

Sponsored by: Garrett

**CITY OF MARATHON, FLORIDA
RESOLUTION 2021-65**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF
MARATHON, FLORIDA, ADOPTING THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
& RESILIENCE STRATEGY AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE
DATE.**

WHEREAS, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) had awarded the City a grant of \$35,000 to complete a Competitive Florida Partnership within the City of Marathon; and

WHEREAS, the project would allow the City to refine its ability to manage future storm events and the long term eventuality of sea level rise; and

WHEREAS, the project components included:

- a review of existing economic development and disaster preparedness documents.
- facilitation of public participation efforts to undertake outreach and engagement with residents.
- a comprehensive inventory of its assets; and preparation of an action-oriented economic development and disaster preparedness strategy.

WHEREAS, the City entered into a Grant Agreement with DEO through Resolution 2020-86; and

WHEREAS, the City of Marathon Economic Development and Resilience Strategy was created with generous support from the grant program; and

WHEREAS, The Southern Group and OVID Solutions prepared the plan in close coordination with the City of Marathon Staff and all stakeholders.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MARATHON, FLORIDA, THAT:

Section 1. The above recitals are true and correct and incorporated herein.

Section 2. The City Council authorizes the adoption of the Economic Development & Resilience Strategy a copy of which is attached as Exhibit “A” together with such non-material changes as may be acceptable to the City Manager and approved as to form and legality by the City Attorney is approved.

Section 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon its adoption.

PASSED AND APPROVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MARATHON, FLORIDA, THIS 10TH DAY OF AUGUST, 2021.

THE CITY OF MARATHON, FLORIDA

Luis Gonzalez, Mayor

AYES:
NOES:
ABSENT:
ABSTAIN:

ATTEST:

Diane Clavier, City Clerk

(City Seal)

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY FOR THE USE AND RELIANCE OF THE CITY OF MARATHON, FLORIDA ONLY:

Steven Williams, City Attorney

2021 | City of Marathon



Economic Development & Resilience Strategy



Acknowledgements

City Councilmembers

Mayor Luis Gonzalez
Vice Mayor Mark Senmartin
Councilman John Bartus
Councilman Steve Cook
Councilman Daniel Zieg

The City of Marathon wishes to thank the following individuals for their contribution to this plan through participation in the Economic Development Stakeholders Group.

Commissioner Michelle Coldiron, Monroe County
Maria Covelli, City of Marathon
Ben Daughtry, Aquarium Encounters
George Garrett, City of Marathon
Christine Hurley, Monroe County
Michael Legere, Marathon Airport
Mike Puto, College of the Florida Keys
Daniel Samess, Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce
Matt Sexton, Grassy Flats
Brian Shea, City of Marathon
Noah Singh, Singh Investors
Brian Schmitt, Coldwell Banker Schmitt

The City of Marathon Economic Development and Resilience Strategy was created with generous support from a Competitive Florida Partnership Program grant from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity. The Southern Group and OVID Solutions prepared this plan in close coordination with City of Marathon Staff and all stakeholders.



Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
ECONOMIC DATA	4
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW	4
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT.....	6
MUNICIPAL TAX RATE	8
PUBLIC SURVEY INPUT.....	9
STAKEHOLDER INPUT.....	11
PUBLIC MEETING INPUT	11
CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS	13
AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND THE COST OF LIVING	14
COASTAL VULNERABILITY TO HURRICANES, STORM SURGE, CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEA LEVEL RISE	20
COMMERCIAL FISHING CHALLENGES AND RESTORATION OF NEARSHORE/OFFSHORE WATERS	24
WORKFORCE TRAINING, ACCESS TO TALENT AND RETENTION CHALLENGES	27
ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES.....	30
OPPORTUNITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS	36
COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION.....	37
DEVELOPMENT OF A TOWN CENTER	51
CREATE OUTDOOR MARKET SPACE	55
SUPPORT FAMILY-FRIENDLY TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES.....	59
AIRPORT ENHANCEMENTS & EXPANSION	62
HOSPITAL/HEALTHCARE EXPANSION OF SERVICES.....	65
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS	67
APPENDIX: COMMUNITY ASSET INVENTORY	68

Executive Summary

In 2020, the City of Marathon was selected as a Competitive Florida Partnership Community and received a grant from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity to create an economic development and resilience strategy that will guide future efforts to grow the local economy. To direct this effort, the City formed a group of community leaders and sought input from the public through an online survey and two public meetings. This plan is the result of the information gathered through the feedback received and additional research. The plan is presented as challenges faced by the City and opportunities available to the City along with recommendations on options for moving forward to tackle the challenges and seize opportunities.



Challenges

- Affordable housing and the cost of living continue to strain the workforce of the largely service-based tourism economy.
- Coastal vulnerability to hurricanes, storm surge, climate change and sea level rise is a way of life and must be factored into economic growth and expansion plans.
- Restoration of nearshore/offshore waters will continue to be a priority to ensure the viability of the commercial and sports fishing industry.
- Workforce training, access to talent and retention challenges is likely to be an ongoing challenge that will be further exacerbated in the future.
- There is a need for more resources and technical assistance to support the growth of small businesses and provide education on resilient business practices for continuity of operations.

Opportunities

- Revitalize commercial areas and improve business corridors through streetscaping and façade improvements and other strategies.
- Develop a town center, leveraging the Quay Property – a site owned by the City of Marathon.
- Develop outdoor open-air market space to serve as a venue for local artists, farmers and cottage industries.
- Enhance assets including Pigeon Key and Grassy Key to support family-friendly tourism opportunities that are also enjoyable for residents.
- Support the long-term enhancement and expansion of the Marathon Airport to meet both charter and some commercial demands.
- Support the ongoing needs of the new hospital to expand healthcare services to provide better access for the Middle Keys.

Introduction

This Economic Development and Resilience Strategy is intended to serve as a resource for community leaders in the public, nonprofit and private sector in guiding the long-term economic growth of the City of Marathon and Middle Keys. It contains high-level economic data, an inventory of community assets and recommendations for addressing challenges and seizing opportunities to grow the economy of Marathon. The plan was developed with significant public input and guided by stakeholders who were consulted in the crafting of recommendations.

Economic Data

This section provides a summary of data points gathered to analyze and understand the economy of the City of Marathon.

Community Overview

The City of Marathon spans a chain of 13 islands connected by bridges in the middle of the Florida Keys, which is located at the southernmost tip of the State of Florida starting at the East end of the Seven Mile Bridge (Mile Marker 47) to the West-end of Toms Harbors Bridge (Mile Marker 60). Marathon, incorporated in 1999 includes Boot, Knights, Hog Vaca, Stirrup, Crawl and Little Crawl keys, East and West Sister's Island, Deer and Fat Deer keys, Long Pine and Grassy keys. The history of these islands is prominently centered around Henry Flagler's railroad, which is highlighted at nearby Pigeon Key. In the early 1900s railroad workers worked around the clock under tremendous pressure to complete the project and often exclaimed, "This is getting to be a real Marathon" - hence the name of the City.

The economy of Marathon is largely centered around the tourism industry as Marathon is a major sports fishing destination with bountiful reefs popular for diving, snorkeling, spearfishing and lobster fishing. A county-owned airport which caters mostly to privately-owned and charter aircraft, brings part-time residents and visitors to the Keys daily. In addition, Marathon is home to one of the last untouched hardwood hammocks at Crane Point Museum. Fisherman's Hospital, one of three hospitals in the Florida Keys, recently opened a brand-new facility which is centrally located in Marathon.

Today, Marathon has a population of just over 8,500 permanent residents, but these numbers often fluctuate throughout the year due to seasonal residents and visitors. The median household income is \$56,365 and just over 10% of the population lives in poverty. Due to its central location and relatively lower cost of living, Marathon is often thought of as where the workforce of Keys calls home. However, just over 50% of the homes are owner-occupied, showing that much of the housing is secondary, vacation homes. The average median value of a home is \$425,000, which is less than the countywide average of \$494,100. Median gross rent for the City (\$1,319) is also lower than the countywide average of \$1,627/month.

Top employers countywide include both public and private sector organizations, listed in [Table 1](#). While this is countywide, it can offer insight for Marathon as well since many individuals may work on one island but live in another place. The most important industry in Monroe County/Florida Keys is the recreation-tourism industry. Recreation-tourism accounts for anywhere between 33% and 75% of the local economy depending on the definition of income (i.e., by place of residence or by place of work).¹ When reviewing the list of major employers, the lodging industry combined with over 3,000 employees dwarfs most other employment sectors. When combined with the entertainment-restaurant businesses, most who are employed support the tourism industry. Top industries by employment include:

- Tourism & Hospitality
- U.S. Military
- Local Government
- Healthcare
- Food Retail

Commercial fishing is one of the key export industries in Monroe County/Florida Keys accounting for between 5-8% of the total income or jobs in the local economy.² With more than 350 federally permitted fishing boats, the Florida Keys are home to the largest commercial fleet from Texas to North Carolina. Over 80 percent of the spiny lobster harvested in the state of Florida are caught in Monroe County, making commercial fishing the county's second largest economic engine and employer next to tourism. The commercial fleet supports over 1,600 families, which is close to 5 percent of the county's population. Stock Island alone lands seven million pounds with a dockside value of \$24 million — that's five percent of Florida's total landings and 13 percent of total value. In 2006, Monroe County was ranked the fifth most valuable port in the nation, with a dockside value of about \$54.4 million. In only 8 years that ex-vessel value has increased to more than \$100 million. This figure does not include retail sales and profits made by wholesalers who marketed seafood products worldwide. Most economists agree to a turn-over rate within the county of 'x6' putting the value of those harvests at more than \$600 million. It is reasonable to predict that seafood and related industries earned upwards of \$70 million.³

¹ <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/socioeconomic/floridakeys/recreation/welcome.html>

² https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/socioeconomic/floridakeys/commercial_fishing/

³ <http://fkcf.org/our-association/>

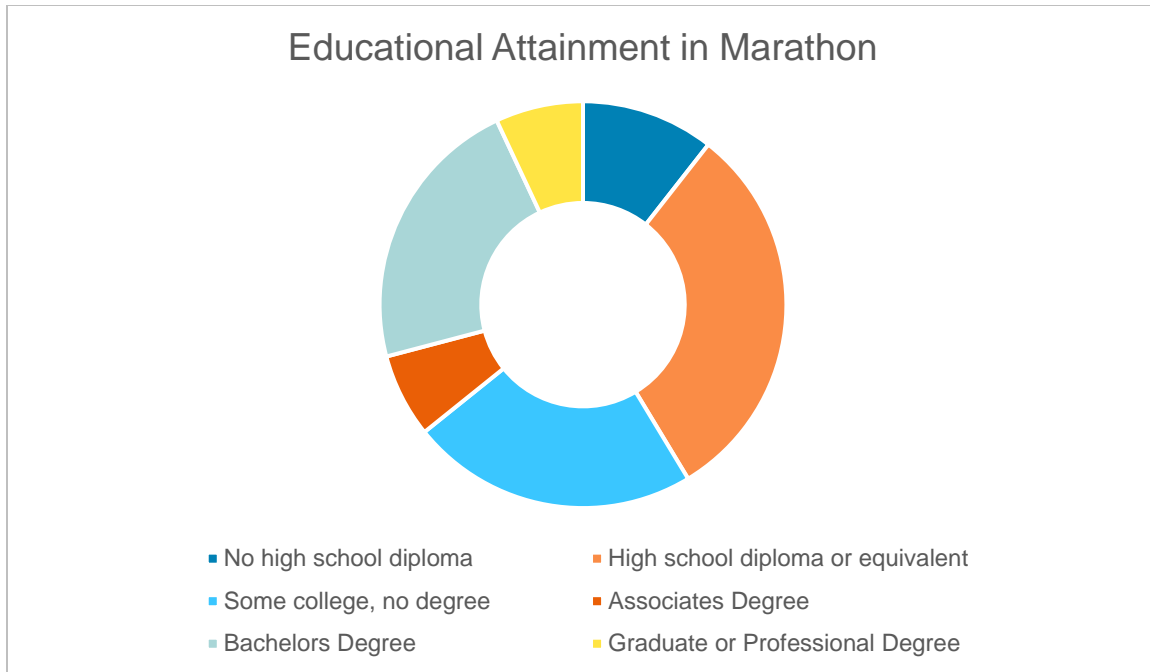
Table 1: Monroe County Major Employers (October 2020)⁴

Public Sector Employers		Number of Employees
US Armed Services (including civilian supports and contractors)		2,190
Monroe County Schools		1,446
Monroe County Sheriff's Office		557
Monroe County Government		540
City of Key West (including police, fire and EMS)		501
Florida Keys Community College		307
Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority		290
Keys Energy Service		128
Florida Keys Electric Cooperative Association		113
Private Sector Employers		Number of Employees
Ocean Reef Club		1,124
Publix Stores (Key West, Marathon and Key Largo)		920
Lower Keys Medical Center, Key West		487
Ocean Properties		444
Casa Marina/Beach Resort		356
Spottswood Properties		311
Fogarty's/Red Fish Blue Fish/Caroline's Jack Flats/Waterfront Brewery		280
Cheeca Lodge		268
Winn Dixie (Key West and Big Pine)		220
Historic Tours of America		216
First State Bank of the Keys		174
Southernmost Beach Resorts		170
Keys Collection		153
Charley P Toppino & Sons/Monroe Concrete		148
Fury Water Adventures		147
Hawk's Cay Resort		130
Bagatelle/Kelly's/915		106
Remington Properties		90
The Islander Resort (Islamorada)		44

Educational Attainment

While some 36 percent of residents have earned a college degree of some level, most residents in Marathon (over 64 percent) do not hold a higher education degree. This further supports the workforce-nature of the City's population and is likely reflective of the dominant tourism and hospitality industries that do not require this type of education.

⁴ <https://www.keywestchamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Major-Employers-2020.pdf>



Marathon High School and Stanley Switlik Elementary School are rated as “B” schools by the Florida Department of Education with the elementary school fluctuating between A, B and C and the high school rating remaining consistent over the past five years. To help prepare the next generation for the workforce, Marathon High School offers several Career and Technical Education industry certifications including:

- Culinary Arts/Nutrition & Wellness
- Custom Promotional Layout and Design
- Digital Information Technology
- Digital Video Technology
- Outboard Marine
- Promotional Design Management⁶

The College of the Florida Keys is in Key West, which is an hour-long commute from the City of Marathon. However, there is a Middle Keys Center located on the high school campus. The offerings at the college include dual enrollment options for high school students and other opportunities in line with the industries that thrive in the Keys:

- Marine Science
- Marine Engineering, Management and Seamanship
- Hospitality and Ecotourism
- General Studies
- Culinary Management

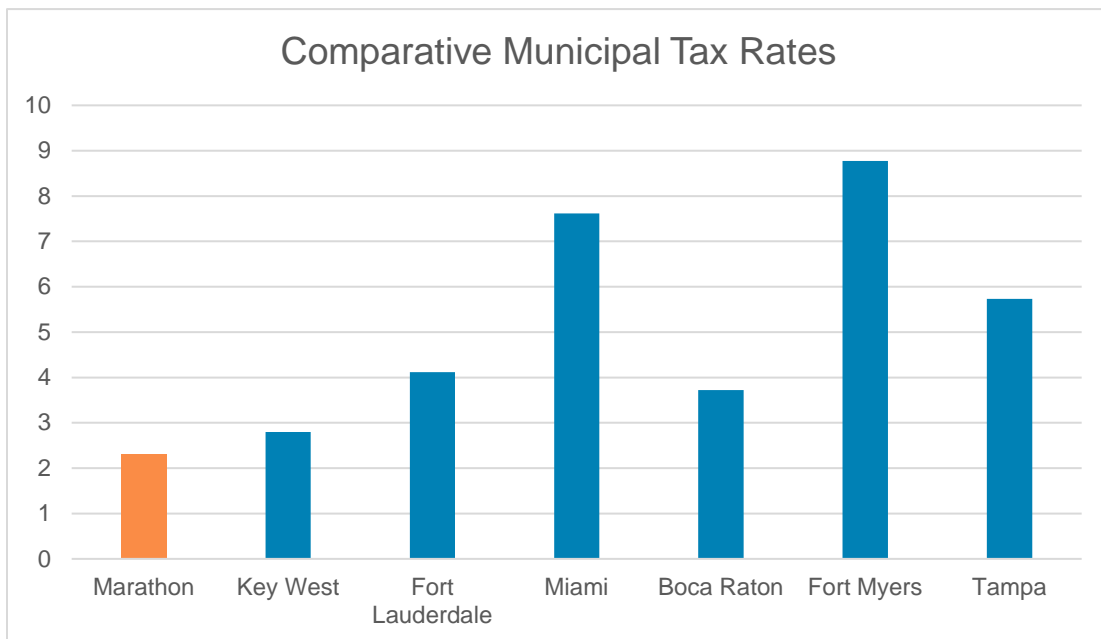
⁵ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=marathon,%20fl&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1501&hidePreview=true>

⁶ <https://www.keysschools.com/Page/369>

- Business Administration
- Nursing and Health Sciences
- Lockwood School of Diving and Underwater Technology
- Institute for Public Safety
- Engineering Technology/Renewable Energy
- Construction Apprenticeships

Municipal Tax Rate

The City of Marathon boasts one of the lowest millage/tax rates in the State of Florida and U.S., offering a competitive advantage for businesses that may wish to locate in the community. As seen in the chart below, the tax rate is a fraction of that compared to larger municipalities in South Florida. ⁷



⁷ <https://www.relocatetothefloridakeys.com/island-economics/>

Community Engagement

To gather input on this project, the City of Marathon conducted a public survey, convened a stakeholders' group focused on economic development and hosted two public meetings. The input gathered from these outreach efforts are detailed below.

