



## *Vision 2025 for Sustainability*

5 Critical Actions to Focus the  
Growth of Gulf Shores



To Our Community,

June 2014

The members of the Gulf Shores City Council and I recognize the significant opportunity that we have as a community to define the future for Gulf Shores and our obligation to put plans in place to make that future a reality for us all.

Our community relies greatly on our beachfront and thriving tourism industry. This industry allows us to welcome millions of visitors each year and generates 62% of the city's annual revenue base. In recent years, we have experienced how delicate this balance between nature and economy can be and how our dependence on this segment of the economy leaves our community vulnerable to storms, oil spills and other disasters.

For nearly two years, our administration has worked with local stakeholder groups to develop a strategic plan to focus the growth and design the future of Gulf Shores. This plan is about shifting the mindset of our community from "let it happen" to "make it happen" by identifying strategies that help our community become more sustainable. These strategies will allow us to address challenges related to transportation, will create opportunities to diversify our tourism-dependent economy and will help us protect our natural environment and enhance the quality of life we all enjoy.

We are pleased to present the Small Town, Big Beach Vision 2025 for Sustainability. We encourage continued active participation and collaboration from our devoted community and look forward to working together to implement the plans detailed inside.

Sincerely,

Robert Craft, Mayor

Carolyn Doughty, Mayor Pro Tempore - Place 2 • Joe Garris, Councilperson - Place 1  
Philip Harris, Councilperson - Place 3 • Jason Dyken, Councilperson - Place 4  
Steve Jones, Councilperson - Place 5

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## ***Introduction***

The citizens and City of Gulf Shores are resilient and have prevailed through the adversity of an oil spill, hurricanes and a severely unstable global economy. The central issue now is how to sustain our quality of life and natural ecology as Gulf Shores navigates growth at a prosperous pace, while improving its reputation as a desirable destination to live, visit, retire and invest.

Despite an overall satisfaction among citizens and visitors, there are growing concerns around key trends in the City of Gulf Shores. These include the economic reliance on tourism concentrated around the beach, traffic congestion, a lack of public gathering spaces, visual appeal in commercial buildings and community design, a deficiency in sense of place, and an absence of planned preservation for our natural surroundings and quality of life.

The Small Town, Big Beach Vision 2025 for Sustainability was created to focus the future of Gulf Shores, addressing these concerns and providing a set of recommended strategies based on the community's core values.

## ***Core Values***

The City intends to prioritize allocation of its resources based on these core values.

- We protect and enhance the quality of life for our residents, visitors and retirees
- We protect and preserve our unique natural resources
- We honor the family centric-and safety-oriented tradition
- We maintain a relaxed, no-hassle environment
- We support a clear culture of Southern hospitality
- We enhance the sense of place
- We embed sustainability into the fabric of the community
- We promote economic prosperity in a business-friendly atmosphere
- We boost competition in the market place unaccepting of the status quo
- We commit to excellence and the highest quality standards





## ***Mission Statement***

The City of Gulf Shores is committed to meeting and exceeding the needs and expectations of our residents, visitors and businesses. We are committed to preserving our city's family-friendly, small-town, safe atmosphere and beautiful natural surroundings, while providing the infrastructure and amenities necessary to support a sustainable, vibrant economy.

## ***Vision 2025***

In the year 2025, the City of Gulf Shores will be the most desirable small-town destination community in the South in which to live, visit, retire and invest. This will be due to its enduring, wholesome, low-key and pleasurable lifestyle amidst its restorative and vibrant natural surroundings and thriving economy.

## *Key Strategies and Priorities*

In order to prioritize actions for implementation, we present the following key strategies.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

- The responsible use and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices will preserve Gulf Shores' balance with nature.
- Environmental education should be expanded in our community to promote responsible stewardship of natural resources and steps to live more sustainably.

### **WELL-ORGANIZED INFRASTRUCTURE**

- The design of new roadways, air services and waterways as well as the enhancement of existing transportation routes are essential.
- Architecture of utilities including water, fiber, electricity, sewage and other public services are imperative.

