

Martin County

Economic Recovery Opportunities

August 2021



BUSINESS FLARE®

Economic Development Solutions
Maximize Your Marketplace

Based on a review of the market research, stakeholder interviews, field observations, reputational and brand assessment, and initial feedback from key staff members, a variety of trends, consistent core values, physical assets, and overall strategic themes for countywide economic development opportunities were identified. Those strategic themes are summarized below, followed by a listing of more specific opportunities we consider to be bold and new for Martin County that resulted from our own internal brainstorming sessions. These strategic themes, bold new opportunities, and additional action items that are consistent with other plans that are in place have been combined to create the full plan in a way that fits easily into your existing framework of action.



For Martin County, the evaluation and active listening identified the following strategic themes within the BusinessFlare® framework:

Preserve your brand and values – They are a major asset for your talent attraction and retention efforts. Post-pandemic, some of the best talent is going to choose places that value unique natural places the way Martin County residents do. They may work remotely, relocate their businesses, or build new businesses around new innovations. The natural places – on land and water – of Martin County are even more valuable in the innovation economy.

Enhance and embrace your talent advantages – Now more than ever is a good time to celebrate and further improve the sustainable lifestyle you have created – including in the name of economic development. This includes existing clusters of concentrated mixed-use development and walkable, sustainable places to accelerate innovation and attract the talent pool of workers.

Expose your increasing prosperity and positive stories – There are many industries doing well in Martin County while still honoring the community’s values. Helping to tell their stories, and the stories of sustainable lifestyles, will attract more investors, companies, and talent that highly value sustainability.

Invest in key sectors and pandemic recovery – Several sectors continue to struggle with recovery and need investment of various kinds. This can include short term direct assistance from federal funds, longer term assistance in key infrastructure investments, start-up program investments, and even targeted research partnership investments.

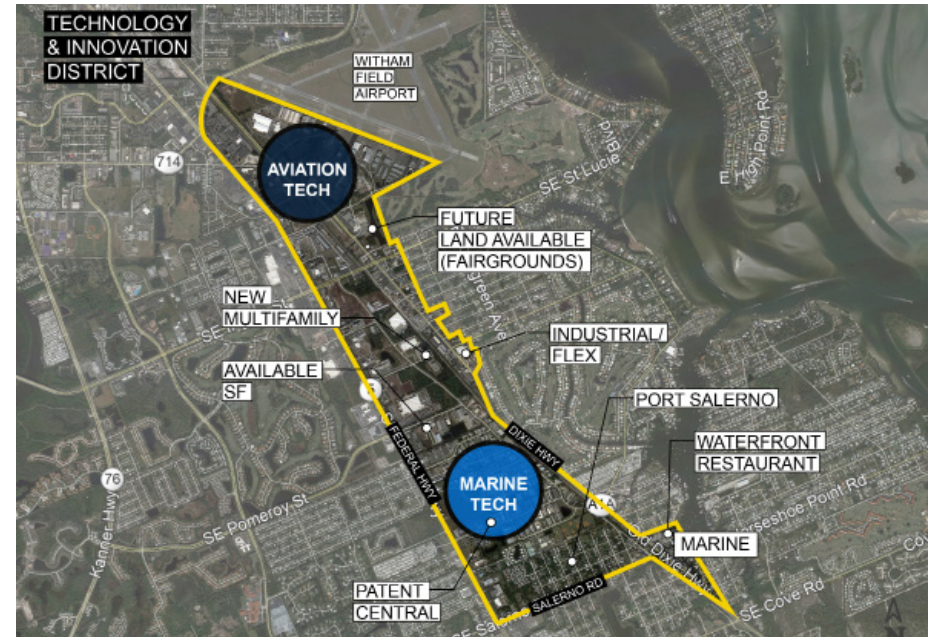
Capitalize on emerging “clean” sectors – Water and air quality improvements are clearly key to the sustainable lifestyle so important for the Martin County economy. Targeted efforts to attract and grow innovative companies related to those improvements are not just consistent with sustainability goals, they will help enhance them with innovative breakthroughs in energy, mobility, large scale water management, and even social impact investing.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Opportunity: *Create an Innovation District in partnership with the City of Stuart, Indian River State College (IRSC), the Cleveland Clinic, the Airport, and others.*

