

# Town of Oak Island Strategic Economic Development Plan



2026

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	3
Plan Review & Adoption.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Current Conditions.....	7
NC Commerce Rural Planning Program Approach .....	8
Planning Process .....	9
Strategic Planning Definitions.....	10
Existing Plans Review .....	12
Community Tour .....	14
<b>Market Retail Report Summary</b> .....	15
Local Work Group Establishment and Involvement.....	16
Asset Mapping: Types, Definitions, and Examples .....	17
Town of Oak Island’s Assets.....	18
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis .....	20
Community Engagement .....	22
<b>Stakeholder Interviews</b> .....	23
Plan Implementation .....	24
Economic Positioning/Vision Statement:.....	28
<b>Strategy 1: Oak Island nurtures a thriving business environment</b> .....	29
<b>Strategy 2: Revitalize Legacy Business Districts</b> .....	31
<b>Strategy 3: Develop the Off-Island Gateway District</b> .....	34
<b>Strategy 4: Strengthen Communication, Recruitment, and Awareness</b> .....	38
<b>Implementation Chart</b> .....	43
Appendices .....	49
1. NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center’s Resource and Funding Guide .....	49
2. Oak Island Market Data Report .....	49
3. Project Development Vision Boards .....	49
<b>Appendix 1: Resource and Funding Guide</b> .....	50
<b>Appendix 2: Oak Island Market Data Report</b> .....	51
<b>Appendix 3: Project Development Vision Boards</b> .....	64

# Acknowledgements



## Town of Oak Island Town Council

- Mayor Chris Brown
- Mayor Pro Tempore Bill Craft
- Council Member Tommy Brown
- Council Member Chasey Bynum
- Council Member Terri Cartner
- Council Member Bob Ciullo

## Local Work Group

- Bill Craft
- Bob Ciullo
- Joe Yeager
- Zach Fisher
- Durrall Gilbert
- Kevin Annas
- Howie Franklin
- Lisa Fitzgerald
- Matt Mansfield
- Garrett Isenhour
- Kathryn Adams
- Hallie Willis

## The North Carolina Main Street & Rural Planning Center (MS&RP)

NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center’s Rural Planning Program, which is responsible for facilitating strategic economic development planning and implementation services, worked with the Town of Oak Island staff to facilitate the strategic planning process for the Town of Oak Island Strategic Economic Development Plan (2025—2030).

Main Street & Rural Planning (MS&RP) staff would like to thank and recognize all who contributed their time and efforts to the development of the Town of Oak Island Strategic Economic Development Plan. The plan centers around economic development strategies that adopt a place-based approach to economic development. This refers to strategies that build upon existing assets, take incremental actions to strengthen the community, and build long-term value to attract a range of investments.

The plan identifies strategies, goals, objectives, priority project development and implementation actions.

Town of Oak Island Strategic Economic Development Plan was prepared by:

Samantha Darlington  
Community Economic Development Planner, Southeast Region  
North Carolina Department of Commerce  
Email: [samantha.darlington@commerce.nc.gov](mailto:samantha.darlington@commerce.nc.gov)



**NC DEPARTMENT**  
**of COMMERCE**  
RURAL ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT



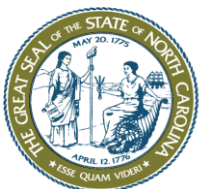


*Photo taken by staff from the community site tour on July 23, 2025.*

## Plan Review & Adoption

A draft of the Town of Oak Island Economic Development Strategic Plan (2026—2031) was produced in February 2026 and shared with the Town of Oak Island’s Local Work Group for review.

Following review, the Town Council adopted the plan on **Insert Date.**



**NC DEPARTMENT**  
**of COMMERCE**  
**RURAL ECONOMIC**  
**DEVELOPMENT**



## ***Economic Positioning/Visioning Statement:***

***In the heart of the Coastal Carolinas, Oak Island serves as a premier coastal destination, offering year-round recreation, a vibrant food scene, and a variety of events for residents and visitors alike. Located along one of North Carolina's longest shorelines, the town's economy is anchored by locally owned businesses across several legacy commercial corridors, each maintaining its unique character while becoming more connected and cohesive. The off-island gateway functions as a welcoming front door, supporting major development, a thriving jetport, and a range of local enterprises.***

### **Executive Summary**

The Town of Oak Island, with an approximate population of 8,700, is located in Brunswick County along North Carolina's southern coast. Recognized for its extensive shoreline and year-round coastal amenities, Oak Island serves as a premier destination for outdoor recreation, dining, and tourism while maintaining a strong sense of community rooted in locally owned businesses and coastal character. The town's commercial areas, including its legacy business corridors and gateway district, play a vital role in supporting the local economy by providing dining, retail, services, and visitor-oriented experiences that serve both residents and tourists.

Through collaboration with local stakeholders, business owners, community partners, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the Town of Oak Island initiated a strategic planning process to identify opportunities for targeted economic development and corridor revitalization. The plan focuses on strengthening Oak Island's commercial environment by supporting small business growth, encouraging reinvestment in established districts, and enhancing the visitor and resident experience while preserving the town's unique coastal identity.

The strategic planning process reflects input from town leadership, business owners, residents, and regional partners. It identifies four core economic development strategies to guide future growth: nurturing a thriving business environment, revitalizing legacy business districts, developing the off-island gateway district, and strengthening communication, recruitment, and transparency. Together, these strategies focus on reinforcing Oak Island as a vibrant coastal destination while supporting long-term economic resilience, community engagement, and a strong sense of place for residents and visitors alike.

This plan is organized around four priority strategies and 11 goals that define Oak Island’s direction for the next five years. These strategies and goals guide the overall framework for economic development and are supported by a phased implementation timeline that outlines short-term, mid-term, and long-term actions.

➤ **Strategy 1: Oak Island Nurtures a Thriving Business Environment**

**Goal 1:** By June 2028, establish a formal small business ecosystem that engages at least 30% of Oak Island’s businesses annually and establish baseline three-year survival rate by FY 2027, increasing it by 5–10% relative by 2030.

**Goal 2:** By June 2027, institutionalize a “Business Partner” framework within Town government and achieve at least 80% business satisfaction related to communication, transparency, and support.

➤ **Strategy 2: Revitalization of Legacy Business Corridors**

**Goal 3:** Host an annual street festival or activation event to engage at least 30 businesses and attract 1000 attendees each year by the end of 2027.

**Goal 4:** By 2030, improve corridor accessibility by: Completing a full commercial parking inventory and implementing at least 2 parking management improvements. Adding 1,500 linear feet of sidewalk or pedestrian enhancements. Installing new crosswalks, traffic-calming, or wayfinding improvements.

**Goal 5:** Increase transportation options, walkability, and parking accessibility along commercial corridors by 20% by 2030.

➤ **Strategy 3: Develop the Off-Island Gateway Districts**

**Goal 6:** Facilitate development readiness in the gateway districts by coordinating with utility providers and regulatory agencies to address water, sewer, and utility capacity by 2030.

**Goal 7:** Implement gateway-specific aesthetic and branding improvements to create a visually cohesive, welcoming, and recognizable district by 2030.

**Goal 8:** By 2030, position at least 5 priority gateway parcels as development-ready through zoning alignment, utility coordination, and active recruitment efforts.

➤ **Strategy 4: Strengthen Communication, Recruitment, and Awareness**

**Goal 9:** By 2030, achieve at least 80% of responding surveyed residents and businesses reporting they feel “well-informed” or “very well-informed” about Town events, business activity, and economic development initiatives.

**Goal 10:** Market Oak Island to visitors to support a year-round economy, achieving at least a 15% increase in off-season visitation by 2030.

**Goal 11:** Enhance business and job recruitment through improved communication tools by establishing a two-business-day response standard for inquiries and facilitating at least 5 new business establishments or expansions by 2030.

# Current Conditions

## Setting

The Town of Oak Island is located in Brunswick County along North Carolina’s southern coast, offering a unique balance of coastal living and regional accessibility. With an estimated population of approximately 8,700 residents according to recent U.S. Census data, Oak Island has experienced steady growth driven by its high quality of life, strong tourism economy, and appeal as both a permanent residential community and seasonal destination. The community supports a diverse population that includes full-time residents, second homeowners, and visitors drawn to the area’s coastal amenities and relaxed lifestyle.



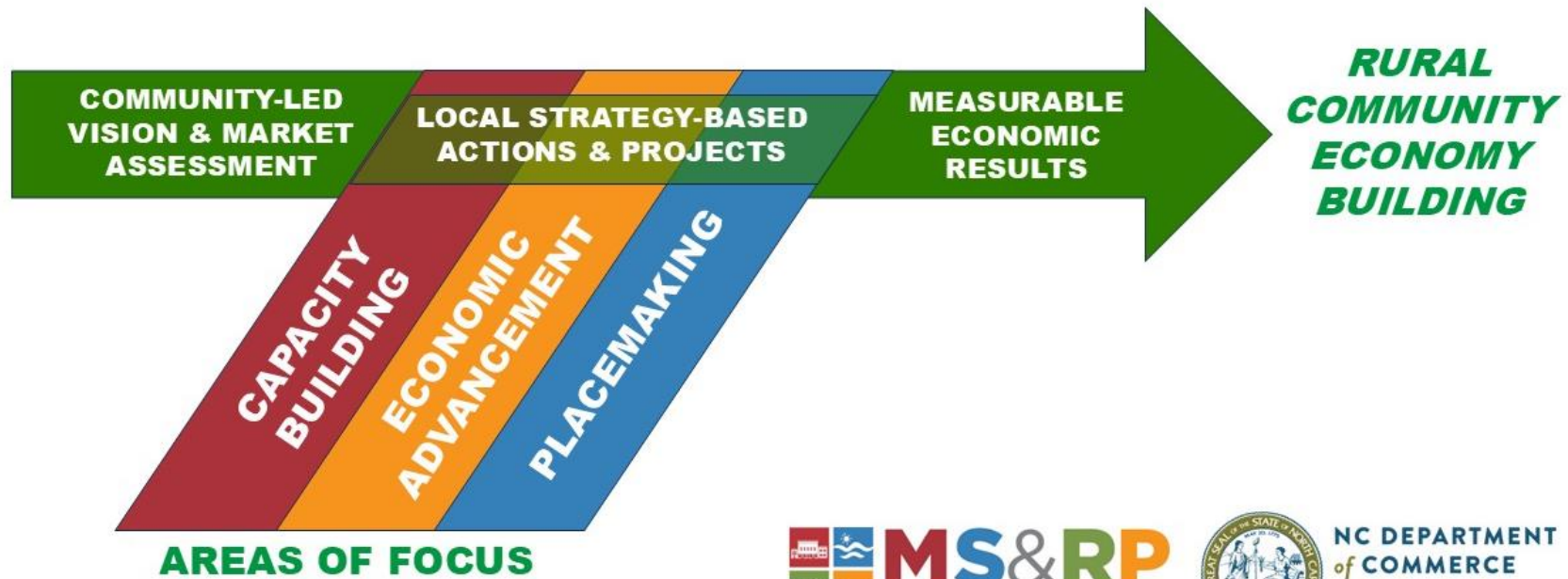
Oak Island’s development is closely tied to its maritime heritage and barrier island geography. Historically, the area evolved from a collection of small beach communities and fishing settlements that supported local maritime industries, tourism, and seasonal recreation. Over time, these communities merged to form the incorporated Town of Oak Island, with many of its original commercial corridors and beach-oriented development patterns continuing to shape the town’s character today.

The community benefits from regional connectivity via NC Highway 211 and proximity to nearby coastal and regional employment centers such as Southport and Wilmington. Oak Island’s geographic location positions the town as a coastal destination while maintaining accessibility to healthcare, higher education, and regional commerce. Its extensive public beach access points, recreational amenities, and maritime resources contribute to its appeal for residents and visitors seeking outdoor recreation and waterfront experiences.

Oak Island’s legacy commercial corridors serve as important economic and community anchors throughout the island. These areas support a mix of locally owned restaurants, retail establishments, service providers, and tourism-related businesses that provide essential amenities and foster community identity. The corridors’ coastal character, visibility along primary travel routes, and proximity to beach access create opportunities for reinvestment, business diversification, and enhanced visitor experiences.

Economically, Oak Island functions as a tourism-driven coastal community while maintaining a strong base of local businesses that support residents and seasonal populations. The town’s off-island gateway area further strengthens economic opportunity by supporting hospitality, aviation, and commercial development that complements island-based businesses. Together, these assets position Oak Island as a place of recreation, community identity, and long-term economic resilience along North Carolina’s southern coast.