### **ECONOMIC, GEOGRAPHIC AND SEASONAL DIVERSIFICATION**

- Foster a long-term relationship between ecology, technology and economy, promoting the equitable sharing of resources and reducing conflicts.
- Because the tourism-related sector is so dominant, things we do that help or hurt this sector will have a far greater effect on our economy than what happens in other sectors.
- Additionally, becoming less beach-dependent and investing in infrastructure that encourages the long-term growth of other business sectors will help diversify and stabilize the overall economy.

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

- Infrastructures that promote a natural balance, preserve biodiversity and protect our valued natural resources are solutions that benefit the land and community now and for future generations.
- Health and wellness of a community correlate to the health of a community's economy.
- Standards of excellence in service to meet and exceed the needs of the community and its safety must be upheld.

## PROSPERITY

- Strategies should take into account impacts across all business sectors and strive to strengthen the relationship between small town and big beach.
- To protect the quality of life for all residents and the high-value experience for our visitors, hospitality, retirement and businesses independent of these sectors must be able to prosper.
- Thoughtful investment in our community will attract more investment.

## LEADING EDGE HEALTHCARE

- Enhanced healthcare services contribute to the well-being and safety of the community and contribute to the economy.

## PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

- Quality education is a critical necessity for any prosperous community to attract educated professionals as well as feed our economy from within with targeted and nationally-recognized programs and facilities.

## COMMUNITY PLANNING

- New development and revitalization of buildings and infrastructure will enhance sense of place and quality of life.
- Ongoing and consistent enforcement of zoning and building codes and regulations will protect the health, safety and welfare of our residents and businesses.
- Infrastructure and transportation improvements will focus on creating bike-and pedestrian-friendly corridors as well as public green spaces.





# COASTAL ALABAMA MEDICAL COMPLEX



## *Action 1: Medical*

We have a responsibility to provide direct access to quality wellness services and emergency care to our citizens and visitors. Encouraging quality public health serves the needs of our citizens and helps to foster retiree and visitor recruitment and retention.

**PROPOSAL:** The city supports the development of a prestigious medical facility invested in people, patient and family-centered care; medical discovery and education. The complex, located within the coastal Alabama region, will be impressive in scope, innovation and medical specialties.

- We must provide prompt access to our medical facilities; the difference between seconds and minutes is critical. The proposed location would provide this access for our community and would promote geographic diversification by redistributing traffic away from Highway 59.
- This state-of-the-art facility and its services would ensure our residents and visitors have access to innovative treatment specific to their needs.
- Studies have shown a direct connection between improving a community's health and improving its economy.
- Access to quality healthcare affects our ability to attract and retain employers, families and retirees. It is important to provide the necessary resources to successfully implement workplace and community wellness programs to help improve productivity and reduce health spending.
- This medical facility would provide an opportunity to create partnerships to strengthen our education ecosystem and diversify our economy by offering residency and other academic programs.

## *Action 2: Education*

Exposure to advanced levels of education and curriculum supports sustainable economic development by providing our community with a perpetual and attractive workforce.

**PROPOSAL:** The city and its partners will build a first-rate academic campus incorporating a powerful dual-enrollment model proven to promote access to higher education. The campus will feature a leading-edge design incorporating the latest technology into a new high school and a new additional Faulkner State Community College location complete with on campus housing and student life activities. This innovative campus will encourage affiliations with four-year universities to complete the higher education model by offering bachelor's and master's programs.