Why this matters: Boat building, aerospace, information tech, and related supply chain companies have clustered to some degree along US 1 and A1A/West Dixie near the airport and current fairgrounds. Much of this work is custom and requires some degree of innovation, and retention of appropriate sites for these uses is critical. To survive and thrive, these enterprises will need to continue innovating, particularly as several sectors switch to electric mobility modes, lightweight drone use expands exponentially, telehealth and medical drones become more common, and both boats and drones use tech to self-navigate. The area has a significant number of sites and buildings ready for new tenants, the County and City control several key sites, and the entire area could take advantage of the Life Science, Technology and Research (LSTAR) regulation incentives with terrific partnership opportunities around medical technology innovations.

With multiple locations for innovation “3rd places” in or near the district – some already in place – along with substantial amounts of new housing, this district has the best combination of land uses in Martin County for innovation to thrive. Finally, the area has the best opportunities to use rail transit and electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) vehicles at the airport for employee commuting, for wealthy residents to connect more easily using drones, for drone delivery of parts (particularly shore to ship), and to easily combine modes for both passenger travel and logistics. These industry disruptions are not 10 years away. They are being tested all around the globe and are likely to see commercial use in the next two to three years – sooner in some countries. There is urgency to embrace this idea so that existing businesses can compete amidst the coming wave of change and new businesses can be recruited to employ reskilled workers.



Opportunity: *Create a REACH (Reimagining Education And Career Help) training center at the airport to help anchor the Innovation District and address talent pipeline needs.*

Why this matters: Future mobility is in a major phase of disruption. The electrification of most forms of mobility, the imminent creation of three-dimensional mobility beyond traditional aircraft, autonomous mobility, and new kinds of multi-modal hubs are going to require new skills to support current and future marine, auto, and aerospace companies – while taking advantage of existing skill sets around composite materials, IT, marine electronics and navigation, custom boat builders, and other traditional trades.

There is a great opportunity to create partnerships with Indian River State College and Martin County School District to begin this training in anticipation of the coming disruptions. Additionally, there are private sector partners expressing interest in working to grow these sectors and invest in the talent development. Finally, there is urgency to position Martin County to be competitive with more obvious choices on the Space Coast and in other States like Ohio, Texas, Georgia, and Alabama.

Opportunity: Create a major research facility related to the health benefits of cleaner water, technology transfer for cleaner water inventions, and seafood industry benefits.

Why this matters: By connecting clean water and health, the County addresses two major goals: better water quality and a growing health sector. Federal funding for public health efforts is likely in the near term, and this kind of partnership can position Martin County to compete for those resources. Additionally, some of the innovations stemming from the research can be commercialized locally, leading to new businesses and more jobs.

Opportunity: Recruit companies innovating in the field of clean water.

Why this matters: Challenges related to polluted waters will continue to negatively impact multiple economic sectors for Martin County. Boat building, eco-tourism, quality of life for talent recruitment, water sports, seafood, and even real estate development industry sectors will contract significantly if water quality continues to deteriorate throughout the ecosystem. Like air pollution from fossil fuels, technological innovation is needed to turn the tide on water quality, and companies addressing those challenges have a great place to find success in Martin County because of the community support they will find, the clear challenges that need to be addressed, and other businesses that will want to partner on innovations to protect their own interests. Such companies can help grow the economy in keeping with County values and brand.

Opportunity: Recruit electric boat manufacturers and expand the marine tech sector.

