polk County continues to have higher than average homeowner occupancy (69.1%, 66.5% and 64.6% for the county, state, and nation, respectively) and lower than average costs for both homeowners and renters.

Polk County has also seen meaningful growth in taxable property values, with total value increasing from \$51.4B in 2022 to \$59.5B in 2023, with over \$2.5B of that attributable to new construction. The largest dollar value of new construction growth came from Haines City (\$285M), the largest percentage growth came from Eagle Lake (50.7%) and Davenport (37.6%). The large increases in taxable value that the county has experienced in recent years should provide a meaningful revenue increase which should help mitigate the growing costs that come with the population growth the county has experienced.

Looking forward, we should expect the markets to stabilize a bit as the Federal Reserve's actions to stem inflation have taken hold and we appear to be entering a holding period. We have, so far, avoided the dreaded "hard landing" and may be in a position to avoid a recession at all. We still remain at least a year or so away from what most would consider a "normal" economy, but with the pandemic-era stimulus money nearly done rippling through the economy, student loan payments set to resume and many workers returning to the office full-time, we are closer than we have been in a while.

Central Florida Development Council, Incorporated
Statement of Functional Expenses (Public)
Year Ended September 30, 2023

Expenses	Public
Personnel Costs	\$ 548,797.00
Meetings and Conferences	165,867.00
Advertising	238,897.00
Facility and Equipment Lease and Maintenance	80,228.36
Sponsorships	44,954.00
Professional Fees and Contract Services	35,784.00
Supplies	33,852.00
Membership Dues and Subscriptions	15,151.00
Depreciation and Amortization	26,805.00
Miscellaneous	14,359.00
Due to County	-
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	\$ 1,204,694.36