

# FROSTPROOF ON THE MOVE!



## An Economic Development Strategy for the Community of Frostproof

**DRAFT: June 2017**

Prepared by Central Florida Regional Planning Council

Prepared for the City of Frostproof

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# FROSTPROOF ON THE MOVE!

## AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE COMMUNITY OF FROSTPROOF

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A major challenge facing many rural American communities is strengthening and diversifying their economies. Limited opportunities and resources threaten economic vitality and a community's quality of life. Making a place welcoming, beautiful, and usable for the community while also creating an attractive setting for new business investment is a key step in development and ensuring a vibrant future for communities. Frostproof is one of these communities. Located approximately 1.5 hours (driving distance) southwest of Orlando on the beautiful Lake Wales Ridge, the Friendly City of Frostproof (population 3,000) is 19 square miles with its downtown located between Lake Clinch and Lake Reedy. Designated as a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Community, Frostproof is on the move and exploring alternatives through an economic development strategy to generate economic return and increase its local tax base.

**“For there to be people in cities, there must be something to attract them, a way for them to get to the desired destinations, areas in which they can gather together, interact, and do business with one another, and places for rest, recreation and amusement- a great public realm”**

**Alexander Garvin, 2016**

### City's Mission Statement

It is the mission of the City of Frostproof to continually strive to improve the quality of life for all citizens by providing a safe enjoyable environment in which to live and work. The City is continuously committed to fostering an effective team focused on delivering quality services in the most efficient manner, as well as promoting partnerships, volunteerism and civic pride.

## City's Vision Statement

The City of Frostproof, known as “The Friendly City”, desires to retain its rural character and historical heritage, encourage smart growth while maintaining sustainability, provide a friendly, safe and dynamic environment, and create a City where citizens choose to live, raise families and take pride in the community.

## Goal and Objectives

**Overall Goal:** Strengthen Frostproof’s economy while improving the quality of life for all citizens.

### **Objectives**

1. Designate an Economic Development Representative/Agency to serve as the lead agency for implementing an Economic Development Element and for coordinating economic development activities and initiatives.
2. Create a unified vision for the future of Frostproof.
3. Provide quality education and responsive workforce training to support and attract new businesses.
4. Expand Frostproof’s outdoor adventure and historic tourism.
5. Improve transportation network facilities in order to attract new businesses, create new jobs and increase the tax base.
6. Increase housing diversity to attract more residents and businesses in Frostproof.



## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The City of Frostproof was established in the late 1890's. The Friendly City has become known for its weather providing a relaxing paradise for winter residents and a destination for northern visitors looking for a warmer climate. The City is in proximity to the Lake Wales Ridge State Forest and the Great Florida Birding Trail as well as Lakes Clinch and Reedy, where residents and visitors can launch a canoe or kayak and spend a great day with nature.

Frostproof is home to several large employers outside of the retail sector, including Ferguson Enterprises, Inc., Bevolution Group, and Lowe's Flatbed Distribution Center. Overall, there are approximately 670 people employed within the city limits. Looking at a more regional picture, Frostproof competes with employment centers in the region such as the Lake Wales and Avon Park markets which are located north and south respectively along the US 27 corridor.

The primary industries in Frostproof are retail trade and agriculture with a heavy emphasis on citrus production based on *2014 FL Labor Market Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Program*. Over the past 11 years, Florida's citrus industry has been in a state of decline caused by exposure to citrus greening disease caused by a bacterium that constricts a tree's vascular system, shriveling fruit and eventually killing the tree. In 2007, Cargill Citro, Frostproof's largest employer and largest commercial water consumer, left the City of Frostproof and since then, the City has not been able to attract a similar company. Cargill's departure significantly affected the city's economy.

The City of Frostproof, in partnership with the Central Florida Development Council (CFDC), has worked extensively to bring businesses to the city after Cargill's closing. As a result, Ferguson Distribution Center, a plumbing and supply company opened its 86-acre location in 2008. Lowe's Flatbed Distribution Center also moved its facility to the city's industrial park. The Bevolution Group, one of the nation's most diverse and creative foodservice beverage providers, recently opened its production facility in downtown Frostproof between Scenic Highway (SR 17) and Lake Reedy.

Frostproof is designated by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity as a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Community. The REDI program has been established to better serve Florida's rural communities by providing a more focused and coordinated effort among state and regional agencies that offer programs and services for rural areas.

Frostproof is in proximity to natural and recreational resources such as the Hickory Lake Scrub and the Walk-in-the-Water Tract of the Lake Wales Ridge State Forest, where the Great Florida Birding Trail is located. These unique natural resources attract outdoor and rural enthusiasts. These assets are attractive to new residents, businesses, and visitors alike seeking an authentic Florida lifestyle or experience.

## **Project Overview**

The City of Frostproof was awarded a Competitive Florida Partnership Grant from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) to prepare an Economic Development Strategy (EDS) for the city. The City worked with the Central Florida Regional Planning Council and the community to develop the EDS. The EDS is the result of six months of stakeholder engagement and extensive community conversations and public meetings, stakeholder interviews with economic development professionals and local experts, dialogue with non-profit organizations and business leaders, and input from residents and elected officials including the City Council. An asset mapping exercise facilitated by DEO brought together experts from several state and local agencies to discuss Frostproof's assets.

