

# 01

## Executive Summary







INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to Pensacola!

Pensacola is a vibrant coastal city where rich history and culture meet a cosmopolitan future. Residents here enjoy an exceptional blend of laid-back, family-friendly coastal living with vibrant, commute-worthy events and outdoor activities — adding up to a unique culture that is driving change in this little city.

As the city grows, it's navigating uncharted waters: contending with nationwide housing challenges and working to reposition itself in the evolving economy, all while providing a desirable quality of life.

Strive to Thrive: Pensacola 2035 is the city's inaugural strategic plan — and with that, comes an opportunity to shape Pensacola's future. Rather than a reactive approach, this plan sets the City on a course to proactively chart its evolution with key goals in mind.

This plan is a foundation on which future decisions will be made. Informed by feedback and perspectives from the Pensacola community, the plan lays out an ongoing and iterative process for city growth. If the City follows the roadmap this citizen-led process has generated, then Pensacola's future will be bright.



Community development — Mayor Reeves, center left, at the celebration for the opening of the Blake Doyle Skatepark.



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### INTRODUCTION

While Pensacola shows great promise, key improvements are needed to unlock the city's potential and create a livable, equitable, and healthy community. Throughout the strategic planning process, a number of key themes emerged that describe Pensacola's current opportunities and challenges.

**Opportunity for All /** Pensacola is home to a diverse community, ranging from young families to older retirees. This is a point of pride: many residents are proud to have spent their life in Pensacola, or to have returned to their hometown after years away. People want Pensacola to be where they can grow and thrive at all stages of life, but gaps remain in educational and workforce opportunities, especially for youth and young families. Without stronger career and educational pathways, young people may struggle to see a prosperous future in the city.

**Geography /** Downtown Pensacola, particularly along Palafox Street, has seen strong investment and has become lively and prosperous. However, other neighborhoods in Pensacola lack the same level of investment and, particularly in western Pensacola, lack basic infrastructure and services to ensure a comfortable life. These areas require more focused investment to experience the same growth and vitality seen downtown.

**New Development /** Some recent investments in the public realm have catalyzed denser development Downtown, but Pensacola is competing with suburban sprawl that pulls energy away from the city core and exacerbates transportation challenges. To create a more livable Pensacola, the city must proactively incentivize the form of housing and commercial development it wants to see.

**Resources /** The city, county, and state offer valuable programs and resources, but many residents are unaware of these opportunities due to poor coordination among agencies. Improved communication and collaboration can help maximize the impact of these resources.

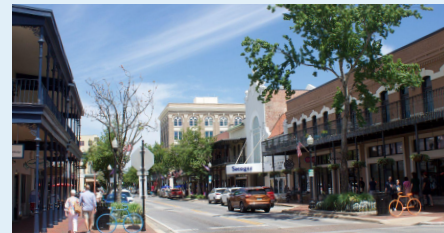
**Capacity /** Pensacola has many forward-thinking ideas in its planning documents, but lacks the capacity to execute them effectively. The City needs to select key priorities and direct its time, attention, and resources to a few big initiatives at a time. This iterative approach is both more feasible and more responsive to people's needs, as the City can continually reassess what is needed next as Pensacola evolves over time.

**Identity /** Although Pensacola is prominent in Escambia County and Northwest Florida, the City needs a clear, distinct identity as the urban and cultural asset in the region. Defining this identity is essential for the city to position itself as a regional leader and an attractive destination for residents and businesses.

## Pensacola Today: High-Profile Initiatives and Investments



**Belmont-DeVilliers** — A historic African-American neighborhood in Pensacola with ongoing efforts to preserve its rich cultural heritage while embracing its evolution.



**Reimagine Palafox** — Building on Palafox Street's success, changes aim to enhance walkability, expand outdoor dining, and boost vibrancy with more entertainment in Downtown Pensacola.



**Port of Pensacola** — The future vision positions the Port as a key maritime asset, accommodating vessels and cargo while driving innovation in the expanding regional and global blue economy.



**Bruce Beach** — Enhancements to Bruce Beach include improved stormwater management systems that boost local ecology, all while honoring the site's rich African American heritage.



**Housing** — New infill mixed-use commercial and residential development in the Belmont-DeVilliers neighborhood has transformed previously vacant land into much-needed housing.



**Hollice T. William Greenway** — Anchored by Blake Doyle Skate Park, the greenway will become a signature green spine with stormwater features and gathering areas for all ages.