Public Survey Input

A public survey was initiated to elicit feedback from the local community regarding economic development issues facing the City of Marathon. The survey was launched on February 24, 2021, and a total of 28 responses were received.

The top three priorities identified in the public survey were:

- Affordable housing and cost of living challenges for workforce,
- Workforce training, access to talent and retention challenges, and
- Hospital and healthcare expansion of services.

Several medium ranked priorities were also identified that highlight the commercial needs of residents in the community. These included the need for more outdoor space to accommodate vendors including farms, cottage industries, food trucks, etc. as well as the need for revitalization and redevelopment of commercial areas including façade improvements and streetscaping. Challenges related to the commercial fishing industry and the restoration of our nearshore and offshore waters were also identified as the need for airport enhancements and the expansion of services. Jobs were also prevalent in the medium ranked priorities, with residents identifying the challenges associated with the availability of jobs within the City and the need for additional college campus space for continued education. Finally, hurricane and storm surge vulnerability and access to capital for small businesses were recognized as continuing challenges. Of the survey responses received, a total of five priorities were ultimately ranked lowest by survey respondents. Overall, community members providing input on the survey felt that climate change and sea level rise vulnerability ranked lower than other priorities (although as noted above, hurricane and storm surge vulnerability ranked higher) and residents seem satisfied with the level of local, state and/or federal regulations currently facing local businesses. Survey responses also showed that a lack of resources for small businesses in need due to COVID-19 and expanding tourism opportunities for marketing of similar enterprises were also lower on the priority list.

The public survey also requested that respondents identify the obstacles and propose solutions to the challenges faced by the City of Marathon regarding improving the local economy. Responses in these categories focused again on affordable and workforce housing, disaster recovery and an over-reliance on tourism as well as the need for additional streetscaping and

improvement of economic centers within the City. Additional regulation of vacation rentals to provide additional housing, incentives for small businesses and creative partnerships and the establishment of additional outdoor vending locations were identified as potential solutions. Respondents also identified the need for small local government involvement and the establishment of volunteer citizen groups as potential solutions.

When asked what other opportunities are available to grow the local economy in the City of Marathon, there were several responses identified that further highlight the priorities recognized in the survey. Residents recommended creating launch fees at local boat ramps for non-residents, improving facilities at the local beaches like Coco Plum Beach and creating more opportunities for local businesses. Residents also highlighted the need for more commercial airlines flying at Marathon Airport and the potential for reducing the speed limit along U.S. 1 within the City to help bring attention to local establishments.

A sampling of feedback received from the survey is included below.

Public Survey Responses

“Need entertainment district.”

“Street sign improvements.”

“Need for more code enforcement.”

“Provide incentives for small businesses, an arts district and more creative partnerships.”

“Leverage volunteer citizen groups”

“Provide more outdoor vending spots by the 7-mile bridge, at sunset park, and across from Isla Bella on knights Key.”

“Create launch fees at the boat ramp for non-residents”

“Commercial airlines flying to Marathon Airport”



Stakeholder Input

The City convened a group of stakeholders to provide input on economic development issues and challenges in the community. The group formally met on March 11, 2021, via Zoom and then met one-on-one with the project team over the course of several months. The following is a high-level summary of feedback provided by stakeholders.

- The largest under-resourced opportunities for economic development in Marathon include: 1) the airport, 2) establishment of a Main Street organization through a public-private partnership along the US-1 Corridor leading to Pigeon Key, 3) organized activities for families.
- The biggest challenges for economic development include: 1) need for improvements at the airport including runway realignment and potential opposition from residential areas, 2) government regulations at the state and federal level, 3) sea level rise and impacts to the Florida Keys both real and perceived.
- There is a need for continued support from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation to support affordable housing development in Monroe County.
- There is a need for minimum landscaping and design standards to help with revitalization of businesses in commercial corridors.
- The transition of the old library into a Medical Arts Building will help to consolidate physicians' offices and create more opportunity for reuse of space or expansion of healthcare services.
- The Quay Property, currently owned by the City, is a huge asset that has the potential to serve as a community gathering space and Town Center for Marathon with leasing available for commercial operations.
- The Old 7 Mile/Salty's Marina property could be a great asset for the City to serve as additional marina space and base operations for the expansion of opportunities offered at Pigeon Key, including ferry and trolley stations.
- The community would like to see more open-air market space, farmers markets and outdoor gathering opportunities.
- The expansion of activity offerings at Pigeon Key with the re-opening of the Old 7-Mile bridge and electricity available on the island will bring about new opportunity. There is a need to partner with the Pigeon Key Foundation and Monroe County and support projects to help the island reach its full potential as a family-friendly destination in the Keys.

Public Meeting Input

Marathon also held two public meetings on March 29, 2021, and June 10, 2021. The first public meeting focused on the identification of issues and challenges and the second public meeting reviewed recommendations suggested by the project team. The following feedback was obtained during these two meetings.

Public Meeting – March 2021

Participants discussed the regulation of vacation rentals and potential legislation to place limitations on the use of properties for this purpose, which decreases the affordable housing stock. In addition, the opening of the new hospital was mentioned along with the new jobs that could come from the facility as well as expanded retail opportunities that could emerge as support for the hospital. Kiosks at boat ramps which could provide information on fishing regulations and shallow water maps along with advertising for businesses was mentioned as a space to educate visitors about their surroundings and recreational opportunities to support local businesses. In addition, participants suggested that landscaping improvements are needed to improve bare spaces within the median along US-1 to improve the aesthetics of the community. This could include flowers or trees along the sides of the road for pedestrian shade. Finally, participants mentioned that hangar space within the airport as well as public works facilities could be a great canvas for murals in the future to promote public art.

Public Meeting – June 2021

The second public meeting focused on the recommendations developed to-date and requested additional input as the plan was finalized. Participants suggested tax breaks for businesses who invest in beautification of their structures (like in Pittsfield, MA). Another participant cautioned that the City could face challenges with the Army Corps of Engineers when redeveloping the Quay property. In addition, the College of the Florida Keys new apprentice program was highlighted and the need to promote the new commercial airline service from Fort Lauderdale to Marathon to residents to ensure that it is supported and sustained. The need for a community street cleanup program was discussed and strategies for mobilizing the volunteers was mentioned as part of this effort. In addition, a new proposed resort development on Grassy Key was announced that has the potential to become a model for sustainable design and integrating workforce housing solutions.



Challenges & Recommendations

Overview

This section will highlight key challenges faced by the City of Marathon that present an issue for economic development in the community which are highlighted in the graphic below.

Economic Development Challenges in Marathon

- 

Affordable housing and the cost of living continue to strain the workforce of the largely service-based tourism economy.
- Coastal vulnerability to hurricanes, storm surge, climate change and sea level rise is a way of life and must be factored into economic growth and expansion plans.**


- 

Restoration of nearshore/offshore waters will continue to be a priority to ensure the viability of the commercial fishing and sports fishing industry.
- Workforce training, access to talent and retention challenges is likely to be an ongoing issue that will be further exacerbated in the future.**


- 

Support for the growth and expansion of small businesses along with education on resilient practices for continuity of operations after disasters.

Affordable Housing and the Cost of Living

Overview of Challenge

While the need for more workforce and affordable housing is a nationwide concern, this is an acute challenge throughout the Florida Keys. This is due to many unique factors that together exacerbate the issue, making it a top concern not only for residents but also business owners who cannot find workers due to the high cost of living. The contributing factors include:



- **Limited land availability.** Due to the island nature of Marathon and the entire Florida Keys, land is limited by both geographic and environmental features.
- **High land values.** Based on scarce supply, developable land is highly valued making it difficult to build housing at an affordable rate.
- **Vacation rentals.** Many seasonal homeowners chose to rent their properties out as vacation rentals, limiting the number of rental units available for the workforce.
- **Rate of Growth Ordinance.** The number of building permits that can be issued each year is limited by an ordinance to ensure safe evacuation in advance of a hurricane.
- **Tourism-dependent economy.** Most jobs are service-sector based and low-wage, making it difficult for workers to make ends meet and afford the cost of rent.
- **Cost of construction.** Construction costs are higher due to limited workforce, the need to transport supplies from the mainland and the increased cost of building to code in areas highly susceptible to flooding and storm surge.

While the City of Marathon is making great strides with new income restricted affordable rental coming online and more affordable housing ROGO permits in the pipeline, it is not likely that this will satisfy the demand for workforce housing in the Keys. However, among stakeholders, the City of Marathon is widely thought to be the most progressive community in the Keys in its acceptance and prioritization of affordable housing.

Rate of Growth Ordinance

A Rate of Growth Ordinance (ROGO) was implemented countywide to limit the number of building permits that can be issued to ensure that the population can be safely evacuated during a hurricane, as required by the State. This results in a finite number of residential building permits that can be released on an annual basis through the year 2026. The population inputs that are used in the models to determine maximum allowances will be reevaluated when the census data is updated to reflect 2020 numbers. In 2018, the Governor issued a limited allocation of additional ROGOs that local governments could accept to incentivize affordable housing units, with the caveat that these developments must be evacuated at the same time as hotels and lodging operations for visitors.

Recommendations

Continue to advocate for Sadowski funding for the State Apartment Incentive Loan Program and State Housing Initiative Partnership to support affordable housing.

The Sadowski Fund is a statutorily dedicated funding source derived from documentary stamp tax and General Revenue for affordable housing. Approximately 70% of the funding is dedicated to the State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP), which provides funding to local governments annually predominately to support homeownership programs. An additional 30% of the funding can be used for other programs, predominately the State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) program, which is sometimes matched with federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) funding to create affordable rental housing development packages for private and non-profit developers. SAIL funding is also used in the Keys often as a stand-alone incentive to target affordable housing in the <80% AMI range, an income bracket that is difficult to serve through affordable housing developments that do not receive financial assistance or those that are funded with LIHTC support. These funds are provided to offset the cost of development resulting in attractive housing complexes that can be rented at a fraction of the market rate price to individuals who qualify, based on their income. During the budget process each year, this fund is often targeted for sweeps, diverting funding for affordable housing to other legislative needs and priorities. Most recently in 2021, Senate Bill 2512 diverted funding from this fund permanently to support infrastructure programs targeting environmental and resilience challenges.

SAIL funding is used in the Keys as a stand-alone incentive to target affordable housing in the <80% AMI range, an income bracket that is difficult to serve through affordable housing developments that do not receive financial assistance or those that are funded with LIHTC support.

This funding is an important part of the resources available to support affordable housing challenges statewide and in the Florida Keys and is often needed as match for federal funding available to support housing. The City should consider monitoring the legislative budget process annually and be aware of laws or actions that could divert funding from this source and how it could affect the funding available to Monroe County and affordable housing developments in Marathon.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in coordination with Monroe County.

Resources to Support

City legislative advocacy and lobbying team.

Advocate for a recurring, permanent Request for Applications, specific to Monroe County affordable housing developments.

The Florida Housing Finance Corporation issues Requests for Applications (RFAs) on an annual basis to allocate affordable housing incentive resources statewide. Each year, Marathon, other local governments along with other organizations in the Keys must advocate for this RFA that is specific to the County. With administration and staff turnover occurring frequently at all levels of government, the education on the need for this set-aside can be complex to ensure that the affordable housing resource needs of the Florida Keys are met. The City should consider working with the Florida Housing Finance Corporation Board of Directors or legislative delegation to create a permanent set-aside to meet this need that could be conditioned upon the availability of affordable housing (or market rate) ROGO allocations available to meet the needs.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in coordination with Monroe County.

Resources to Support

City legislative advocacy and lobbying team.



Reserve ROGO affordable housing allocations for developments that target residents in the <80% area median income households.

Monroe County includes a set-aside of ROGO allocations specifically for affordable/workforce housing. These permits must meet specific qualifications outlined in the County Land Development Code including the requirement to serve <140% area median income (AMI) households for rental development and <160% AMI households for owner-occupied housing. This is a major incentive for encouraging affordable housing in Keys. As stated above, the federal government offers the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program to offset the cost of development for affordable housing (up to 60% AMI). This has resulted in rental housing developments at two ends of the spectrum: those that target <140% AMI households (which may not be rented at rates affordable for many service industry workers), as these are financially feasible without additional incentives and those that target 60% AMI and below households, as significant federal resources are available to offset the cost of development. However, this also creates a gap in the middle of this range for households that bring in between 60 - 80% of the area median income. In 2019, the Florida Housing Finance Corporation issued two Requests for Applications (RFAs) in response to Hurricane Irma that specifically targeted the up to 80% area median income household bracket. These

City of Marathon Economic Development and Resilience Strategy

developments were supported with SAIL funding as well as a one-time allocation of Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding.

In concert with advocating for Sadowski Funds to support SAIL projects, the City should consider reserving ROGO allocations (or working with the County to advocate at for countywide ROGO allocations) that specifically target households that are not served through non-incentivized affordable housing developments or LIHTC funding. ROGO allocations are a finite resource and without targeting this income bracket, workers that fall in this range may not be served. To monitor the need, the City could work with property managers from all affordable housing developments to determine the income levels of individuals that are on their waiting lists. Specifically, Boatworks and Seaview Commons which serve households in the <80% AMI should be monitored to determine where there is the greatest need.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in coordination with Monroe County along with private and not-for-profit affordable housing developers in Marathon.

Resources to Support

City staff and coordination with affordable housing developers.



Explore housing options specifically for essential services personnel including first responders and teachers.

It can be challenging to retain education, healthcare, and first responder personnel as limited housing options can make it difficult for these households to afford the cost of living. This will call for creative partnerships which could include private and not-for-profit developers working together with local law enforcement agencies or school boards to develop properties that are rented only to their workforce, like military housing units. The 2019 Community Development and Housing state legislation (HB7103) recognized this need, specifically in Areas of Critical State Concern. The bill defined essential services personnel as *natural persons or families whose total annual household income is at or below 120% of the area median income, adjusted for household size and at least one of whom is employed as police or fire personnel, a childcare worker, teacher or other education personnel, healthcare personnel, a public employee, or a service worker*. This was an important step in creating a definition so financial resources could be dedicated to resolving workforce challenges for these households, which are essential to the sustainability of the Keys.

The City could leverage this definition when advocating for additional resources. A model for employment-specific housing includes the 2019 RFA released by the Florida Housing Finance Corporation specific to farmworker and commercial fishing workers.

Another model for encouraging workforce housing for specific employment categories is the HUD Good Neighbor Next Door Program. This program offers law enforcement officers, teachers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians a substantial incentive in the form of a discount of 50% from the list price of a home, in return for committing to live in the property for 36 months as a primary residence. This program is not available in the Keys as there are not qualifying revitalization areas but using local SHIP funding (for homeownership) or other potential housing resources, a similar locally managed program could be created.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in coordination with law enforcement agencies or local school board and private and/or not-for-profit developers.

Resources to Support

- Community Planning Technical Assistance Program to support the need for developing any new policies that may be required to encourage these types of developments.
- Florida Housing Finance Corporation to advocate for resources to support housing set-aside for specific workers.
- SHIP funding (in cooperation with Monroe County) to create local homeownership incentive programs for first responders and teachers.

Leverage recent affordable housing developments to change public perception around affordable housing in the community.

As more affordable housing units come online in Marathon, they serve as shining examples to counter the public perception of income-restricted development. The City should consider partnering with the affordable housing developers and residents to showcase these developments through potential open houses, press releases, social media and other opportunities that share information on the quality of the development along with the new neighbors that live in these communities. Affordable housing developments can sometimes receive opposition because of misconceptions about how they may affect property values. By releasing factual information on the industries where individuals are employed and highlighting design features that help to make the development attractive, the City can help to create a positive image around the need for these developments over time, potentially decreasing the opposition faced when a new affordable housing development is proposed.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in coordination with private and not-for-profit affordable housing developers in Marathon.