# NC Commerce Rural Planning Program Approach to Community Economy Building

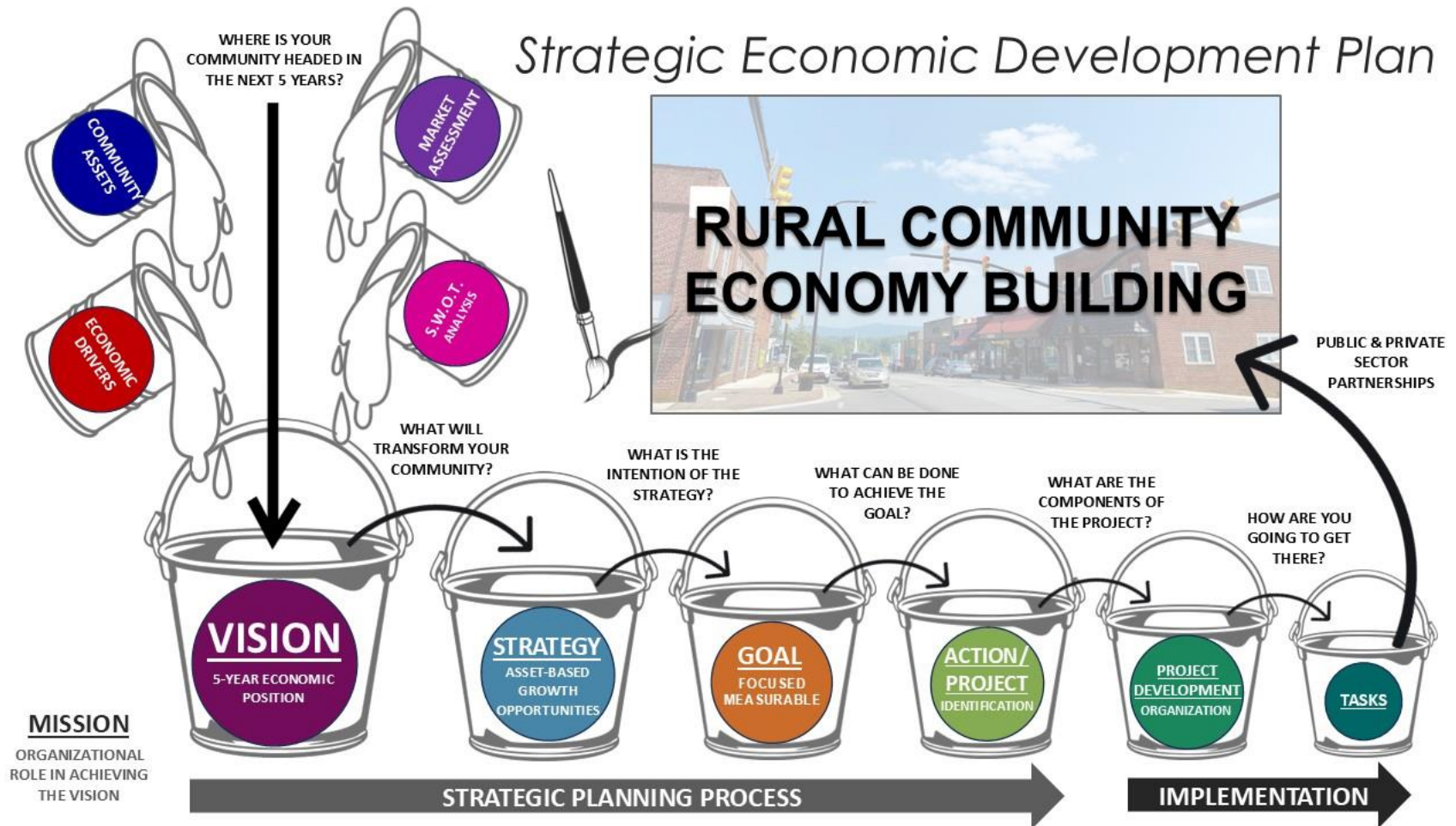


Updated 2/9/2026

## NC Commerce Rural Planning Program Approach

The Rural Planning Program's Approach to Community Economy Building is an economic development framework focused on three key areas: Capacity Building, Economic Advancement, and Placemaking. When this approach is applied through locally coordinated actions with public and private sector stakeholders, rural communities can improve their quality of life, strengthen strategic partnerships, cultivate civic pride, and drive investment. This approach is designed to be community-led and partnership-driven, not a service provided by a single organization. Rural Community Economy Building serves as a holistic foundation for a consensus-driven plan guided by a shared community vision and asset-based strategies.

# Planning Process



NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center Strategic Plan Development Process

Under the REDD (Rural Economic Development Division), MSRP Center staff facilitated the strategic planning process with participation from the local government and an established local work group. This work group was comprised of individuals with a vested interest in leveraging Oak Island’s assets to enhance economic development. The planning process employed established planning methods including economic and associated data, asset mapping, economic driver identification, SWOT (Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, & Threats) analysis, a community survey stakeholder interviews, local work group discussions, and more. The planning process was tailored to meet the specific needs, goals, and opportunities that local stakeholders identified.

## Strategic Planning Definitions

This page outlines the key terms used throughout the strategic planning and implementation process. By clearly defining each element—from the community’s economic positioning statement to strategies, goals, projects, actions, and tasks—we create a shared understanding of how the plan is organized and how its pieces fit together. Having consistent definitions ensures that everyone involved is working from the same foundation, improving communication, guiding decision making, and supporting effective, coordinated implementation.

### Economic Positioning Statement (Vision)

An economic positioning/vision statement is the vision for the economic role that the community will play in the greater economy (local, county, regional) over the next five years. It demonstrates what the community can achieve and how it will distinguish itself from other areas in the county or region. It is grounded in realistic growth opportunities and built through community consensus. All economic development strategies should connect directly to this vision.

### Economic Development Strategy

A strategy is a broad, asset-based approach or method the community will use to achieve its vision. Strategies define *how* the community intends to leverage opportunities, address challenges, and move toward the desired future. They provide direction but are not specific enough to be measured on their own.

Strategies answer the question: *What is the broad approach we will take?*

**Example:** Position the community as a premier outdoor recreation destination.

### Goal

A goal defines a clear, measurable, and time-bound outcome the community aims to achieve in support of a specific strategy. This combines the traditional goal (broad desired outcome) and objective (specific measurable target) into one SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, & Time-Bound), action-oriented statement.

Goals answer the questions: *What outcome do we want, and why does that outcome matter?*

**Example:** Increase trail connectivity by completing 8 additional miles of multi-use trails within three years.

### Project

A project is a focused initiative made up of multiple coordinated actions that collectively achieve a goal. Projects are larger efforts that require planning, resources, and sequencing. They typically span months or years and involve multiple partners or stakeholders.

Projects answer the question: *What initiative will we carry out to accomplish the goal?*

**Example:** Implement the Southeast Greenway Expansion Project.

*Or*

### Action

An action is a concrete step that moves a project forward. Actions are smaller than projects, more specific and usually can be completed by a single team or department.

Actions answer the question: *What concrete steps will we take?*

**Example:** Install uniform trail signage and wayfinding at all major access points.

The defined terms referenced under implementation are not identified within the strategic plan's implementation chart on page 43 but instead relate to work that occurs after the plan is formally adopted. While the chart outlines priority strategies, goals, actions and projects, the detailed work of project development (project scopes, timelines, and responsibilities) is developed during the post-adoption implementation phase. This approach allows the plan to remain flexible and responsive, enabling the community and its partners to refine implementation details as conditions, funding opportunities, and local priorities evolve.

## Implementation

### Project Development

Project development is the phase in which a planned initiative or action is designed, organized, and prepared for implementation. It involves defining the scope, objectives, resources, timeline, and steps necessary to successfully carry out the project. During project development, tasks are identified, assigned, and scheduled to ensure the action progresses efficiently toward achieving the broader goal.

Project Development answers the question: *How will we organize and prepare a specific project or action so it can be successfully implemented?*

### Task

A task is a specific, actionable step taken during the implementation phase of a project. It breaks an action into smaller, detailed activities that can be assigned, tracked, and completed. Tasks outline the exact work needed to move actions/projects forward and contribute to the overall progress of the project. Tasks answer the question: *What are the specific tasks required to complete the project?*

**Example:** "Order materials from supplier," or "Paint the new signage."



Photo taken by staff from the community site tour on July 23, 2025.

## Existing Plans Review

To compliment and build upon subsequent community planning efforts, staff assembled and reviewed other relevant plans and documents. This review provides valuable insight and helps avoid duplication or contradictions of past planning proposals. The following documents were reviewed and considered during the planning process:

### Town of Oak Island Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2025)

Oak Island's Comprehensive Land Use Plan serves as the Town's primary long-range policy document and fulfills North Carolina coastal planning requirements through the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA). The plan establishes a unified vision for managing growth while balancing economic vitality, environmental protection, infrastructure capacity, and community character.



The Comprehensive Plan vision emphasizes maintaining Oak Island as a vibrant coastal community that supports year-round residents while sustaining its identity as a premier visitor destination. The vision promotes preserving the Town's natural coastal environment, strengthening locally owned businesses, maintaining safe and resilient infrastructure, and fostering a high quality of life rooted in coastal heritage, recreation, and community connectivity.

Economic development policies within the plan emphasize strengthening the Town's local business base, encouraging redevelopment and reinvestment in existing commercial areas, supporting tourism as a primary economic driver, and promoting diversified commercial opportunities that serve both residents and visitors. The plan also highlights the importance of protecting the natural resources that support the visitor economy, including beaches, waterways, and coastal ecosystems.

Several recommendations within the Comprehensive Plan are particularly relevant to the Town's current economic development efforts. These include supporting reinvestment and redevelopment within established commercial corridors to maintain their viability and character; encouraging mixed-use and commercial development patterns that enhance walkability and connectivity; promoting tourism-related businesses that complement Oak Island's coastal identity; and strengthening gateway areas to enhance first impressions and economic activity entering the island. The plan also emphasizes improving wayfinding, public access to recreation, and coordinated marketing and branding efforts to reinforce Oak Island's position as a premier coastal destination.

CAMA planning components further reinforce hazard mitigation, resilience, and environmental stewardship. The plan addresses risks associated with storm surge, flooding, shoreline erosion, and sea level rise, encouraging development patterns and infrastructure investments that enhance long-term sustainability. By integrating environmental protection with economic development, the Comprehensive Plan establishes a balanced policy foundation that supports both growth and coastal resource preservation.

## Town of Oak Island Bicycle Improvement Plan (2025)

The Oak Island Bicycle Improvement Plan complements broader land use and economic development goals by promoting multimodal connectivity, safety, and mobility across the island. The plan identifies infrastructure improvements that enhance bicycle and pedestrian access between residential neighborhoods, commercial corridors, public amenities, and recreational destinations.

Improved bicycle infrastructure supports economic development by increasing access to local businesses, expanding tourism opportunities, and enhancing Oak Island’s appeal as an active and environmentally conscious coastal destination. The plan also advances community quality of life by promoting safe transportation alternatives and reducing reliance on automobile travel, which is particularly important in managing seasonal visitor traffic and limited roadway capacity common to barrier island communities.



## Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)

Oak Island’s Unified Development Ordinance serves as the Town’s primary regulatory tool for implementing the policies and vision established in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The UDO establishes zoning districts, development standards, and design requirements that regulate land use, building placement, stormwater management, and natural resource conservation.

The ordinance includes the Table of Uses, which defines permitted land uses within each zoning district, ensuring compatibility between residential, commercial, and mixed-use development. The UDO also contains dimensional standards, setback requirements, and development guidelines intended to promote orderly growth and predictable development outcomes. Additionally, the ordinance includes regulations addressing floodplain development, stormwater protection, and coastal resource preservation, supporting resilience and environmental protection goals critical to Oak Island’s long-term viability.

Recent discussions and audits of the UDO have focused on improving clarity, streamlining development standards, and enhancing usability for property owners, staff, and developers. These updates reflect the Town’s ongoing commitment to maintaining regulatory tools that are both protective of community character and supportive of responsible economic growth.

## Community Tour



*Photos taken by staff from the community site tour on July 23, 2025*

On July 23, 2025, staff from the NC Commerce Rural Planning Program participated in a site visit to the Town of Oak Island to better understand local assets, opportunities, and challenges. Prior to the tour, staff attended a Town Council meeting and a Oak Island Business Advisory Board meeting to provide an overview of the strategic economic development planning process and to meet directly with committee members and key stakeholders. Those meetings were followed by a guided tour of the community, led by Town of Oak Island Staff, which included visits to several businesses and on-site discussions about early priorities and problems to be solved.

The site visit was an essential component of the research process, helping establish a clear baseline understanding of current conditions, gain context that does not appear in reports and to hear directly from stakeholders, ensuring the planning process is grounded in local reality from the very beginning.

## Data: Retail Market Analysis

As part of the strategic economic development planning process, a retail market assessment was completed for Oak Island to better understand existing conditions, market demand, and opportunities for growth. The assessment analyzed local demographics, consumer spending patterns, retail leakage and surplus, and the current mix of businesses to identify retail and service gaps that could be realistically supported by the local and visitor market.

### Market Retail Report Summary

Oak Island's retail market data indicates a strong economic foundation supported by both local spending and significant visitor activity, while also revealing opportunities for targeted retail expansion. Retail leakage analysis conducted within the Town's 10 and 20 minute trade areas shows approximately \$67 million and \$155 million in unmet retail demand respectively. These gaps are particularly evident in sectors such as clothing, specialty retail, home furnishings, sporting goods, grocery, and full service dining. This leakage indicates that residents and visitors are currently spending a portion of their retail dollars outside the immediate market area, suggesting opportunities for the Town to capture more of this spending locally through business recruitment, retention, and expansion efforts.

Market conditions also reflect a strong and growing customer base. Oak Island has experienced approximately 11 percent population growth since 2020 and maintains a median household income of about \$83,483, with a highly educated population that supports higher consumer spending potential. In addition to resident demand, Oak Island benefits from substantial visitation, with approximately 4.2 million annual visits to the Town's commercial areas. This combination of resident spending power and visitor activity positions the community well to support additional retail, dining, and experience based businesses that serve both local needs and the visitor economy. The full retail market report is included in the appendices of this plan.