Why this matters: Air mobility is not the only mode undergoing electrification at a rapid pace. In response to climate change concerns around the globe, all mobility is focused on electrification as a clean-



Electric boat charging.

er and quieter energy source tapping renewables like wind, solar, and hydro-electric systems (including wave action). Boating and shipping are part of this trend, and electric and solar boat building is very consistent with the Martin County brand and values. This taps an existing talent pool that can upskill and expand to provide excellent wages and entrepreneurial opportunities. Again, eco-conscious Martin County residents are likely to be early adopters and provide companies with a nearby client base as has been observed with electric cars.

Opportunity: Recruit drone fabricators and provide them a testing opportunity at Witham Field.

Why this matters: As mentioned in the innovation district opportunity, drones will be disrupting mobility very soon. With an existing group of employees who work well with lightweight composites for boat building, with electronic navigation systems, with autopilot systems, and with other mobility safety systems, the County has a competitive advantage to enter this industry. And with the emerging field of amphibious drones, Witham Field is better located than most for testing opportunities. Coming soon to a shipyard near you – personal drones

on yachts (cleaner - fewer pollutants, safer, quieter, and lighter than helicopters). Finally, select households are almost certainly going to be the initial target market for personal or small group drone mobility, and the nearby cluster of such households will be appealing to drone fabricators – along with the companies creating new drone innovations.

Opportunity: Create an entrepreneurship partnership program with area nonprofits attracting investment in companies and programming from Martin County residents.

Why this matters: A good system of educating and assisting potential entrepreneurs exists, but it does not start early, focus on equity, or take full advantage of significant potential investors. Given existing relationships and potential investor engagement with Martin County organizations, it will be a great place to expand such efforts. The multiple sites can help generate startup businesses across the County, and there may be opportunities to create a new site in the proposed innovation district.

Opportunity: Request that the Florida High Tech Corridor (FHTC) be expanded to include Martin County and leverage that participation to expand recruitment of aeronautical companies as part of an expanded Space Coast and identify other related partnerships with organizations in other parts of the State.

Why this matters: With current strengths in aerospace, marine technology, medical technology, and investor wealth, Martin County has a strong portfolio of existing and potential tech companies and opportunities that many other FHTC counties do not. The County is just as proximate to Florida Institute of Technology, University of Central Florida, Embry Riddle, University of Florida, and other FHTC partners as similarly situated counties on Florida’s west coast. These partners can participate in the suggested innovation district, help with major research and tech transfer by local partners, and take advantage of State resources for similar activities in Martin County, including workforce development.

CAPITAL PROJECTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Opportunity: Dredge and improve the St. Lucie Canal to increase use by pleasure boats, allow location of additional boat manufacturers and protected marinas, and host water related ecotourism like kayaking and paddle boarding.

Why this matters: Water sports, ecotourism, seafood, marine, and recreational opportunities are all economic sectors of strength for Martin County, and all are consistent with the County values and brand. The canal is currently a major underutilized asset and can be upgraded to have major economic impacts. Depending on the design solutions, there might even be an opportunity to improve estuarine water quality in the process.

Opportunity: Develop an airspace corridor for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) between the airports and Palm Beach International Airport in anticipation of expanded passenger drone use.

Why this matters: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and community acceptance are seen as the most significant challenges to automated air mobility. Creating an airspace corridor to take people and goods to PBI creates another “first to market” advantage for Martin County and its businesses and residents. The potential for such mobility provides a distinct locational advantage – close enough for a quick flight to an international airport, but far enough away to enjoy a natural setting. This combination could prove a major advantage in the competition for talent and wealthy investors.

Opportunity: Develop the western private airport near Indiantown into a UAV testing facility and general aviation innovation facility similar to those in Ohio, Texas, Georgia and elsewhere.

Why this matters: In order for the UAV/Drone industry to develop quickly in Martin County, there is a need for more immediate testing

in less populated areas. With nearby companies like Pratt Whitney, the western airport provides unrestricted airspace for testing that can eventually include flights to and from Witham Field, Pratt, and other nearby facilities. Such flights might include automated drone monitoring of Lake Okeechobee algal blooms, inspection of Florida Power & Light solar farms, and similar functions supportive of County goals and industries. The activity also provides a “first to market” advantage for Martin County.