- This new campus and its location will support geographic diversity and the county school system's efforts to resolve overcrowding and traffic issues with our current school campus.
- This education model presents an opportunity to create nationally-recognized programs in ecology, maritime, culinary, hospitality and college preparatory specialties. These programs will enhance the education of our youth and will develop a skilled workforce to propel our local economy.
- The strategic collaboration between the city, the Baldwin County Board of Education, Faulkner State Community College and four-year institutions will provide our citizens with a direct and affordable path to a four-year degree or vocational career without ever having to leave our community.
- Enhancing our quality of education along with developing partnerships with respected colleges and universities will serve as an attraction for residential retention and relocation.
- The presence of a college or university nearby will add to the cultural offerings of our area and will stimulate education industry investment and economic diversity.
- On-campus student housing can be utilized for seasonal workforce housing.
- Having a superlative education facility located in a vacation destination will support economic development by attracting educational and business conferences to bolster our shoulder season tourism.
- The reputation of providing world-class education will be invaluable for enhancing our community pride and perception.

# COASTAL ALABAMA CENTER FOR EDUCATION EXCELLENCE





GULF STATE PARK  
RESTORATION

## *Action 3: Gulf State Park Restoration*

Enhancement of Gulf State Park will foster a synergistic and sustainable relationship between the park's habitats, ecology and economy by promoting the equitable sharing and protecting of resources.

### **PROPOSAL:**

1. The city will support projects to provide better access from the Baldwin Beach Express to the beach in an effort to help connect visitors to Gulf State Park.
  2. Environmental improvements include an environmental research and education facility for Alabama students, trail development and enhancement in the park, dune restoration along the park's beachfront and the establishment of a coastal ecosystems interpretive center.
- Improved roadway connections to the beach will resolve major traffic obstacles and is a primary facilitator in our ability to develop economic diversification.
  - Reconstruction of the lodge and conference center stimulates tourism and strengthens opportunities for a year-round, stable coastal economy by supporting local jobs and introducing a new market of conference attending visitors to our area.
  - Enhancements in the Gulf State Park will invite locals and visitors to become ambassadors for the Alabama Gulf Coast.
  - The opportunity to work with Jean-Michel Cousteau's Ocean Futures Society would align the city with a prestigious international initiative in the field of environmental development and preservation, enhancing the city's ecological and educational reputation in the market.
  - Proper and sustainable enhancement and protection of state park land will attract outdoor enthusiasts, photographers, academics and conservationists to appreciate our distinct bionetwork. The opportunity to be immersed in our unique surroundings will help to inspire the conservation and preservation of our environment.
  - Strategies to develop educational opportunities include outdoor classrooms to be utilized by our forthcoming academic campus, as well as students from throughout the nation, public excursions for visitors, coastal training and professional development.

## *Action 4: Waterway District*

A vibrant waterway district will create a unique sense of community and place that engages citizens and guests in an enriched experience of the local landscape, economy and culture.

**PROPOSAL:** Waterway Village has already begun to take shape along the Intracoastal Waterway. This walkable waterfront district will connect the north and south sides of the Intracoastal Waterway and the east and west sides of Highway 59. Its pedestrian-friendly design will feature quaint streets with tree-lined sidewalks, inviting seating areas, decorative lamp posts and a waterfront boardwalk offering a year-round destination for dining, shopping, arts and entertainment. The proposed plan recently received the ALCPA 2014 Outstanding Planning Award.

- Pedestrian-friendly waterway district is already underway.
- The district will connect the north and south sides of The Intracoastal Waterway and east and west sides of 59.
- The waterway district will provide a lively destination and unique “sense of place” where locals and visitors can gather to experience a different side of Gulf Shores. Water taxis, shrimp boats, fresh seafood and produce markets, retail shops, restaurants, art galleries, music and entertainment will create a lively area to enjoy.
- The district will enhance our community’s resiliency and geographic diversification by providing a new economic hub in an area away from the beach that has proven to recover quickly after storms.
- The waterway district will further attract private enterprise investment as it becomes a hotspot for arts, culture and entertainment.
- The area’s pedestrian-friendly design will help to stimulate our local economy by providing residents and visitors easier access to local businesses.
- Form-based zoning will entice investment in the area as it allows for flexibility in land use and development within the district.
- The Gulf Shores Business and Aviation Park’s available sites and buildings and its future expansion provide additional opportunities to diversify our economy with both aviation and non-aviation business recruitment that is complementary to our quality of life and tourism economy.
- Significant marketing efforts are underway targeting aircraft maintenance, overhaul and repair services to add to an already diverse mix of seafood, environmental and service industries located in the park.
- The airport’s proximity to the waterway district, combined with potential future connections to the Baldwin Beach Express, provides new opportunities for economic growth capacity and community-based economic development.
- Saunders Yachtworks, a high-end yacht service company located on the Industrial Canal near the Business and Aviation Park, has proved to be a significant contributor to the area’s non-tourism economy and serves as an example of the potential business opportunities presented along this corridor.