## Local Work Group Establishment and Involvement

A discussion on the composition of the Local Work Group was held with Town leadership, including staff and elected officials. The Local Work Group was set up by the Town of Oak Island and intentionally structured to reflect a broad cross-section of the community, bringing a wide range of lived experiences and perspectives. The group actively participated in strategic planning meetings held from September 2025 through March 2026. Activities from each meeting are summarized on the table below.

Meeting Date	Topics
5-13-2025	Presented NC Main Street & Rural Planning Services to the Town of Oak Island Town Council.
5-27-2025	Met with Oak Island Business Advisory Board to discuss opportunities.
7-8-2025	Town of Oak Island and NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center execute a MOU for strategic planning services.
7-23-2025	NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center Staff attends a Community tour with Town of Oak Island Staff
9-30-2025	Local Work Group Meeting 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of Strategic Planning Process</li> <li>• Asset and Economic Drivers Decision</li> </ul>
11-3-2025	Local Work Group Meeting 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis</li> <li>• Market Data Overview</li> </ul>
12-1-2025	Local Work Group Meeting 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft Vision</li> <li>• Draft Strategies</li> </ul>
1-7-2026	Local Work Group Meeting 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize Vision and Strategies</li> <li>• Draft Goals</li> <li>• Draft Projects</li> </ul>
2-16-2026	Local Work Group Meeting 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalize &amp; Prioritize Goals</li> <li>• Prioritize Projects</li> </ul>
3-4-2026	Local Work Group Meeting 6 (Virtual) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review Strategic Plan</li> <li>• Review Plan Presentation</li> </ul>
3-17-2026	NC Main Street & Rural Planning staff presented the final plan to the Town of Oak Island Town Council.

## Asset Mapping: Types, Definitions, and Examples

Asset-based economic development is critical to rural community economy building because it leverages existing local strengths, resources, and identity to create sustainable growth that is grounded in place and community capacity. The chart below defines key types of assets and provides examples of assets that may fall within those categories. This chart is meant as a baseline summary of asset types not specific to Oak Island. The following chart on pages 18 – 19 lists Oak Island’s specific assets.

Asset Type	Definition	Examples
<b>Economic Assets</b>	Goods, services, information, etc., produced, exchanged & consumed in/by a community.	Businesses/Industries, Services, Business Clusters, Buildings/Structures/Districts, Downtowns, Commercial Activity Nodes, Industrial Parks/ Warehouse Districts, Infrastructure, Workforce.
<b>Cultural Assets</b>	Tangible, such as: buildings, sites or places. Intangible, such as the stories and traditions that define a community’s identity	Museums, Mills (Former), Buildings/Architecture, National Register Districts/ Properties, Music/Art/Dance, Writers, Festivals and Events, Language, Occupations, Traditions/Values, History/Heritage.
<b>Natural Assets</b>	Relating to/of the natural environment. Recreational — relating to/denoting activity done for enjoyment.	Scenic Beauty, Water Bodies, Blueways, Wetlands, Fish/ Wildlife (Types), Forest (Types), Geology/Minerals, Soils/Prime Farmland, Greenways/Trails, Recreational Activities (Types), Sports (Types).
<b>Institutional Assets</b>	Public or private entities and places devoted to a particular cause, program, or social purpose.	Universities/Colleges, Community College, Pre-K—12 Schools (Public & Private), Technical Schools, Vocational Schools, Hospitals.
<b>Community/Human Resource Assets</b>	Accumulated knowledge and skills that make a community productive. Individuals and organizations.	Community/Human Service Agencies and Nonprofits, Civic Groups, Community Clubs, Youth, Seniors, People with Special Skills/Expert Knowledge, Faith-Based Organizations, Social Fabric.
<b>Governmental Assets</b>	Any governmental unit, department, agency, special purpose district, or other public entity.	City/Town, County, State, Federal, Tribal, Water/Sewer District, Airport, Municipal Service District, Central Business District, Business Improvement District, Redevelopment District.

## Town of Oak Island's Assets

During the strategic planning process during the first workgroup meeting staff facilitated asset mapping exercises to identify key assets in the community. Asset mapping is a process that identifies the strengths of a community, highlights areas for growth opportunities, and brings together key stakeholders. While it does not necessarily include every asset, it provides a good starting point for the process. Identifying Oak Island's unique assets helped to establish clear economic development strategies to achieve measurable growth.

Asset Type	
<b>Economic Assets</b>	<b>Airport &amp; Adjoining Commercial Facilities, Tourism, Retail Stores, Restaurants (mom &amp; pop), Events, Accommodations, ILM Port, ILM Airport, Grant Access, 2 Commercial Districts, New Housing Developments, Brunswick County Growth, Recruitment, Quality of Life, Residential Base, Paid Parking, Town Jobs, Sunny Point, Novant, Duke Power, Brunswick Electric, Wedding Industry, Nuclear Plant Outage, Location, 211/906/133 Corridors, Fishing Tournaments,</b>
<b>Cultural Assets</b>	<b>Town Sponsored Events, Christmas Parade, Mardi Gras Parade, 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival, Concerts, End of Summer Festival, Non-Town Sponsored Events, Ride the Wave Bike Ride, Witches Ride, End Soldier Suicide, Turkey Trot, Veterans, Loggerhead, US Open, Ft Caswell, Beach Day, Brunswick Catch, Lighthouse, Oak Island Golf Course, Par 3, Bars, Live Music, Local Seafood, Dog Culture, Surfing, Brunswick Town, Orton Plantation</b>
<b>Natural Assets</b>	<b>The Beach, OKI Sea Turtle Protection Program, ICW &amp; Ramps, The Point, Davis Canal, Fishing, Boating, Loggerheads Baseball, Pocket Parks, Soccer Teams, 65 Beach Accesses, Wildlife/Sealife, US Open, Parks and Recreation Events and Venues, OKI Pier, Ocean Crest Pier, Marshes, Rec Center, Paddleboarding, Canoeing, Biking, Golf Carting, Live Oaks, Alligators, Pickleball Courts, Splashpad, Skate Park, waterways</b>
<b>Institutional Assets</b>	<b>Faith Based organizations (over 10), Cape Fear Jetport, UNCW, Brunswick Community College Doshier Hospital &amp; Offices, Novant, VFW, Cape Fear Community College, Language Pre School, Charter Schools, County and District Public Schools, Private Schools, Home School Organization</b>

<p><b>Community/Human Resource Assets</b></p>	<p>Seabiscuit (Mary Ellen Rogers), OKI Turtle Protection (Suzan Bell), Howie Franklin, Grape N Ale, Senior Center, Churches, Oak Island Water Rescue, Beach Ambassadors, Beach Preservation Society, Moose Lodge, Elk Lodge, OKI Beautification Club, Fundraisers, Small Town Home, Bo warren and family, Ocean Education Center, Nature Center, Classic Car Club, Quilt Group, Oak Island Angels, Beachfront Owners Association</p>
<p><b>Governmental Assets</b></p>	<p>Town of OKI, Town Staff, Jetport, Committees and Boards, Excellent Police and Fire, Town Manager, Town Mayor, Growing relationship with County and State leaders, Southport Police and Fire, Brunswick County Police, Coast Guard, St. James, Southport, Chamber of Commerce, Town Hall, Local Mayor Group, Southeast Brunswick Sanitary/Sewer District, Town Sewer, Town Council</p>

## Economic Drivers

- Nuclear Plant
- Beach
- Location
- Weather
- Festivals, fishing tournaments, special events, parades
- Airport and Flight Training
- Large Accommodation Supply
- Restaurant Industry
- New Housing Developments
- Waterways
- Recreation
- Baseball team & travel ball
- Quality of Life
- Tourism
- Residential Base
- Paid Parking
- Small Town Feel
- Fishing/Boating
- Pickleball
- Town Jobs
- Sunny Point
- Novant
- Duke Power
- Brunswick Electric
- Wedding Industry
- Brunswick Community College

# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

During the second workgroup meeting, staff facilitated a SWOT analysis exercise that identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the community. This analysis is an essential tool in strategic economic development planning because it provides a clear, organized way to understand a community's current conditions and future opportunities. By identifying strengths and weaknesses as internal factors, such as local assets, infrastructure, workforce, leadership capacity, and existing businesses, communities can realistically assess what they do well and where gaps exist. Opportunities and threats are external factors shaped by market trends, regional competition, state and federal policies, demographic shifts, and broader economic forces. Evaluating both internal and external conditions together helps communities make informed, place-based decisions, prioritize strategies that build existing strengths, and proactively respond to challenges that may impact the local economy.

## SWOT Analysis Summary

Oak Island benefits from strong coastal assets, public safety, low taxes, growth, and positive public perception. However, it remains highly seasonal and beach-dependent, with corridor aesthetics, limited commercial land, regulatory barriers, and workforce housing challenges constraining diversification.

Opportunities focus on economic diversification, corridor improvements, year-round tourism, land use reform, and leveraging the jetport. Key threats include hurricanes, erosion, sea level rise, insurance costs, workforce housing shortages, regional competition, and economic downturns.

## Strengths (Internal)

- Beach/coastal
- Low Taxes
- Thriving Jetport
- Growing Population
- Daily, weekly, & nuclear outage visitors
- Tourists wanting to spend money
- 10,000 + house in the county are coming
- High resident spending power
- Commitment to beach nourishment and shoreline protection
- Large resident population
- Safety
- Airport Clientele
- 2 entrances and bridges
- Strong town leadership
- Water rescue
- Strong Police & Fire
- Good Public Perception
- ISO Rating
- Insurance rates
- Undeveloped track of land
- 2 piers
- Lighthouse
- Expansive Beach
- Number of Beach access points
- Long season / Good weather
- Community Ethos
- Town Events

- Proximity to international airports
- Diversity in business
- Strong small town identity
- Myriad of recreation opportunity
- Diversity of environment
- People want to live here
- Close to Wilmington and Myrtle Beach
- 2 commercial districts

## Weaknesses (Internal)

- Vast Seasonality of population
- Unattractive commercial corridors
- Limited parking
- Reactive instead of proactive (lacking vision)
- Limited available commercial land
- A lot of competition
- Labor constraints
- UDO out of sync with LUP
- Highway divides town (DOT control)
- Not walkable commercial
- High income jobs lacking
- 1 big draw is the beach
- Less year round residents
- Diminishing sales tax
- Loosing residents to investment property (beach front)
- Worker/commuter imbalance
- Difficult to build commercial or revitalize buildings
- Regulations that prohibit improvement
- Far proximity to affordable housing
- Traffic
- Lack of cooperation between businesses
- Lack of affordable rentals for vacation
- No shopping
- Cost of land
- Lack of revenue generating amenities
- Less % of county per capita spending

## Opportunities (External)

- Vacant spaces & property owner relationship improvement
- Business growth
- Jobs for younger residents
- Purposeful/activated community spaces
- Consistent level of tourism (year-round)
- Enhanced walkability & appeal of commercial spaces
- Tourism Development
- Variety in attractions & businesses
- Tapping into St. James Residents
- Boutique Services
- Expanding Jetport Development
- New Land use plan, UDO, Commercial Code Repair
- Streetscape Plan
- Nonprofit & Small business resources
- More events at Middleton park
- Strengthen Partnerships (public/private)
- 211 Expansion

- New commercial Zoning
- Create and grow a niche
- Diversification of drivers
- Retail Gaps filled
- Capture spending from daily workers
- Beautification
- Uniformity
- Tax Incentives for company recruitment
- Ecotourism
- Festivals & Events

## Threats (External)

- Hurricanes
- Erosion
- Sea level rise and climate change impacts
- Rising insurance costs or coverage withdrawal
- State or federal coastal policy changes
- Aging infrastructure (stormwater, roads, utilities)
- Overreliance on short-term rental market
- Regional competition from other coastal destinations
- Loss of workforce due to housing affordability
- Increased construction costs
- Visitor fatigue / over-tourism backlash
- Transportation disruptions (bridge access vulnerability)
- Demographic shifts toward older residents without workforce replacement
- Shifts in travel behavior (remote work normalization reducing vacation stays)
- Increasing cost of property ownership



## Stakeholder Interviews

Input gathered through stakeholder interviews, workgroup sessions, and broader community engagement revealed strong alignment around Oak Island's identity, economic conditions, and future priorities.

Oak Island is widely valued for its small-town coastal character, family-oriented atmosphere, natural beauty, and strong sense of community. Residents and business owners consistently emphasized the importance of protecting this character while accommodating thoughtful, well-managed growth.

Economically, the Island's heavy reliance on seasonal tourism presents both opportunity and vulnerability. While summer activity is strong, businesses face challenges sustaining operations during off-season months. Small business retention, workforce availability, and housing affordability were identified as interconnected issues impacting long-term stability. The lack of workforce housing and limited year-round customer base create ongoing pressures for local employers.

Stakeholders also identified service gaps, particularly in healthcare access and select retail categories, along with opportunities to enhance infrastructure, expand off-season events, and better promote local entrepreneurs and artists.

Across conversations, a consistent theme emerged: the desire for strategic, intentional investment — paired with transparent decision-making — to ensure Oak Island remains economically resilient while preserving the qualities that make it distinctive.



**Throughout engagement efforts, the balance between protecting Oak Island's character and supporting sustainable economic growth surfaced as a central theme, with particular emphasis on off-season activity, infrastructure improvements, and long-term business stability.**

## Plan Implementation

The Town of Oak Island will work collaboratively with partners during implementation to track progress, evaluate outcomes, and share accomplishments related to this plan with the NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center, helping ensure priority projects continue to move forward. Implementation of this plan is designed to be community-led and partnership-driven, not reliant on a single organization. The NC Commerce Rural Planning Program’s approach to Rural Community Economy Building serves as a holistic foundation for a consensus-driven plan guided by a shared community vision and asset-based strategies.