UAV inspection of electrical infrastructure.

RESIDENTIAL AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Opportunity: Invest in public health system improvements, including expanded mental health and telehealth services in partnership with non-governmental organizations, and hospital/health systems.

Why this matters: As the workforce returns to offices and other workplaces, there has been 18 months of “deferred” attention to employee health issues. Without extra efforts to address these issues, productivity will be lower, reducing company profitability and competitiveness – and even keeping people from returning to work. This talent gap requires immediate intentional investment to minimize negative impacts.

Opportunity: Partner with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and cities to proactively share stories about new housing and community redevelopment area housing and commercial development.

Why this matters: The lack of housing and variety in housing types is consistently cited as a challenge in attracting and retaining talent for key industries, including health. A key component of this challenge is the perception that more housing is not welcomed throughout the County, but there are actually a large number of units approved or under development. Our review of various media sources showed there is little happening to contradict current perceptions. To attract additional developers – and employees – the various partners need to change the narrative with an intentional positive storytelling system.

Opportunity: Clarify and consistently use a new County brand promise/statement/tagline to reflect Martin County’s values as a way to enhance talent attraction and retention.

Why this matters: Innovation talent, tech talent, and many kinds of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) talent are attracted by several key conditions: clusters of other people and companies



DuPuis Management Area.

like them; walkable cities and neighborhoods with great 3rd places for “incidental innovations”; and natural places where they can embrace and enjoy outdoor recreational opportunities. Beyond the ocean and mountains of California, places like Boise, Austin, and Nashville offer this combination – and have the growth to show for it. Most other cities can find ways to provide the clusters and the 3rd places, but simply

cannot compete in the “natural places” category. Martin County can compete, but the “natural places” part of the brand and storytelling has been subtle, indirect, and understated – almost as if to keep it a secret. This branding strategy is wholly consistent with core values and brand – and it will further enhance economic prosperity by attracting the kind of talent that will grow clean and innovative industries.

Opportunity: Further explore development opportunities in Western Martin County that support and advance agriculture technology and recreation that will be beneficial to Martin County.

Why this matters: Agriculture is a key part of the Martin County experience and brand but preserving it as development pressures mount will require a way to make it more productive and valuable. By embracing and expanding technology as part of Martin County’s agriculture sector, the County can invite AgTech companies to participate and become a showcase, protecting the agriculture industry in the process.

Opportunity: Expand and celebrate all aspects of the equestrian industry in ways that make Martin County the place of choice in all of Florida.

Why this matters: Many aspects of the equestrian world are driven by wealthy households, and Martin County will continue to attract such households with its high quality of life and preserve paradise values. There is an opportunity to have those households spend more money locally as part of their enthusiasm for all things horses, and this local spending will have a significant impact on other sectors. Many assets to grow this industry are already in place, and the addition of horse trails along the St. Lucie Canal will add to the equestrian ecosystem. Finally, this strategy will make more obvious another key aspect of the County’s reputation – a place for wealth, and that will attract additional businesses, investors, and jobs.

TRANSPORTATION, TRANSIT AND PARKING

Opportunity: Develop micro-transit and other localized connections into the Innovation District and other employment centers.

Why this matters: Sustainability requires better mobility options to reduce single occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips. Better mobility options can make it possible for many more people to live affordably in Martin County, even when housing is not affordable. Finally, talent is attracted to Innovation Districts with sustainable mobility options like micro-transit, walkability, and a wide variety of electric vehicles. By starting with micro-transit connections, Martin County can attract more of this talent – even as more innovative mobility options evolve.

All of this also helps reduce traffic congestion, carbon emissions, and traffic accidents and deaths when properly designed and managed. Lower SOV trips and enhanced walkability are also clearly connected to improved health outcomes. With these improvements to quality of life, even more talent will be attracted and retained.

