



2023 Annual Report



Left: Meet your Commissioners Rick Wilson, District 2; Neil Combee, District 5; George Lindsey III, District 1; Bill Braswell, District 3 and Martha Santiago, Ed.D, District 4. **Below:** Polk County opened the new Northeast Government Center in May 2023. In addition to county services offered from this facility, the Clerk of Courts, the 10th Judicial Court System, Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections and the Tax Collector also serve the public from this facility conveniently located between Lake Alfred and Haines City.



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In May, Polk County Commissioners and Constitutional Officers officially opened the new Northeast Government Center in Lake Alfred. **Left to Right:** Tax Collector Joe Tedder, State Attorney Brian Haas, Commissioner Neil Combee, Commissioner Rick Wilson, Commissioner Martha Santiago, Property Appraiser Marsha Faux, Commissioner George Lindsey, Commissioner Bill Braswell and Clerk of Courts Stacy Butterfield cut the ribbon and welcomed the public to see the new facility.

Each Spring, Polk Vision hosts a “State of the County” presentation for residents and business leaders to learn more about the current issues and long-term challenges facing local governments. Representatives from the Board of County Commissioners, Polk County Public Schools and the Department of Health-Polk County participate. In April, County Manager Bill Beasley (left) and Board Chair George Lindsey (seated right) talk about population growth, economic development, and transportation and water needs and solutions for the future.



FY 2023/24 At A Glance

\$2.548 Billion
Proposed Total Budget

\$576.4 Million
General Fund Budget

15.86%
Property Value Increase

3%
Millage Decrease

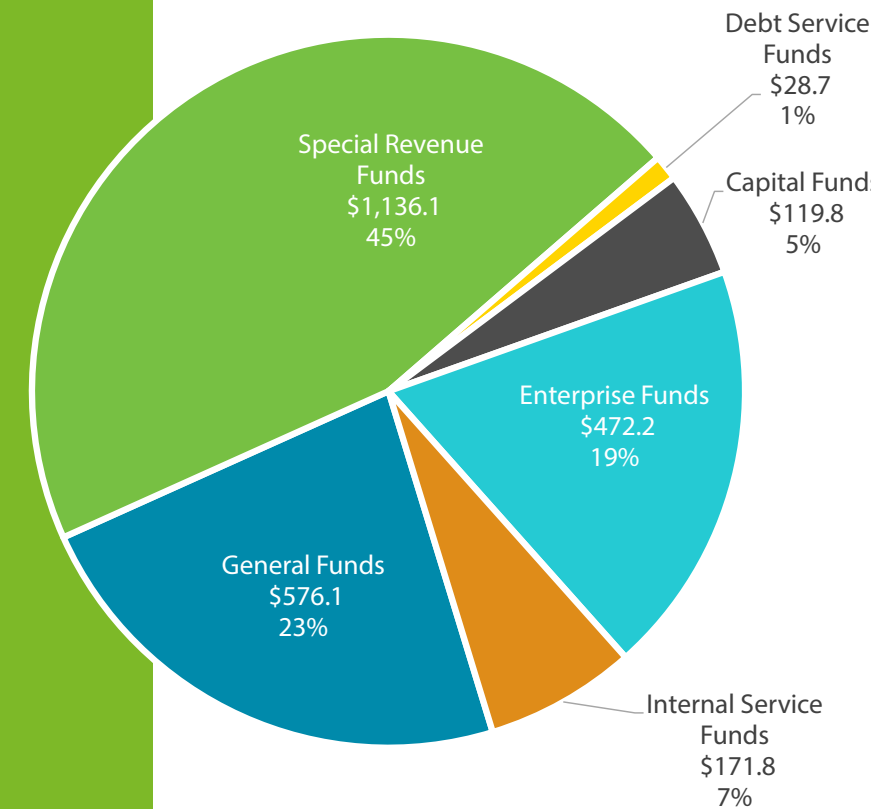
GOOD GOVERNMENT

Polk County continues to lead the State of Florida in population growth and is the fifth fastest growing county in the country. By October 2023, estimates are that Polk is now home to about 810,000 people; that equates to about 88 people a day moving into the county. According to the Property Appraiser's July 1, 2023 tax roll, countywide taxable values of all properties increased 15.86 percent over 2022. The steep increase in home values is due in large part to high demand by people moving to our area. For the second consecutive year, the Board has reduced the countywide and unincorporated Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) millage by 3 percent.