WHY A PLAN

# Why do we need a strategic plan?

Pensacola is at a turning point: it's a city, rooted in rich history, that is growing and transforming with a renewed focus on livability and quality of life for all. Pensacola's history has been shaped by multiple private- and public-sector plans, policies, and regulations that impact people who live and work here. While many plans have focused on specific Community Redevelopment Areas, like Urban Core CRA District, or citywide assets, like Palafox Street, few have tried to address the entire city in a single document like Strive to Thrive: Pensacola 2035.

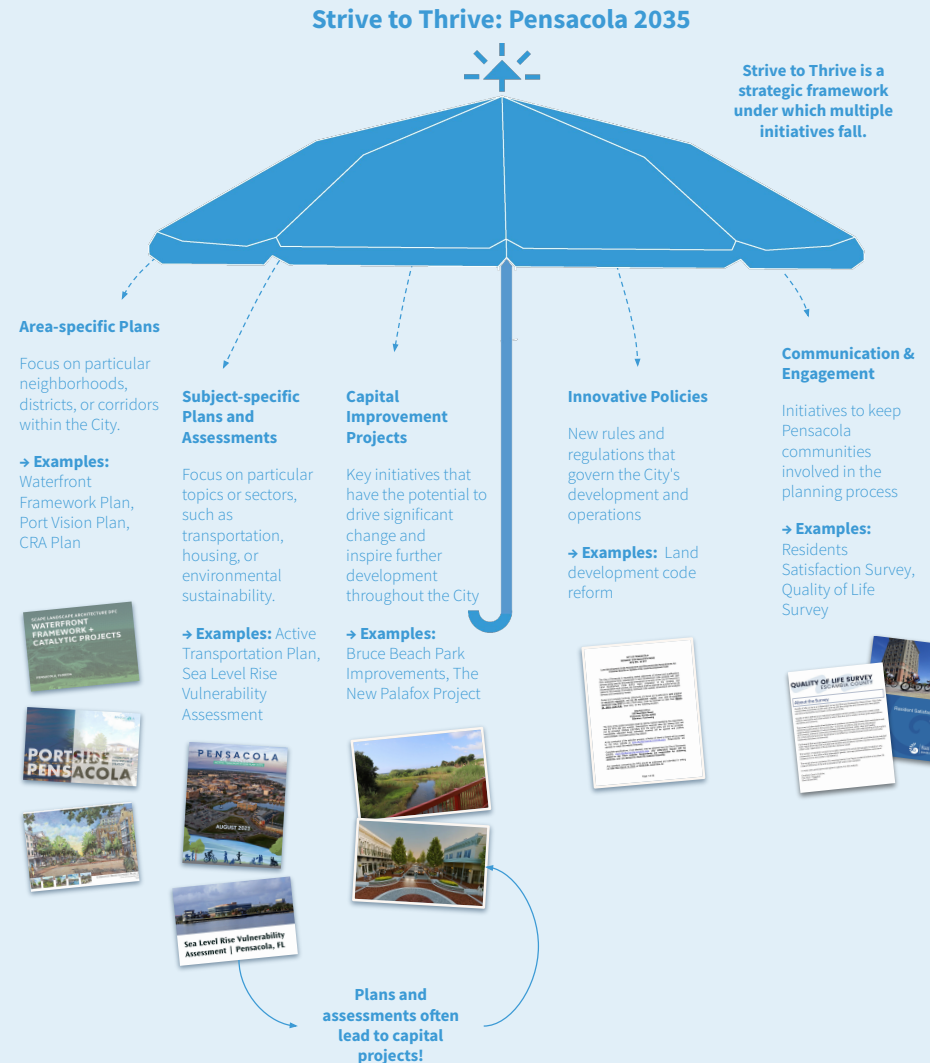
This document, informed by extensive consultation with and surveying of communities, is a tool to guide city government's decision-making and ensure that strategic initiatives add up to achieve the broader goals and values of the Pensacola community.

This document speaks to city officials, setting out prioritized goals that public sector investments will strive to achieve. This plan also speaks to private entities — nonprofits, businesses, developers, and more — signaling a clear set of actions where these groups can play a role. And, this plan speaks to Pensacola's community at large, laying out what matters most to them and holding public and private actors accountable to their concerns.



**STRIVE TO THRIVE: PENSACOLA 2035 IS AN "UMBRELLA" TOOL** — this plan guides the City's future annual budgets, capital projects, and policy priorities, ensuring public decision-making is focused on the needs of the entire City and all of its residents. Under this umbrella are multiple different initiatives, from subject-specific plans to innovative policies, all of which — sometimes separate efforts, other times interrelated initiatives — are organized under the same recommended goals and actions set out in this plan. As time goes by, more and more initiatives will emerge as opportunity presents itself — this plan sets the overarching framework to ensure that time, funds, and attention are funneled to projects foster this vision.