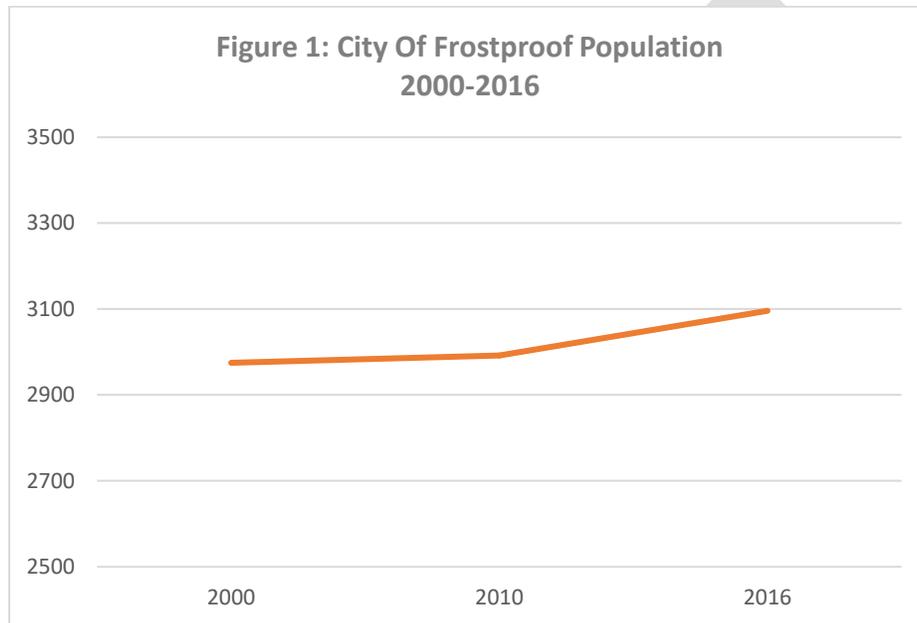
This report builds upon the goals, objectives, policies intended to guide growth and development activities in Frostproof that will be incorporated in a new Economic Development Element of the City's Comprehensive Plan. The ultimate objective is to provide systemic, pragmatic and sustainable approaches to economic development that support the goals of the EDS.



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Population

According to the Bureau of Economic and Business Research, Frostproof's population increased from 2,992 in 2010 to 3,096 for 2016. Since the year 2000 however, Frostproof's population has only grown 3.9% at an annual rate of 0.12%. The minimal increase in population is potentially due to the recession and recovering real estate market as well as long term trends of population.



Source: 2000 – 2016 U.S. Census Bureau.

Frostproof's population is 83.5% white, 20% Hispanic, and 7.5% African American. Much of the Hispanic population is comprised of farmworker families that support the agricultural operations in the city; however most of this population does not live within the City limits. Descendants of the original Frostproof family live in and around the city, and many Frostproof residents have deep roots in the community that go back five or six generations. The median age in Frostproof is 39 years, slightly lower than the statewide average of 40.3 years. The estimated median household income in 2016 was just \$34,147, also lower than the state average.

### Industry Sectors and Employment

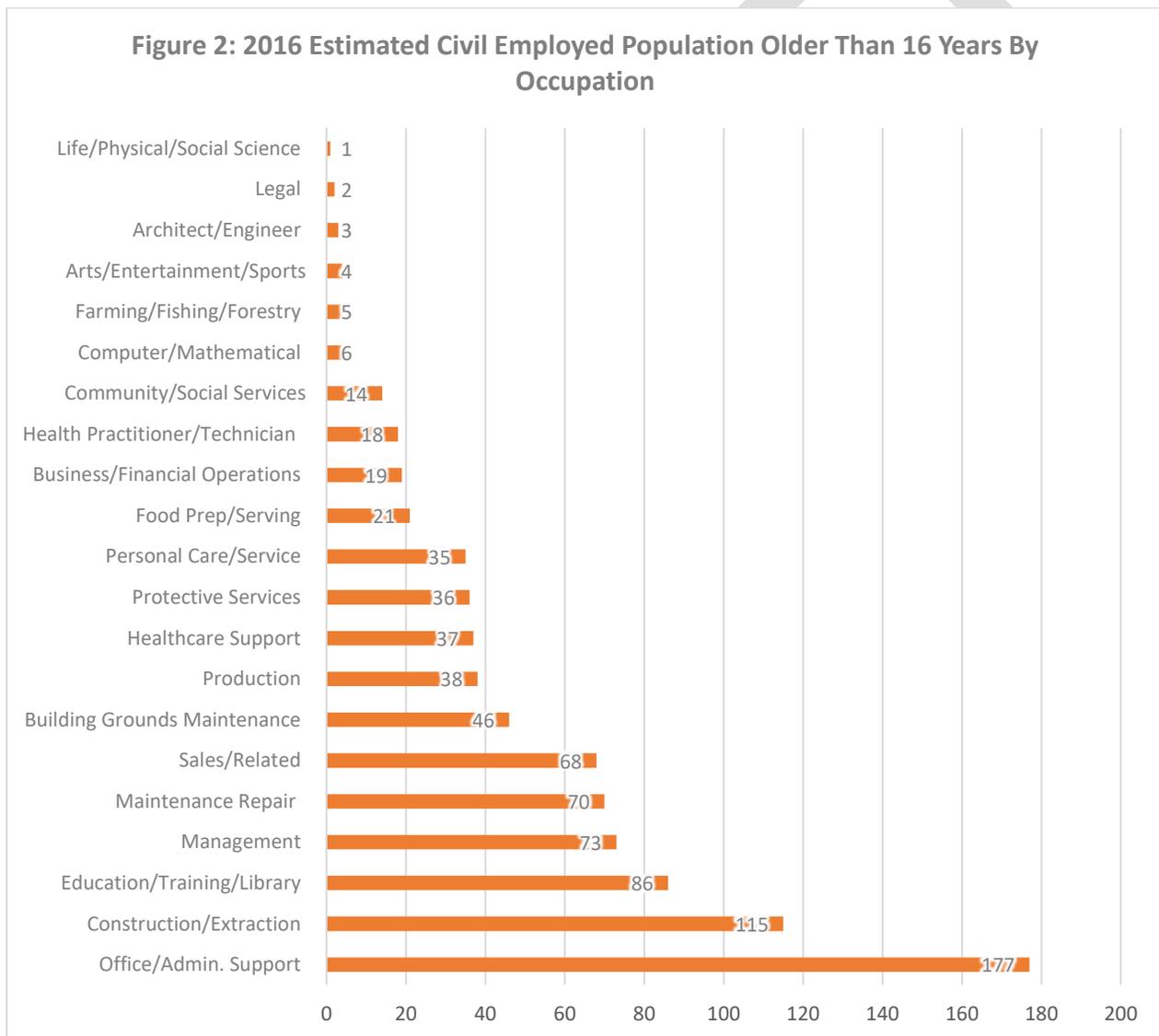
For Frostproof's Economic Development Strategy (EDS) the composition of businesses has been evaluated by an analysis using Business Certificates and the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). These have largely replaced the former version of the Standard Industrial Classified (SIC) system as the updated

version offers flexibility when comparing businesses on a global scale. These were also overlapping design similarities with that of the classification system of the United Nations Statistical Office.