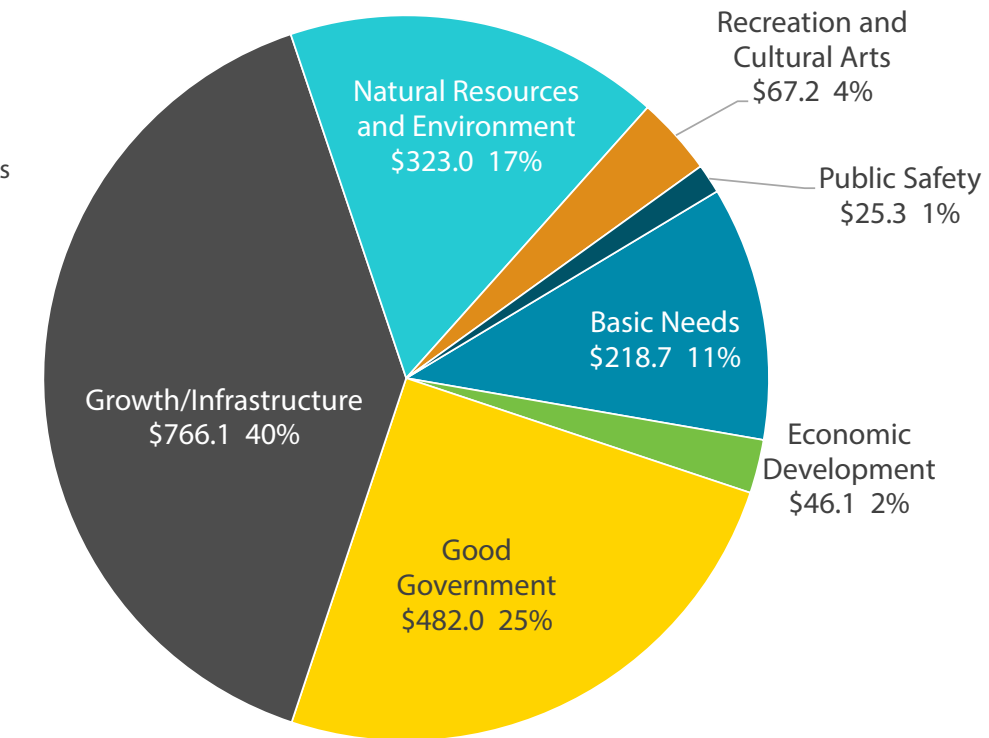
Economic indicators show that Polk County must prepare for a leveling off of property value increases. The exponential growth that we have experienced the last few years is not sustainable. Permits for new residential and commercial construction, a key economic indicator, have dropped after peaking in FY 2021/22, with only slight increases expected in future years.