# WATERWAY DISTRICT







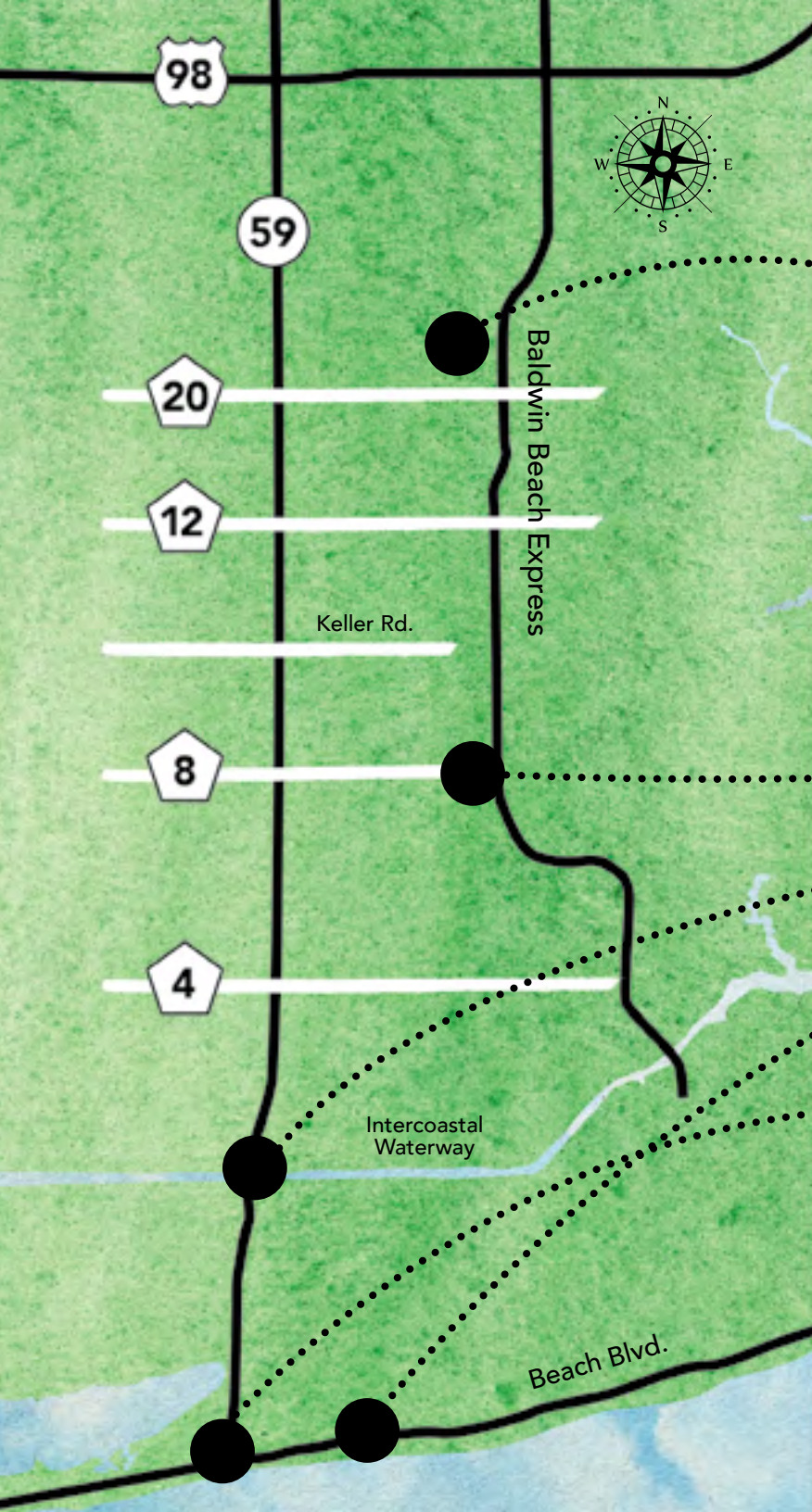
GULF SHORES GULF  
BEACH DISTRICT

## *Action 5: Gulf Beach District*

The construction of a walkable, energetic beachfront district will attract tourism, stimulate local business, and encourage business and residential relocation.

### **PROPOSAL:**

1. Revitalize our beachfront with the development of a quaint, landscaped boulevard that will reroute tourism traffic further from the coastline.
  2. Design and construct a contemporary beachfront that is pedestrian- and bike-friendly with access to beachfront dining, shopping and entertainment.
  3. Connect the Gulf Beach District to Waterway Village with a pedestrian and bike-friendly route.
- This plan will rejuvenate the face of our community by enriching the experience to live, work, play and connect at the beach.
  - A captivating and engaging beachfront will further instill pride with residents that love to live here and visitors that love to visit here, creating an elevated reputation of the community.
  - The new Gulf Beach District takes maximum advantage of the entire half mile of city-owned beachfront.
  - A pedestrian-friendly beachfront reinforces the community “sense of place,” providing a walkable community that is welcoming, safe and accessible.
  - Storm damage recovery is lessened by rerouting major roadways farther north from the coastline.
  - Walkable communities, including sidewalks and bike paths, are proven to increase property value and contribute to the local economy.
  - The diversion of traffic from the beach along with the development of walkable, pedestrian-friendly corridors and the introduction of beach shuttles anticipates the desires of the population and positions Gulf Shores as a progressive beachfront community.



COASTAL ALABAMA MEDICAL COMPLEX



GULF SHORES GULF BEACH DISTRICT

# REGIONAL OVERVIEW



COASTAL ALABAMA CENTER FOR  
EDUCATION EXCELLENCE



WATERWAY DISTRICT