Resources to Support

City staff and coordination with affordable housing developers.



Coastal Vulnerability to Hurricanes, Storm Surge, Climate Change and Sea Level Rise

Overview of Challenge

The Florida Keys and the City of Marathon are one of the most vulnerable parts of the state when it comes to climate change impacts and sea level vulnerability. This is particularly critical given the additional challenge of hurricane vulnerability. In 2012, The City of Marathon initiated a Sustainability and Climate Plan to help identify and provide address potential solutions related to climate change and sustainability including the financial impacts that these challenges will have on the City. Key components of this plan included descriptions of the City of Marathon's emissions sources and how those emissions could be expected to grow, recommended ways that the City can potentially reduce emissions leading to increased green jobs opportunities and improved public health, establishing a timeline for the plan's implementation, and defining an implementation strategy for turning the plan into action and tracking/reporting progress on the goals outlined (including funding).

Hurricane Irma in 2017 served as a harsh reminder of the Keys vulnerability when it made landfall just south of Marathon, causing widespread damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

The 2012 plan identified a number of growth management activities that could be undertaken by the City in its existing Comprehensive Plan to help address climate change and sustainability. These included direct development or redevelopment to infill scarified sites, promotion of workforce housing close to businesses centers, promotion of in-fill of platted/scarified lots for new residential units, promotion of redevelopment of substandard housing within the City, establishing concurrency management, establishing a program to retire development rights and encourage critical land acquisition and establishing a transfer of development rights program.

Hurricane and storm surge vulnerability are part of the ecosystem of the Florida Keys due to the island-environment and location of the community. Hurricane Irma in 2017 served as a harsh reminder of this fact when it made landfall just south of Marathon, causing widespread damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure. However, living with hurricanes and flooding is a way of life in the Keys and something that cannot be avoided. Therefore, mitigation measures and actions to create resiliency are important investments that not only make the infrastructure and community stronger but enable businesses and the local economy to recover at a more rapid rate, post-disaster. With funding provided from disaster recovery resources, the City of Marathon is making investments in its resiliency with the following measures:

- Implementation of a voluntary home buyout program that offers to purchase homes in high-risk flood areas.

City of Marathon Economic Development and Resilience Strategy

- Repair and elevation of electronic components for wastewater remote vacuum pump stations and chemical storage areas in the community.

In addition to infrastructure improvements, local businesses are still in need of support to harden their places of business against future disasters. The U.S. Highway 1 Corridor serves as the main transportation artery for residents and visitors to the Keys. As the primary commercial corridor, U.S. 1 hosts most Keys businesses. Approximately 200 businesses sustained various amounts of physical damage to the exterior of their properties. These businesses and commercial properties are in dire need of mitigation projects to improve their resilience to future storms, namely upgraded roofing systems, windows, elevation, and flood proofing technologies/systems that meet current building codes. Following Hurricane Irma, businesses were slow to reopen and several closed indefinitely. Some of those that are open are still missing important signage, landscaping, and visual appeal to attract patrons/customers. This affects their ability to operate, generate revenue, sustain employment, and provide services.



Recommendations

Compile a short-list of needed projects to access additional resources for sustainability and resiliency.

The City should consider developing a “short-list” of priority projects that are needed for sustainability and resiliency like raising roads and other infrastructure improvements. During the 2021 Legislative Session, legislation was passed and \$500,000,000 has been allocated in the budget for a new Resilient Florida Grant Program that establishes a statewide program for adaptation to flooding and sea level rise.

The program will be authorized through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to provide assessments, plan development, and projects to adapt critical assets. In addition, other federal sources like the FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program are now available and can serve as a great tool for reducing risk. It is likely that additional state and federal resources will become available or further emphasize risk reduction in the future and by taking the proactive approach of having projects at the ready, the City can seize these opportunities.

During the 2021 Legislative Session, legislation was passed and \$500 million has been allocated in the budget for a new Resilient Florida Grant Program that establishes a statewide program for adaptation to flooding and sea level rise.

Lead Entity:

City of Marathon

Resources to Support:

Annual funding resources include the Resilient Florida Trust Fund managed by the Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection and FEMA BRIC Program. In the aftermath of a major disaster, other funding sources like the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Program, FEMA Public Assistance Program and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) – Disaster Recovery and CDBG – Mitigation Program can be valuable resources.

Ensure all mitigation projects are included in the Monroe County Local Mitigation Strategy.

Placing mitigation projects on the prioritized list for funding in the Countywide Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) is a requirement for federal mitigation funding and an important step that can help the community prepare for grant applications. The City has many other high priority projects waiting in the wings that would further increase resiliency. This includes a proposal for rebuilding a fire station with other emergency response improvements (\$14.75 million), marina hardening strategies (\$11.85 million), and a public works to provide better stormwater and sea wall infrastructure (\$13 million). Given the focus on resilience at both the state and federal levels of government, it is expected that significant funding opportunities will be available to cities and

counties to invest in major infrastructure improvements in the coming years. By having projects at-the-ready with grant writing staff available to support, the City will be able to harness these opportunities to make major improvements.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in cooperation with Monroe County

Potential Resources

The Monroe County Local Mitigation Strategy can be found [online](#)⁸ and was updated recently in 2021. The next update will occur in 2026, however the County will host meetings of the LMS working group where projects can be added, and prioritization can be discussed.

Maintain a grant writer position either on staff or on standby through a contract to ensure that the City of Marathon is planning for grant funding cycles.

The City of Marathon should be commended for its recent hiring of a grant writer. This will help the City to be proactive in securing grants for resiliency projects. With the state and federal government current focus on resiliency, the City will have many opportunities to gain access to millions of dollars to support infrastructure improvements and other projects that will increase the island chain's resiliency to both storm surge and sea level rise. Without a grant writer standing at the ready, the City could miss out on valuable opportunities to reduce its risk in the future. This position should be prioritized with additional support added when needed to ensure that the City can continue to receive access to these dollars and manage grants to ensure compliance with state and federal regulations.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon

Potential Resources

It is likely that grant writing funding will need to be supported by General Revenue, however some of the costs can be recouped for successful grant awards.



⁸ <https://www.monroecounty-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/29054/2021-Monroe-County-LMS-Final>

Commercial Fishing Challenges and Restoration of Nearshore/Offshore Waters

Overview of Challenge

The three main economic drivers in the Florida Keys include tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, and military operations, making commercial and recreational fishing critical to the economic sustainability of the Florida Keys and the City of Marathon. Florida Keys is home to one of the largest commercial fishing fleets in the country, with more than 350 federally permitted fishing boats. More than 80% of the spiny lobster harvested in the State of Florida are caught in Monroe County and close to 5% of the population of the Florida Keys are supported by Commercial Fishing. The dockside value of Monroe County's commercial fishing industry is valued at more than \$100 million.



Commercial and recreational fishing also support the City of Marathon's tourism industry with visitors hiring local guides for fishing experiences in both the nearshore and offshore waters and support local restaurants serving fresh seafood. Seafood exported to customers around the country also supports local fishermen and residents involved in the commercial fishing industry. In 2017, 41% of visitors participated in recreational sport fishing according to Monroe County's Tourist Development Council.

Recommendations

Continue to advocate for state resources to support coral reef restoration.

The Florida Keys Stewardship Act, passed in 2016, is authorized to receive as much as \$20 million annually to help Monroe County and its municipalities to address stormwater, wastewater and canal restoration needs. These funds directly impact the health of the waters of the Florida Keys and nearshore water quality. Additionally, an influx of funding from both the public and the private sector are geared toward coral restoration efforts to combat threats like Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease and other stressors including rising water temperatures and acidity.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in collaboration with Monroe County and organizations focusing on coral restoration or nearshore water quality.

Resources to Support

Funding allocated for coral restoration to organizations like the United Way and Mote Marine via the State of Florida and private funding sources. Monroe County and City of Marathon lobby teams to support additional Florida Keys Stewardship Act funding.

Work with County, state, and federal agencies to minimize negative impacts of regulations on fisherman while improving conservation efforts.

Over the last ten years, there have been several bills passed at the state level to address those who violate existing fisheries regulations. These bills focused in large part on the more egregious violators, for example, those who possess wrung lobster tails on the water or take large numbers of lobsters out of season. These efforts were moved forward in collaboration with local fishing interests to ensure that they were targeting ‘bad actors’ and not negatively impacting the commercial fishing industry. Other collaborations include partnerships between commercial fishing organizations and law enforcement to address trap poaching and the removal of ghost traps.

Lead Entity

Florida Keys Commercial Fishing Association

Resources to Support

Florida Keys representatives at the state and federal level (State Representative, State Senator and Member of Congress).

Establishment of additional mooring fields and/or buoys as needed to address anchoring impacts.

During the 2020 legislative session, bills were filed to address at-risk and derelict vessels by requiring that vessels be moved after a certain number of days. Since in many cases in the Florida Keys these liveaboard vessels serve as affordable housing, a compromise was reached requiring that before such limitations could be initiated, additional mooring buoys/mooring fields must be established. While primarily impacting the Lower Florida Keys, these discussions highlight the need for the City of Marathon to work collaboratively with state organizations to identify if/when additional mooring fields/mooring buoys are needed and limit the need for anchorages outside of these sites.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in collaboration with Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Resources to Support

Potential state funding for additional mooring fields/mooring balls.

Encourage laws that protect the fishing industry countywide while maintaining and improving resource sustainability of the harvested species and advance cooperative research on fishing and fishery sustainability.

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regularly assess the sustainability of specific fisheries regulations whether it be restrictions on access to locations or bag/size/season limits. For example, this year, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission moved forward with a spawning season limitation on an area in the Lower Keys called Dry Rocks. The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary for its part is in the process of reviewing and updating their management plan which will impact areas throughout the Florida Keys, including the City of Marathon. It is important as these types of actions are considered that commercial fishing interests play a key role in advocating for policies and restrictions that address sustainability but do not unduly restrict commercial fishing interests.

Lead Entity

Florida Keys Commercial Fishing Association

Resources to Support

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

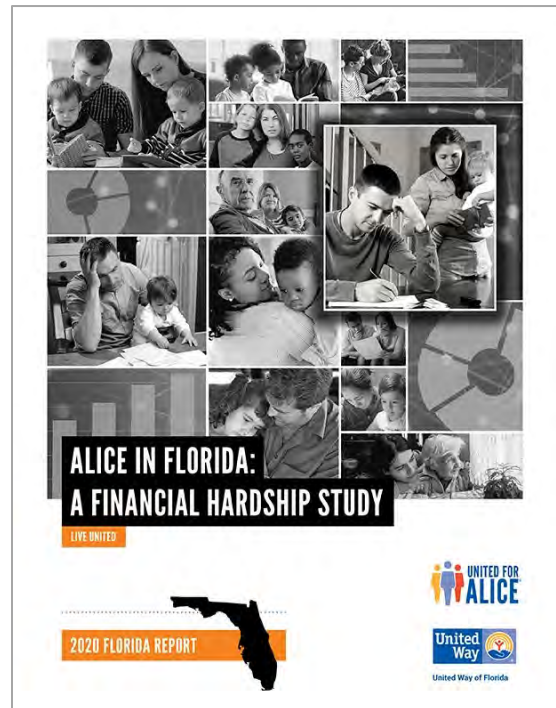


Workforce Training, Access to Talent and Retention Challenges

Overview of Challenge

A critically important issue identified by the City and its residents relating to economic development was the need for workforce training, access to talent and retention challenges. One contributing factor to this challenge is the unique geography of the Florida Keys and the City of Marathon as well as the extremely high cost of living associated with living in the Florida Keys as described above. Across Monroe County and across all industries, recruiting and retaining employees is a continuing challenge for policy makers and local businesses. Located more than two hours from mainland Florida, it is increasingly difficult for employers to find employees who can live and work in the city.

A report initiated by the United Way of Collier and the Florida Keys examined the cost-of-living challenges for those working and living in this unique area. The ALICE Report (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) outlines several challenges facing employees as well as employers that make retaining qualified employees more difficult. The report emphasizes the critical role that ALICE workers play in the local economy, building and repairing our infrastructure and educating and caring for our past, current and future workforce. The United Way report defines these individuals as those who fall above the Federal Poverty Level but struggle to afford basic household necessities. The ALICE Report identifies both survival budgets and stability budgets across the state, outlining the costs for housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, technology, and taxes (survival) as well as savings, and increased budget for housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, technology, and taxes (stability). In Monroe County, a single individual faces a survival budget threshold of \$27,192 and a stability budget threshold of \$42,228. For a family of four, that increases to \$68,916 (survival) and \$119,628 (stability). ALICE employees often lack basic employee protections including salary, adequate health care coverage and access to other benefits. ALICE families are defined by the study as those residents who are employed yet struggling with little to no savings, making them particularly vulnerable to changing economic conditions. The report also emphasizes the impact that living paycheck to paycheck has on both employees and the local economy including increased absenteeism in the workplace, reduced educational success, a greater burden on social services, increased emergency health care, and higher insurance premiums. The City of Marathon has one of the highest ALICE percentages found in Monroe County at 47%.



The Florida Keys and the City of Marathon are also constrained in this regard as they are statutorily obligated under the Area of Critical State Concern designation to provide affordable housing in proximity to places of employment for residents within the City and County. This statutory requirement is unique to Monroe County and the City of Apalachicola as state designated Areas of Critical State Concern.

Employers within the City of Marathon also find it challenging to find and retain employees in fields and positions where certifications and licensing are required. Due to the cost-of-living constraints, it can be difficult to recruit individuals from outside of the Florida Keys to move to the City of Marathon and to keep them here for long-term employment. This is seen in a variety of fields including law enforcement, trade jobs, and even hospitality.

Recommendations

Provide support for ALICE families to help with attracting and retaining talent within the City of Marathon.

Providing support for these ALICE families could help with retaining and attracting talent within the City of Marathon. Establishing additional affordable and workforce housing opportunities within the City of Marathon has been identified as a critical need that can be addressed by the City in consultation with state and county leadership.

A variety of strategies have been instituted to try and overcome these challenges including a collaboration with Miami-Dade County to provide buses for employees travelling from South Miami-Dade County to the Florida Keys for work which provides some relief, especially for the hospitality industry. The Miami-Dade bus system provides some relief, but it does not address the need for employers who need highly specialized employees or are concerned with long-term employee retention.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in collaboration with the Florida Housing Finance Corporation and non-profit organizations like the United Way.

Resources to Support

State affordable housing tax credit programs, programs that provide additional social services.

Encourage employers to play a role in developing solutions for attracting and retaining talent and recognize those who do.

Employers can also play a role in this issue by providing more short-term financial stability for employees, increasing wages to help meet cost of living and providing additional incentives for employees like housing or other benefits that help stabilize these families and make it more affordable to live within the City of Marathon. Options that have been considered and offered by

local employers include housing allowances outside of traditional wage benefits and sign-up bonuses which can help offset cost of living challenges like the requirement by many landlords to provide payment of first month, last month, and security deposit upon move-in. The community should consider formally recognizing those employers who are stepping up to the plate to address these challenges and create positive news stories and case studies to share with other employers as creative ways to be part of the solution.

Lead Entity

Marathon Chamber of Commerce and the broader private sector business community.

Resources to Support

Private sector incentive programs.

Encourage local businesses to grow their own talent and partner with organizations that provide resources to support.

A recent demographic study pointed to the retirement of baby boomers, accelerated by the global pandemic as a contributor to the mass exodus of individuals from the available workforce. This is a challenge that is forecasted to become even more acute in the coming years due to declining birth rates and employment preferences of more recent generations.⁹ In places like the Keys, where unemployment rates are extremely low, local businesses will need to recognize the importance of growing their own talent pools within the community and establish partnerships with organizations that will allow local employers to tap into financial resources for specific industry certifications and licenses (ex. CDL licensing). Promote discussions within the business community about what resources are available now and what additional resources could be made available locally to provide additional training and meet the needs of local businesses.

The College of the Florida Keys has recently begun offering CDL certification within the Florida Keys and is promoting a new apprenticeship program to help increase the pool of eligible employees within the Florida Keys for trade jobs. In building out these programs, the College is working to build a larger workforce from within the Florida Keys and provide more additional trade education, certification, and licensing opportunities within the existing population and saving those in need of these services from having to seek them outside of their current places of residency and employment.

Lead Entity

Marathon Chamber of Commerce along with the broader Marathon business community and the College of the Florida Keys.