FY 2023/24 Budget \$2,547,803,259

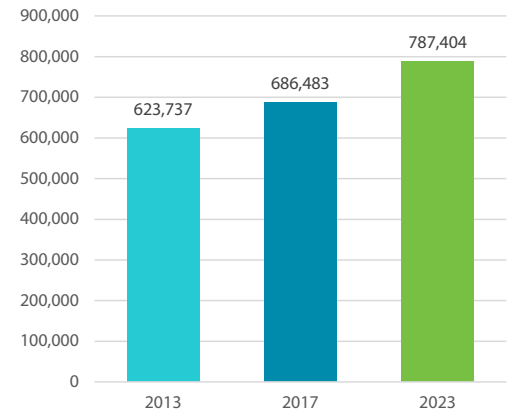
Revenue



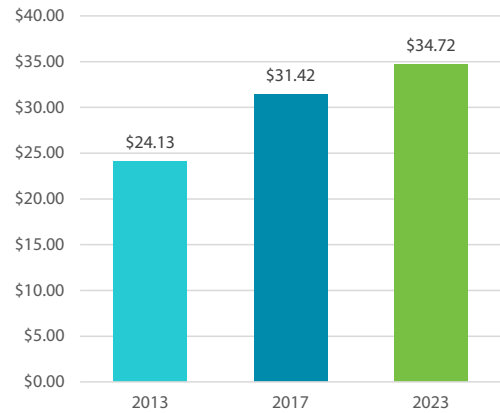
Expenses by Results Area



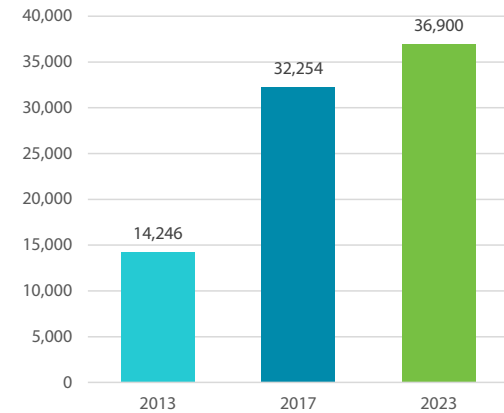
GROWTH AND PERFORMANCE



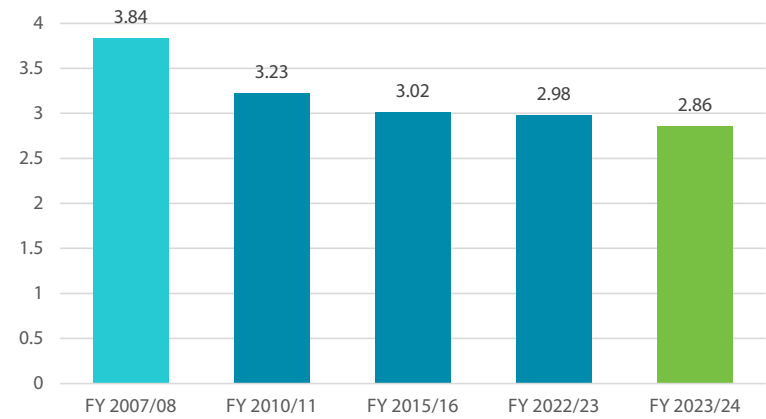
Population Growth
U.S. Census Estimates



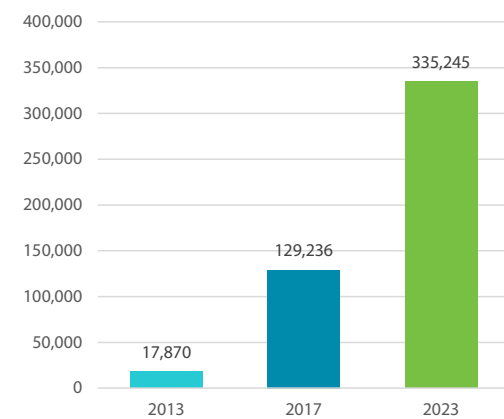
Countywide Taxable Values
Property Value in Billions



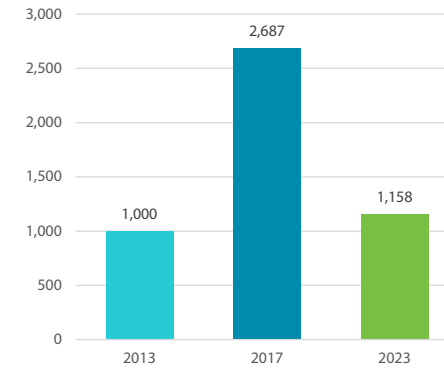
Total Building Permits
Unincorporated Polk