## Relationship to Other City Projects, Initiatives, and Planning Plans





## How might we create a shared vision for Pensacola's future that guides our priorities over the next 10 years?

As the City evolves, a shared vision is crucial to guide investments and decisions over the next decade. This strategic plan provides a clear roadmap for Pensacola to work collaboratively toward its future goals.

With many initiatives already underway, the City of Pensacola engaged Gehl, an urban design, research, and strategy firm, to explore what residents love and want to preserve in Pensacola today, what changes they envision in their neighborhoods, and the big ideas they have for the City's future. Gehl led an extensive, multi-method visioning process that included a review of existing city plans, global best practices in urban strategy, and a robust community engagement effort.

The visioning process involved over 1,300 survey responses from those who live, work, and play in Pensacola, a public open house, two vision workshops with representatives from public, private, and community sectors, two focus groups with Black and African American residents and youth, interviews with four city council members, expert input from housing and economic development professionals, and more.

The result is a forward-looking vision for Pensacola, along with a community-informed decision-making framework and eight key goals that the city will work toward over the next ten years. This strategic plan sets the stage for Pensacola to thrive as a leader in livability, health, and equity.

### VISION STATEMENT



- 1** Equitable outcomes for everyone — no matter one's background
- 2** Investments that promote security and opportunity
- 3** Foundational necessities like housing, safe streets, and community resources
- 4** A city that current and future generations want to build a life in
- 5** A city with all the necessary and fun assets that let people lead full lives
- 6** Services, amenities, and places that help you every step of the way

PRIORITIZATION FRAMEWORK

## A community-informed decision-making framework ensures Pensacola's future investments address core community concerns.



### Prioritize basic needs first

- Does this project address safety and security: attainable housing, safer streets, well-resourced community facilities, or resilience?



### Prioritize more mixed-use hubs beyond Downtown

- Does this project advance investment in livability outside of Downtown to create more neighborhood centers with walkable amenities and services?



### Prioritize feasible wins

- Does this project have a clear path to implementation, community partners and champions, and/or access to funding?



### Prioritize racial equity

- Does this project further equitable outcomes for communities of color in Pensacola, especially for attainable housing and quality of infrastructure?



### Prioritize systems

- Does this project address multiple strategic goals at once?

City leaders should prioritize projects based on these questions above, with more "yeses" indicating higher priority.

GOALS

## Eight goals to guide priorities for Pensacola over the next 10 years



### Attainable Housing for All Income Levels



### Safe Streets for All Mobilities



### Support for Youth Experiences



### Resilient Waterfronts and Neighborhoods



### More Walkable, Mixed-use Districts



### Public Spaces that Connect Communities



### Thriving Innovation and Businesses



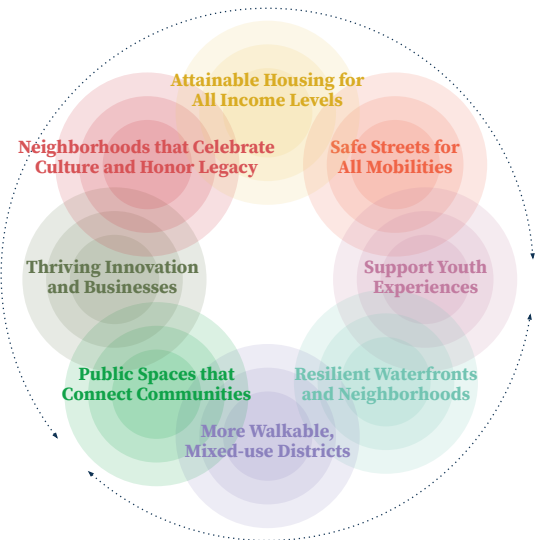
### Neighborhoods that Celebrate Culture and Honor Legacy





**Executive Summary**

**BRINGING ALL GOALS TOGETHER**

To anchor the Pensacola's eight key goals (see Chapter 3) over the next decade, investments in hard infrastructure—such as housing, safe streets, parks, and resilient facilities—and soft social infrastructure—like arts, unique cultural programming, and innovation development programs—must be strategically integrated into the built environment. These investments should prioritize fostering a thriving community by enhancing quality of life, directing resources to areas with the greatest need, and achieving multiple goals at once.