### Plan Implementation

Maintaining a dedicated group to follow through on implementation after the planning process to begin addressing goals and objectives outlined in this plan is critical to attaining the potential economic impact of these strategies. These efforts could be led by the same local work group that helped develop this plan, or another similar group, such as the Oak Island Business Advisory Board, that is representative of the town and can advance the goals of this plan. The sustained presence of such a group builds social capital within the group that improves their ability to work together and effectively address common goals. Furthermore, a dedicated group ensures continuity from planning stage through implementation, provides accountability to ensure that objectives are being met, and allows the community to react and respond quickly when an opportunity is presented. To clarify, this group should not be the sole entity responsible for implementing all the goals of the plan. Instead, the group should function as a convener and point of contact to connect to other stakeholders, organizations, and resources to help the broader community achieve these goals. Maintaining a regular meeting schedule will also help increase the effectiveness of the group, and the plan.

The implementation of the plan is designed as a collaborative and community wide effort. While the plan was developed with the Town of Oak Island, the strategies and projects identified within it are intentionally designed to be undertaken by a varied set of partners. This approach reflects the deeply interconnected nature of economic development and community vitality across the town. Rather than placing the sole responsibility for implementation on the town government, this plan recognizes and embraces the strength of shared ownership. During the planning process, a variety of local, regional, and state stakeholders were engaged—including government leadership, non-profits, business leaders, tourism and recreation organizations, educational institutions, and civic groups. As a result, each project identified in the plan should include partners whose expertise, capacity, and community ties make them well-positioned to lead or support implementation efforts.

This distributed responsibility model ensures that implementation builds stronger, more sustainable partnerships while increasing local capacity. By aligning the work of various entities under a shared vision and strategy, the plan supports the creation of a more cohesive and resilient outdoor recreation economy. Each project has an identified lead or key collaborator, and in many cases, cross-sector coordination will be critical to success. The Town of Oak Island government plays a vital facilitative role but is not the sole entity responsible for plan implementation. Ultimately, the success of this strategic plan depends on the collective engagement of all partners involved.

## **Resources and Support**

The Town of Oak Island Strategic Economic Development Plan is intended to be a living, working document that guides action, supports decision-making, and helps prioritize community needs over time. Regular reflection on the plan's goals, objectives, and actions through periodic review sessions with the Local Work Group and community leadership is encouraged to ensure the plan remains relevant, achievable, and responsive to changing conditions.

Rather than serving as a rigid checklist, the value of this plan lies in its ability to help the Town of Oak Island and its partners set realistic priorities, measure progress, and adapt strategies as opportunities or challenges emerge. Pivoting, refining, or re-sequencing actions over time is not only expected, but essential to successful implementation.

## **Local Work Group and/or Dedicated Community Development Organization Expectations**

To support accountability and momentum, it is recommended that the Local Work Group meet at least quarterly or be otherwise formalized as a standing implementation body. These meetings provide an opportunity for:

- Track progress on priority projects and actions
- Identify capacity or resource gaps
- Coordinate roles among partners
- Share updates internally and with the broader community

The Town of Oak Island plays a supportive coordination role by helping monitor progress related to project management, timelines, communication, and use of available resources, while implementation itself remains a shared, collaborative effort among public, private, and nonprofit partners.

## **A Network-Based Approach to Implementation**

Successful implementation is most effective when approached through a network-based model, rather than a traditional top-down structure. In this approach, leadership, responsibility, and expertise are distributed across a broad group of partners, allowing the town to respond more nimbly to opportunities and challenges as they arise. By intentionally leveraging relationships with regional, state, and local partners, Town of Oak Island can expand its implementation capacity beyond staff and budget limitations, tap into specialized knowledge, and better align local projects with broader economic development, workforce, tourism, and placemaking initiatives already underway across the region.

Key partners may include organizations such as the North Carolina Department of Commerce, regional economic development organizations, nonprofit and philanthropic partners, educational institutions, small business support providers, and public and private funding agencies. Each partner brings unique assets to the table, whether technical expertise, data and market insight, funding opportunities, programmatic support, or convening power. When these partners are engaged early and consistently, projects are more likely to be feasible, well-coordinated, and competitive for external resources.

Continued collaboration through this networked model allows the community to build momentum around shared goals while remaining flexible and opportunity driven. Rather than relying on a fixed sequence of actions, Oak Island can advance multiple efforts simultaneously, adapt to changing market conditions, and pursue catalytic opportunities as they emerge. This collaborative structure also strengthens relationships, increases transparency, and fosters shared ownership of outcomes—ensuring that implementation is not only effective, but resilient, inclusive, and aligned with the long-term vision for the broader community.

## **Two Buckets of Implementation**

Implementation actions generally fall into two complementary buckets:

- 1. Near-Term and Ongoing Actions**

These include projects, programs, and organizational efforts that can be initiated or advanced using existing capacity, partnerships, or resources. Examples may include coordination activities, small-scale downtown improvements, marketing efforts, or organizational development.

- 2. Longer-Term or Opportunity-Based Actions**

These actions may require additional funding, staffing, technical assistance, or external partnerships. Progress on these initiatives may depend on grant cycles, private investment timing, or future conditions, and should be revisited regularly as opportunities arise.

Both buckets are equally important, and movement between them over time is expected as projects mature or conditions change.

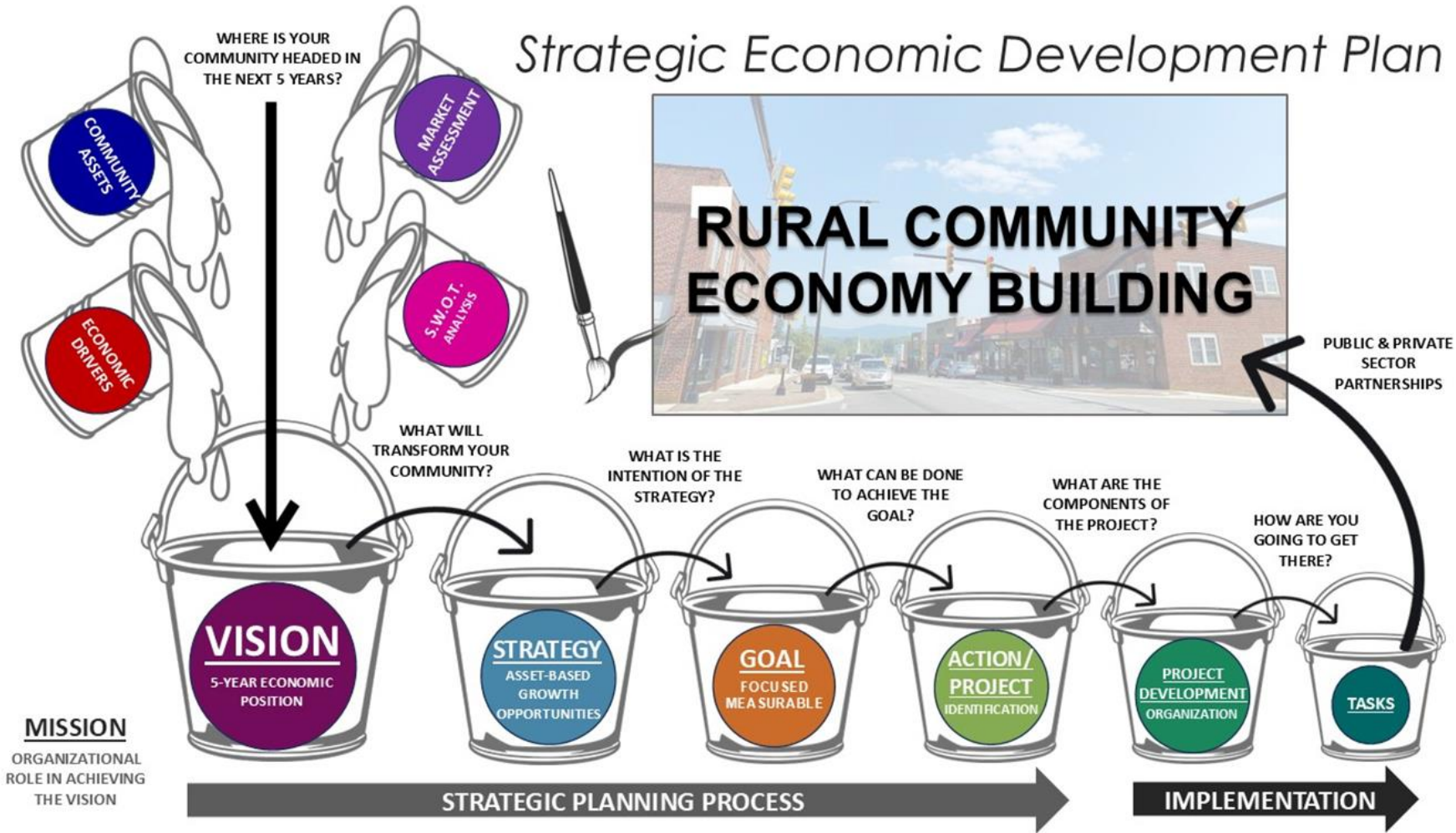
## **Ongoing Support and Technical Assistance**

The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center offers comprehensive services that can directly support plan implementation over time. These services include hands-on strategic planning assistance, one-on-one technical support for specific projects or challenges, professional development and training opportunities for staff, board members, and volunteers, and guidance related to funding strategies, grant readiness, and alignment with state and federal programs. In addition, the Center provides annual implementation plan templates and tools designed to help communities clearly track progress, document wins, identify obstacles, and recalibrate priorities as conditions, capacity, or funding opportunities change.

To reinforce accountability and long-term success, it is recommended that the Local Work Group or designated implementation committee maintain an ongoing relationship with the Southeast Community Economic Development Planner with North Carolina Department of Commerce, with at least one formal check-in each year. These annual touchpoints create space to review progress on priority actions, troubleshoot challenges, assess organizational capacity, and explore additional technical assistance, partnerships, or funding resources that may support next steps.

Through consistent collaboration, regular reflection, and a shared commitment to adaptability, the Town of Oak Island can ensure this plan remains a living, community-driven tool rather than a static document. This approach supports sustained economic vitality, strengthens partnerships among public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders, and helps translate long-term vision into tangible improvements that enhance quality of life for residents while creating a welcoming, engaging experience for visitors.

# Strategic Economic Development Plan



NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center Strategic Plan Development Process

The implementation of the plan is made up of the project development and tasks phases. Project development is the phase in which a planned initiative or action is designed, organized, and prepared for implementation. It involves defining the scope, objectives, resources, timeline, and steps necessary to successfully carry out the project. During project development, tasks are identified, assigned, and scheduled to ensure the action progresses efficiently toward achieving the broader goal. A task is a specific, actionable step. It breaks an action into smaller, detailed activities that can be assigned, tracked, and completed. Tasks outline the exact work needed to move action forward and contribute to the overall progress of the project. This phase is done through, strengthens, and creates public and private partnerships within the community.

## Economic Positioning/Vision Statement:

*In the heart of the Coastal Carolinas, Oak Island serves as a premier coastal destination, offering year-round recreation, a vibrant food scene, and a variety of events for residents and visitors alike. Located along one of North Carolina's longest shorelines, the town's economy is anchored by locally owned businesses across several legacy commercial corridors, each maintaining its unique character while becoming more connected and cohesive. The off-island gateway functions as a welcoming front door, supporting major development, a thriving jetport, and a range of local enterprises.*

The vision statement for Oak Island was developed in collaboration with the project Workgroup during the third planning meeting. Instead of conducting a standalone community visioning workshop, the group built upon previously adopted policy direction and earlier engagement completed as part of this planning process.

Workgroup members reviewed the Town's Comprehensive Plan vision and the economic development section to ensure alignment with existing goals. They then incorporated the key themes identified through the asset mapping and SWOT analysis exercises conducted in the first two meetings, along with the market and economic data overview. This ensured the vision was grounded in both community input and economic realities.

Through discussion, the Workgroup identified the Town's core assets, including its shoreline, commercial corridors, jetport, gateway areas, and locally owned businesses, as well as its long-term priorities related to diversification, connectivity, and year-round activity. The final vision reflects consensus around positioning Oak Island as a premier coastal destination with connected commercial districts, strengthened economic drivers, and a welcoming gateway that supports residents and visitors alike.

# ***Strategy 1: Oak Island nurtures a thriving business environment***

**Strategy 1:** *Oak Island nurtures a thriving business environment.*

This strategy focuses on fostering conditions that help local businesses grow, attract new investment, and create a resilient economy.

**Goal 1:** *By June 2028, establish a formal small business ecosystem that engages at least 30% of Oak Island’s licensed businesses annually and establish baseline three-year survival rate by FY 2027, increasing it by 5–10% relative by 2030.*

This goal focuses on strengthening Oak Island’s business ecosystem by creating intentional opportunities for connection, mentorship, and coordinated support. In a seasonal economy, collaboration and access to resources are critical for long-term sustainability. By increasing engagement and improving survival rates, the Town can build resilience among locally owned businesses, reduce turnover, and create a more stable year-round commercial environment that supports reinvestment and entrepreneurship.