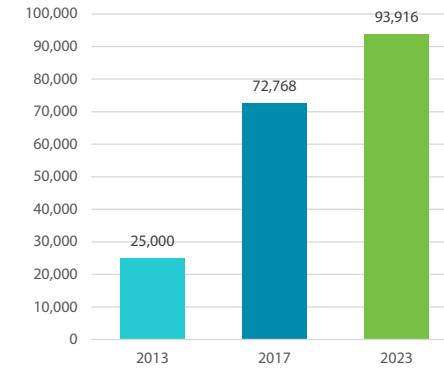
County Employees
Per 1000 Residents



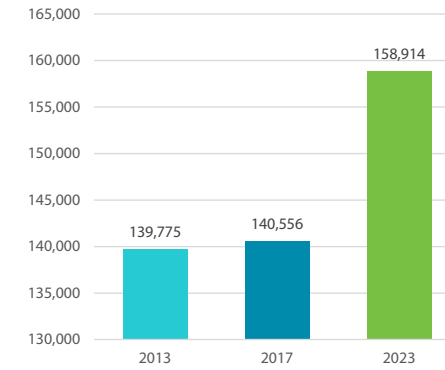
Communications
Social Media Followers



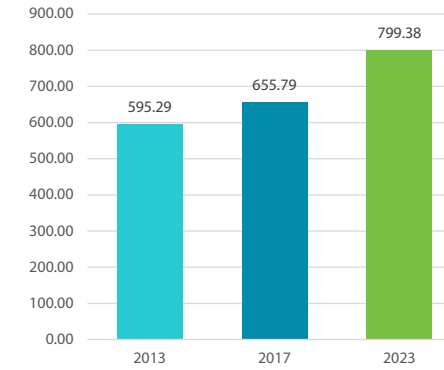
Fire Calls
Polk County Fire Rescue



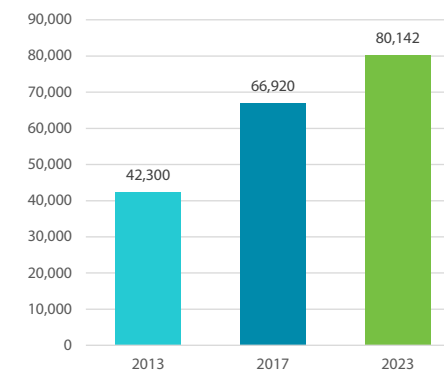
Emergency Medical Calls
Polk County Fire Rescue



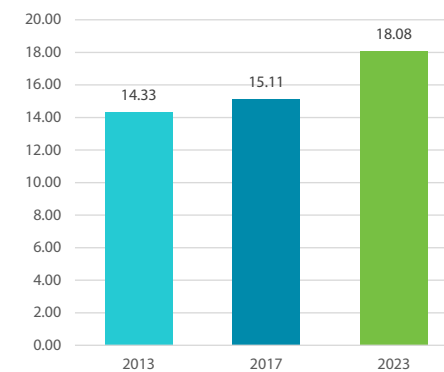
Households Served
Waste & Recycling



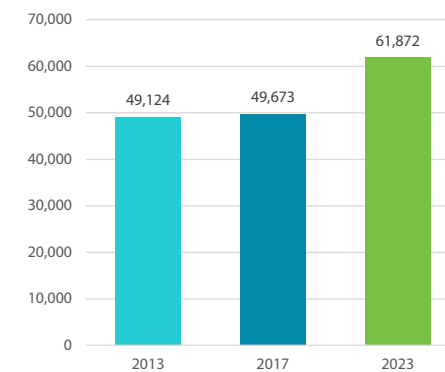
Waste Tons Collected
Waste & Recycling



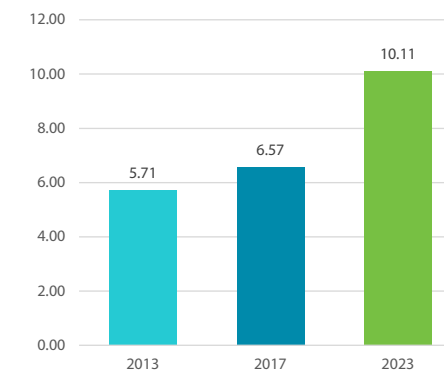
Water Connections
Polk County Utilities



Average Daily Flow
Millions of Gallons



Wastewater Connections
Polk County Utilities



Average Daily Treated
Millions of Gallons

QUALITY OF LIFE

Right: University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) provides educational programs for residents through Polk's Extension Division. Beekeeper class participants get the opportunity to learn about honey bees and beekeeping from the state's experts.

Below: Students in the Prodigy program held at the Eloise Resource Center learn how to play guitar. The Prodigy Cultural Arts Program is a research proven, diversion and prevention program where youth learn life skills through visual and performing arts.



Provide safe housing for qualifying homeowners

Protecting the safety of our residents goes beyond emergency medical services, fire suppression and law enforcement. We want our residents to live in safe and affordable homes, have access to adequate healthcare and are safe on our roadways. In 2023, Polk County leveraged more than \$8.2 million of federal and state funds improving 460 housing units across the county.