Resources to Support

College of the Florida Keys and Career Source

⁹ <https://economicmodeling.com/demographic-drought/>

Access to Resources and Technical Assistance to Support Small Businesses

Overview of Challenge

The economy of Marathon is largely based on small businesses that are locally owned and operated and started by entrepreneurs with a vision or idea. While many business owners may be excellent at the service they provide or product they create, they may not have the business background that is needed for long-term sustainability. Providing wraparound support for these operations – especially start-ups – can help ensure that they are a success and serve the City for many years to come. Many communities provide access to these resources through a local economic development organization which is sometimes co-located with a Chamber of Commerce or can be separate. Unlike the Chamber whose focus is on promoting interest in local businesses, the responsibility of an EDO is to help grow existing businesses and attract new businesses to the community. These organizations are often a public-private partnership between local government and private industry leaders committed to the growth of the economy.

There are many partner organizations that exist at the regional, state, and national level to help provide free support to businesses, but without a local point person, business owners may not know that they exist. For example, to grow small businesses, entrepreneurs and business owners often need access to low-interest loans and capital. Organizations such as the Florida Small Business Development Center Network and U.S. Small Business Administration are key in providing these resources along with training to help a business owner navigate funding options and more. The Small Business Development Center at FIU in Miami serves the Monroe County area and can provide professional business consulting at no cost, management training, and vital information they need to grow and succeed in a complex and competitive global environment. However, the distance to Miami makes the SBDC not as easily accessible to business owners in the Florida Keys.



In addition, a new business owner who is not from the area may not fully understand the implications of owning a business in an area that is high risk for hurricanes. In 2019, nearly two years after Hurricane Irma made landfall in the Florida Keys, Monroe County conducted a survey of local business owners to better understand the long-term economic recovery needs. The following ongoing issues were reported:

- Nearly 60 percent of businesses stated that the assistance they received was not enough to support the long-term recovery of their business.
- Close to 50 percent of business owners reported still having physical damage 18 months after the storm.

- Over 50 percent of businesses reported to be uninsured or under-insured and some business owners who had insurance reported ongoing litigation battles with insurance companies to receive necessary recovery compensation.
- Even with the support provided through insurance, loans and other sources, only 47 percent of businesses reported that they were currently stable. This means that almost half of the businesses are experiencing decline, are struggling to stay open or may have already closed in the wake of Hurricane Irma.

While the global pandemic did not result in physical damage to businesses, the economic impacts from the loss of tourism were significant. However, in a vulnerable island community like the Florida Keys, disasters are events that must be factored into a business owner's plans for long-term sustainability.

Recommendations

Consider advocating for a countywide economic development organization that is separate from the Chamber and TDC to focus on the expansion and growth of existing businesses and attraction of new businesses.

An economic development organization focuses on leadership in policy making and the administration of programs and projects. They focus on organizational development, product development, market development, business development and workforce development. The model for funding an EDO is typically a public-private partnership with funding coming from local governments involved, along with large and small businesses and other organizations in the region. These individuals can coordinate resources for small businesses and show that the community has a strong focus on economic development. They are separate from a Chamber of Commerce that works with its membership, consisting of local businesses, to promote these businesses and provide networking opportunities among membership organizations. Communities that have an EDO will also have a separate Chamber of Commerce and Tourist Development Council.

In Monroe County, these organizations can also be helpful in helping businesses to prepare for, respond to and recover from a disaster by being the local on-the-ground support for economic recovery. An organization such as this could start as an economic development committee led by the Chamber of Commerce and then grow to have its own nonprofit status and be separate from the Chamber operations.

Lead Entity

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce but should be countywide.

Potential Resources

- [*Learning to Lead: A Primer on Economic Development Strategies*¹⁰](#) provides an overview of the function of an EDO and how to kickstart its development.
- Typically, these organizations are funded through a commitment of funds from local governments along with investments from large and small businesses and organizations that represent industries and workforce development. Electric companies can also contribute significant funding to these organizations as well.

Further develop resources for expansion and training available on the Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce website.

The Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce website has a landing page for Business and Economic Development along with a website relocatetothefloridakeys.com, which focuses on helping businesses understand why they should live and work in the Keys and how to take the leap. This website is a great start for businesses who may be hoping to open or expand in Marathon. This website could be further enhanced by sharing resources on how to gain access to capital (through a Small Business Administration Loan) and emphasizing the free resources and training that are available through the Small Business Development Center. Another opportunity may be to work with local commercial realtors to advertise available properties suitable for new businesses on the website in one location. These are often called buildings and sites databases. The website could link back to the realtor's page, as the realtor would continue to be the lead in navigating the sale or lease of the facility, but the database could serve as a central repository.

Lead Entity

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Potential Resources

Most of these tasks can be done relatively easily through a quick website update. To coordinate the development of a buildings and sites database would be a collaborative effort with a local association such as the Marathon and Lower Keys Association of Realtors.

Conduct a survey of local business owners to better determine needs and partner with the SBDC at FIU to host in-person training or local office hours to meet the needs of businesses.

To better understand the needs of businesses in the community, it could be helpful to start with a survey of business owners. This survey may ask what their challenges are but should be more

¹⁰ <https://mrsc.org/getmedia/fb021343-eac7-4407-bc2a-2325fd292a8e/wacted-learn.pdf.aspx>

focused on the types of solutions, trainings, resources that they would like to see or participate in. With online survey platforms and social media, outreach such as this could be easy to accomplish and low-budget and help to avoid kicking off larger initiatives or programs that are underutilized by the community. In addition, it can be powerful when communicating with organizations such as the SBDC at Florida Atlantic University to advocate for a partnership to meet the need of business owners.

Lead Entity

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Potential Resources

This task can be accomplished with a free online survey platform, social media and outreach through Chamber membership.

Create guidance on local, state, and federal regulations unique to businesses in the Florida Keys and Marathon to help new businesses navigate these requirements.

Regulations vary from place-to-place and perhaps are more unique in the Florida Keys than anywhere else in the State. Potential business owners who are exploring the establishment of their business in your community may be deterred by what seems like cumbersome regulations but are necessary to preserve the environment and community of the Keys. A simple way to streamline regulations (without removing them) is to create a guide on how to open a business in the Florida Keys with points of contact for who should be contacted along the way. While there are many websites that offer some of this information, collecting it in one location can be helpful. Not only does the map out the process of opening a business but also promotes the image of a business-friendly environment that is welcoming to new opportunities. Some examples include:

- [Critical Resources for Starting a Business in Monroe County¹¹](https://www.floridakeyscommercial.com/crucial-resources-for-starting-a-business-in-monroe-county-florida/)
- [The Key Largo: Doing Business in the Florida Keys Guide¹²](https://www.keylargochamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Doing-Business-in-the-Florida-Keys.pdf)

The Marathon Chamber of Commerce website relocatetothefloridakeys.com is a great starting place for this information. The site includes the process for requesting assistance from the Chamber and what types of assistance can be offered to new businesses looking to relocate, along with important demographic information. The Chamber might consider starting to document the process that it follows with various businesses and then slowly building out this step-by-step guide with contact information, specific to Marathon and the Keys. While this is no replacement for the one-on-one technical assistance that is offered, it captures the steps easily so that once a person leaves a meeting with the Chamber, there is a road map for the next

¹¹ <https://www.floridakeyscommercial.com/crucial-resources-for-starting-a-business-in-monroe-county-florida/>

¹² <https://www.keylargochamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Doing-Business-in-the-Florida-Keys.pdf>

steps in the process to make it less complicated. This information could be captured in a guide with case studies for specific businesses.

Lead Entity

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Potential Resources

This task can be accomplished over time by documenting processes and placing this information on the existing website.

Host business continuity and preparedness speakers at Chamber events to discuss insurance options and resources available to support businesses after disasters.

Many new business owners who chose to open shop in Marathon may be coming from other places around the nation (or world) and are new to living in an environment that is prone to hurricane risk. As presented in the information above, following Hurricane Irma one of the top challenges for businesses was lack of insurance or being underinsured. While it is widely known that the island chain is vulnerable to wind and flood events, business owners do not often fully grasp how this can affect their operations until experiencing a disaster. It is in the months after a disaster that many of these businesses can fail and close their doors forever. By proactively providing this information through speaker series, webinars and other events, the community can help ensure that their business owners have the information they need to be prepared and avoid the loss of businesses and jobs that can sometimes follow an event. The Florida Small Business Development Center Network offers a host of resources on [their website](#)¹³ that could be used for these preparedness events.

Lead Entity

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Potential Resources

Small Business Development Center at FIU, Business Continuity Coordinator

Create a disaster preparedness page on the Chamber of Commerce website to help business owners navigate resources and training for disaster preparedness, including insurance options.

In addition to a speaker/webinar series, websites could include useful links on writing business disaster preparedness plans and other helpful information. By compiling this information and providing this information on the Chamber's website, it can be used as resources for individuals

¹³ <http://floridasbdc.org/services/business-continuation/preparedness/>

who want more information after a seminar or event. The page could include information on insurance resources and how to determine the appropriate level of information to ensure continuity after a disaster.

Lead Entity

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Potential Resources

Small Business Development Center at FIU, Business Continuity Coordinator

Create a premade disaster recovery resources page for business owners that can go live quickly after a disaster with important links to assistance that can be provided.

Separate from disaster preparedness, it can be helpful to provide a webpage specific to disaster recovery information and resources that are available to support the hours and months following an event. This could include links to www.FloridaDiaster.biz, a great recovery resource for businesses along with links to the SBA Bridge Loan application process, once activated. It could also include local links to disaster resources and information.

A webpage like this is often extremely helpful immediately after a disaster but due to the myriad of challenges faced at that time (lack of power, internet, personal recovery efforts), it can be difficult to prioritize. However, if the web page is already created, a web master may be able to quickly turn it on after a disaster to be proactive about information dissemination. With the page already created, updated links to information (like Bridge Loans and other resources) can be quickly accomplished.

The community could consider brainstorming the resources that were helpful to the business community in the weeks and months following Hurricane Irma and compile this information as a starting point. By having this information ahead of time in one place, community members can easily get the message out after an event on where to go for information.

Lead Entity

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Potential Resources

Small Business Development Center at FIU, Business Continuity Coordinator

Opportunities & Recommendations

Overview

This section will highlight key opportunities faced by the City of Marathon that present an issue for economic development in the community.

Economic Development Opportunities in Marathon



Revitalize commercial areas and improve business corridors through streetscaping, facade improvements, and other strategies.

Develop a town center and outdoor market space to serve as a venue for community gatherings and small businesses leveraging city-owned property.



Enhance assets including Pigeon Key and Grassy Key to support family-friendly tourism opportunities that are also enjoyable for residents.

Support the long-term enhancement and expansion of the Marathon Airport to meet both charter and some commercial demands.



Support the ongoing needs of the new hospital to expand healthcare services and provide better access for services in the Middle Keys.

Commercial Revitalization

Overview of Opportunity

The revitalization of commercial corridors along US 1 (Overseas Highway) has been identified as a top priority for the City of Marathon. While much has changed over the course of the past two decades, many of the storefronts within this corridor remain the same or are in disrepair. This is likely driven by two key factors: 1) unrepaired or under-repaired



damage from Hurricane Irma or past storms along with 2) limitations placed on improvements that are not compliant with current flood building code standards due to compliance with the National Flood Insurance Program. With both regulatory and land mass restrictions on growth, the redevelopment of commercial properties in Marathon is an important part of the continued evolution of the community. The City of Marathon understands that to encourage revitalization that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the businesses within this area, creative measures will need to be taken.

Recommendations

Implement minimum design standards throughout the City that provide a benchmark for the development of new commercial structures along with the significant revitalization of older structures.

In Marathon, there are limited opportunities for new commercial development, making the iterative redevelopment of property important to the overall economic development of the community. Design standards in a community can help to enhance the personality of an area and provide a sense of place that instills community pride, is attractive to visitors and encourages the development or location of new businesses. It is important to consider guidelines and standards such as these when the community is not in recovery mode after a major hurricane recognizing that post-hurricane is likely a time when many of these standards will be implemented. In 2006, the City of Marathon commissioned a master plan, providing thorough details for redevelopment of the city. While the plan is 15 years old, it provides a particularly good foundation and should be considered for implementation. The plan divides the City into several:

1. **Old Town:** Running from the end of the Seven-Mile Bridge approximately 33rd street.
2. **Midtown:** Running from 33rd Street to approximately 70th Street.
3. **Airport District:** Consisting of the areas along the length of the airport runway.
4. **New Town:** Consisting of the areas on either side of the Vaca Cut, all the way to the intersection of Coco Plum Drive.
5. **Grassy Key:** Extending south to Mile Marker 54 but concentrating primarily on the upper end of Grassy Key.

The plan makes many recommendations for distinct design standards and streetscaping improvements that should be revisited. However, for a city the size of Marathon it may be difficult and too burdensome to create separate design standards for different parts of town. The City could consider revisiting these standards, deciding what elements could work across the board and adopt them uniformly to improve curb appeal.

In 2009, after the development of the Master Plan, the Marathon City Council convened a US1 Design Review Task Force to develop recommendations for design standards around height, landscaping, parking, lighting, architecture, and signage. The intent was to create a unified, consistent look that would encourage travelers who may be passing through the area to stop and explore the Middle Keys.

In 2009, after the development of the Master Plan, the Marathon City Council convened a US1 Design Review Task Force to develop recommendations for design standards around height, landscaping, parking, lighting, architecture, and signage. The intent was to create a unified, consistent look that would encourage travelers who may be passing through the area to stop and explore the Middle Keys. The Task Force made the following recommendations:

1. *Create a unified consistent look to Marathon’s commercial corridor to encourage and invite the traveling public to stop and explore Marathon, its businesses and attractions.*
2. *Encourage pedestrian access to businesses by planning coordination between the Overseas Heritage Trail, the bike path and sidewalks, landscaping, parking and rest areas.*
3. *Require Bahamian/Conch/Key West Architecture on all new construction within the US 1 Corridor implemented through a visual “design vocabulary” that provides graphic displays of the architectural standards to be utilized. The graphic elements of the “design vocabulary” include:*

Building Mass & Style

- *Bahamian/Conch/Key West Architecture within setbacks. Possible variances from setbacks to porches to interface with pedestrian access.*
- *Materials: Wood and masonry siding, stucco, concrete block construction with architecturally consistent exterior.*

- *Façade treatments, windows, and trims consistent with Bahamian/Conch/Key West Architecture, window framings, awnings, decorative porches and gingerbread features.*

Roof Types

- *Bahamian/Conch/Key West Architecture.*
- *Hip, gable, manscard, flat (no barrel tile roofs).*

Porches, Eaves, Gables, Dormers, Courtyards & Arcades

- *Bahamian/Conch/Key West Architecture porches to be encouraged facing Overseas Heritage Trail or bike path/sidewalks.*
- *Pedestrian access from porches to parking areas/Overseas Heritage Trail/bike paths/sidewalks to encourage shade and require coordination between public and private landscaping.*

Colors

- *Pastels and tropical colors only. Graphic elements of design vocabulary will establish parameters for building colors, awnings, facades, window frames, dormers, etc.*

Street Furniture

- *Create a set of street furniture that reflects the character of Marathon including:*
 - *Benches,*
 - *Street and parking lighting,*
 - *Trash/recycling receptacles,*
 - *Information centers/kiosks,*
 - *Bicycle/golf cart parking,*
 - *Landscaped and shaded resting areas, and*
 - *Public restrooms.*

Lighting

- *Consistent architectural design for all streetlights.*
- *Low luminosity, solar or LED with low poles.*
- *Directional lighting, aimed down, reducing light pollution.*
- *Coordinated with Landscape and Overseas Heritage Trail, sidewalks and bike path.*

Signs

- *Signs over time must achieve aesthetic architecture uniformity with similar height and size.*
- *Encourage use of box lit signs to minimize damage and maximize flexibility with special consideration for businesses off US 1.*
- *More historical or attraction identification signs.*

- *Restore historic names of streets, in addition to present name.*
- *Give parks appropriate names (historic, honorary, locational) and bigger, better signs.*
- *Use bigger, better signage to identify attractions.*

Using these two documents as a basis for starting discussions, the City could hire an urban designer and/or landscape architect to write the policies that will be needed and guidance documents for communicating the new standards to businesses and developers. These standards could then be vetted through a reconvened Task Force and public meetings prior to implementation. The City should focus on simple improvements that are low-cost and will not be perceived as burdensome on businesses or landowners.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in coordination with an appointed Task Force.

Resources to Support

- Community Planning Technical Assistance Program to support hiring a consultant to develop policies for Land Development Code and guide to clearly communicate standards to business owners.

Create a façade improvement program in cooperation with the Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce Program to offer financial assistance to businesses and property owners that invest in the beautification of their buildings or property.

