



# Economic Development Strategic Plan - RCM2342AS

## Task 1 Report

prepared for:

**City of Cape Coral – Office of Economic and  
Business Development**

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## Task 1: Project Kick Off/Facilitation of the Vision

### 1.a – Project Kick-off/Project Management

#### Project Management

In preparation for the Kick-Off meeting, the DCG Corplan Team obtained background reports developed by the City, outside consultants, Lee County representatives, and others. These reports are as follows:

- Cape Compass 2030 Strategic Plan
- Urban Land Institute Advisory Services Panel - Cape Coral
- National Community Survey – Cape Coral – 2021
- CRA Redevelopment Plan – 2019
- Cape Coral Comprehensive Plan – Economic Development Element
- Economic & Business Development Office Quarterly Report – Q3 2023
- Cape Coral Bridge Project

While in Cape Coral prior to the Kick-Off Meeting, the DCG Corplan Team Project Manager attended a ResilientLee Task Force meeting. Other related meetings included the after-hours business function with the Chamber of Commerce and a Marine Industry conference.

A Project Review Committee was organized by the Economic and Business Development Office. City and Lee County members of the Committee are:

- T. Sharon Woodberry, Economic Development Officer
- Matt Grambow, Special Projects Coordinator – City Manager’s Office
- Laura Dodd, Principal Transportation Planner – Public Works
- Chad Boyko, Principal Planner – Development Services – Public Works
- Amy Yearsley, City Planning Manager – Development Services
- Bill Corbett, Design and Construction Manager - Capital Projects
- Melissa Mickey, Communications Manager - City Manager's Office
- Pamela Johnson, Deputy Director, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau
- Claudia Arguelles-Miller - Economic Development

An email-contact group of the above persons together with the DCG Corplan Team members was established to efficiently disseminate project information. Video conferences for progress reports will be an ongoing mechanism for participation by the Review Committee.

The project was officially commenced on July 17, 2023 through issuance of an emailed Notice to Proceed authored by T. Sharon Woodberry, Economic Development Officer

### **Kick-Off Meeting**

Due to vacation schedules, an agreed date for the Kick-Off Meeting was establish as August 17, 2023. Attendees, either in-person or virtual, were as follows:

- Bruce Hoch - DCG Corplan Consulting LLC
- Max Forgey - Forgey Planning
- Alan Parter - Parter International, Inc.
- John Dolan-Heitlinger - D-H & Associates Consulting, LLC
- Rob DeRocker - Rob DeRocker & Assoc.
- Michael Ilcyszyn - City of Cape Coral - Interim City Manager
- Kimberly Bruns - City of Cape Coral - City Clerk
- Maureen Buice - City of Cape Coral - City Manager's Office
- Connie Barron - City of Cape Coral - City Manager's Office
- Matt Grambow - City of Cape Coral - City Manager's Office - Special Projects
- Tom Slaughter -City of Cape Coral - Community Redevelopment Agency
- Vince Caution - City of Cape Coral - Development Services
- Chad Boyko - City of Cape Coral - Development Services - City Planning Division
- Mark Mason - City of Cape Coral - Financial Services
- Crystal Feast - City of Cape Coral - Financial Services
- Ryan Lamb - City of Cape Coral - Fire- ER Services
- Michelle Hoffman - City of Cape Coral - Information Technology Services
- Persides Zambrano - City of Cape Coral - Public Works
- Bill Corbett - City of Cape Coral - Public Works - Design and Construction
- Laura Dodd - City of Cape Coral - Public Works - Transportation Division
- Jeff Pearson - City of Cape Coral - Utilities
- Paul Clinghan - City of Cape Coral - Office of Capital Improvement
- T. Sharon Woodberry - City of Cape Coral - - Office of Economic & Business Development
- Pamela Johnson - Lee County - Convention & Visitors Bureau

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Key takeaways from the meeting were that Cape Coral is now the size of Salt Lake City in population and could reach that of Tampa in the next few years. In order to be sustainable in the future, the economy needs to grow in sync with the population. Jobs and commercial investment are vital building blocks, but understanding and navigating roadblocks or pitfalls are essential.