GULF STATE PARK RESTORATION

## *Appendix*

### DEFINITIONS

**SUSTAINABILITY:** In ecology, sustainability is how biological systems endure and remain diverse and productive. Creating a healthy ecosystem of culture, health, environment, infrastructure and economy is imperative to meet the needs of future generations.

**DIVERSIFICATION:** To sustain and enhance quality of life, diversification of the big beach economy is necessary to manage risk and avoid implosion. Investment in a variety of geographic, seasonal and economic tactics will simultaneously release the congestion of the big beach economy while increasing its prosperity and experience.

**SENSE OF PLACE:** The relationship between the characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as to those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging. Characteristics including history tradition, cultural diversity, attitude, vitality, and particularly valuable landscape strongly enhance “sense of place” and identity.

### *Nick Cantrell, Illustrator*

Alabama native, Nick Cantrell, began seriously studying art after surviving a life threatening blood clot in his right arm at the age of 20. “It was as if I were being told to use it or lose it,” Cantrell said. He went on to earn a BA from Auburn University in 2001 and began his career in the art world. Over the years, Cantrell has produced illustrations, corporate logos, album artwork, and completed a variety of special projects. Currently, his fine art creations, Batik Watercolors, are his primary focus. He is married to ceramics artist, Maya Blume Cantrell. They reside in Orange Beach with their two children, Finch and Ayla.



## ***Gulf Shores Elected Officials***

- Robert Craft, Mayor
- Carolyn Doughty, Mayor Pro Tempore - Place 2
- Joe Garris, Councilperson - Place 1
- Philip Harris, Councilperson - Place 3
- Jason Dyken, Councilperson - Place 4
- Steve Jones, Councilperson - Place 5

*Produced Locally in Gulf Shores, Alabama*