Based on NAICS codes, the following industries provide 60.8% of the total business in the community.

- Retail Trade
- Educational Services
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting
- Manufacturing
- Construction

**Figure 2: 2016 Estimated Civil Employed Population Older Than 16 Years By Occupation**

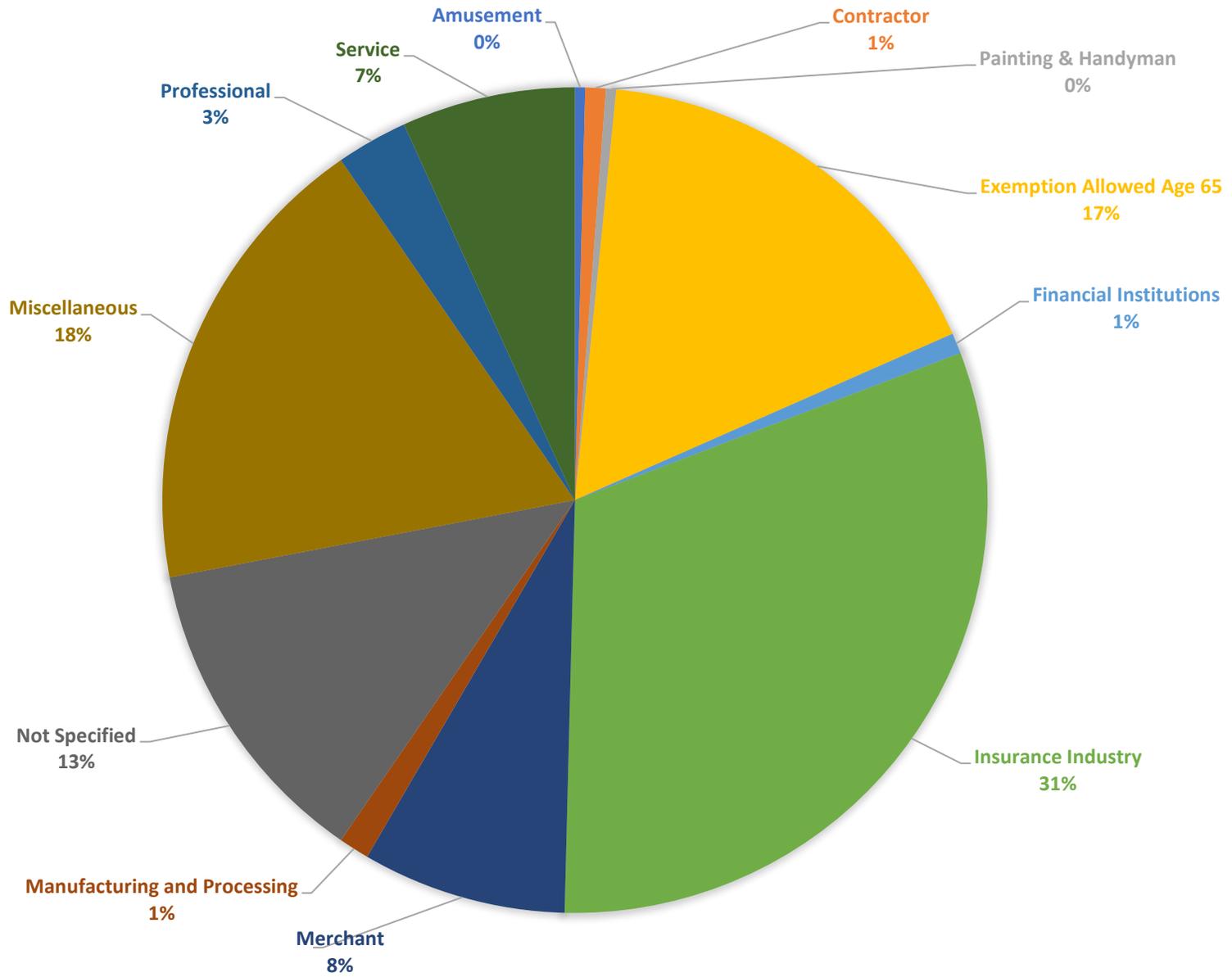


Source: 2016 CFDC Frostproof Pop-Facts Demographics

One of the challenges identified by Frostproofians during the stakeholder meetings and interviews conducted for the project is the long-term stability of a labor force and the decline of citrus industry over the last decade. There is concern about what would be the next industry that could significantly impact growers' ability to retain farmworkers as competition for employees increases. This status quo is not only a Frostproof concern but also a regional concern. According to a 2016 labor force study, the majority of civil employed population older than 16 years old are office or administrative support, followed by construction and extraction (mining). Polk Career Source is the primary organization that delivers workforce development services with a mobile unit that comes once a month to Frostproof's public library.