The various department heads of City agencies in attendance were engaged and promised active participation in the process. (For notes for the Kick-Off Meeting, refer to the Task 1 Report Appendices).

### 1.b – Project Website

The DCG Corplan team prepared a project website as a landing pad for project information. A main overview page is supported by individual pages for each of the twelve project tasks. A progress chart graphically depicts tasks completion to date. The site is continually updated when new information is updated. The Review Committee will be alerted when major new updates occur.

The address for the website is: <https://capecoraledsp-work.com/>

DCG Corplan has requested that the site be considered as confidential at present. However, as activities are finalized, a more graphically-pleasing website will be designed for public viewing that will summarize key data points for presentation.

### 1.c. – Public Survey and Stakeholder Interviews

#### Public Survey

Obtaining public input is vital for economic development plans, so a Public Survey was designed to engage Cape Coral residents. SurveyMonkey.com was retained to host the online survey, with a series of brief questions devised through the input from the Review Committee. Ten questions were posed; nine were multiple-choice, the tenth was an essay-type. With help from the City, multiple announcements and advertisements were presented to the public including social media and a Q-R code. The survey was published on September 8, 2023 and closed on October 13, 2023.

DCG Corplan anticipated a return of approximately 2,000 responses or about 1% of the City's population. In total, 1,841 surveys were received. A summary of the questions and answers are as follows (for detailed information on the Public Survey, refer to the Task 1 Report Appendices):

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Q1: How long have you been a resident of Cape Coral, Florida?

Leading response: **Five Years**

Q2: Which aspects of infrastructure do you think are most crucial for economic development in our area? Rank by priority of investment.

Leading responses: **Utilities, Multimodal Roadway, Stormwater Management**

Q3: Looking to the future, which areas should Cape Coral prioritize for development over the next decade? (Select up to three):

Leading responses: **Business & Commerce, Healthcare Facilities, Education & Schools**

Q4: How would you rate the effectiveness of local government in addressing community concerns?

Leading response: **Not Very Effective**

Q5: At present, the City of Cape Coral has only one college. What forms of higher education do you think the city currently lacks? (Select any that apply):

Leading responses: **Technical/Vocational Training, Community Colleges**

Q6: How would you rate the employment opportunities in Cape Coral?

Leading response: **Fair**

Q7: What is your opinion about the current state of tourism and its impact on Cape Coral?

Leading response: **It is good, but there are some negative impacts that should be managed**

Q8: Are you in favor of more downtown development projects in Cape Coral?

Leading response: **Strongly in Favor**

Q9: In the future, what would you like to see more of in Cape Coral? (Select up to three):

Leading responses: **Linear Parks & Streetscape Beautification, Outdoor Recreation Opportunities, Cultural Events**

Q10: Please provide any additional comments or concerns you may have about Cape Coral and its future direction. Feel free to explain any of your answers to the questions above.

1,248 written comments were received and the major themes were as follows:

- **Desire for more greenspace throughout the City**
- **Completion of parks started though GoBond funding**
- **Rejection of the Jaycee Park plan**
- **More outdoor recreation activity opportunities**
- **Full restoration of the Yacht Club beach**
- **Tourist attraction based on water use**





- Installation of shade trees and planted medians
- Installation of sidewalks in residential neighborhoods
- Better policing of traffic violators
- Better controls on vehicle storage and general cleanliness of properties
- Improved traffic control, stoplights, street widening – to handle ever increasing congestion
- Better connectivity to I-75
- Clean-up of canals
- Sensitivity for eco-systems sustainability, including Redfish Point development
- Limitation on rental apartment construction
- More cohesive zoning and planning
- Improvement of building facades in downtown
- Infrastructure improvements, including burying of electrical and telecommunication cabling
- Higher-paying business attraction
- Commercial/office development in the north area
- Attraction of a second hospital/health care provider
- More efficient permitting processes
- Tax reduction
- Responsiveness from municipal government to citizens' needs