-  Opportunity Area for each goal
-  Opportunity Corridor

**Transform northern Pensacola and the Carpenter Creek area...**

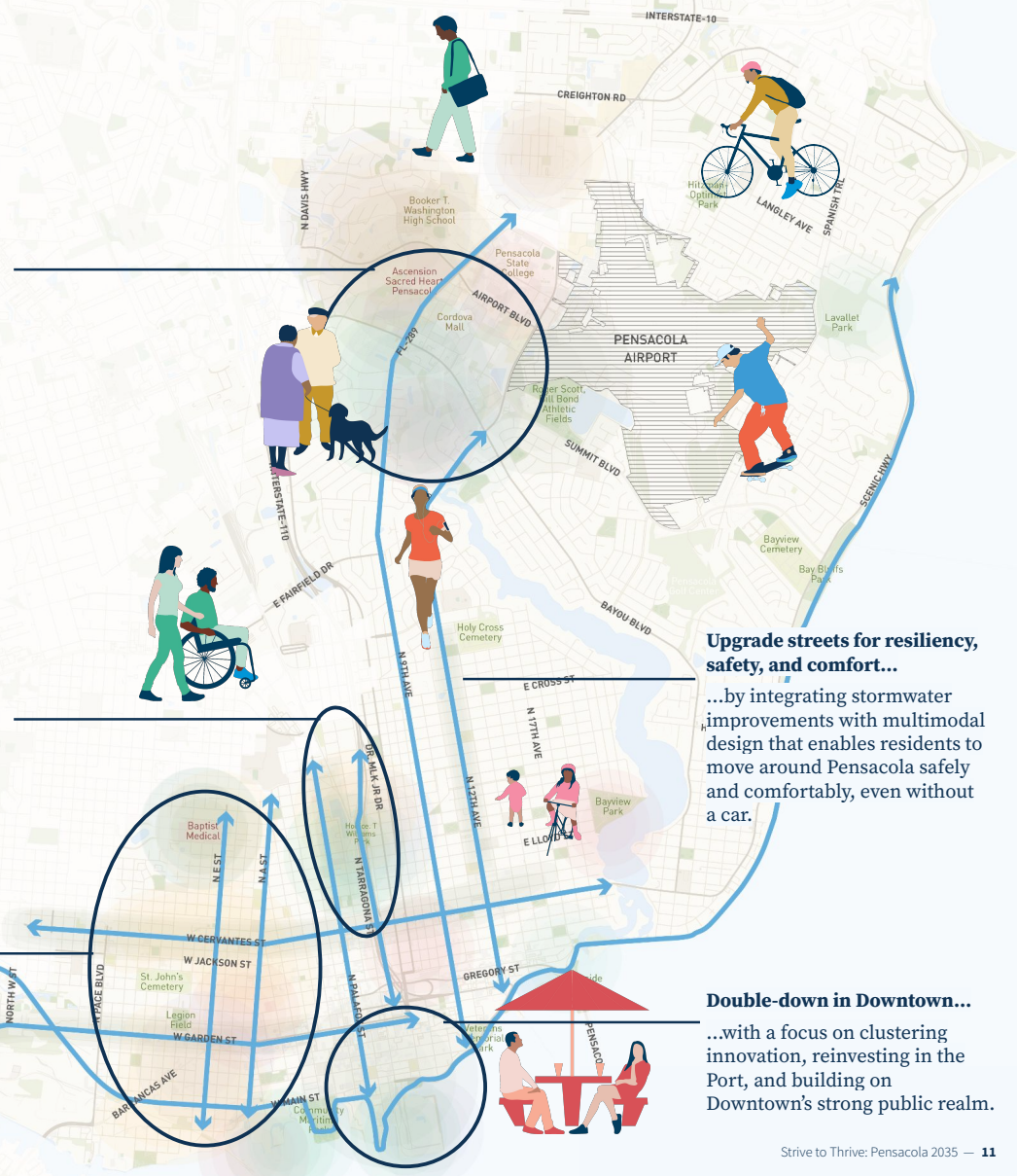
...with significant investment in resiliency and public space, coupled with denser mixed-use real estate development that catalyzes innovation economies.

**Invest in incredible public space to stitch the city back together and catalyze infill development...**

...leveraging Hollice T. Williams transformation to deliver a signature gathering place that invites equitable development at its edges.

**Prioritize investment in historically disinvested parts of Pensacola...**

...directing funds and resources towards bolstering affordable housing, supportive services for youth, and cultural expression.



**Upgrade streets for resiliency, safety, and comfort...**

...by integrating stormwater improvements with multimodal design that enables residents to move around Pensacola safely and comfortably, even without a car.

**Double-down in Downtown...**

...with a focus on clustering innovation, reinvesting in the Port, and building on Downtown's strong public realm.