## **Goal 1 Actions/Projects:**

Actions under this goal emphasize connectivity, access to resources, and measurable business retention outcomes. While developing these actions the work group considered what partners might already be doing similar work and if a partnership could be established or their offerings expanded. Partners that the workgroup envisioned assisting with these projects include the Southport Oak Island Chamber of Commerce, Brunswick Community College Small Business Center, and the Oak Island Business Advisory Board. Other possible partners include the local library, the community center, the NC SBTDC, and the SBA.

- 1.1** Host business networking sessions focused on peer connection, resource sharing, and small business support, in partnership with the Chamber and Brunswick Community College Small Business Center.
- 1.2** Launch a structured Business Mentorship Program pairing experienced business owners with new or expanding entrepreneurs, with a minimum of 10 mentor-mentee matches in the first year.
- 1.3** Host at least four on-island small business workshops annually focused on finance, marketing, succession planning, and seasonal revenue strategies in partnership with the Small Business Center.
- 1.4** Create a centralized online Business Resource Hub with permitting guidance, funding resources, technical assistance contacts, and partnership opportunities.
- 1.5** Conduct an annual Business Climate & Satisfaction Survey beginning no later than FY 2027 to track trends, challenges, and program effectiveness.
- 1.6** Track and report annually on business closures and three-year survival rates to establish a baseline and measure progress toward the 10% increase target.

**Goal 2:** *By June 2027, institutionalize a “Business Partner” framework within Town government and achieve at least 80% business satisfaction related to communication, transparency, and support.*

This goal shifts Oak Island from being passively “business-friendly” to proactively serving as a business partner. Sustainable economic growth requires mutual understanding between the Town, residents, and the business

community. By improving transparency, modernizing communication, and educating decision-makers on business realities and economic impact, Oak Island can build trust, reduce friction, and create a more predictable and collaborative environment for investment.

## **Goal 2 Actions/Projects:**

The projects under Goal 2 are necessary to formalize Oak Island’s commitment to being an active, reliable partner to the business community rather than a reactive regulator. In a seasonal coastal economy, uncertainty, inconsistent communication, and complex permitting processes can discourage investment and strain relationships between businesses and local government. Designating the Liaison creates a clear, accountable point of contact to reduce confusion and improve coordination across departments. Publishing step-by-step permitting and development guides increases transparency, shortens learning curves for new and expanding businesses, and sets realistic expectations about timelines and requirements. Annual economic impact and partnership training ensures that elected officials and staff understand the realities of seasonal operations and small business challenges, fostering more informed decision-making. Hosting a “State of Oak Island Business” forum creates structured dialogue and reinforces mutual accountability, while modernizing communication tools ensures timely, consistent outreach beyond traditional newsletters. Finally, implementing a proactive outreach and retention program allows the Town to identify concerns before businesses close, support major employers, and gather valuable data through exit interviews. Together, these projects reduce friction, build trust, improve predictability, and create a more stable environment for private investment and long-term economic resilience.

- 2.1** Designate the Permit Liaison as the initial point of contact for development and business inquiries, responsible for providing standardized welcome materials, coordinating interdepartmental reviews, and connecting businesses with Economic Development staff.
- 2.2** Develop and publish clear, step-by-step permitting and development guides with defined timelines and expectations.
- 2.3** Implement annual economic impact and partnership training for Council and key staff focused on seasonal economies, small business realities, and best practices in municipal-business collaboration.
- 2.4** Host an annual “State of Oak Island Business” forum to share data, gather feedback, and strengthen dialogue between businesses, residents, and Town leadership.
- 2.5** Modernize business communications through a dedicated business email list, digital alerts, or app-based notification system to supplement newsletters and social media.
- 2.6** Create a proactive outreach and retention program, including annual check-ins with local employers and an exit interview process for businesses that close or relocate.



# Strategy 2: Revitalize Legacy Business Districts

## Strategy 2: Revitalize Legacy Business Districts

Strategy 2 focuses on enhancing the character and connectivity of existing commercial corridors, making them vibrant destinations for residents and visitors. The legacy business districts include the Long Beach corridor and Yaupon corridor, both located on East Oak Island Drive. As demonstrated by the photo below, these corridors are separated by residential development.



Oak Island Business Corridors- May 2, 2026

**Goal 3:** Host an annual street festival or activation event to engage at least 30 businesses and attract 1000 attendees each year by 2030.

This goal focuses on activating the commercial corridor as a vibrant, community-centered destination. Festivals and activation events increase foot traffic, encourage local spending, and provide opportunities to showcase businesses, arts, and culture. Incorporating an educational component about revitalization efforts and vacant storefronts informs residents and visitors about ongoing improvements and investment opportunities.

### Goal 3 Actions/Projects:

The projects under Goal 3 are designed to activate Oak Island's legacy business districts and shift them from pass-through corridors to intentional destinations. Regular street festivals create consistent opportunities to increase foot traffic, showcase local businesses, and encourage residents and visitors to spend more time—and money—in the district. Integrating educational components ensures that activation efforts also build awareness of revitalization initiatives and available commercial space, supporting recruitment and investment. Temporary art installations and curated storefront features improve visual appeal and reduce the negative perception of vacancies, while a Business of the Month program maintains engagement beyond event days. Post-event surveys provide measurable feedback to track improvements in awareness, perception, and satisfaction. Together, these projects generate energy, strengthen corridor identity, and create momentum for

long-term revitalization. Partners for these projects include local businesses, the school system, the chamber, the small business center, the UNC School of Government, and the community center.

- 3.1** Collaborate with businesses to host at least one annual street festival or activation event designed to increase foot traffic and showcase local businesses.
- 3.2** Include educational and promotional components highlighting corridor revitalization efforts, vacant storefront opportunities, and improvements.
- 3.3** Partner with local artists or schools for temporary art installations during festival weekends.
- 3.4** Launch a “Business of the Month” or featured storefront program to encourage year-round engagement.
- 3.5** Conduct post-event surveys to track awareness and satisfaction in improvements.

**Goal 4:** *By 2030, improve corridor accessibility by: Completing a full commercial parking inventory and implementing at least 2 parking management improvements. Adding 1,500 linear feet of sidewalk or pedestrian enhancements. Installing at least 5 new crosswalks, traffic-calming, or wayfinding.*

This goal was selected to improve the physical character, functionality, and economic attractiveness of legacy business districts. Streetscape enhancements, mixed-use projects, and façade improvements strengthen the corridor’s identity, reduce vacancies, and support business recruitment. Partners include property owners, developers, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, local design consultants, and town departments responsible for public works and planning, all coordinating to implement improvements and design standards.

**Actions/Projects:**

The projects under Goal 4 are necessary to strengthen the physical character, functionality, and long-term economic viability of Oak Island’s legacy business districts. Creating a multi-use gathering space near Town Hall establishes a central community anchor that supports events, daily activity, and small business traffic. Streetscape improvements along East Oak Island Drive enhance safety, walkability, and visual appeal, making the corridor more inviting to residents and visitors. Adopting design and branding standards ensures cohesive improvements that reinforce corridor identity, while façade grants incentivize property reinvestment and elevate overall appearance. Supporting mixed-use redevelopment introduces new housing and commercial activity that sustains businesses beyond peak season. Modernizing zoning reduces barriers that may discourage investment, and maintaining a property and vacancy inventory allows for targeted recruitment and strategic activation of underutilized spaces. Together, these projects move beyond short-term beautification and create the structural conditions necessary for sustained corridor revitalization and private reinvestment.

- 4.1** Complete pre-development analysis and advance a market-ready concept for a mixed-use Town Center area near Town Hall to catalyze private investment.
- 4.2** Advance corridor revitalization along East Oak Island Drive through streetscape planning, design standards, and priority safety and placemaking improvements.
- 4.3** Adopt corridor-specific design and branding guidelines based on resident and business surveys by FY 2027-28; complete initial improvements by FY 2028-29.
- 4.4** Provide and promote façade grants, incentives, and design assistance for priority commercial properties along key corridors. This effort should include educating property and business owners about available programs and exploring updates to the façade program to better encourage pedestrian-friendly improvements and strengthen corridor identity.

- 4.5 Support redevelopment of mixed-use projects to bring additional housing, retail, and office space.
- 4.6 Modernize zoning and development regulations to reduce barriers to redevelopment and encourage active street-level uses.
- 4.7 Maintain an up-to-date property and vacancy inventory to prioritize recruitment and investment efforts.

**Goal 5:** *Increase transportation options, walkability, and parking accessibility along commercial corridors by 20% by 2030.*

This goal focuses on improving access and mobility for both residents and visitors, which is critical for corridor success. Safe, convenient parking, enhanced pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and alternative transportation options increase visitation, encourage longer stays, and support economic activity. By setting measurable targets, such as a 20% increase in access and walkability, the town can track improvements and adjust strategies over time. Public engagement, signage, and education campaigns ensure residents and visitors can navigate the corridor efficiently, reinforcing a perception of Oak Island as a walkable, accessible, and vibrant destination.

**Actions/Projects:**

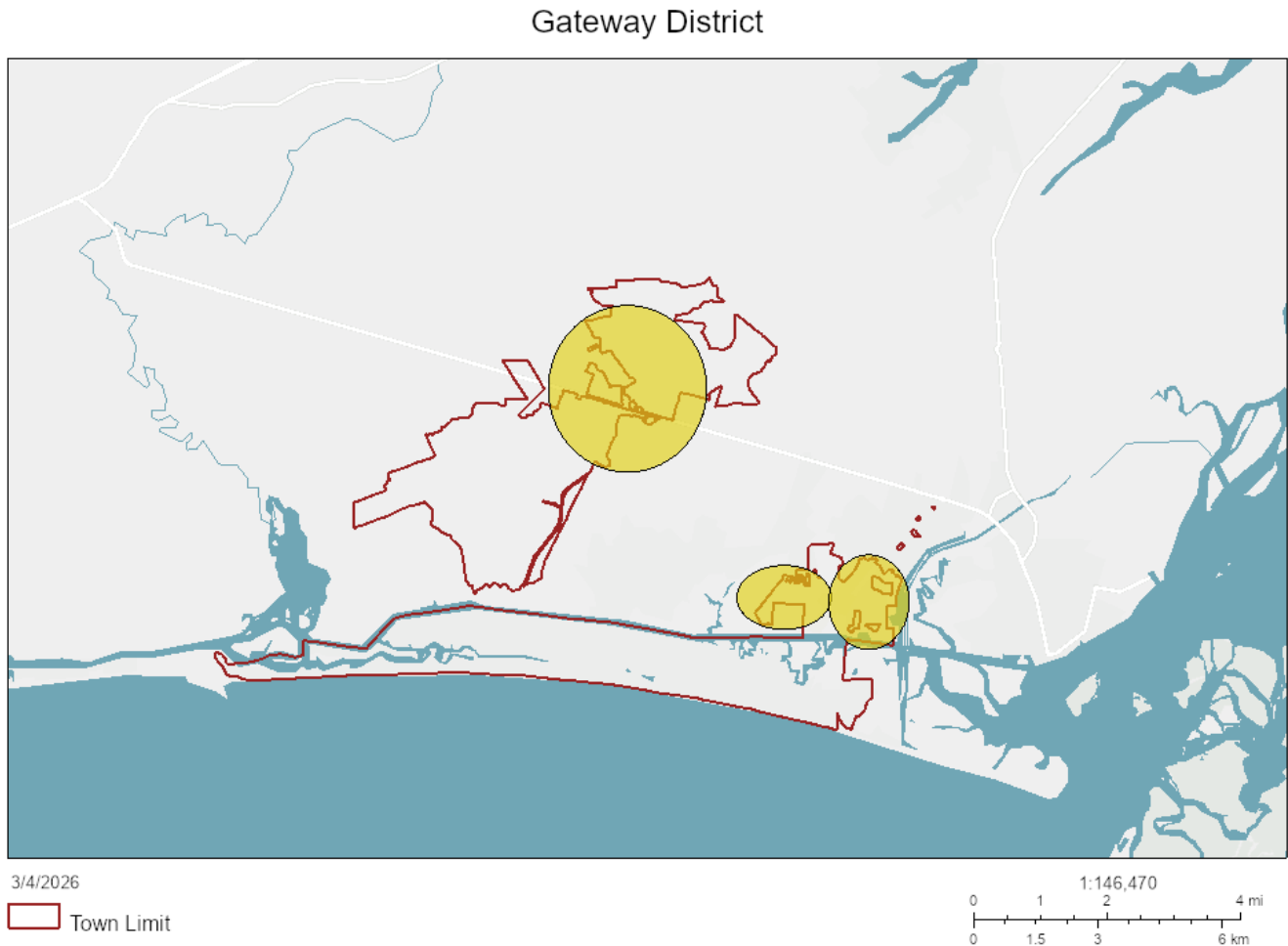
The projects under Goal 5 respond directly to one of the most consistent concerns raised by businesses and property owners: parking. Oak Island’s legacy commercial corridors were historically developed along a high-traffic highway, with shallow lots, limited shared parking areas, and few large public lots. This pattern creates both real and perceived shortages, particularly during peak season, and makes circulation and pedestrian access more challenging. Because the issue is rooted in corridor design, no single solution, such as adding spaces alone, will resolve it. A comprehensive approach is required, beginning with a full parking inventory to understand true capacity, followed by improved signage and wayfinding to better utilize existing spaces. Enhancing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, adjusting traffic speeds, and exploring shuttle or micro-transit options can reduce dependence on front-door parking. Long-term tools, such as evaluating structured parking, may also be necessary as redevelopment occurs. Together, these projects acknowledge that Oak Island’s parking challenge is complex and structural, requiring coordinated, multi-layered solutions to support businesses and improve the visitor experience.