Nothing says community pride more than the condition of its commercial district buildings. Façade improvements are small things that property and business owners can have a big impact on the curb appeal of their place of business and the entire community. When combined with streetscaping - sidewalks enhancement, landscaping, decorative street lighting and more - these small improvements can make a huge difference and create momentum for other beautification projects and private investment. Façade improvements are small things that property and business owners can have a big impact on the curb appeal of their place of business and the entire community. When combined with streetscaping - sidewalks enhancement, landscaping, decorative street lighting and more - these small improvements can make a huge difference and create momentum for other beautification projects and private investment. The City of Marathon has two ongoing efforts related to facade improvements and streetscaping. First, the Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce created an annual Business Beautification Grant Program in 2011 to help improve the aesthetic and visual appearance of the US 1 Corridor in Marathon. Each year the Chamber of Commerce awards up to ten matching grants of up to \$2,000 each to assist local business owners with small upgrades to make the outside of their property more attractive. As evidenced by the small grant program managed by the Chamber of Commerce, a small amount of funding provided to a business owner is typically matched 1:1 or sometimes with an even higher return on investment.

City of Marathon Economic Development and Resilience Strategy

In addition, the City of Marathon's Capital Infrastructure Fund provides a dedicated stream of funding for infrastructure and public facility improvements through discretionary sale surtaxes. In 2021, the City saw a \$711,000 decrease from the previous year, likely due to reduced revenue from the impacts of COVID-19. As life and the tourism industry return to normal operations, post-pandemic, it is likely that this revenue stream will increase again in the future.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in Partnership with the Chamber of Commerce

Resources to Support

While some grant funding resources are available to support commercial façade improvement programs, many of these come with restrictions that make implementation difficult. The City could consider the following grant programs for support:

- Community Development Block Grant Small Cities Annual Program
- American Rescue Plan Act Funding



Perhaps the simpler option to create this program is to set-aside a manageable amount of local government funding with a required match for business owners. The examples below demonstrate how other cities have developed similar programs to achieve these results.

Façade Improvement Grant Program Examples

City of Rockledge

The City of Rockledge, through the City's Community Redevelopment Agency, developed the Façade Improvement Grant Program in 2004. Since the Program's inception, the Agency has funded 51 successful projects and awarded over \$374,000.00 in grant funding, which has led to nearly \$900,000.00 in improvements and renovations. In FY20-21, the Agency budgeted \$150,000 for the program, which provides grants of up to \$10,000 and no more than 50% of the cost of the project. More information is [available on their website](#).

(<https://www.cityofrockledge.org/477/About-the-Facade-Improvement-Grant-Progr>)

City of Jacksonville

The City of Jacksonville's Façade Renovation Matching Grant Program provides commercial or retail façade renovation funding assistance for existing businesses in designated economically distressed areas (EDA) throughout the City. The program matches two dollars of City funding for every one dollar of eligible façade renovation costs (including contributions of materials with documented receipts) borne by the owner/tenant up to a maximum of \$10,000, depending on the designation area. More information is [available on their website](#).

(<https://www.coj.net/departments/office-of-economic-development/facade-renovation-matching-grant-program>)

City of Leesburg

The City of Leesburg's Façade, Sign and Landscaping (FSL) Grant Program assists property owners in the City's major roadway corridors by providing a financial incentive to replace signs, facades and landscapes that do not conform to the City's current design standards. Participating businesses can receive up to \$20,000. Funding for FSL grants is through a combination of CRA and General Revenue sources. More information is [available on their website](#).

(https://www.leesburgflorida.gov/government/departments/planning_and_zoning/facade_sign_and_landscaping_grants.php)

City of St. Cloud

The City of St. Cloud's Building and Site Improvement Grant Program is available for façade improvements for buildings located within any of the three designated CRA Districts. Eligible projects must be for façade improvements to a building, properties that are permanent, or could be described as "beautification" projects that are visible portions of structure or site. The program can refund up to 50% of the cost incurred per eligible project, upon proof of full payment. Grant awards are based on building square footage and range from up to \$10,000 to \$65,000. More information is [available on their website](#).

(<https://www.stcloud.org/1084/Grant-Programs>)

Adopt historic preservation recommendations from the 2018 Survey and Master Plan of Historic Resources.

In 2018, the City of Marathon received a grant to conduct a Historic Preservation Survey and create a [Master Plan¹⁴](#) that identifies architectural styles and pocket districts and record historic resources in the community in the Florida Master Site File along with assesses their eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Master Plan contains recommendations for the City's Comprehensive Plan, along with its Historic Preservation Ordinance and many other suggestions related to the preservation of the City's history and culture.



Commercial revitalization and historic preservation often go together as preserving history creates a sense of place in a community. In addition, for areas vulnerable to flooding, there are variance processes that can be put into place (and streamlined) that can relax some code requirements related to flooding, making it easier to rehabilitate these buildings while maintaining their historic significance. This process can be an important part of an adaptive reuse strategy for encouraging the redevelopment of older buildings that may be in disrepair.

Marathon should consider the draft policies and recommendations found in these documents as part of their commercial revitalization efforts and move forward with implementation. In addition, the City can seek grants specific for historic preservation to restore older buildings – a resource that is not as readily available for commercial properties – which can help draw down more grant funding to support the effort of revitalization.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon

Resources to Support

The implementation of policy can be a task that is managed with in-house resources and implementation can be funded through many grant opportunities available largely through the Florida Department of State. These include:

- [Small Matching Grants¹⁵](#)
- [Special Category Grants¹⁶](#)
- [General Program Support¹⁷](#)

¹⁴

<https://www.ci.marathon.fl.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning/page/27439/historicpreservationmasterplan.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://dos.myflorida.com/historical/grants/>

¹⁶ <https://dos.myflorida.com/historical/grants/>

¹⁷ <https://dos.myflorida.com/cultural/grants/grant-programs/general-program-support/>

- [Specific Cultural Projects](#)¹⁸
- [Fast-Track Projects](#)¹⁹
- [Cultural Facilities](#)²⁰

These grant cycles typically occur in the spring of each year, meaning that the City should use time over the fall/winter to prepare for submission. There are also several private and nonprofit organizations that provide grant support to assist with historic preservation. The next recommendation details a program that will provide more access to these resources.

Consider pursuing the Florida Main Street Florida Program to gain technical expertise on historic preservation and commercial revitalization.

[Florida Main Street](#)²¹ is a technical assistance program with the goal of revitalizing historic downtowns and encouraging economic development within the context of historic preservation. It is part of a network of programs that exist in many states across the nation, making it a strong resource for communities that prioritize historic preservation to revitalize commercial areas. Benefits to joining this program include access to nationwide conferences, a network of peers that have been working to revitalize downtowns for decades, unlocks grant resources available only through National Main Street and prioritization for other grant programs and a framework under which to organize efforts. The Main Street Program emphasizes four main points which are captured in the graphic below.



¹⁸ <https://dos.myflorida.com/cultural/grants/grant-programs/specific-cultural-projects/>

¹⁹ <https://dos.myflorida.com/cultural/grants/grant-programs/fast-track-project/>

²⁰ <https://dos.myflorida.com/cultural/grants/grant-programs/cultural-facilities/>

²¹ <https://dos.myflorida.com/historical/preservation/florida-main-street/>

Perhaps one of the most powerful elements of a Main Street Community is the organization that is formed through the designation process and implementation of the effort. This program provides the framework for bringing individuals together in a community and can result in a nonprofit organization that takes the lead on commercial revitalization overall. This program will help individuals in the community with organizing events that bring our historic areas to life such as festivals, downtown gatherings, etc. that not only provide a sense of community but are done in a way that draws people into a commercial area to support local businesses.

The application and designation process can be lengthy, and communities are encouraged to start the effort well before the cycle opens (in early summer).

Lead Entity

City of Marathon with support from the Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce and the Florida Keys Council of the Arts.

Resources to Support

The Florida Main Street Office is a great resource for communities that are interested in learning more about the process. They can be reached at: FloridaMainStreet@dos.myflorida.com or (850) 245-6345.

Explore grant programs that support public art and cultural opportunities in the City of Marathon to install murals and other interesting features that celebrate the uniqueness of the community.

Community members emphasized the desire to have more public art and cultural opportunities in the City including murals and other features that celebrate what makes Marathon special. According to the National Endowment for the Arts “Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire and be inspired.” Supporting the development of local art is more than the art itself, it’s about tourism, civic pride, economic stimulus, and safety.

An example of such a mural that is known internationally is the Whaling Wall, a famous Wyland Mural that makes the former K-Mart Shopping Plaza stand out among its Big Box retailer peers. Other ideas presented by the community included murals along the hangers at the airport (maintenance was discussed as an issue) along with other stretches of wall and buildings that could serve as a blank canvas for an artist.

Murals can typically be installed for between \$5,000 - \$10,000, depending on the size of the painting. Some murals can even be painted on exceptionally large canvas-type materials that can be affixed to walls, allowing them to be moved throughout the community (and maintained as public property, a requirement of some grant programs). While there is funding available to support murals and other art projects, with its low-cost nature, it is sometimes easier to implement through a fundraising activity. If an organization committed to raising \$5,000 a year

and installing a mural each year somewhere unique in the City, a relatively small investment of \$25,000 could result in a significant boost to commercial revitalization efforts.

Another idea popular among many communities is the creation of public art “trails” first made famous by the Cows on Parade initiative in Chicago in 1999. This results in small statutes or casts representative of a community icon (typically an animal of some sort) that are painted in vibrant colors and placed in front of businesses and important landmarks. These places are then advertised collectively as a “trail” and can be promoted collectively and add an interesting feature to local businesses that highlight the flavor of a community.

This project can be done relatively low-cost through the following methods:

- A local organization can sponsor the casting of a mold (<\$5,000)
- Businesses can then purchase the small statutes for their properties (<\$500)
- Local artists can compete in an art contest to paint the murals that showcase their work at no cost throughout the community and the statues can be offered up through either a lottery process (no additional cost to businesses) or a bidding process (fund raising) to place the structures in front of their businesses.

Through creative partnerships, public art can be a low-cost option for revitalization that is transformational.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon with support from the Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce, Tourist Development Council and the Florida Keys Council of the Arts.

Resources to Support

The implementation of these programs can largely be accomplished in house with a small budget. These projects are often suited for support by local Tourist Development Council's with some grant programs offered from the Florida Department of State that could potentially support their implementation (see grants listed above).

Mural Matching Program

The City of Stuart's Community Redevelopment Agency initiated a pilot **Mural Matching Grant Program in 2021** with the intent to use murals as a catalyst for redefining their area as a destination for arts and culture. The applicants are eligible to receive financial assistance, in the form of a 50/50 funds match, not to exceed \$3,000, for new mural artwork that are adjacent to the public right-of-way or surface parking lots, or visible from the public right-of-way. \$20,000 was allocated in the CRA's budget for the pilot. More information is [available on their website.](https://cityofstuart.us/DocumentCenter/View/523/Mural-Matching-Grant-Program-and-Application-PDF)

(<https://cityofstuart.us/DocumentCenter/View/523/Mural-Matching-Grant-Program-and-Application-PDF>)

Encourage the creation of a volunteer-based programs that organize city-wide clean-up days and other campaigns for beautification.

One of the low-cost, most impactful steps that can be taken to improve a commercial district experience and make the area feel more inviting and welcoming is a good cleaning of local businesses. This could include a City or nonprofit sponsored clean-up day with a focus on washing windows, picking up debris from sidewalks, and pulling weeds. Through this effort, the City could identify a champion for beautification and encourage them to form a small organization (that could obtain nonprofit status to access grants) for managing these events in the future. The group could create an Adopt-A-Mile Marker program where businesses could adopt a mile-long segment of highway to clean on a routine basis in exchange for signage that shows this is their segment, giving credit to the business for giving back to the community. This organization could also recognize businesses that are forward thinking in their beautification or clean-up efforts through a “Business of the Month” award (could be done less frequently than monthly, if too burdensome), drawing attention to their efforts to encourage other businesses to take similar steps.

Lead Entity

The Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce with support from the City of Marathon.

Resources to Support

The largest resource needed to support community clean-up is volunteers to support the activity and keep it ongoing. To create a cadre of volunteers in the community, City or Chamber of Commerce might consider seeking a [Volunteer Florida Generations Fund](#) grant to hire a volunteer coordinator. This position will help to recruit, train, maintain and recognize the volunteers working in the community. While community clean-up could be the focus of the volunteer efforts, many of the other projects listed under commercial revitalization could benefit from the sweat-equity provided by this group as well.

Review and strengthen signage around commercial areas and encourage the use of signs that are attractive in the community.

Signs in a community are intended to be eye-catching to attract patrons into a business or bring awareness of a certain place to individuals who are passing by. However, with no standards in place for the creation of signs, some options, while eye-catching can be unattractive and detract from the look and feel of a community. The placing of signs is often regulated through local building codes and even state or federal government, depending on the location. The need for appropriate regulations around signs should be considered as part of the overall design standards in a community (detailed above). The City has considered signs as part of past efforts to create design standards. Standards implemented should allow for variation among

businesses to allow businesses to express creativity and also consider low-cost requirements that will not add to the expense of a new business locating in Marathon.

The community should identify key traveling decision points and provide simple and sequential wayfinding signs that lead visitors to downtown. Keep the messaging clear and consistent and highlight the uniqueness and valuable assets of Marathon.

Wayfinding Signage

- Keep it simple and sequential.
- Identify decision points and checkpoints along the way.
- Provide a clear and consistent message.
- Express what is unique and valuable about Marathon.
- Do not over complicate or overspend, the messaging should be clear and efficient.
- Stay consistent to the community brand.

Commercial Signage

- Well crafted, highly visible store signs that make it obvious as to what is inside the building is incredibly valuable for a commercial district. Signs can be a welcome mat to commercial shopping and even be examples of public art. Consider the use of blade signs, those that are perpendicular to the road. These are easier for motorists and pedestrians to see and help shoppers coming out of stores see what additional adventures await them down the block. Looking down the block and not seeing what there is to go see or having to walk past vacant stores to get there, might cause a potential customer to not explore further. However, blade signs can signal to customers what there is to see, and they are less likely to be deterred.
- Consider working with local artists, the school district, or local colleges for possible sign design, fabrication, and installation. Students gain valuable hands-on experiences, and the cost of unique, one-of-a-kind signs can be greatly reduced.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in coordination with an appointed Task Force.

Resources to Support

- Community Planning Technical Assistance Program to support hiring a consultant to develop policies for Land Development Code and guide to clearly communicate standards to business owners.

Develop a Streetscaping Improvement Plan to encourage vibrant and enhanced commercial corridors along US 1.

An important part of streetscaping is the development of a plan that considers civil engineering needed to implement improvements along major highways and commercial corridors. The City should consider creating a streetscaping master plan that includes all of the engineering and design work so that projects stand ready to be implemented as local or grant funding become

available. In addition to landscaping improvements along the side of roads and in medians, considerations that may be included in a streetscaping improvement plan are:

- Retrofitting decorative streetlights with LEDs provides a safe atmosphere and are safe for sea turtles.
- New street banners to welcome residents and visitors to the heart of the community.
- Ground-based sidewalk planters on the end of City blocks and larger planters throughout depending on the length of a particular block are a good alternative to hanging flowerpots, which are nice but can be expensive and hard to maintain. Consider asking organizations or local businesses to adopt planters and help fund and maintain them.
- Consider adding benches, chairs and tables or other seating areas to create gathering places for non-shoppers or customers needing to find a quick respite. Encourage businesses to do the same and offer casual outdoor seating along the front of their business. People are more willing and able to walk further and explore more of a commercial district if convenient seating is provided. Consider partnering with a local artist or school for seating design, construction, and installation.
- Trash/Recycling receptacles are becoming more in demand by an environmentally conscious public.
- Bicycle Parking/Rentals are popular with a health-conscious culture of which Marathon benefits from. Offering these items only compliments, if not, enhances your already famed natural resources that Marathon is known for.
- Another amenity to consider enhancing the visitor's experience audibly would be to install a Music/PA System which could provide light music during events, throughout the holidays or during peak shopping times on nights and weekends.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon.

Resources to Support

Community Planning Technical Assistance Program to create a streetscaping master plan.

Consider establishing a vacant building registry ordinance which can be seen as helpful for both business owners and realtors.

A vacant building in a commercial district can be characterized as one not open to the public. Typically, these buildings can be absentee owners or a foreclosure, they could also be a building that is used for storage. Inventory the vacant commercial buildings and keep the list updated. Collect data such as building owner information, square footage, previous use, building condition, etc. and take photos inside and out. Be ready to respond proactively when you have an interested business owner or investor. This also allows building/code officials to do regular inspections to identify problems on the interior of a building that cannot be seen from the outside. This will create a proactive approach to issues with a building instead of reactive.

Additionally, it can help motivate the sale of a property. Fees and timelines set for inspections can be set by the Planning and Zoning Commission along with the City Council.