Opportunity: Create, adopt, and implement a corridor master plan between Lake Okeechobee, Indiantown and the Turnpike to be used for biking, horseback riding, runoff cleansing, Lake Okeechobee discharge cleansing (huge bioswales), and brand enhancement.

Why this matters: Protecting the County’s brand and identity” is a major competitive advantage in the race for talent. A highly unique aspect of the expression of that brand are green corridors along major highways created with natural areas, farms and nurseries, and other parks and open spaces. To continue those brand protections, there is an opportunity to protect that image along SR 76. There is urgency to create such protections given the likely development pressure during the coming economic recovery. In addition, such a corridor can support recreational activities attractive to young talent. Finally, using such a corridor for bioswale water cleansing helps support the marine industry and ecotourism.



St. Lucie Canal connection to Lake Okeechobee.

POLICY INITIATIVES (LDRs, FEASIBILITY, LAND)

Opportunity: Expand regulatory incentives and investment programs to include the County’s contributory industry and entrepreneurial manufacturing, including those recovering from the pandemic, but also for the next 10 years.

Why this matters: This sector greatly enhances the quality of life for the entire County, and it plays a key role in talent attraction and retention. Because creative industry businesses were hard hit by the pandemic, they are at risk of weakening further, creating a ripple effect for multiple sectors, and reducing real estate values. Left to run a natural course, it could take a decade for many businesses and NGOs to recover. A strategic investment to help these businesses recover quickly will have substantial positive impacts beyond the businesses themselves including in the areas of placemaking and talent retention and attraction.

Opportunity: *Preserve at least 30 acres of waterfront sites for water-dependent companies and public access to the water using revised LDRs.*

Why this matters: Water drives much of the County's economy and continued growth in the marine industries, including food-related businesses, requires sites for water-dependent enterprises. The current trend is to use waterfront property for its aesthetic value related to housing or hotels, even though this has very limited long-term value to the County's economy. Marine industry jobs are much more likely to provide living wages and long-term career opportunities. In addition, as the economy recovers and strong migration to Florida returns, pressures to develop such sites for non-marine uses will increase substantially. More immediate action will avoid further loss of such sites.

Opportunity: *Expand permitted outdoor uses and adjust design guidelines within the CRAs to respond to post-Covid business environment.*

Why this matters: The mixed-use and walkable CRA districts are a key feature of the quality of life in Martin County, and a major magnet for tech and STEM talent. The pandemic hit these areas hard, and they need help recovering – both in the immediate and longer-term future. Thoughtful regulatory flexibility, in keeping with the plans and goals of each district, will help attract more customers, residents, investors, and businesses.

Without this increased flexibility, creativity, and related public investments, it could take 5-10 years for such areas to recover. Recovery could take longer if suburban areas are able to capture significant portions of their market share in the short term. Such increased sprawl-style development is counter to the goals, values, strategies, and brand of Martin County. There will be a significant opportunity cost if recovery takes too long.



Four-story residential redevelopment of a struggling shopping center in Rockledge, Florida.

Opportunity: *Work with private owners to redevelop obsolete retail centers into a mixed use and mixed income) investments. Assist project feasibility through targeted financial and regulatory investments as needed.*

Why this matters: Like downtowns, shopping centers and malls are sizeable enough to impact the brand of a place, particularly smaller communities like Martin County. The current state of Treasure Coast Square Mall for example, with a prominent location along two key roadways, is a significant concern. Transforming the mall into a more modern mixed-use place will enhance its role as an amenity for talent, can help add new kinds of housing to help attract and retain talent, and boost the County's place brand with an innovative real estate development project. Additionally, there are underutilized and obsolete shopping centers along the County's main commercial corridors that provide additional opportunity for mixed-use, infill redevelopment. To achieve these results, investments are often needed as part of a partnership, and the County can use them to help guide the potential redevelopment toward goals the private marketplace will not support on its own.