Protect pedestrians on paths and roadways

According to Polk's Transportation Planning Organization, the county ranked 21st nationally in most pedestrian deaths. In 2022/23, the Polk TPO launched the Vision Zero campaign, a critical effort focused on eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries on our roads. Vision Zero is an important step toward creating safer streets for all road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.

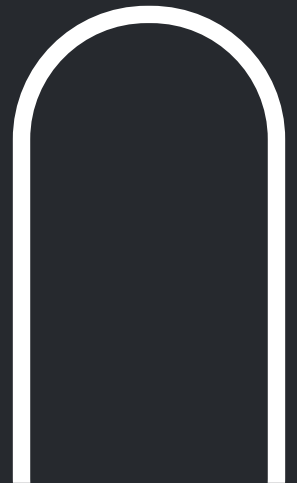


Growth and Infrastructure

Major capital improvements that will provide adequate infrastructure and facilities for residents and new business development are funded in the county's Community Investment Program (CIP). The CIP is a rolling five-year plan that prioritizes funding for major capital projects so that Polk can meet the demands from growth and economic investment in the county.

Left: In 2023, the State broke ground on the first leg of the proposed Central Polk Parkway. The need for increased road capacity hits federal and state highways, as well as local roads.

Above: Polk County replaced the bridge on Thornhill Road.



Polk's Direct Potable Water Reuse Project at Cherry Hill

Construction was completed on a \$2.5 million building at the Cherry Hill Water Production facility. There, Polk County's Direct Potable Reuse (DPR) Pilot project's goal is to demonstrate that the DPR process can produce drinking water that meets or exceeds federal and state standards and provides an option for increasing Polk's water supply in the future.

This project is a joint agreement with the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

Drainage projects help keep stormwater flowing after rain events

Polk County experiences frequent and unpredictable tropical systems most commonly from June 1 through November 30. The greatest risk is during August and September. These systems can drop tremendous amounts of rain in very short periods of time. When this happens, heavy equipment operators from the Roads and Drainage division clear swales and piping to help keep stormwater flowing.

In FY 2022/23, Roads and Drainage had identified 17 projects throughout the county to mitigate stormwater flooding.



PUBLIC SAFETY

Local government’s most important role is making sure residents feel safe where they live. Polk’s Board of County Commissioners invested more than \$400 million for emergency medical services, fire safety and law enforcement in FY 2022/23. This included new fire stations, new and updated training facilities for our first responders and apparatus needed to respond to calls.



Fire Services

Special Operations includes hazardous materials (above), technical rescue, tactical SWAT medics, mobile bike and UTV medics, honor guard, marine/dive units, drones and unmanned vehicles.



Emergency Management

In August, the Emergency Operations Center activated staff in preparation for Hurricane Idalia, which did little damage in Polk, but ravaged the panhandle of Florida.



TOURISM, RECREATION AND CULTURAL ARTS



Polk County's Parks and Natural Resources and Tourism and Sports Marketing Divisions provide outstanding venues and events for residents and guests of Polk County. A "staycation" in Polk may include camping, fishing and boating in one of our lakeside campgrounds, such as Coleman Landing (above).

Youth sports leagues use county facilities every month of the year, but Polk shines when it is the epicenter of Spring collegiate diamond sports. Between softball with THE Spring Games, to baseball and RussMatt, Polk County enjoyed hosting more than 400 teams with more than 16,500 innings of baseball and softball played.



Polk's History Shared through Education and Exhibits

Throughout the year, the History Center hosts rotating exhibits and educational programs that feature a variety of subjects specific to Polk County.

Above: Delta Sigma Theta sorority's Lakeland Alumnae Chapter has been serving the Lakeland area for more than 40 years. The History Center showcased these accomplished ladies and their legacies in a special program and exhibit.



www.polk-county.net



In 2023, Polk County divisions were selected as national leaders in their industries. **Left:** Roads and Drainage received the James B. Sorenson Award for being the best in the U.S. for pavement management solutions. **Right:** Accela software helps residents navigate through Building, Code Enforcement and Land Development processes online. Accela recognized Polk as the national trendsetter.