- Hang catchy “business opportunity” signs in the window or “I would make a great [insert use]” to spur creativity in the community.
- Remove faded posters/flyers that draw attention to the length of time that a property has been available for lease or sale.
- Consider requiring property owners to notify the City when a building is soon to be vacant and a plan to maintain and reoccupy the building. Put in place financial penalties or disincentives, such as an annual escalating permit fee for properties vacant for extended periods of time.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in partnership with the Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce.

Resources to Support

This could be incorporated into another proposal for Land Development Code updates or commercial revitalization activities. The establishment of this ordinance could also be done in-house, and implementation could be conducted in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce.

Utilize the Federal Opportunity Zone designation in Marathon to attract new investment into the area.

Opportunity Zones (OZ) are an economic development tool that allows people to invest in distressed areas around the United States. The purpose is to spur economic growth and job creation in low-income communities while providing tax benefits to investors. A taxpayer is given tax incentives to employ capital gains into qualified opportunity zone funds which are structured as corporations or partnerships and then invest in quality opportunity zone property. This can be an opportunity zone business (which can be structured as either a corporation or a partnership and must hold at least 90 percent of its assets in OZ property) or a OZ business property which is tangible property used in trade or business of a qualified opportunity fund. The City of Marathon is home to the only Federal Opportunity Zone designation in the Florida Keys starting at Vaca Cut and extending to 70th Street.

The City should consider exploring various Opportunity Funds as a potential revenue source for investment in the area.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon and Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Resources to Support

The US Economic Development Administration released a [StatsAmerica Opportunity Zone Tool²²](#) which provides more information and resources on specific opportunity zones and best practices from other communities.

Development of a Town Center

Overview of Opportunity

According to the Urban Land Institute, “A town center is an enduring, walkable, and integrated open-air, multi-use development that is organized around a clearly identifiable and energized public realm where citizens can gather and strengthen their community bonds. It is anchored by retail, dining, and leisure uses, as well as by vertical or horizontal residential uses. At least one other type of development is included in a town center, such as office, hospitality, civic, and cultural uses. Over time, a town center should evolve into the densest, most compact, and most diverse part of a community, with strong connections to its surroundings.”



The location of a Town Center is not necessarily in the “center” of town but gives the impression of being the heart of the community. In a linear community like Marathon, this may be one or more locations spread out through the community to create this concept with the goal of drawing individuals into a place that could include nearby commercial opportunities. In the Marathon, where development is pre-existing and land is limited, the idea of creating a Town Center from a blank slate is likely not feasible. However, a concept like this can be as involved as encouraging the development of a new downtown area with shops and other amenities through private sector investment or implementing actions over which the City has control like streetscaping, architectural standards, landscaping along with creating new community parks or spaces within the existing corridor.

²² <http://www.statsamerica.org/opportunity/>

Recommendations

Develop the Quay Property into Town Center that includes public uses but also encourages commercial uses through creative partnerships with private developers.

The City of Marathon purchased the property in 2018 to serve as a place for welcoming visitors traveling southbound and define the community through this public space. In 2020, the City conducted public workshops to gather feedback on what amenities should be included in the park space. Top ideas presented include:

- Boat trailer parking (some off site)
- Boardwalk
- Splash Park
- Food trucks/other vendors
- Restrooms
- Restoration of lighthouse monuments
- Structures for shade

Participants also created potential site plans to show how and where their ideas could be implemented. These ideas could be developed into a public park, or the City could issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to developers to create a space that includes these types of amenities, while also encouraging the lease of space for commercial opportunities, which could be transitory space (like kiosks, huts, and small structures on a chassis that could be moved in the event of an impending storm). The significant public investment needed to make many of these ideas come to life could be mitigated by allowing private investment in the area.

Using the input from the community, the City could elicit ideas from developers through an RFP to capture all the models for redevelopment, tapping into the design and financial creativity from this group of professionals. Prior to developing the property, the City will need to make some improvements, including the restoration of the sea wall. The City should ensure that funding used to improve the seawall or make other investments on the property do not hamstring them in the options for redevelopment. For example, some resiliency programs will provide funding to make improvements to areas but in return require that the property be used passively in the future. By ensuring that funding sources are not limiting, the City can keep its options open for future use.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon

Resources to Support

The City could leverage public workshops held in 2021 and public space grants like the Florida Department of Environmental Protections Recreational Development Assistance Program and resiliency grant programs available through FEMA. It will be important to ensure that any grant programs targeted do not limit the use of the property.

Tap into underutilized revenue generating opportunities to fund the improvements of parks and other community gathering centers.

To make improvements to public spaces requires revenue, which could be made through some of the public uses in the community. This includes launch fees at boat ramps as well as potential lease or rent of properties for commercial use (like the idea proposed for the Quay property). The revenue generated from these activities should be dedicated to park and public space improvement, providing a solid funding source to incrementally make improvements over the years. This funding could also be matched with other grant sources, enabling dollars to be stretched further.

Most users of these public spaces are not residents however these spaces are funded largely through tax revenue currently. By implementing new launch and user fees, the community could ensure that a larger portion of the maintenance and improvement costs are borne by visitors, who will likely not be deterred by these costs. Many user fees such as these could be implemented by issuing permit stickers for residents (giving them public access) and then kiosks with payment boxes and permits that can be placed in dashboards for visitors, like is used in state and national park systems. These parking lots could be patrolled routinely to ensure that visitors are complying with the fee on a voluntary basis. While it is likely that some visitors may not respect the honor system, it will keep the implementation of the policy low-cost and avoid the need for staff or personnel to be on site to collect the fees, which is an added cost.

The City may also consider consolidating some of its departments (such as Marinas and Parks) to allow funding generated from these sources to be more flexible to meet the needs and priorities of the community for green space and community space improvements.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon

Resources to Support

These ideas would largely need to be supported by the City Council and staff to ensure implementation.

Strategically place Electric Vehicle Charging Stations around Town Centers and commercial areas to attract a captive audience.

Electric vehicles are becoming more popular as the cost of gas increases and more affordable options with longer battery life spans are in production. It can take as little as 30 minutes to charge a car or as long as 12 hours, depending on the size of the battery and speed of the charging point. However, as the popularity of electric vehicles rise, many communities are strategically placing these chargers in locations that will help promote local businesses. A free EV hook-up can be an incentive to visit an area of town – like a commercial area. The driver is

taking advantage of the free charge while the community benefits from having a captive patron for local businesses.

Locating a charging station on-site may be a partnership with a company, such as Tesla's Charging Partner program where communities/business owners can suggest a location for review by their team. Idea hosting sites can support eight or more individual parking stalls and provide a hospitable experience for customers with amenities such as restaurants, groceries, shops, restrooms, and Wi-Fi. If a location is determined to be a good fit, the EV company will often cover the cost of the charging station, if the business agrees to cover the cost of electricity provided to the customer.

The City could consider evaluating appropriate public sites and sending them to Tesla for consideration for this program. Local businesses may also be encouraged to determine if they meet the criteria and apply for their own charging station. There are many federal programs available to support this infrastructure that could be leveraged to make the installation relatively low-cost or free.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon and Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce

Resources to Support

Tesla Charging Partner Program along with the Department of Energy's [Alternative Fuels Data Center and Guide to Funding and Federal Financing for PEVs and PEV Charging](#).²³



²³ <https://www.energy.gov/eere/vehicles/downloads/guide-federal-funding-financing-and-technical-assistance-plug-electric>

Create Outdoor Market Space

Overview of Opportunity

Community markets are a popular way to shop locally, purchasing directly from small business and cottage industry makers in the community. These spaces allow residents to gather, meet with their neighbors, search for unique items, and enjoy the fresh air. An ideal location could:

- Be visible to passing traffic along US-1.
- Have parking nearby or within walking distance.
- Include some covered space.
- Have seating or space for socialization.
- Be close to other shops in the area that may benefit from foot traffic.
- Be away from neighborhoods where noise and parking violations may be a concern.



Once a suitable location has been found, there is often little cost associated with establishing the market, however the organization required to manage the event can be time consuming. It is recommended that the market have established bylaws or rules for vendors that are clear and provided upfront so that all are aware of expectations. These should be consistent with any City Ordinances and obtain permits necessary for use. A committee of small business owners working closely with the Chamber of Commerce or City of Marathon can be helpful for establishing and managing the market since it will likely occur outside of business hours.

Recommendations

Consider city-owned property behind City Hall as an option for outdoor market space.

Nestled behind City Hall is Oceanfront Park, a nearly eight-acre passive park that is dog friendly and offers a great place to picnic, fish or kayak. This Park includes several acres of undeveloped green space that could serve as a great venue for outdoor market space. With City Hall nearby, there is ample parking and bathrooms are already available on-site. Parking is limited in the keys, so the availability of this infrastructure on site makes it an ideal location. While the property does not front US-1 (preferable for marketing), signs could be placed along

US-1 to direct traffic to the site. Located in the government district of the City, there are not a lot of nearby commercial shops that would benefit from the traffic, but shops could be encouraged to set up booths to sell their products and promote their business. This Park may also be a great location for smaller festivals hosted by the City, reducing the impact to sports fields when the venue can accommodate the activity.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon

Resources to Support

The management of a small market can be involved, and they are often hosted on weekends, outside of normal business operations. It is recommended that the City encourage the development of a small organization to support the operation of the market.

Consider a partnership with Crane Point Hammock for smaller outdoor market space that could attract more visitors to the center.

The City owns the small strip of property that fronts US-1 in front of Crane Point Hammock Museum and Nature Center. While it is a relatively small location, it could serve as an additional attraction for Crane Point Hammock and draw in new visitors who may stop to visit the shops and then take a tour of the property as well. Parking would be a challenge at this location but could potentially leverage parking from behind the site or other nearby locations.

Lead Entity

Crane Point Hammock in partnership with the City of Marathon.

Resources to Support

The City could explore a partnership with Crane Point Hammock to manage this outdoor market space, if the organization saw it as a benefit for their operations as well.



Consider Old 7 Mile Bridge/Salty's Marina Property as outdoor market space, connected to Pigeon Key access and expansion plans.

The City recently applied for funding to acquire the Old 7 Mile Bridge/Salty's Marina property. While this grant was not awarded, the City is encouraged to reach out to the program, strengthen the application and reapply. The property could serve as another marina for the community, a base for Pigeon Key operations (both ferry and trolley) and could include some outdoor market space for vendors to set up that cater to those who may be visiting this site to access Pigeon Key. Parking and space would be limited on this site as well.

Lead Entity

The City of Marathon in partnership with the Pigeon Key Foundation

Resources to Support

The City could explore a partnership with the Pigeon Key Foundation to manage this property, if acquired.

Partner with an organization to organize and manage open-air market and other community events.

The ongoing planning, coordination, marketing, and management of market space is a time-consuming process that may not be an appropriate use of limited staff resources. City staff should explore the feasibility of partnering with an existing nonprofit organization or encouraging the development of an organization made up of the farmers, artists and other vendors that would benefit from the market. To help with the formation of this type of group, the City could:

- Form a small committee of cottage industry and business owners who are interested in the space and help them organize.
- Determine the appropriate rules that would need to be in place for the management of the space and update any codes or ordinances needed.
- Leverage the Main Street Program organization (if the City pursues this in the future) as a resource for organizing the event.

Lead Entity

The City of Marathon in partnership with community volunteer organization

Resources to Support

Most of the resources needed to support a market do not require large amounts of funding, but rather time commitment from volunteers. However, there are a couple of funding sources that could be leveraged to make any improvements needed to the property selected as the venue.

- [USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program](#) - The Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) through USDA funds projects that develop direct producer-to-consumer markets

to help increase access to locally and regionally produced agricultural products. A 10 % or a 25% match is required. As an example, the Riverview community received a grant award of \$197,460.82 in 2018 to address capacity building needs for “A Simpler Place” Farm and Market Roadside Stand and Agritourism Expansion Project.

- [AARP Community Challenge Grant Program](#) - The AARP Community Challenge grant program is part of the nationwide AARP Livable Communities initiative that helps communities become great places to live for residents of all ages. The program is intended to help communities make immediate improvements and jump-start long-term progress in support of residents of all ages. For example, Springfield, Illinois received a grant in 2020 to sustain access to fresh, healthy foods by making coronavirus-related safety improvements to the Old Capitol Farms Market. The City of Ponce in Puerto Rico received a grant to improve the downtown center by improving a walkway that connects the main plaza with the community marketplace with awnings, benches and artistic interventions for visitors to enjoy.



Support Family-Friendly Tourism Opportunities

Overview of Opportunity

A characteristic that sets the City of Marathon apart from the rest of the Florida Keys is its reputation as a family friendly location for both visitors and residents. Attractions including the Turtle Hospital, Crane Point Hammock and Nature Center, and Aquarium Encounters provide for a variety of family friendly activities as well as adventure activities for all ages like those offered by Keys Cable Park. With the reopening of the Old Seven Mile Bridge imminent and development of Grassy Key in forward motion, there are additional opportunities for the City of Marathon to build on this reputation as a ‘family friendly’ destination and provide additional activities and resources.

While located just outside the city limits, Pigeon Key is an incredible resource for the City of Marathon and those who visit the island are likely to stay in the City of Marathon and frequent the city’s hotels, restaurants, and shops. The island is accessible by boat or via the Old Seven Mile Bridge, which has been closed for repairs for the last several

The Completion of the bridge project as well as electricity on the island will provide an opportunity for Marathon to capitalize on the unique beauty and history of Pigeon Key and provide new activities to draw visitors and recreational opportunities for residents.

years. While ferry service has remained in operation, the closure of the bridge has greatly diminished the number of visitors who could visit Pigeon Key for historic tours and snorkeling. The completion of the bridge project this year, as well as the addition of electricity to the island, will provide an opportunity for the City of Marathon to capitalize on the unique beauty and history of this island and provide new activities to draw visitors and recreational opportunities for residents.

At the other end of the City of Marathon, a development is planned that will add a nature-based resort and commercial development to Grassy Key. The Valhalla Island project will cover approximately 66 acres and include the development of a resort with commercial and dining opportunities, integrated to be resilient to storms and fit within the unique natural environment of the area. Proposed boardwalks will provide guests with recreational and educational experiences featuring several important habitats including mangrove forests, scrub mangrove, high and low Saltmarsh-Buttonwood, Caprock and Tropical, Hardwood Hammock. This development also has the potential to provide additional job opportunities for local residents.

Recommendations

Support a long-term strategic plan for Pigeon Key to maximize available opportunities on the island including family-friendly activities and transportation options.

This year, Pigeon Key brought electricity to the island which will greatly increase the opportunities available for visitors and provide the Foundation with the tools to better utilize the space. Partnerships should be explored to provide transportation and recreational activities, and a variety of grants exist at the state level that could assist with historic preservation and other needs including septic-to-sewer conversion. The development of a long-term plan and the initiation of that plan will provide both Pigeon Key and the City of Marathon with strategic goals and a pathway for funding those needs as tourism to the island and within the City of Marathon increase.

Lead Entity

Pigeon Key Foundation

Resources to Support

State and non-profit grant opportunities.

Continue to explore funding to acquire the Salty's Marina property at the base of Seven Mile Bridge.

To support the expansion efforts of Pigeon Key, the City should continue to explore options to acquire the Salty's Marina Property at the base of the Seven Mile bridge for better transportation access. This property can serve as base operations for multiple transportation options for accessing the island, including ferry and trolley. The property can also serve as another option for leasing space to small businesses that could offer items for sale that would complement these uses.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in collaboration with Monroe County.

Resources to Support

The City could explore creative financing options as well as grant programs available through Florida Community Trust.

Continue to provide support for the development of Grassy Key to expand hotel capacity, commercial development and eco-tourism opportunities.

City of Marathon Economic Development and Resilience Strategy

Grassy Key is one of the underdeveloped areas in Marathon that is a perfect spot for visitors who enjoy outdoor activities and adventures that are focused on the environment. The community should enhance this area through the creation of a boardwalk for birding and hiking and encourage developments that choose to locate in this area to incorporate some of these features.

The recently proposed Valhalla Island development has the potential to set the bar for resorts in terms of sustainability and become a best practice for this area as well as other communities in the Keys. The development is currently moving through the approval process at the local level and will require coordination with state entities to address environmental components of the site. Local support will also be critical to the project as it moves forward. Interests in this part of the City of Marathon should collaborate with Valhalla Island as the project moves forward to provide guests with additional activities that draw them further into the City of Marathon for recreation and education and to frequent additional local businesses.