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Figure 3: 2016 Frostproof Business Type According To City's Taxes

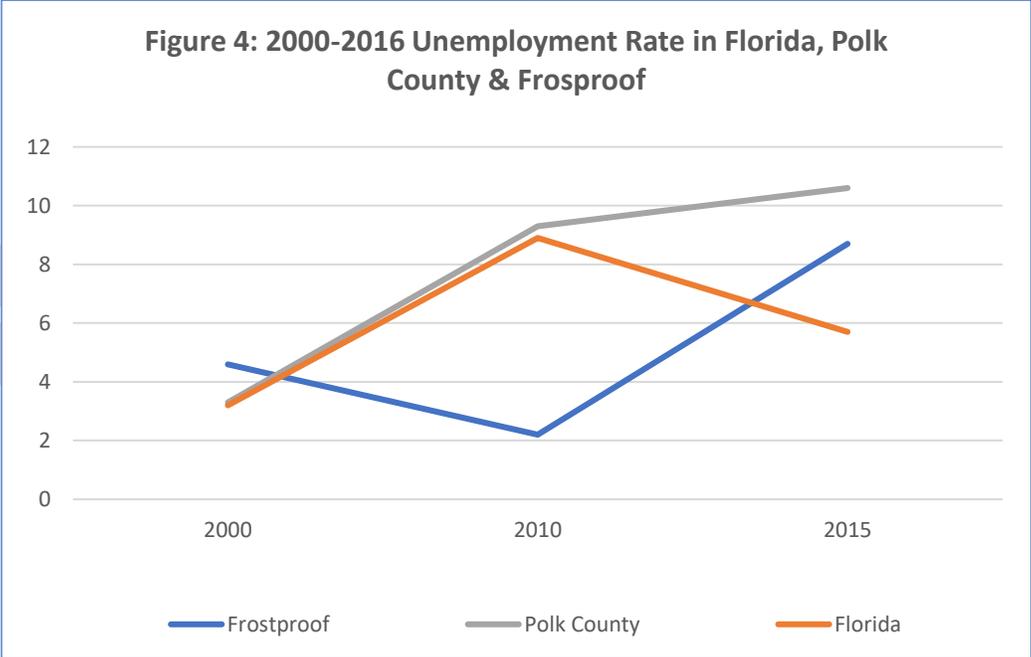


Source: 2016 Frostproof Business Tax Codes for All Types

According to Dun and Bradstreet INC, there are no significant differences between Frostproof and its neighboring communities' area industry structure (Figure 2). There are about 6,509 businesses located in a 10 and 15 mile-study area which comprise of Avon Park, Babson Park, and Lake Wales. However, according to the City's 2016 Business Tax, 252 businesses are within the City limits (See Figure 3). This number is small and reflects the study area's rural character. Figure 5 depicts the number of businesses by NAICS industry sector. It shows that the area's economy is dominated by establishments classified as Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (33%). There were also a large number of establishments within the Other Services (except Public Administration), retail trade, and Construction categories.

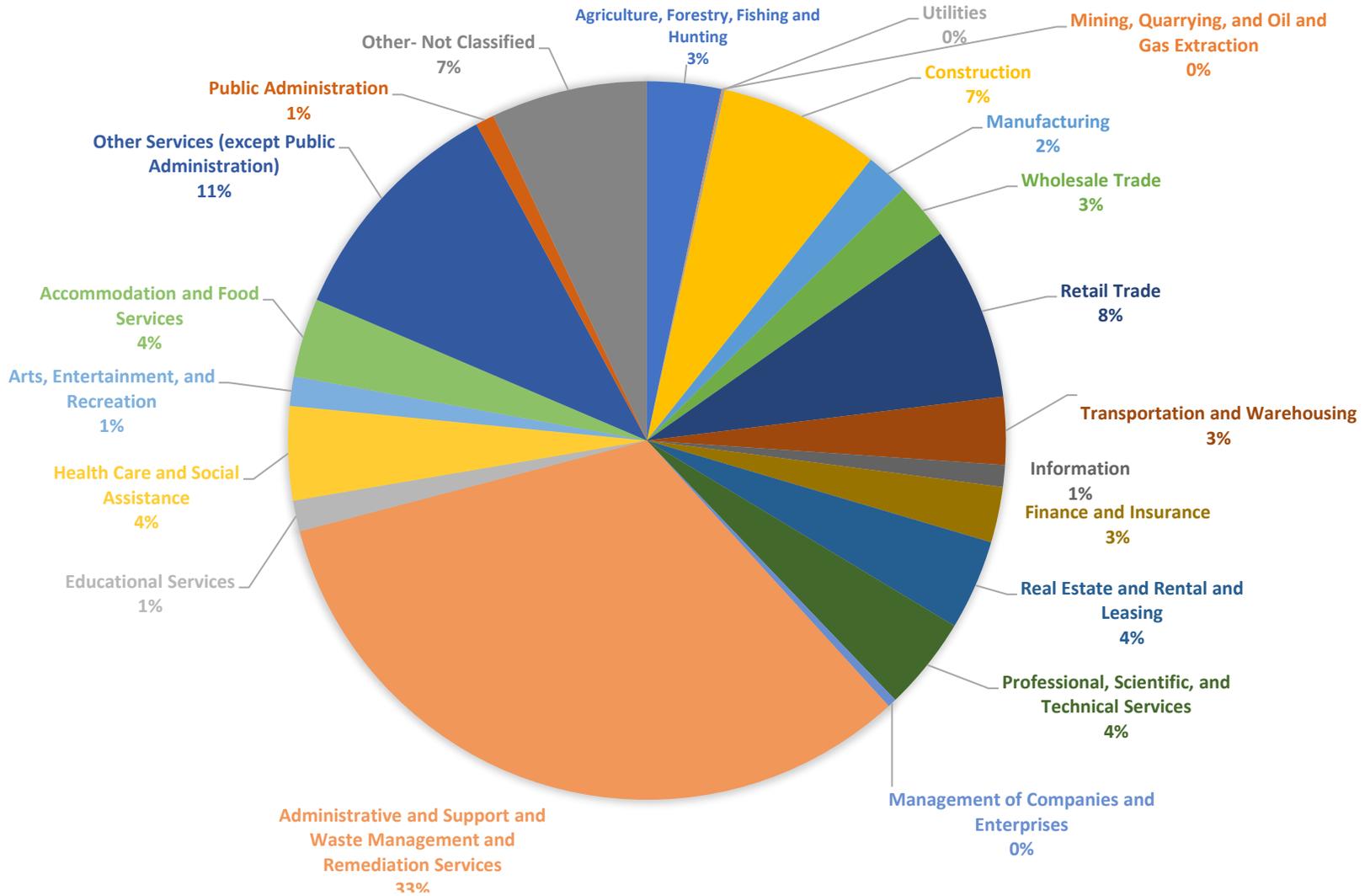
### Unemployment

Local unemployment for Frostproof residents has seen a slight decrease and remains relatively consistent with county and state unemployment rates. In 2017, Florida had a lower unemployment rate than the nation suggesting an improved economy at the regional and local levels. Below is a comparative graph of Frostproof's unemployment rate against county and state unemployment rates.