- 5.1 Conduct a corridor-wide parking inventory to quantify on-street, off-street, public, and private parking capacity and identify priority areas for improved utilization or new public parking.
- 5.2 Implement parking and pedestrian wayfinding signage to improve visibility of existing public parking and strengthen connections between parking areas and businesses.
- 5.3 Explore shuttle services, golf-cart rentals, or micro-transit partnerships with local businesses.
- 5.4 Evaluate feasibility of a parking deck for long-term capacity.
- 5.5 Improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to raise walk and bike scores (crosswalks, bike lanes, lighting, benches).
- 5.6 Adjust traffic speeds and circulation patterns to enhance pedestrian safety and comfort.
- 5.7 Promote alternative transportation options through maps, apps, or educational campaigns highlighting walkable routes and parking resources.

# Strategy 3: Develop the Off-Island Gateway Districts

**Strategy 3:** *Develop the off-island gateway districts.*

This strategy focuses on positioning the gateway districts as dynamic hubs for commerce, transportation, and hospitality that complements Oak Island’s coastal identity. The map below highlights the areas referenced. This includes Midway, South Harbor, and commercial areas off of Highway 211.



*Oak Island Gateway District Map- May 2, 2026*

**Goal 6:** *Facilitate development readiness in the gateway districts by coordinating with utility providers and regulatory agencies to address water, sewer, and utility capacity by 2030.*

Adequate infrastructure is essential for attracting commercial, retail, and light industrial development. While the town does not own the water and sewer systems, proactive coordination with utility authorities and NC DEQ ensures that necessary improvements are planned, prioritized, and aligned with Oak Island’s growth

objectives. This goal positions the town as an effective partner, supporting development readiness and signaling to investors that the gateway district is prepared for sustainable growth.

### **Actions/Projects:**

The projects under Goal 6 recognize that infrastructure readiness is the primary constraint to development in the gateway districts. Because the Town does not control water and sewer systems, progress depends on consistent advocacy, coordination, and clear communication with utility providers and state regulators. Prioritizing key parcels along 211, Midway, and near Fish Factory Road ensures that limited infrastructure improvements align with targeted economic development areas. Maintaining updated parcel and utility maps provides clarity for developers and reduces uncertainty during site selection. Clear communication materials signal preparedness to investors, while annual coordination with utility partners keeps gateway needs visible and prioritized. Together, these projects position the Town as an active facilitator of development despite not owning the infrastructure itself. Partners for these projects include State agencies, such as the Department of Environmental Quality, county partners, jetport, and utility providers.

- 6.1** Identify priority development sites within the gateway district and formally communicate infrastructure needs to utility providers and regulatory agencies to support phased capacity improvements.
- 6.2** Maintain an updated map of parcels, utility access points, and infrastructure limitations to guide developers and track progress.
- 6.3** Develop communication materials for potential investors highlighting infrastructure readiness, anticipated improvements, and partnership efforts.
- 6.4** Convene annual coordination meetings with utility providers and state agencies to review gateway district priorities, track progress on capacity improvements, and update development readiness timelines.
- 6.5** Prepare a gateway infrastructure readiness summary identifying short, medium, and long term utility needs to inform future capital planning, grant applications, and developer discussions.

**Goal 7:** *Implement gateway-specific aesthetic and branding improvements to create visually cohesive, welcoming, and recognizable districts by 2030.*

The projects under Goal 7 are intended to move the gateway district from a collection of individual properties to a coordinated commercial environment with a clear sense of place. As development interest increases, establishing design standards early helps guide growth in a way that is intentional rather than reactive. Consistent signage, landscaping, lighting, and façade improvements create visual order and elevate the overall quality of the corridor, which in turn supports recruitment and property values. Public-sector improvements demonstrate commitment and set expectations for private investment, while financial incentives reduce the burden on individual businesses to participate. Measuring visitor and business perception ensures that improvements are not only aesthetic, but also meaningful in shaping how the district is experienced. Together, these projects provide structure and direction for future growth while reinforcing the gateway's role as a strong economic complement to the island.

## **Actions/Projects:**

The projects under Goal 7 address the need to create a clear, welcoming, and recognizable identity for the gateway district. As the primary entry point into Oak Island, this area shapes first impressions for visitors and investors, yet without cohesive design standards, signage, and landscaping, it can feel fragmented and inconsistent. Adopting gateway-specific branding and implementing visible streetscape improvements establish a strong sense of arrival and signal coordinated investment. Providing incentives encourages private property owners to align with the district's identity, while upgrading town-owned spaces ensures the public sector leads by example. Ongoing visitor and business surveys allow the Town to measure perception and refine improvements over time. Together, these projects transform the gateway from a pass-through corridor into a defined and intentional commercial district.

- 7.1** Develop and adopt gateway-specific branding and design standards by FY 2027-28, incorporating cohesive signage, landscaping, and streetscape elements.
- 7.2** Prioritize gateway properties within existing façade improvement and redevelopment programs to encourage upgrades that align with adopted gateway design standards.
- 7.3** Implement signature gateway improvements—including landscaping, lighting, and streetscape upgrades—by FY 2028-29.
- 7.4** Upgrade town-owned spaces and rights-of-way in the gateway district to match the branding and design standards, creating a welcoming environment for residents and visitors.
- 7.5** Conduct annual visitor and business surveys to measure awareness, perception, and satisfaction with gateway improvements.

**Goal 8:** *By 2030, position at least 5 priority gateway parcels as development-ready through zoning alignment, utility coordination, and active recruitment efforts.*

This goal targets the gateway district as an economic hub that complements Oak Island's coastal character. Recruiting national chains, mid-sized retail, and light industrial businesses ensures diverse economic activity, creates jobs, and strengthens the tax base. Targeted recruitment in priority areas such as 211, Midway, Middleton, and near Fish Factory Road, supports coordinated development while ensuring that the gateway district is both functional and attractive for businesses and visitors.

## **Actions/Projects:**

The projects under Goal 8 recognize that successful gateway development requires a coordinated and targeted recruitment strategy rather than opportunistic growth. By identifying and prioritizing parcels based on market demand and infrastructure readiness, the Town can direct investment to areas most capable of supporting near-term development. Recruiting national and regional retail along 211 and Midway provides visible anchors that increase traffic and confidence, while targeting light industrial and mid-sized manufacturing near Fish Factory Road and Middleton supports job creation and economic diversification. Clear marketing materials and defined development phases reduce uncertainty for investors and signal strategic intent. At the same time, retention efforts ensure existing gateway businesses are supported and not displaced by new growth. Together, these projects balance recruitment, diversification, and stabilization to

build a stronger and more sustainable gateway economy.

- 8.1** Identify and prioritize gateway parcels suitable for retail, commercial, and light industrial development based on market analysis and infrastructure readiness.
- 8.2** Support recruitment of regional commercial and retail users along 211 and Midway to anchor commercial activity and increase visibility.
- 8.3** Target service oriented commercial and flex space businesses near South Harbor and Midway for job creation and diversified economic activity.
- 8.4** Develop marketing materials highlighting available parcels, infrastructure readiness, incentives, and design standards to support recruitment efforts.
- 8.5** Phase development on undeveloped parcels in the gateway district, with priority areas activated first, and monitor occupancy rates annually.
- 8.6** Offer business retention and support programs for existing gateway businesses to complement new recruitment.



# Strategy 4: Strengthen Communication, Recruitment, and Awareness

## Strategy 4: Strengthen Communication, Recruitment, and Awareness

Strategy 4 focuses on building trust and engagement through clear communication with residents, businesses, and visitors while promoting Oak Island as a premier destination.

**Goal 9:** *By 2030, achieve at least 80% of responding surveyed residents and businesses reporting they feel “well informed” or “very well-informed” about Town events, business activity, and economic development initiatives.*

Clear communication with residents and existing businesses is essential for fostering community engagement, trust, and participation in Oak Island’s economic and cultural initiatives. By providing consistent, coordinated messaging and showcasing local businesses, the town can create a stronger sense of place, improve satisfaction, and drive attendance at events and participation in local commerce.

### Actions/Projects:

The projects under Goal 9 respond to the need for clearer, more consistent communication between the Town, businesses, and residents. In a seasonal community with multiple events and initiatives happening throughout the year, inconsistent messaging can limit participation and reduce impact. Providing event toolkits ensures businesses have the tools to promote and align with Town-led initiatives, while expanding the Business of the Month program strengthens visibility and storytelling around local entrepreneurs. Temporary signage and structures in high-traffic public areas increase awareness beyond digital platforms. Annual community surveys create measurable accountability, and coordinating communication across departments reduces duplication and confusion. Together, these projects create a unified, intentional communication system that increases awareness, engagement, and participation. Partners for these projects could include local businesses, the business advisory board, the small business center, and event partners.

- 9.1 Develop and distribute event toolkits to businesses to ensure consistent messaging and participation.
- 9.2 Expand the Business of the Month program to highlight at least one local business each month across town social media, newsletters, magazines, and websites, including owner stories, history, and upcoming events.
- 9.3 Implement temporary structures or signage in key public spaces (parks, town-owned corridors) to increase visibility of events and announcements.
- 9.4 Conduct an annual community survey to measure awareness of events, news, and town communications and adjust strategies accordingly.



**9.5** Coordinate communication strategies across departments to ensure consistent messaging and reduce gaps in outreach.

**Goal 10:** *Market Oak Island to visitors to support a year-round economy, achieving at least a 15% increase in off-season visitation by 2030.*

Promoting Oak Island as a premier destination year-round encourages economic activity outside of peak season, supporting businesses, hospitality, and tourism. By identifying gaps in current marketing, leveraging events, and using social media and newsletters strategically, the town can increase off-season traffic, raise awareness of unique offerings like the food scene, and enhance Oak Island's reputation as a vibrant coastal destination.

**Actions/Projects:**

The projects under Goal 10 address the need to strengthen Oak Island's year-round economy by intentionally expanding off-season visitation. Traditionally, the off-season would be from Labor Day until Memorial Day. The work group discussed this traditional definition and concluded that Oak Island's season is extended past that. They defined off-season as November through March. As a coastal destination, economic activity is heavily concentrated in peak months, leaving businesses vulnerable during slower periods. Conducting a marketing inventory helps identify gaps in messaging and promotion, ensuring resources are aligned with target audiences. Developing off-season events and themed programming creates reasons to visit beyond summer tourism, while consistently showcasing local businesses reinforces that Oak Island offers more than a seasonal experience. Tracking digital engagement metrics introduces accountability and allows marketing strategies to evolve based on performance. Partnerships with restaurants, attractions, and accommodations to create bundled promotions further incentivize travel during quieter months. Together, these projects support business sustainability and help smooth seasonal fluctuations in revenue. Partners for these projects could include Visit NC, the local TDA, county tourism partners, and local businesses.

- 10.1** Develop and promote off-season events to attract visitors during slower months, including themed festivals, food and beverage events, and cultural programming.
- 10.2** Conduct an inventory of current visitor marketing assets, identifying gaps in messaging, events, and promotion.
- 10.3** Promote Oak Island's year-round amenities, dining, retail, and recreational offerings through coordinated destination marketing that highlights the diversity of experiences available to visitors.
- 10.4** Track website, newsletter, and social media metrics (opens, visits, engagement, time on page) to measure success and guide improvements.
- 10.5** Partner with local restaurants, attractions, and accommodations to create bundled promotions or packages that incentivize off-season visits.
- 10.6** Invest in scalable event infrastructure (such as tents, staging, tables, and chairs) to support Town-led and partner events, increasing Oak Island's capacity to host off-season programming.

**Goal 11:** *Enhance business and job recruitment through improved communication tools by establishing a two-business-day response standard for inquiries and facilitating at least 5 new business establishments or expansions by 2030.*

A streamlined, transparent communication approach helps the town attract new businesses, retain existing ones, and fill local jobs more efficiently. By providing clear guidance, tools, and outreach for potential business owners and employers, Oak Island can strengthen its commercial base, diversify offerings, and sustain economic growth year-round.

**Actions/Projects:**

The projects under Goal 11 are designed to make Oak Island’s recruitment process clear, efficient, and competitive. Without standardized materials and defined procedures, prospective businesses may experience delays or uncertainty that discourage investment. Developing recruitment packets and establishing a central point of contact streamlines communication and signals professionalism. Maintaining an up-to-date inventory of available commercial properties reduces friction during site selection and allows the Town to respond quickly to inquiries. Aligning recruitment efforts with broader marketing campaigns ensures consistent messaging about amenities, incentives, and lifestyle advantages. Tracking metrics such as inquiries, response times, and successful placements introduces accountability and allows the Town to refine its approach over time. Together, these projects create a structured and transparent recruitment system that supports sustainable economic growth.

- 11.1** Develop standardized recruitment communication materials, including information packets for prospective businesses, site selectors, and developers.
- 11.2** Implement clear procedures for engaging with potential businesses, including a central point of contact and timeline for responses.
- 11.3** Maintain a digital and physical inventory of available commercial spaces and properties suitable for business expansion or relocation.
- 11.4** Coordinate recruitment efforts with marketing campaigns that promote Oak Island’s amenities, economic incentives, and lifestyle benefits.
- 11.5** Track recruitment metrics such as inquiries, response times, and projects supported to measure effectiveness and guide continuous improvement.
- 11.6** Conduct targeted outreach to regional brokers, developers, and site selectors using standardized recruitment materials.