Airport Enhancements & Expansion

Overview of Opportunity

One of the top priorities identified in the public survey and among local stakeholders as both an issue and an opportunity was the need for airport enhancements and an expansion of services at Marathon Airport. Located approximately three miles East of Marathon, Marathon Airport has offered commercial air service in the past but primarily serves general aviation activities today. Marathon Airport is one of two airports located in the Florida Keys, the other being Key West International Airport located close to 100 miles away. On mainland Florida, Miami International Airport provides the bulk of commercial activity for South Florida and several fixed-base operators (FBO's) provide general aviation options. Marathon Airport's largest tenant is the Monroe County Sheriff Aviation Department which provides resources across the Florida Keys, followed by Federal Express, and the Marathon Jet Center, a fixed-base operator (FBO). In March 2010, the airport provided more than \$12 million in direct impacts, more than \$8 million in indirect impacts and provided 387 jobs. While located within the City of Marathon, the airport is owned and operated by Monroe County.

A 2012 study conducted by the University of Miami further outlined the economic impact of the Marathon Port of Entry. The economic analysis quantified the increase in visitor expenditures because of a more convenient access to the Middle Keys for foreign sea and air travelers, evaluating the total output, total earnings, and total employment. It highlighted the multiplier effect in the economic area of direct investments and jobs that increased enhancements and expansion of services would have on the local economy, in part due to an



influx of visitors increased operations would bring. At the time of the study, tourism in the Middle Keys accounted for about \$900 million in regional domestic product and with its central location in the Florida Keys, Marathon Airport is perfectly situated to benefit from increased aviation operations that would boost the demand for hotel services, restaurants, and other recreational activities. Possibilities also exist for increased travel between Marathon and the Caribbean and increased aviation operations would have a net benefit on jobs and would provide convenience to residents. It was noted in the stakeholder meeting that increased aviation operations would also allow the City of Marathon to better market to those individuals who could live and work in the City but need the ability to travel out of the Florida Keys conveniently without having to travel to either Key West International Airport or to Miami International Airport.

Recommendations

Advocate for community support for increased aviation operations at the Marathon Airport.

Monroe County is currently in the process of working with state and federal agencies to approve the necessary runway improvements so that additional services can be provided at Marathon Airport. This process should be continued over the next 3-5 years.

Part of the challenge to increased aviation operations at Marathon Airport is the need for significant runway improvements to meet federal aviation guidelines. That deficiency was identified, and the necessary improvements are being spearheaded by Monroe County. To move the runway and bring it into compliance with federal aviation guidelines will require continued cooperation and coordination between local, state, and federal agencies including the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA). The Director of Airport also noted that as that project moves forward, it will be critically important for the local community to support the need for increased aviation operations at Marathon Airport and to help encourage the establishment of commercial aviation operations as they become available.

Lead Entity:

Monroe County in collaboration with the Florida Department of Transportation, the Federal Aviation Administration.

Resources to Support:

A variety of state and federal grants may be available to support increased aviation operations at Marathon Airport. Monroe County is working in cooperation with state and federal agencies to identify and apply for these potential grant opportunities and continue moving this project forward. However, likely the largest challenge will likely be residential areas nearby who may not support expansion efforts. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) released a guidance document on how to address noise and compatible land use issues. The airport could consider reviewing [these guidelines²⁴](https://www.aopa.org/-/media/Files/AOPA/Home/Supporting-General-Aviation/Get-Involved/Airport-Support-Network/AOPA-Resources-for-You/120112asn-airport-noise-compatible-land-use.pdf) and working with pilots to take steps to reduce impact to residents when taking off and landing.

Support the further development of Marathon Airport as a charter designation and provide additional hangar space for private planes at and around the airport.

Even without significant commercial activity, Marathon Airport sets itself apart as a destination for charter traffic with private planes landing regularly and a robust FBO. This became even more apparent during 2020 when commercial air travel was limited due to the COVID-19

²⁴ <https://www.aopa.org/-/media/Files/AOPA/Home/Supporting-General-Aviation/Get-Involved/Airport-Support-Network/AOPA-Resources-for-You/120112asn-airport-noise-compatible-land-use.pdf>

pandemic and charter activity became more popular. There is also a strong demand for additional hangar space at the airport for privately owned planes.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in collaboration with Monroe County

Resources to Support

Visit Florida and other marketing opportunities can be utilized to encourage additional charter traffic to Marathon Airport.

Support the continued use of Marathon Airport as a multi-use airport servicing the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the Florida Keys Mosquito Control and as a key component of Monroe County's disaster preparedness and response efforts.

Currently, Marathon Airport is home to a hangar owned and operated by the Monroe County Sheriff's office as well as Florida Keys Mosquito Control operations for the Middle Keys. Additionally, a new Emergency Operations Center (funded in part by the state) will be built in proximity of the airport and access to air transportation in and out of Marathon Airport after an emergency will be a critical component of Monroe County's overall emergency response.

Lead Entity

City of Marathon in collaboration with the Marathon Chamber, Monroe County and other stakeholders including the Monroe County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District.

Resources to Support

State funding for Monroe County's Emergency Operations Center to be located next to Marathon airport.

Hospital/Healthcare Expansion of Services

Overview of Opportunity

There are three hospitals located in the Florida Keys, covering the Upper, Middle, and Lower Keys respectively. Lower Keys Medical Center is owned and operated as a for-profit hospital while Mariners Hospital in Tavernier and Fishermen's Hospital in Marathon are owned and operated by Baptist Health South Florida. These hospitals provide critically needed medical services to residents of the Florida Keys and a place from which to airlift more serious patients if needed. While the Florida Keys have three hospitals, none are equipped to handle all medical issues and in cases of trauma or for those with chronic illness or major diseases, it is often necessary for individuals to travel to Miami-Dade County for treatment. For example, only Lower Keys Hospital in Key West has an OB-GYN ward in Monroe County to deliver babies.

In 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall in the Lower Keys, causing significant damage and impacts up the island chain and within the City of Marathon. Fishermen's Hospital was substantially damaged in the storm and ultimately needed to be demolished.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, a field hospital was set-up to provide medical care to the community and eventually a mobile hospital was installed by Baptist Health of South Florida so that emergency room (ER) facilities and services could be maintained while a new hospital was planned. In September 2019, construction began on a new \$43 million facility in the same location as the original

In September 2019, construction began on a new \$43 million facility in the same location as the original Fishermen's Hospital. The new facility opened this summer, nearly four years after the previous hospital closed and is now providing much needed hospital and healthcare services to the Marathon community and reducing the need for extensive travel to other Florida Keys hospitals.

Fishermen's Hospital. The new facility opened this summer, nearly four years after the previous hospital closed and is now providing much needed hospital and healthcare services to the Marathon community and reducing the need for extensive travel to other Florida Keys hospitals. The new hospital also provides a location for medical evacuations as needed to hospitals in mainland South Florida.

Recommendations

Continue to support the Middle Keys Health Care Municipal Services Taxing Unit.

To support the rebuilding of the hospital and to expand hospital and healthcare expansion of services, the Monroe County Commission unanimously approved a new property tax for the Middle Keys in 2018 to raise \$1.5 million a year for 10 years to pay for the poorest patients' care. This was a request by Baptist Health South Florida. The Marathon City Council recently

authorized the continuation of the Middle Keys Health Care Municipal Services Taxing Unit after reviewing information on expenditures on care for uninsured and underinsured patients in the Middle Keys. The Marathon City Council will need to review the continuation of this taxing district annually.

Lead Entity:

City of Marathon (City Council)

Resources to Support:

Baptist Health South Florida and Monroe County with tax contributions from residents within the district.



Conclusion and Next Steps

The City of Marathon has many opportunities for expanding economic growth in the future in a way that both recognizes the need for resiliency and maintaining the unique culture of the Keys. However, the recommendations in this plan are a starting point and will require a significant amount of work to come to fruition. In a community the size of Marathon, it is imperative that the implementation of a plan such as this be seen as the responsibility of the entire community and not fall solely on the shoulders of City Staff. The following next steps should be considered in the implementation of this plan:

- **Present the plan to City Council for review and adoption to show support of elected officials behind this vision.** This is not only helpful in getting the community behind the plan but is also an important step when using this plan to access grant dollars and other funding to support its implementation.
- **Create a formal Economic Development Committee to spearhead the implementation of the plan.** To move the plan forward will involve leadership from many organizations. The City should appoint an Economic Development Committee with the task of monitoring the implementation of this plan. The Committee can prioritize the actions outlined in this report and then identify organizations and resources to move them forward. It is recommended that the top 5 projects are identified and that some of the projects are low-cost or easier to implement to create momentum behind the effort. The Stakeholder group formed to develop this plan is a great starting point for the committee.
- **Revisit the plan on an annual or bi-annual basis and add new projects or priorities.** The City should revisit the plan once or twice a year to determine if priorities remain the same and add new projects as they emerge. These projects should also be integrated into other plans that may be needed for funding (such as the Capital Improvements Plan or Local Mitigation Strategy).
- **Consider the plan as a resource during the long-term recovery following a major disaster.** While disasters are devastating to communities, with them also comes opportunities to move forward on the vision for the community and the funding resources available to implement projects. In the immediate aftermath of a storm, state and federal agencies will often visit to see how they can best support the community's redevelopment. A plan like this can be used to show where the community would like to head in the future and help to secure funding to achieve these goals.

Appendix: Community Asset Inventory

Overview

This report provides a summary of assets in the City that could be leveraged for economic development.

Natural Resources

Crane Point Hammock and Nature Trails

5550 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Crane Point Museum & Nature Center is a 63-acre hammock featuring two museums, a gift shop, nature trails, fish pedicure, tidal pool, and more. Part native, part cultivated, it was purchased by Francis and Mary Crane in 1949. Preserved from development in 1989 by the Florida Keys Land Trust, it is the largest tropical hammock in the Middle Keys. Ironically, this was the first site to be developed in the Keys. Bahamian immigrants started a subsistence farming village there in the 1830s. Numerous interpretive trails wind through dense tropical hammock. Visitors can explore the park by tram or walk the forest roads out to the Sunset Boardwalk along Florida Bay, where they will find the Marathon Wild Bird Center, a wildlife rescue and rehab center.



Curry Hammock State Park

56200 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Halfway between Key Largo and Key West sits 1,000-acre Curry Hammock State Park, the largest uninhabited parcel of land between Key Largo and Big Pine Key. The Park protects large areas of mangrove swamp, rockland hammocks, and seagrass beds. This Park is made up of a group of islands in the Middle Keys, with public access to swimming, a playground, picnic tables, grills, and showers on the ocean side of Little Crawl Key. The hardwood hammocks found on these tropical islands support one of the largest populations of thatch palms in the United States. The Park includes a 28-site campground, located along the oceanfront, that is open from November 1 through May 31 each year.

Sombrero Reef

Sombrero Reef is a designated SPA area and is one of the more popular scuba diving and Florida Keys snorkeling destinations in the Marathon Florida area. The area's name is derived from the 142' lighthouse which is in the northern section of the SPA region. This large reef is a good example of a standard spur and groove coral reef formation. The arch is a large, limestone structure decorated with numerous colorful stony and gorgonian coral and sea sponges that's

also teeming with snapper, grunt and neon gobies. With such variety in the marine life, this Florida Keys coral reef is one of the best and most colorful Florida Keys snorkeling and novice dive sites in the region. Also, because the light can penetrate the shallow waters, everything is given a brighter tone. This makes it one of the best places to capture some amazing underwater photos.

Delta Shoals

Delta Shoals is part of a federally protected section of the United States' only living coral barrier reef, just a few miles offshore. It is a very shallow Florida Keys dive site making it much better for Florida Keys snorkeling. Its unique shape is made up of numerous long coral fingers stretching out with sandy areas in between. This Florida Keys dive site is also the location of several important shipwrecks that make it worth a diver's visit. First the North America Shipwreck's remnants which are partially buried beneath sand and grass. There is also the infamous slaver, the Ivory Wreck. Even though mostly ballast remains, it is the sense of what this ship carried that makes wreck diving this burial spot a worthy effort. This slaver is located at the west end and is positioned near the barge named after this area. The remains of all three of these easy wreck dives are well worth investigating while you are in Marathon diving.



Coffins Patch

Coffins Patch is a shallow coral reef, or patch reef, located within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. It lies to the southeast of Bamboo Key. This reef lies within a Sanctuary Preservation Area. Coffins Patch is a collection of about six different patches of reef in a variety of depths, and each incredibly unique. Like many of the reefs around this part of the Florida Keys, this location was named for a shipwreck, supposedly a ship carrying coffins.



Thunderbolt Wreck

The Thunderbolt was intentionally sunk on March 6, 1986, as part of the Florida Keys Artificial Reef Association project. She now lies intact and upright on a sand bottom in 120 feet of water four miles south of Marathon and Key Colony Beach. Located 120 feet below the surface, the ship is a popular spot for divers.

Sombrero Beach

Sombrero Beach Rd, Marathon, FL 33050

Sombrero Beach is a beautiful park and sandy beach. In 2001 the City redeveloped Sombrero Beach to include total handicap accessibility. Along with free, adjacent parking, the beach has other perks, including handicap access on a wide, flat path, a picnic pavilion, children's playground, volleyball court, restrooms, and showers. Dogs on leashes are allowed. The sandy strip is a perfect perch for sunning, snorkeling in the gentle surf and fishing in the shallow water during the park's hours between 7:30 a.m. and dusk. Sombrero Beach is also a turtle nesting beach. During active turtle nesting season, the city limits human activities in the vicinity of active turtle nest establishments.

Coco Plum Beach

109 Coco Plum Dr, Marathon, FL 33050

Coco Plum Beach is located on the Atlantic Ocean. It is a natural beach area with an adjacent wetland area. There are restroom facilities and a covered pavilion available for visitors. The beach is also a turtle nesting beach. The hours are from 7:30 a.m. until dusk.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is a U.S. National Marine Sanctuary including the Florida Reef, the only barrier coral reef in North America and the third-largest coral barrier reef in the world. It also has extensive mangrove forest and seagrass fields. The Sanctuary, designated in 1990, is the ninth national marine sanctuary to be established in a system that comprises 13 sanctuaries and two marine national monuments. It protects approximately 2,900 square nautical miles of coastal and ocean waters, encompassing more than 1,700 islands. The mission of the sanctuary is to protect the marine resources of



the Florida Keys while facilitating human uses that are consistent with the primary objective of resource protection. Sanctuary waters and habitats support high species diversity, including the largest documented contiguous seagrass community in the northern hemisphere and extensive coral reef habitat. The sanctuary is also home to maritime heritage resources.

Activities

Rotary Children's Park

7575 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Rotary Children's Park is a children's playground built through the grassroot efforts of Marathon's Rotary Club and volunteer efforts. This is a 3-acre park that has a wooden playground of swing sets, lookout towers, Thomas the Train, Captain Hook's Ship, tunnels, slides, a toy shark, and a toddler only area. There is a large picnic pavilion with tables, as well as picnic tables located throughout the park, and restroom facilities. Surrounding the playground is a beautifully landscaped park.



Sunset Bay

200 36th St Ocean, Marathon, FL 33050

Sunset Bay Park is located on Grassy Key's gulfside (Morton Street and Kyle Avenue). Composed of three lots, the park also has an upland hammock of vegetation. While wandering among the growth several species of palms can be identified, including native species of Gumbo Limbo, Poisonwood, Sea Grape, Mahogany, and Mangrove (white, black and red), providing habitat for crabs and songbirds. This area is an excellent place to go birdwatching, with species such as the White Crown Pigeons, ospreys, woodpecker, and hummingbirds.

Marathon Community Park

200 Ocean, 36th St., Marathon, FL 33050

This Park is located directly on the Overseas Highway at 200 36th Street Ocean (MM 49). There are four tennis courts, tennis wall, a combination hockey/basketball court (3 courts), two little league fields, and two soccer fields. There is also a skate park, two shuffleboard courts, two bocce ball courts, batting cage, concession stand, amphitheater, picnic areas and restrooms. This facility is handicap accessible.



Marathon's Dog Park

9805 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

In 2009 a group of dog lovers "Friends of the Dog Park" came together to raise funds for a dog park at Rotary Park. The area next to the Rotary Children's Park (between 75th and 76th Streets Oceanside) is designated for dogs in supervised off-leash dog play. There are separate areas for large and small dogs. Rules are posted at the park for everyone's enjoyment of the park.

Key Colony Beach Golf Course

8th St, Key Colony Beach, FL 33051

The 9-hole Key Colony Beach course at the Key Colony Beach Par-3 facility features 962 yards of golf from the longest tees for a par of 27. The Key Colony Beach golf course opened in 1973. Located in a residential neighborhood, this course is good for beginners and casual golfers.