Source: 2000 – 2016 U.S. Census Bureau.

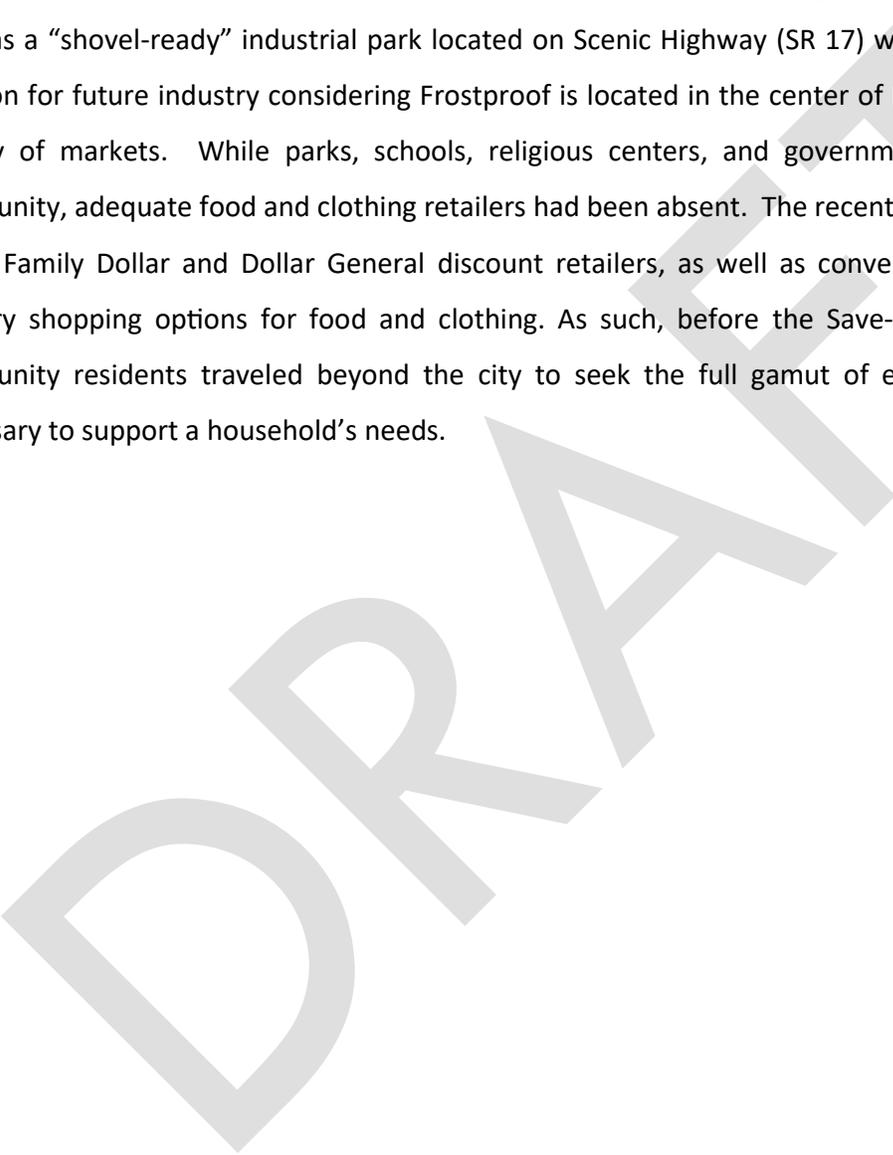
**Figure 5: Concentration of Businesses By Industry Based in Frostproof and within 15 miles of Frostproof: Avon Park, Babson Park, Frostproof, and Lake Wales**



Source: Dun & Bradstreet, Inc. 2017. All Rights Reserved.

## Land Uses and Commercial Core

The city consists of approximately 19 square miles of which approximately 11% is water and public rights of way. Frostproof is characterized by fertile soils suitable for crop production. The city is comprised primarily of agricultural and residential properties and includes a commercial core of businesses that support the surrounding population. Most of the businesses are located on Scenic Highway, CR 630 and Wall Street. The city has a “shovel-ready” industrial park located on Scenic Highway (SR 17) with access to rail. This is key location for future industry considering Frostproof is located in the center of Florida with access to a wide variety of markets. While parks, schools, religious centers, and government facilities are within the community, adequate food and clothing retailers had been absent. The recently opened Save-A-Lot grocery store, Family Dollar and Dollar General discount retailers, as well as convenience stores, represent the primary shopping options for food and clothing. As such, before the Save-A-Lot grocery store opened, community residents traveled beyond the city to seek the full gamut of essential community services necessary to support a household’s needs.





From Left to Right and top to bottom: City Hall, Frostproof Community Center, Save A Lot, and Frostproof Care Center  
Source: Central Florida Regional Planning Council, 2016 and 2017



## Transportation

In 2015, the Polk Transportation Planning Organization developed a Livable Polk Initiative. As part of the initiative, the *Frostproof Neighborhood Mobility Audit* was published. According to this report, recent inventories of infrastructure within the core of the city (primarily the areas between Lake Clinch and Reedy) indicate that while sidewalks are present, the network remains fragmented; sidewalks predominantly occur along the collector roadways (i.e., Palm Avenue, SR 17, 9th Street, F Street, and CR 630) and within the western half of the area. Bicycle lanes exist along a small section of Scenic Highway (SR 17) north of Bulldog Way. While the remainder of the Scenic Highway (SR 17) corridor and CR 630 contain shoulders, these facilities are inadequate to support bicycle activity as they are discontinuous and narrow.