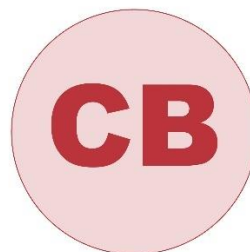
## Rural Planning Program Approach to Rural Community Economy Building: Implementation Key



### **ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT**

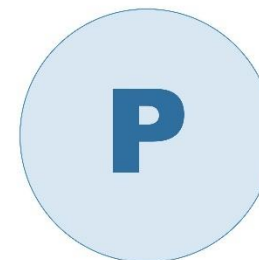
**Economic Advancement** focuses on building the local economy by leveraging existing assets through data-informed strategic planning and collaborative implementation.

Communities advance their economies by maintaining and improving infrastructure, supporting entrepreneurship and businesses, strengthening retention and recruitment, and enhancing access to housing, healthcare, and education.



### **CAPACITY BUILDING**

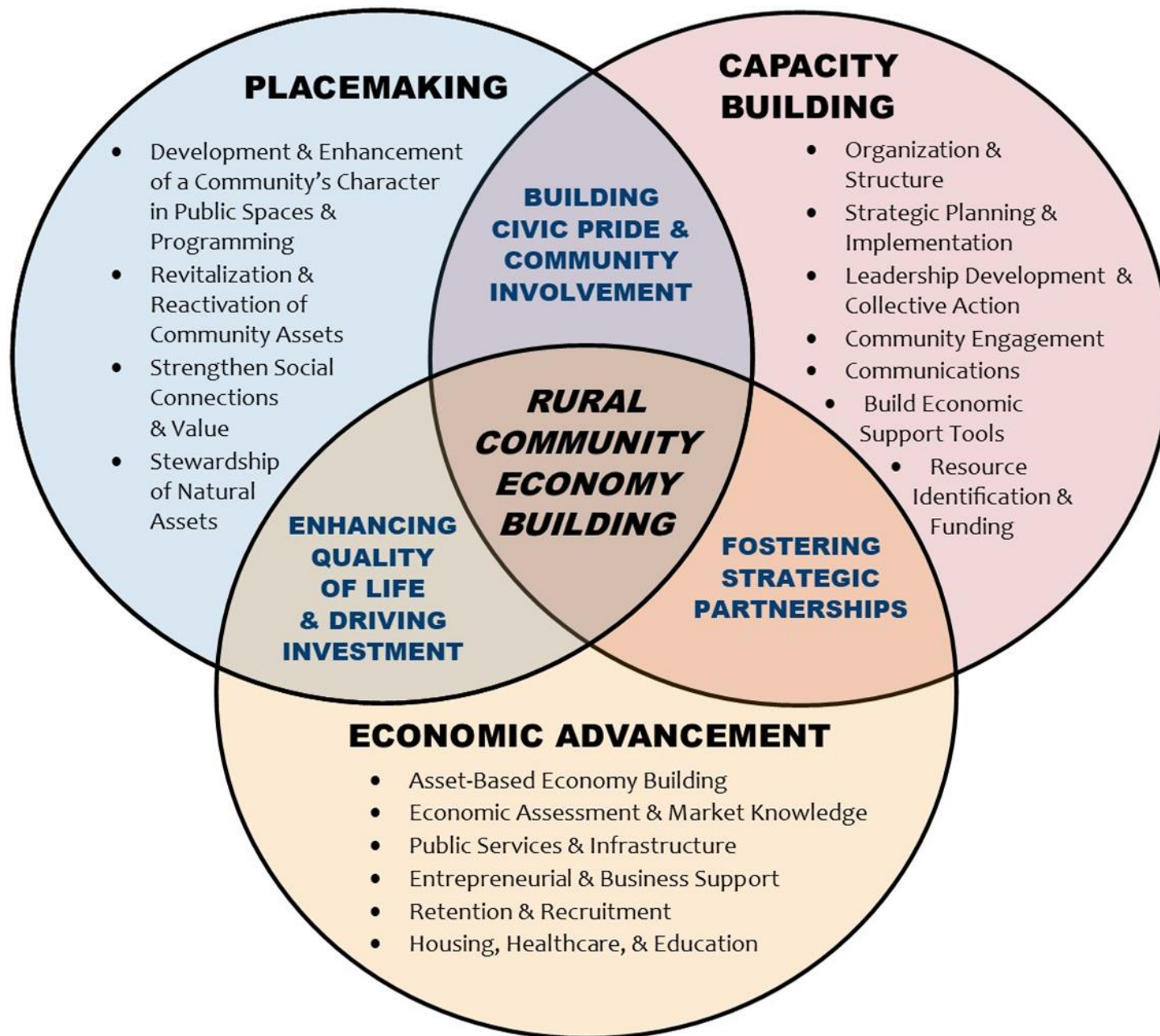
**Capacity Building** involves establishing a strong organizational foundation through vision-driven strategic planning and effective implementation. Communities build capacity by focusing on organization, leadership development, communication, community engagement, and collective action. They gain momentum by cultivating strategic partnerships, developing economic support tools, and identifying resources and funding.



### **PLACEMAKING**

**Placemaking** prioritizes developing strong social connections, community value, and a rooted sense of place through the enhancement of a community's character in public spaces, programming, and storytelling. Communities support placemaking through the revitalization, activation, and ongoing stewardship of both community and natural assets.

## Rural Planning Program Approach to Rural Community Economy Building:



## Implementation Chart

The strategic economic development plan’s implementation chart translates the Town of Oak Island’s vision into action by identifying four core economic development strategies, each supported by clear SMART goals, actions, and projects. This visual framework is designed to guide decision making, track progress, and ensure a balanced, coordinated approach to implementation across all focus areas.

*Economic Positioning/Vision Statement: In the heart of the Coastal Carolinas, Oak Island serves as a premier coastal destination, offering year-round recreation, a vibrant food scene, and a variety of events for residents and visitors alike. Located along one of North Carolina’s longest shorelines, the town’s economy is anchored by locally owned businesses across several legacy commercial corridors, each maintaining its unique character while becoming more connected and cohesive. The off-island gateway functions as a welcoming front door, supporting major development, a thriving jetport, and a range of local enterprises.*

### STRATEGY 1

*Oak Island nurtures a thriving business environment.*

**Goal 1:** By June 2028, establish a formal small business ecosystem that engages at least 30% of Oak Island’s licensed businesses annually and establish baseline three-year survival rate by FY 2027, increasing it by 5–10% relative by 2030.

#### **Actions/Projects:**

- 1.1** Host business networking sessions focused on peer connection, resource sharing, and small business support, in partnership with the Chamber and Brunswick Community College Small Business Center.
- 1.2** Launch a structured Business Mentorship Program pairing experienced business owners with new or expanding entrepreneurs, with a minimum of 10 mentor-mentee matches in the first year.
- 1.3** Host at least four on-island small business workshops annually focused on finance, marketing, succession planning, and seasonal revenue strategies in partnership with the Small Business Center.
- 1.4** Create a centralized online Business Resource Hub (currently titled “Opening a Business” on the town website) with permitting guidance, funding resources, technical assistance contacts, and partnership opportunities.
- 1.5** Conduct an annual Business Climate & Satisfaction Survey beginning no later than FY 2027 to track trends, challenges, and program effectiveness.
- 1.6** Track and report annually on business permits, closures, and three-year survival rates to measure progress toward the target increase.

## STRATEGY 1 CONTINUED...

**Goal 2:** By June 2027, institutionalize a “Business Partner” framework within Town government and achieve at least 80% business satisfaction related to communication, transparency, and support.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 2.1 Designate the Permit Liaison as the initial point of contact for development and business inquiries, responsible for providing standardized welcome materials, coordinating interdepartmental reviews, and connecting businesses with Economic Development staff.
- 2.2 Develop and publish clear, step-by-step permitting and development guides with defined timelines and expectations.
- 2.3 Implement annual economic impact and partnership training for Council and key staff focused on seasonal economies, small business realities, and best practices in municipal-business collaboration.
- 2.4 Host an annual “State of Oak Island Business” forum to share data, gather feedback, and strengthen dialogue between businesses, residents, and Town leadership.
- 2.5 Modernize business communications through digital alerts or app-based notification systems to supplement newsletters and social media.
- 2.6 Create a proactive outreach and retention program, including annual check-ins with local employers and an exit interview process for businesses that close or relocate.

## STRATEGY 2

### *Revitalize Legacy Business Districts*

**Goal 3:** Host an annual street festival or activation event to engage at least 30 businesses and attract 1000 attendees each year by 2030.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 3.1 Collaborate with businesses to host at least one annual street festival or activation event designed to increase foot traffic and showcase local businesses.
- 3.2 Include educational and promotional components highlighting corridor revitalization efforts, vacant storefront opportunities, and improvements.
- 3.3 Launch a “Business of the Month” or featured storefront program to encourage year-round engagement.
- 3.4 Conduct post-event surveys to track awareness and satisfaction in improvements.

**Goal 4:** By 2030, improve corridor accessibility by: Completing a full commercial parking inventory and implementing at least 2 parking management improvements. Adding 1,500 linear feet of sidewalk or pedestrian enhancements. Installing at least 5 new crosswalks, traffic-calming, or wayfinding improvements.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 4.1 Complete pre-development analysis and advance a market-ready concept for a mixed-use Town Center area near Town Hall to catalyze private investment.

## STRATEGY 2 CONTINUED...

- 4.2 Advance corridor revitalization along East Oak Island Drive through streetscape planning, design standards, and priority safety and placemaking improvements.
- 4.3 Adopt corridor-specific design and branding guidelines based on resident and business surveys by FY 2027-28; complete initial improvements by FY 2028-29.
- 4.4 Provide and promote façade grants, incentives, and design assistance for priority commercial properties along key corridors. This effort should include educating property and business owners about available programs and exploring updates to the façade program to better encourage pedestrian-friendly improvements and strengthen corridor identity.
- 4.5 Support redevelopment of large-scale mixed-use projects to bring additional housing, retail, and office space.
- 4.6 Modernize zoning and development regulations to reduce barriers to redevelopment and encourage active street-level uses.
- 4.7 Maintain an up-to-date property and vacancy inventory to prioritize recruitment and investment efforts.

**Goal 5:** Increase transportation options, walkability, and parking accessibility along commercial corridors by 20% by 2030.

### **Actions/Projects:**

- 5.1 Conduct a corridor-wide parking inventory to quantify on-street, off-street, public, and private parking capacity and identify priority areas for improved utilization or new public parking.
- 5.2 Implement parking and pedestrian wayfinding signage to improve visibility of existing public parking and strengthen connections between parking areas and businesses.
- 5.3 Explore shuttle services, golf-cart rentals, or micro-transit partnerships with local businesses.
- 5.4 Evaluate feasibility of a parking deck for long-term capacity; address height ordinance considerations.
- 5.5 Improve pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to raise walk and bike scores (crosswalks, bike lanes, lighting, benches).
- 5.6 Adjust traffic speeds and circulation patterns to enhance pedestrian safety and comfort.
- 5.7 Promote alternative transportation options through maps, apps, or educational campaigns highlighting walkable routes and parking resources.

## STRATEGY 3

*Develop the off-island gateway districts.*

**Goal 6:** Facilitate development readiness in the gateway districts by coordinating with utility providers and regulatory agencies to address water, sewer, and utility capacity by 2030.

### **Actions/Projects:**

- 6.1 Identify priority development sites within the gateway district and formally communicate infrastructure needs to utility providers and regulatory agencies to support phased capacity improvements.
- 6.2 Maintain an updated map of parcels, utility access points, and infrastructure limitations to guide developers and track progress.

## STRATEGY 3 CONTINUED...

- 6.3 Develop communication materials for potential investors highlighting infrastructure readiness, anticipated improvements, and partnership efforts.
- 6.4 Convene annual coordination meetings with utility providers and state agencies to review gateway district priorities, track progress on capacity improvements, and update development readiness
- 6.5 Prepare a gateway infrastructure readiness summary identifying short, medium, and long term utility needs to inform future capital planning, grant applications, and developer discussions.

**Goal 7:** Implement gateway-specific aesthetic and branding improvements to create visually cohesive, welcoming, and recognizable districts by 2030.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 7.1 Develop and adopt gateway-specific branding and design standards by FY 2027-28, incorporating cohesive signage, landscaping, and streetscape elements.
- 7.2 Prioritize gateway properties within existing façade improvement and redevelopment programs to encourage upgrades that align with adopted gateway design standards.
- 7.3 Implement signature gateway improvements—including landscaping, lighting, and streetscape upgrades—by FY 2028-29.
- 7.4 Upgrade town-owned spaces and rights-of-way in the gateway district to match the branding and design standards, creating a welcoming environment for residents and visitors.
- 7.5 Conduct annual visitor and business surveys to measure awareness, perception, and satisfaction with gateway improvements.

**Goal 8:** By 2030, position at least 5 priority gateway parcels as development-ready through zoning alignment, utility coordination, and active recruitment efforts.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 8.1 Identify and prioritize gateway parcels suitable for retail, commercial, and light industrial development based on market analysis and infrastructure readiness.
- 8.2 Recruit regional commercial and retail users along 211 and Midway to anchor commercial activity and increase visibility.
- 8.3 Target service oriented commercial and flex space businesses near South Harbor and Midway for job creation and diversified economic activity.
- 8.4 Develop marketing materials highlighting available parcels, infrastructure readiness, incentives, and design standards to support recruitment efforts.
- 8.5 Phase development on undeveloped parcels in the gateway district, with priority areas activated first, and monitor occupancy rates annually.