### Stakeholder Interviews

It was determined that input from some leading companies could help shape the vision for Cape Coral in the coming years. Stakeholders were invited to participate in telephone interviews with the proviso that their direct comments would not be shared with the public. Seven stakeholders were interviewed in October 2023. The schedule of stakeholder calls and the summary of their comment are listed below:

- James Sommers, RE/Max - Realtor, Residential (10/5/2023)
- Joseph Bonara, Catalyst Development - RE Developer (10/9/2023)
- Charles Pease, Cape Coral Technical College - Educator (10/9/2023)
- Annette Barbaccia, Miloff Aubuchon Realty Group - Realtor, Commercial (10/11/2023)
- Donna Shuman Germain, Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce - Business Leader (10/16/2023)
- Henrik Margard, Nor-Tech Boats - Manufacturer (10/16/2023)
- Larry Nygard, Crown Development - RE Developer (10/17/2023)

### Interviews Summary

- Businesses are largely unhappy with civic leaders
- Permitting process time are too long, personnel attitudes are poor

- City needs to learn about benefits of fast-tracking, Public-Private-Partnerships (P3)
- Years 2021 & 2022 were the City's highest growth years
- Current lending climate due to inflation and interest rates are slowing investment
- Labor supply is limited, and not often qualified
- Educational system opportunity: Marine tech, Welders, Automotive, HVAC, Nursing, CNC production specialists, Transportation, Logistics
- New residents are: typically 25 to 34 year old starters; or, 59-75 year old retirees
- Demand for rental seems to overshadow ownership
- Public awareness training needed on issues of environmental sustainability, preservation of native plant species, etc.
- A city of 400,000 needs:
  - Mixed-use housing development to attract younger residents
  - Affordable workers housing
  - Downtown development through site assemblage
  - Tech Center to house new tech startups companies
  - Business incubator
  - More hospital space

### 1.d – Facilitation of the Vision

The Vision for Cape Coral’s future should be a long-term aspirational goal with a direct and inspiring message. In the supplementary Mission statement, the means of achieving the vision is more practical and short-term.

The Cape Compass Vision and Mission Statements indicates that the city *“will thoughtfully grow into a vibrant and inclusive community that encourages residential character, creates economic opportunity, and ensures respect for its unique environment”*<sup>1</sup>. The mission will be to provide services and resources that enhance the quality of life for those who live, learn, work, and play in Cape Coral.

We began the crafting of the Vision and Mission statements through the review of preceding reports and studies. This will be a continuing effort requiring multiple iterations before finalization. The overarching themes for this effort will be Adaptability and Resiliency. Recognizing Cape Coral’s physical limitations is obvious, with only a few mentioned below:

- Large number of canals and difficulty of movement throughout the city

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<sup>1</sup> Cape Compass 2030 Strategic Plan



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- Low density sprawl and absence of high-rise urban core
- Lack of direct interstate highway access
- Potential for on-going cataclysmic weather events

### Adaptability

How strengths and potentials can overcome drawbacks is the key. We will explore SWOT in later tasks, but an early appreciation of this process is warranted at this early juncture. For now, we will consider the following as strengths to be leveraged:

- Considerable population size with expected growth in near term
- Decreasing median age indicating younger family influx
- Recreational water-oriented city theme
- Affordable living opportunities
- Low crime rate
- Abundant natural and recreational amenities

### Resiliency

With the influx of in-migrants to Southwest Florida, the sudden and shocking revelation of hurricane impacts must be daunting to new residents. There is no other state in the US that is more adept at storm recovery than Florida, but hurricanes are getting bigger and will result in more damage. With the City's near sea-level character and the proliferation of canals, the reality of storm surge and flooding will remain a significant factor.

The City of Cape Coral cannot afford to tackle climate change on its own, but what it can do is constantly balance development planning with the cost of severe weather realities. We will work with the City and stakeholders to develop a vision that is achievable and grounded in the financial and social benefit capabilities of Cape Coral.

### 1.e – Task 1 Progress Report/video conference

We conducted a video conference with the Project Review Committee on progress on October 31, 2023. Work product to date was discussed and the materials covered were previously uploaded to the website. The major theme of the meeting was the range of comments received during the Public Survey and the impacts of some strategic suggestions and recommendations.