In regards to prospective transportation projects, there is a plan to construct the Ridge Scenic Highway Trail along Scenic Highway (SR 17) through Frostproof. This facility is intended to extend from the Highlands County Line (south) to Downtown Haines City (north), providing a recreational spine in eastern Polk County and connecting several communities. The Ridge Scenic Highway Trail is also intended to directly connect to several other multi-use trail facilities, including: 1) the Highlands County Connector (extending from the Highlands County Line to 7th Street and Scenic Highway, providing direct access to the Lake Wales Ridge State Forest); and 2) another local system directly north of Frostproof (Windy Hill Trail and Tiger Creek to Ridge Scenic Highway Trail) providing access to Crooked Lake Prairie, Crooked Lake Sandhill, Tiger Creek Preserve, and Lake Wales Ridge State Forest. The addition of these features will likely result in increased non-

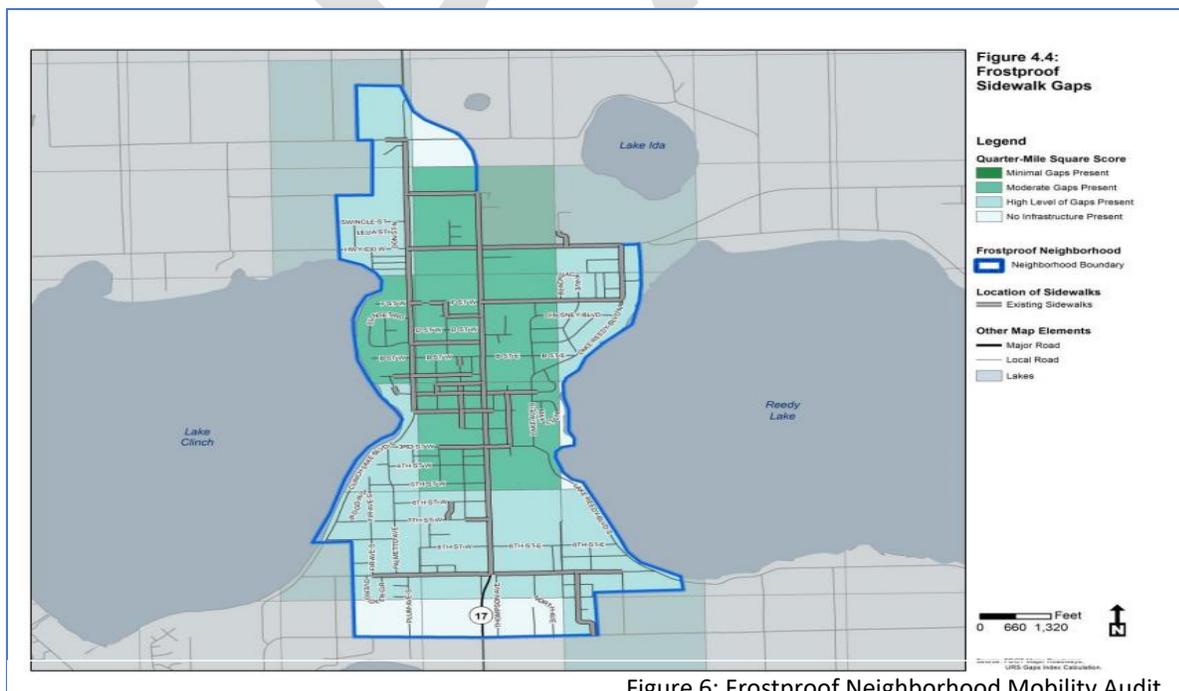


Figure 6: Frostproof Neighborhood Mobility Audit.

Source: Polk TPO 2015

vehicular travel creating a greater need for improved pedestrian and bicycle networks within and adjacent to the neighborhood. As mentioned in the community outreach, public transportation in Frostproof is limited. Polk County Transit Services (PCTS) Route 35 constitutes the fixed-route service present in Frostproof. The route operates between the hours of 6:00 am and 7:00 pm on weekdays and 6:00 am to 5:00 pm on Saturday. No service is provided on Sunday. Route 35 operates at 2-hour headways and provides a total of 70 transit trips through the Frostproof neighborhood each week. Route 35 connects Frostproof with the Cities of Lake Wales and Bartow. However, the connection with Bartow is limited to a single inbound trip in the morning and single outbound trip in the evening. Not all of the transit stops within Frostproof are co-located with sidewalks.

## **Education**

Frostproof is home to Frostproof Elementary School, Ben Hill Griffin Jr. Elementary School, and Frostproof Middle-Senior High School. A total of 1,113 students are currently enrolled at Frostproof Middle-Senior High School. Due to the level of poverty, all students are in the lunch program.

South Florida State College is located to the south in Avon Park. Webber International College is located to the north on Scenic Highway in Babson Park. The Polk County School Board and business leaders are exploring partnerships with these colleges.



Source: City of Frostproof.