Keys Cable at oTHERside Adventure Park

59300 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Keys Cable sits on 50 acres adjacent to the Overseas Highway. The lagoon dates to the early 1900's when quarries were dredged by The East Coast Railway for the construction of Henry Flagler's "Overseas Railroad." Through the 1960's quarry operations continued leaving this property with almost 5 acres of tidal lagoon, including depths reaching as deep as 65 feet. In March of 2012 they opened the gates to Keys Cable, bringing in Wakeboarders, Kiteboarders, and Stand Up Paddleboarders. They installed two cable systems, an overhead towing device used to pull riders (wakeboard, waterski, or kneeboard) across a body of water. By summer of 2014 they opened the remainder of the accessible property and began rolling out the rest of their Action Sports – Eco Farm on the property that is still currently expanding. They merge environmental consciousness, education, and fun healthy activities into this water attraction.



Art, Culture & Festivals

Crane Point Hammock Museums

5550 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

There are two museums at Crane Point Hammock. In the Museum of Natural History of the Florida Keys, visitors can walk through a replica reef, see a 600-year-old dugout canoe, and learn the gamut of Keys history, from its indigenous peoples through wreckers and "Flagler's Folly." In the Children's Museum, kids will experience engaging outdoor exhibits that put them on the deck of a pirate ship or in a Native American village or railroad station, with touch tanks and an iguana house, too.

Aquarium Encounters

11710 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

The Florida Keys Aquarium Encounters is an immersive and interactive aquarium that allows guests to get up-close and personal with a variety of animals. They offer encounters where participants can snorkel or dive in their largest tank or stay dry while engaging with our animals. At the heart of their mission is the desire to successfully introduce people from all walks of life to the magic of the



ocean and its majestic creatures through hands-on and face-to-face interaction. They believe that creating lasting memories of positive experiences with marine life will help to create passionate individuals who care about protecting the health of our marine environments.

EAA Air Museum

9850 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Located within the Florida Keys/Marathon International Airport, the EAA Air Museum is a collection of several aircraft (Beech 18, DC3, an experimental project, and Cessna display model under restoration by the members) and a variety of models representing many periods of flight. There's also an extensive collection of aviation memorabilia and aviation equipment donated by "Keys" aviators and EAA Chapter 1241 members. Almost every morning you'll find an active roundtable of local pilots drinking coffee and solving the problems of the aviation community and the world. The museum is managed and maintained by the southernmost EAA chapter and volunteers.



Pigeon Key Foundation & Marine Science Center

1 Knights Key Blvd, Marathon, FL 33050

Pigeon Key Foundation and Marine Science Center is a 501(c)-3 not-for-profit organization located in the middle of the Florida Keys. Pigeon Key is a five-acre island located 2.3 miles west of Marathon. The Pigeon Key Foundation is restoring the historic island, operating a museum, conducting guided tours, and providing a center for marine science research and education.



The Art Studio

12535 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

The Art Studio is an environment that is intended to encourage creativity through many art media for the local community and tourists. They offer art classes and workshops that feature guest artists in the Florida Keys as well as workshops taught by local resident artist staff. The building has five art studios, a kiln room, and a Coffee Loft with full-service espresso-based drinks.

The Original Marathon Seafood Festival

Marathon Community Park, 200 Ocean, 36th St., Marathon, FL 33050

The Original Marathon Seafood Festival is a family-friendly event featuring fresh-caught local keys seafood, live entertainment, over 220+ vendors, a boat show, and rides and games for children. The festival began in 1976 as a way for local Marathon and Middle Keys commercial fishermen and their families to “kick-back” and enjoy the fruits of their labor. The festival has grown into the Florida Keys 2nd largest annual event, boasting over 20,000 guests each year.



The event is still co-organized by the Organized Fishermen of Florida (Marathon Chapter) as well as the Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce. Collectively, both non-profit organizations historically donate \$75,000 in event proceeds back into the community via charitable contributions, donations, and scholarships for local Middle keys students.

Marathon Community Theatre

5101 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Marathon Community Theatre presents live theatre, art exhibits, and hosts cultural meetings for the Florida Keys community. They have four main stage shows, readings, dance showcases, music, an annual holiday show, and more. Dance classes are free to theatre members. Marathon Community Theatre is also the only movie theatre for 50 miles, offering entertainment to locals and tourists.

The Marathon Games Pentathlon

The Marathon Games are Rounds of athletic challenges & competition which take place in The Middle Florida Keys. The annual Rounds are organized by MarathonFlorida.com and TV88 with the assistance of the ten Florida Keys Non-Profits who co-produce the Games. The Venue for the 2020 Marathon Pentathlon is set to be Captain Pips Marina & Hideaway. The 2021 Marathon Pentathlon consists of the following five athletic challenges & competition: foot race (one mile run on US1 and bike path); swim race (quarter mile up and back); SUP race (one mile around buoys); kayak race (one mile around buoys); and frisbee toss challenge.

Tourism, Hospitality & Local Businesses

Charter Boats

The City of Marathon boasts some of the best boating activities anywhere, including deep-sea, reef or flats fishing. Charter fishing boats are a very successful industry given the wide variety of fishing and diving opportunities available in the Marathon area. Activities include but are not limited to saltwater fishing, sightseeing tours, dolphin encounters, shelling, sunset cruises, kayaking, eco-tours, sailing trips, and snorkeling.



Dive Centers & Rentals

Dive centers also capitalize on the natural resources of the area by offering classes, tours, supplies, and more. Tilden's Scuba Center (4650 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050) for example has diving & snorkeling lessons, tours and supplies for rent or sale, plus scuba-gear inspection and repair. A Deep Blue Dive Center (400 Sadowski Causeway, Key Colony Beach, FL 33051) offers everything from Snorkeling, Dive in 1 Day scuba diving experiences, to advanced technical scuba training. Other water activities include kayaking, with commercial rentals available through different vendors, such as Marathon Kayak. In addition to water attractions, there are multiple bike rental businesses, including the Marathon Bicycle Rental.



Marinas & Public Boat Ramps

Boot Key Harbor Marathon City Marina (800 35th St Ocean, Marathon, FL 33050) is a 1992 facility that allows full-time liveaboards only, no wet storage. There are monthly, weekly, and daily dinghy dockage rates. There are 4 public ramps in Marathon and an additional seven privately-owned marinas throughout the City.



Local Restaurants

For a City of less than 9,000, the number of excellent restaurants lining the coast are impressive and contribute to the reputation of fresh and delicious seafood. Local favorites include The Stuffed Pig, Overseas Bar and Grill, Burdines, The Island Tiki Bar and Grill, and The Sunset Grill, just to name a few.

Lodging

To complement the many amenities and attractions in Marathon, there are a wide variety of lodging options available. These include large chain hotels such as the Hyatt Place Hotel (1996 Overseas Highway, Marathon, FL 33050), Hampton Inn and Suites (13351 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050), and Courtyard Marriott (2146 Overseas Highway, Marathon, FL 33050). There are also many local lodging options, including Hawks Cay Resort & Marina (61 Hawks Cay Blvd, Duck Key, FL 33050), Little Palm Island Resort & Spa (28500 Overseas Hwy, Little Torch Key, FL 33042), and Captain Pip's Marina & Hideaway (1480 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050). Finally there are RV parks, including Jolly Roger RV Resort (59275 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050). Over 300 rental options are available through Airbnb and VRBO.

Florida Keys Keynoter

The Florida Keys Keynoter is headquartered in Marathon. The Keynoter is a twice-weekly broadsheet format newspaper owned by The McClatchy Company and is a subsidiary of the Miami Herald. In addition to publishing regular issues on Wednesday and Saturday, the Keynoter also publishes the quarterly magazine Unwind.

Historic Structures and Properties

George Adderley House

5550 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

On the National Register of Historic Places, George Adderley's Home was built of tabby in Bahamian style and completed in 1906. George Adderley's home became the focal point of a small African American settlement called Adderley Town, which persisted on Vaca Key (the original name of Marathon) through the completion of the Overseas Railroad in the 1930s.



Pigeon Key Island

With 8 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Pigeon Key is a 5-acre island that houses century-old buildings and a museum chronicling the construction of the Key West Extension, commonly called the Overseas Railway because its track stretched more than 100 miles out into open water.

Health Resources

Fisherman's Community Hospital

3301 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Fishermen's Community Hospital is providing care to the community from a modular facility with a 24/7 emergency room. The hospital includes inpatient beds, outpatient observation, diagnostic imaging, a lab, pharmacy and more. Fisherman's Community Hospital is part of Baptist Health.

Marathon 17 | Baptist Health Primary Care Upper Keys

5701 Overseas Hwy Suite 17, Marathon, FL 33050

Baptist Health Primary Care (Marathon) is located in the heart of Marathon. The facility is patient-centered with a state-of-the-art office that provides patients with convenient care. The facility offers same-day or next-day appointments; preventive care; annual check-ups; sick visits; well woman care; lab services; nutritional assessments; social work services; chronic disease management; flu shots and vaccines; pediatrics and family medicine; and internal medicine.



Florida Keys Area Health Education Center

5800 Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail STE 38, Marathon, FL 33050

The mission of the Florida Keys AHEC is to provide direct medical, community health and educational services through contract-funded, community-based collaborative partnerships. The Florida Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Network is an extensive, statewide system for health professional education and support founded upon 10 regional Area Health Education Centers. Each center, including the one in Marathon, is supported by an AHEC program at one of the state's medical schools. This organizational structure enables the AHECs to draw upon the resources of the academic health centers in addressing local health care issues. The Florida AHEC Network has, over this past decade, addressed the primary health care needs of Florida's most vulnerable populations through a series of innovative strategies designed to: extend academic health resources; provide information and support for community providers; influence health professions education; and influence the future health professional workforce.

Education

Marathon is part of the Monroe County School District. The Monroe County School District is home to 8,700 students in 16 institutions of learning in the upper, middle, and lower keys. Marathon School, including both middle and high school students, has a student population of 639 and a school rating of B. Stanley Switlik Elementary (K-5 center) has a student population of 584 and a school rating of B. Private schools include Martin Luther Children's Day School (ages 2-5) and Kreative Kids Christian Academy (VPK).

Infrastructure

US Highway 1

Marathon is served by U.S. Highway 1, known locally as the Overseas Highway. The Overseas Highway extends westward, connecting Marathon with Key West. To the northeast, the Overseas Highway connects Marathon to Homestead and Miami.

Mass Transit

Metrobus Route 301 (Dade-Monroe Express) carries riders back-and-forth from Marathon to Florida City, with stops at Islamorada, Tavernier, and Key Largo. Key West Transit connects Marathon with Key West. Greyhound Lines buses run east and west from Marathon twice a day, stopping at the Marathon Airport.

Florida Keys Electric Co-Op

3421 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Florida Keys Electric Co-Op (FKEC) is a local, member owned and operated electric cooperative, serving more than 32,000 accounts in the Upper and Middle Keys. Today they serve approximately 33,000 accounts from the Monroe-Dade County line to the Seven Mile Bridge. As a distribution Cooperative, FKEC maintains a 138,000-volt transmission line, which brings power from the mainland to the Florida Keys. FKEC purchases nearly 100% of its energy needs from Florida Power & Light (FPL). Generators in Marathon and FKEC's two solar arrays also contribute to the power supply.

Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority

3200 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

The Florida Keys Aqueduct Authority (FKAA) is the sole provider of potable water for all the residents of the Florida Keys and presently serves over 48,000 customers within Monroe County. Potable water is transported to the Keys through a 130-mile transmission pipeline with an additional 649 miles of distribution pipelines which deliver water to the customer's property. In 1998 and 2002, the Authority's Enabling Legislation was amended to redefine the primary purpose of the Authority to include collecting, treating and disposing of wastewater in certain areas of the Florida Keys.

Florida Keys Marathon International Airport

9000 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

The Florida Keys Marathon International Airport is a public airport located along the Overseas Highway (US1), it opened in 1943. It was built by the U.S. Navy as an auxiliary airfield for Naval Air Station Key West. It was deactivated as a military facility at the end of World War II and transferred to the Monroe County Board of County Commissioners for use as a civilian airport. The airport covers 197 acres and has one runway. The airport currently does not have any scheduled passenger airline flights but does have charter air service. For most of its existence, the County owned-and-operated airport has been a general aviation facility. On April 20, 2016, for



the first time in approximately three decades, U.S. Customs and Immigration service became available at the airport with the completion of a new 4,200-sq-ft permanent Customs and Border Patrol facility located in the former commercial terminal.

Public Institutions

Dolphin Research Center

58901 Overseas Hwy, Grassy Key, FL 33050

The Dolphin Research Center (DRC) is a dolphinarium on Grassy Key. The 90,000-square-foot series of saltwater lagoons is home to several dolphins and California sea lions.

Founded in 1984, DRC listed 26 dolphins as currently residing at its facilities. It is also home to four sea lions and several exotic birds. Visitors to the DRC can pay to experience a variety of programs. In addition to the general admission price, guests can pay to interact with dolphins in the water. DRC also has an "Ultimate Trainer for the Day" program where guests can shadow trainers and a "Researcher Experience" where they can shadow the DRC research team. Other guest experiences can include painting with a dolphin.



Monroe County Public Library - Marathon Branch

3251 Overseas Highway, Marathon, Florida 33050

The first public library in the Florida Keys opened in Key West in 1853. Today, Monroe County Public Library serves more than 350,000 adults and youth, via five locations, from Key Largo to Key West. The Marathon Branch includes meeting room availability and technology hubs in addition to traditional library functions.

Marathon Wild Bird Center

5550 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

The middle Florida Keys lie beneath a major migratory flyway for over 100 avian species. The Marathon Wild Bird Center's sole purpose is to rescue, rehabilitate, and release both migratory and resident wild birds when they become injured, sick, or orphaned. Their rescue service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and their major emphasis is to ease the suffering of these vulnerable creatures, and to return them to the skies as soon as possible. In addition to rehabilitation efforts, they offer educational wildlife presentations in schools, libraries, and at community events that help to reduce the occasions of injury and lessen the environmental hazards that place these birds at risk.



The Turtle Hospital

2396 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

The Turtle Hospital is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, education, and environmental legislation of sea turtles. Established in 1986, The Turtle Hospital is the only state-certified veterinary hospital in the world for sea turtles. The hospital established four main goals: 1) rehab injured sea turtles and return them to their natural habitat, 2) educate the public through outreach programs and visit local schools, 3) conduct and assist with research aiding to sea turtles (in conjunction with state universities), and 4) work toward environmental legislation making the beaches and water safe and clean for sea turtles.



Marathon Garden Club Inc.

5270 Overseas Highway, Marathon, FL 33050

The Marathon Garden Club was organized in 1955 by a group of civic-minded residents who wanted to help improve the appearance of the area. In addition to its community involvement, the club encourages members to improve the gardens and landscaping of their own homes and neighborhoods. Classes are taught by local experts on topics such as floral arrangements, landscape design, conservation, and orchid growing. In addition to ongoing plant sales, the group hosts a Jamboree in January. The gardens & gift shop are open to the public, free of charge. A variety of programs, workshops, specialty events & rental opportunities are also offered.

Human Capital

Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center

12222 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

The Greater Marathon Chamber of Commerce is a not-for-profit 501c(6) organization that supports, advocates and promotes local business-members here in the Florida & Middle Keys. The Chamber has a long history and has been successful in representing local businesses. They both represent and support business-members as well as attract visitors to the beautiful Islands. The Chamber works with business-members, local citizens, and visitors in The Islands of Marathon.



The Business Professional Women - Marathon Chapter

Established in 1956, Business and Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation became the first foundation dedicated to conducting research and providing information solely about working women. Today, BPW Foundation focuses on issues that impact working women, families and employers. BPW Foundation Mission is to empower working women to achieve their full potential and to partner with employers to build successful workplaces through education,

research, knowledge, and policy. As neutral conveners, BPW Foundation launched its Successful Workplaces Movement while engaging women, employers, and policy makers, to inspire collaboration, create systemic change, and expand options for more equitable and flexible workplaces.

Keys Area Interdenominational Resources

3010 Overseas Hwy, Marathon, FL 33050

Keys Area Interdenominational Resources (KAIR) is a non-profit organization seeking to serve those individuals and families in Marathon and the Florida Keys who have found themselves in crisis. Working in partnership with other agencies and organizations, every effort is made to return people to self-supporting, productive lives. KAIR has served the local community since 1998 and is funded through public and private grants, donations, and fundraisers. Located in the Community United Methodist Church in Marathon, it is a creation of the churches in Marathon seeking to serve on a non-sectarian level without expecting a religious response.

Educational Coalition of Monroe County

900 84th Street Ocean, Marathon, FL 33050

The Educational Coalition of Monroe County's mission is to promote prevention of destructive behaviors among sixth through twelfth grade students and instill the importance of volunteerism and providing service among our youth volunteers. ECMC teaches volunteerism to youth volunteers by providing basic needs, necessary tools, and support to students living in special circumstances to enable them to reach their goals, achieve success, and help their peers.