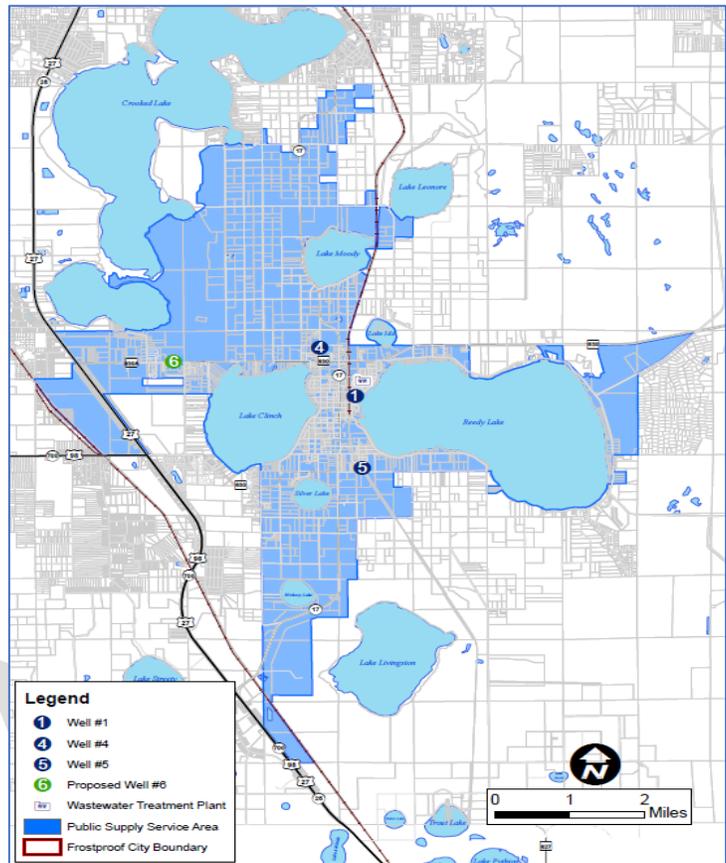
## Parks and Recreation Facilities

The City of Frostproof maintains several public recreation sites. There is a park complex on South Lake Reedy Boulevard on the west side of Reedy Lake, which includes baseball and softball fields, a shuffleboard court, a fishing dock, and racquetball courts. The City is proud of its proximity to Lakes Clinch and Reedy, which inspired the City to build a pier and boat ramp. Additionally, the City maintains a community center, located in East Wall Street, near Lake Reedy, which is utilized for community and City events.

The Gladys Fewox Memorial Park is a neighborhood park located between Scenic Highway and Lake Reedy. The park includes such amenities as a walking area and a play area. Wall Street Park is a 1.8-acre park located in the heart of the downtown and includes two tennis courts, a toddler play area, a merry-go-round, a slide, and a number of other play facilities. With approximately 36 acres of recreation sites and facilities, the adopted level of service of 9.5 acres per 1,000 residents is being met. At present, the City provides 12.8 acres per 1,000 residents. The City and Polk County operate the Sports Complex which is used mainly by middle and high school students.

## Public Utilities

Water and wastewater rates in Frostproof are the highest in Polk County. After the Cargill Citro departure, the City has been challenged to find another heavy water consumer. Therefore, the average cost for residential water consumption and wastewater generation is between \$98 and \$120 per household per month. Public water lines exist throughout the majority of the city's corporate limits. The City is the only provider of water to its service area. The existing potable water system includes three wells located at the southeast side of Scenic Highway, close to Lake Reedy, Harrell Avenue, and in Palm Avenue, respectively. The city is exploring funding from for a fourth well that will connect



lines and will provide water to residents in Whidden Mobile Home Park and possibly Rainbow RV Resort (currently not within the City limits) and other properties on the west side of the city.

Frostproof water usage is an average of 108 gallons per day per capita and a Level of Service (LOS) for potable water to 130 gallons per day per capita. The 10 Year Water Supply Facilities Work Plan updated in 2017 concludes that the City's current Consumptive Use Permit is of adequate capacity, its average gallons per day and level of service are prepared to meet projected growth.



## Community Events and Historic Preservation

Rural communities like Frostproof are using cultural and heritage tourism to diversify their economies. Frostproof's major event is the Orange Blossom Festival, which is coordinated and organized by Frostproof's Chamber of Commerce and other community leaders. This initiative was first led by O'Hara Restoration, an antique auto shop located in the intersection of Scenic Highway and Wall Street. According to the Chamber of Commerce, the Orange Blossom Festival gathers together approximate 5,000 to 7,000 people, mostly car enthusiasts. Antique, customs, monster trucks, race cars, street rods and tractors, vendors, live bands, and displays of all sorts attract visitors and residents to Frostproof.

The Chamber, schools, and local businesses utilize this annual event to promote their products and services as well as fundraising. Other festivals such as the Frostproof Jamboree or the Christmas' Parade are also celebrated by local residents. The Ramon Theater Board has also promoted mystery dinner events in the historic Ramon Theater. In the past, the City organized boat races in Lake Clinch and 4<sup>th</sup> of July festivities; currently, the City is continuing to work to promote and expand its events' package. Although tourism would not be a substitute for the citrus or manufacturing industry, it can provide additional opportunities to generate income for the area's businesses.

With regard to historic preservation, Frostproof does not have a designated Historic District. Without such designation, the City lacks opportunities to find additional funds through the National Register of Historic Places and Florida Heritage. Currently, the City is looking at opportunities to renovate the former gymnasium behind City Hall for youth and adult programs. A partnership with Polk State College to invest in youth and young adult programs is an opportunity that should be explored.

	Frostproof	Avon Park	Lake Wales
Number of Historic properties in the Florida Master Site File	15	14	44
Number of Historic properties in National Register of Historic Places	1	0	14
Number of structures in National Register of Historic Places	0	0	5
Historic District designation (Y/N)	N	Y	Y

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### **Community Visioning and Establishing an Economic Development/CRA Board**

Establishing an Economic Development Board and/or a Community Redevelopment Agency should be explored. An Economic Development Board offers the opportunity to provide unified direction for overall city priorities and growth.

The City is in process of establishing a Community Redevelopment Agency and Area which will enable long-term improvements within the City's core downtown between Lakes Clinch and Reedy.

### **Land Use and Housing**

One consideration the City may entertain with the next update of its Comprehensive Plan is allowing multifamily residential development within the commercial core. Frostproof families generally consist of many generations that still reside in the City and the surrounding area (West Frostproof). USDA multi-family housing rental properties are Elkhorn Apartments, Frostproof Villas, and Pepper Tree Apartments, which are located outside of the commercial core. The insufficient number of sidewalks and lack of bike/trail infrastructure does not encourage Frostproof families to walk to the commercial core. Vacant buildings in Frostproof's commercial corridors may allow residents to live and work in the existing commercial land use category.

### **Transportation and Small Town Trail-Oriented Development**

The benefits of trails extend beyond just fitness and leisure—trail-based economic development, also known as "Trail-Oriented Development" (TrOD), is a tool which capitalizes on trails as community amenities and leverages the placemaking and development potential adjacent to trails. TrOD invests in cycling and pedestrian infrastructure to provide high quality transportation and recreation options, create desirable destinations, and ultimately contribute to a livable community.

There are many benefits to creating high quality trails that activate communities and serve as connectors to other destinations:

- Increased traffic on trails is an incentive for business development and added investment in the community.

- Increased property values with the addition of trail amenities.
- Increased pedestrian and bike safety with protected trails.
- Improved connectivity and accessibility to alternative modes of transportation.
- Promotion of healthier activities and behavior.
- Attraction of visitors: support job and business growth in tourism sector.

## Tourism

Frostproof is an outdoorsman's paradise offering abundant nature trails, state parks and some of the best fishing lakes in the nation. The proximity to the Hickory Scrubs and the Great Florida Birding Trail as well as Lakes Clinch and Reedy make Frostproof a great destination for outdoor activities. Therefore, it is necessary for Frostproof to expand outdoor adventure tourism and consider other opportunities to market the city's agricultural and citrus heritage. Additionally, Frostproof needs to expand its cultural resource and become a historic district. There are grant opportunities that the City may use to revitalize its downtown and improve its downtown buildings through small-matching grants and special category grants with the Florida Division of Historical Resources. The only historic building in the National Register of Historic Places is City Hall. However, renovation is incomplete. Finally, the City should explore the idea of becoming a member of Main Street, a national network of over 2,000 historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.



## ACTION PLAN: GOAL, OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

GOAL: Strengthen Frostproof's economy while improving the quality of life for all citizens.

Objectives	Proposed Activities	Measure
<p><b>Objective1:</b></p> <p>Designate an Economic Development Committee/Agency to serve as the lead agency for implementing the Economic Development Element and the coordination of City economic development activities and initiatives.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create an Economic Development Advisory/CRA Board (EDAB) for the City of Frostproof that will promote economic development and grow the tax base, enhance community character, culture and livability, and target and grow business clusters.</li> <li>2. EDA/CRA Board will create a structure for an economic development and 3-year action plan with tasks, start dates/time, end dates, person in charge</li> <li>3. Through monthly meetings, EDAB will be guided by experts and facilitators that will help the Economic Development Strategy.</li> <li>4. Educate and train EDAB in rural economic development (Oklahoma Economic Development Institute, SCORE, Polk County, Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™ (CIRD).</li> <li>5. Contact successful Frostproofians and business leaders to discuss about the City's future and other politics and Polk County school board members.</li> </ol>	<p>-</p>
<p><b>Objective 2:</b></p> <p>Create linkages between organizations and agencies that are key resources in the city.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. EDAB will coordinate with the City to improve the City's branding and identity</li> <li>2. List all organizations and partnerships in Frostproof on the City's website.</li> <li>3. Publish community's input in a community board and Frostproof's website.</li> <li>4. Develop more cooperation and partnership with the Chamber of Commerce.</li> </ol>	<p>-</p>

**Objective 3:**

Provide quality education and responsive workforce training to support and attract new businesses.

1. Create a Youth and Elder Community Center building for after school artistic and recreational activities. Consider the renovation of the former High School Gymnasium for this purpose.
2. Develop a mentorship program with middle and high school
3. Consolidate a partnership with Polk State College, Warner and Webber University and coordinate a City-wide job and education fair.
4. Create the first Frostproof's Economic Forum/Summit.
5. Develop and implement training programs that will complement economic diversification efforts.
6. In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, prepare a BUSINESS WELCOME PACKET and marketing/ promotion brochure.
7. In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, prepare a WORKFORCE PACKET for future employees. What future employees need to learn, interview preparation, and workshops that could be coordinated with the Care Center's Finance Fitness lessons.
8. Increase the number of Career "mobile unit" visits in Frostproof. Currently, CareerSource provides this service once a month.
9. Training and coordination with the Bevolution Group, Ferguson Enterprises, Inc., and Lowes Flatbed Distribution Center such as job fairs and development events.
10. Develop "My First Business" program with high school students where they have to create a business plan and will do field trips to businesses in Frostproof.

11. Motivate Middle School and High School students to be part of the City's Youth Council.

**Objective 4:**

Expand Frostproof's outdoor adventure and historic tourism.

1. Create new special events committee.
2. Create a package of events like: Orange Blossom Festival, Elvis Day, Frozen Frostproof (for kids/teens), Flyboard, Flyfishing, carboard boat races, Paddleboarding from sunrise to sunshine in Lake Clinch and meetup Polk, Bass fishing tournament.
3. Repurposing of buildings in Downtown Frostproof.
4. Main Street + CRA + Historic District Cooperation with Bea Reifeis, Florida Master Site File. Historic Downtown Map in ARCGIS and linked to the website. Ask residents for all history of buildings. Plan for a grant application/ small matching for historic preservation education.
5. Coordinate with VisitCentralFlorida and develop a video storytelling of Frostproof.
6. Add all special events in the City's and Chamber's website and Facebook page.
7. Cooperate with the Ministerial Association and worship/faith based organizations to invite active members to explore the City. ("Spread the word")
8. Consider using Florida Story to create a walking tour of downtown.

<p><b>Objective 5:</b></p> <p>Improve transportation network facilities in order to attract new businesses, create new jobs and increase tax base.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue to pursue FDOT’s release of grant funds to enhance trails and public transportation service to the City of Frostproof and promote general economic development in the community.</li> <li>2. Explore “Trail-Oriented Development” grant opportunities to expand Frostproof’s outdoor activities. Coordinate with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and other agencies.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Objective 6:</b></p> <p>Increase housing diversity to attract more residents and businesses in Frostproof.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Encourage affordable housing developers to partner and identify new and innovative ways to fund development (cooperation with other organizations).</li> <li>2. Consider conducting a survey gauging the interest of owners of vacant buildings downtown about an optional program to provide managed rentals of empty units.</li> </ol>