8.6 Offer business retention and support programs for existing gateway businesses to complement new recruitment.

## STRATEGY 4

### *Strengthen Communication, Recruitment, and Awareness*

**Goal 9:** By 2030, achieve at least 80% of responding surveyed residents and businesses reporting they feel “well informed” or “very well-informed” about Town events, business activity, and economic development initiatives.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 9.1 Develop and distribute event toolkits to businesses to ensure consistent messaging and participation.
- 9.2 Expand the Business of the Month program to highlight at least one local business each month across town social media, newsletters, and websites, including owner stories, history, and upcoming events.
- 9.3 Implement temporary structures or signage in key public spaces (parks, town-owned corridors) to increase visibility of events and announcements.
- 9.4 Conduct an annual community survey to measure awareness of events, news, and town communications and adjust strategies accordingly.
- 9.5 Coordinate communication strategies across departments to ensure consistent messaging and reduce gaps in outreach.

**Goal 10:** Market Oak Island to visitors to support a year-round economy, achieving at least a 15% increase in off-season visitation by 2030.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 10.1 Conduct an inventory of current visitor marketing assets, identifying gaps in messaging, events, and promotion.
- 10.2 Develop and promote off-season events to attract visitors during slower months, including themed festivals, food and beverage events, and cultural programming.
- 10.3 Promote Oak Island’s year-round amenities, dining, retail, and recreational offerings through coordinated destination marketing that highlights the diversity of experiences available to visitors.
- 10.4 Track website, newsletter, and social media metrics (opens, visits, engagement, time on page) to measure success and guide improvements.
- 10.5 Partner with local restaurants, attractions, and accommodations to create bundled promotions or packages that incentivize off-season visits.
- 10.6 Invest in scalable event infrastructure (such as tents, staging, tables, and chairs) to support Town-led and partner events, increasing Oak Island’s capacity to host off-season programming.

## STRATEGY 4 CONTINUED...

**Goal 11:** Enhance business and job recruitment through improved communication tools by establishing a two-business-day response standard for inquiries and facilitating at least 5 new business establishments or expansions by 2030.

**Actions/Projects:**

- 11.1** Develop standardized recruitment communication materials, including information packets for prospective businesses, site selectors, and developers.
- 11.2** Implement clear procedures for engaging with potential businesses, including a central point of contact and timeline for responses.
- 11.3** Maintain a digital and physical inventory of available commercial spaces and properties suitable for business expansion or relocation.
- 11.4** Coordinate recruitment efforts with marketing campaigns that promote Oak Island’s amenities, economic incentives, and lifestyle benefits.
- 11.5** Track recruitment metrics such as inquiries, response times, and projects supported to measure effectiveness and guide continuous improvement.
- 11.6** Conduct targeted outreach to regional brokers, developers, and site selectors using standardized recruitment materials.

The strategies, goals, and actions outlined in this plan provide a practical roadmap for strengthening Oak Island’s economic vitality while preserving the character that makes the community unique. By supporting local businesses, revitalizing existing commercial corridors, preparing the gateway district for thoughtful investment, and strengthening communication with residents, businesses, and visitors, the Town can continue building a resilient year-round economy. Implementation of this plan will require ongoing coordination between Town leadership, staff, local businesses, regional partners, and the community. As conditions change, the plan should be revisited and refined to ensure Oak Island remains responsive to new opportunities while maintaining a strong foundation for sustainable economic growth.

## Appendices

1. NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center's Resource and Funding Guide
2. Oak Island Market Data Report
3. Project Development Vision Boards

## **Appendix 1: Resource and Funding Guide**

This resource and funding guide was developed by the NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center to help communities, local governments, nonprofits, and partners quickly identify relevant grant programs, technical assistance offerings, and funding opportunities that can support downtown revitalization, economic development, planning, and placemaking efforts. The guide is designed to be practical and easy to use, organizing opportunities by focus area and eligibility so communities can more efficiently match projects with potential resources. It is a living document and is regularly updated by the Center as new funding opportunities become available, program guidelines change, or deadlines shift, ensuring users have access to the most current information possible when planning projects or pursuing implementation funding.

If you are seeking resources for a local project, we encourage you to explore the [MS&RP Comprehensive Grant Funding & Resource Guide](#), (linked and available under the Organization & Resources section of our website).

## Appendix 2: Oak Island Market Data Report



### Oak Island Retail Marketplace Snapshot- September of 2025

The purpose of this report is to give Oak Island the baseline information for a better understanding of its current market. The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center Staff studied the retail marketplace data within a 10- and 20- minute drive time to the Oak Island area. The retail leakage analysis examines the quantitative aspects of the retail opportunities.

By reviewing the retail gap, we can:

- Understand how well the retail needs of residents are being met
- Uncover unmet demand and possible opportunities
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the local retail sector

When consumers spend their dollars outside the specific drive time to Oak Island this is known as “Retail Gap” throughout this report. Retail Gap or leakage indicates an **unmet demand in the trade area**. This suggests the possibility the community can support additional retail for those business categories. Residents within the specified primary trade areas are purchasing products outside that area indicating opportunity to capture those dollars within Oak Island.

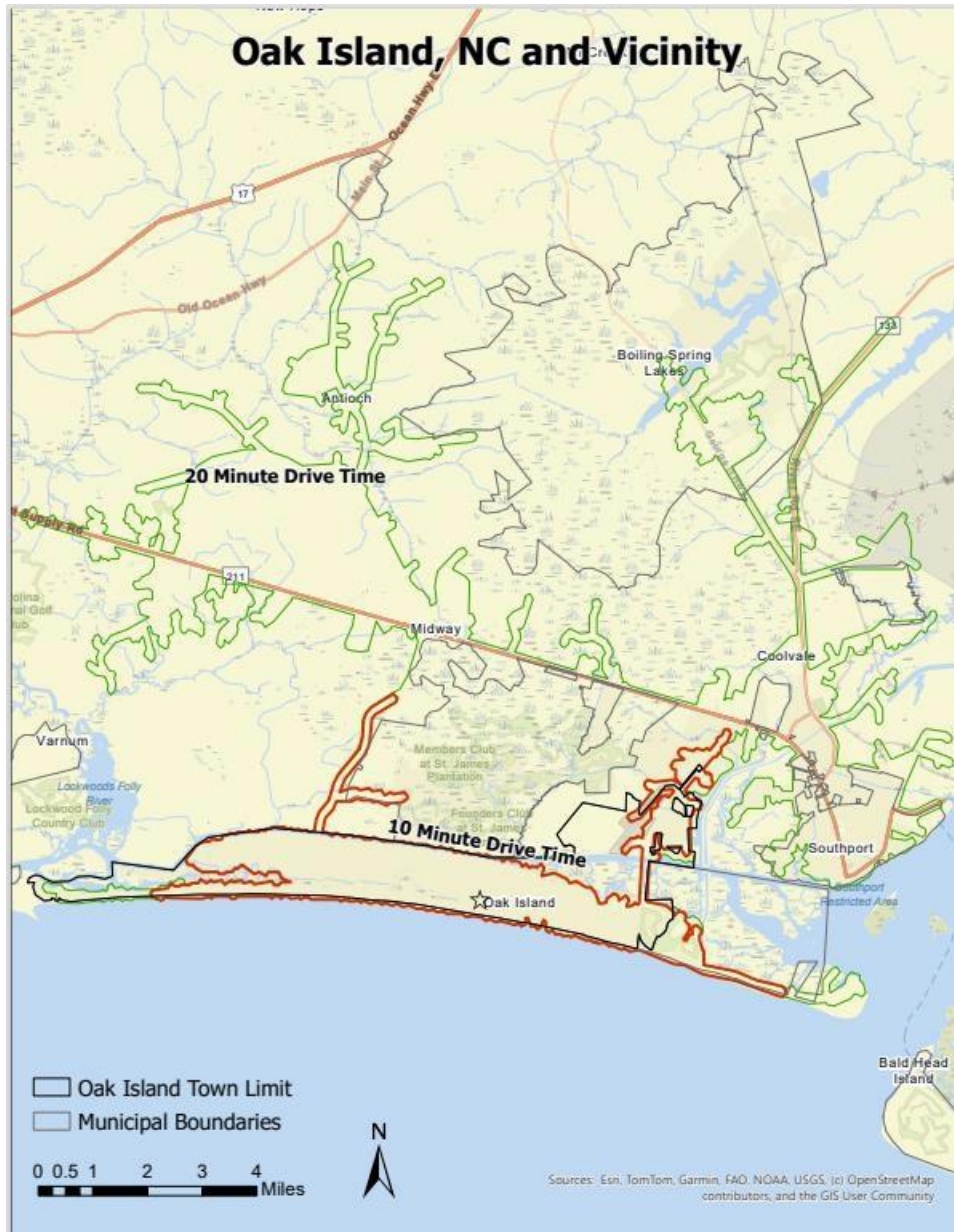
There are also categories for which Oak Island exceeds the local market demand. Those are measured as red numbers on the report below. For the 10- and 20- minute drive time information, this means that Oak Island is exceeding its market potential in these categories. This retail surplus means the community’s trade area is capturing local market plus attracting non-local shoppers. Surplus means the community has possibly

developed strong clusters of retail that have broad geographical appeal.

You can also seek additional retail market data that Brunswick County Business and Industry Development or the Cape Fear Regional Council of Governments can provide. This report is

based on the data collected and should serve as a starting point for your economic vitality efforts.

We highly encourage you to couple this report with consumer surveys to get a complete understanding of the Oak Island potential. The NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center can share examples of consumer surveys and assist with this process as needed.



The above Brunswick County map outlines the two trade areas within a 10- and 20-minute drive time to Oak Island. Defining the Oak Island trade area is critical in determining retail opportunities for the local market. The NC Main Street & Rural Center staff only reviewed the data within these two segments. Oak Island should be targeting residents within these two areas. The goal is to capture the retail sales volume leaking to neighboring communities, such

as North Myrtle Beach, SC. The chart below shows total industry summaries for the 10-minute and 20-minute drive time to Oak Island. It details the total retail sales gap, potential 10% capture and retail square footage needed to attract this sales volume.

The sales per square foot column in the charts is the average number based on recent research across the state. Typically, restaurant annual retail sales are higher than \$300 per square foot. There are variables that impact this number such as building owned versus rented, rental rates either higher or lower as well as overall expenses, such as employee wages, insurance, utilities, etc. **Surplus is shown as a red number and retail gap is shown as a black number.**

Distance	Total Retail Gap	10% Capture	Sales/SF	S.F. Needed
10-MInute Drive Time	\$67,039,535	\$6,703,913	\$300	22,342
20-Minute Drive Time	\$155,111,530	\$15,511,153	\$300	51,704

The above chart shows the aggregate number of potential sales within the 10-and 20-minute drive-times from Oak Island. Below you will see these numbers broken down by retail category.

## 10-Minute Drive Time from Retail Gap

Oak Island				
Primary Trade Area 10-Minute Drive Time Retail Gaps		DOWNTOWN POTENTIAL		
Business Type	Retail Gap	10% of Retail Gap	Sales/SF	SF
		10%	\$300	Needed
<b>Furniture Stores</b>	\$ 2,480,237	\$ 248,024	\$ 300	827
<b>Home Furnishings Stores</b>	\$ 1,594,404	\$ 159,404	\$ 300	531
<b>Appliance Stores</b>	\$ 1,069,578	\$ 106,957	\$ 300	356
<b>Electronics Stores</b>	\$ 3,067,380	\$ 306,738	\$ 300	1,022
<b>Home Centers</b>	\$ 11,579,971	\$ 1,157,997	\$ 300	3,859
<b>Paint and Wallpaper Stores</b>	\$ 727,389	\$ 72,738	\$ 300	242
<b>Nursery, Garden Center and Farm Supply Stores</b>	\$ 2,453,197	\$ 245,319	\$ 300	817
<b>Pharmacies and Drug Stores</b>	\$ 13,365,911	\$ 1,336,591	\$ 300	4,455
<b>Cosmetics and Beauty Supplies Stores</b>	\$ 1,216,705	\$ 121,670	\$ 300	405
<b>Women's Clothing Stores</b>	\$ 1,873,267	\$ 187,326	\$ 300	624
<b>Family Clothing Stores</b>	\$ 6,037,363	\$ 603,736	\$ 300	2,012
<b>Shoe Stores</b>	\$ 1,512,121	\$ 151,212	\$ 300	504
<b>Jewelry Stores</b>	\$ 1,499,232	\$ 149,923	\$ 300	500
<b>Luggage and Leather Goods Stores</b>	\$ 1,128,004	\$ 112,800	\$ 300	376
<b>Sporting Goods Stores</b>	\$ 1,807,181	\$ 180,718	\$ 300	602
<b>Hobby, Toy and Game Stores</b>	\$ 883,715	\$ 88,372	\$ 300	295
<b>Book Stores</b>	\$ 538,861	\$ 53,886	\$ 300	180
<b>Department Stores</b>	\$ 2,664,708	\$ 266,471	\$ 300	888
<b>Used Merchandise Stores</b>	\$ 701,525	\$ 70,153	\$ 300	234
<b>Pet and Pet Supply Stores</b>	\$ 1,463,193	\$ 146,319	\$ 300	488
<b>Full Service Restaurants</b>	\$ 9,375,593	\$ 937,559	\$ 300	3,125
<b>Total Gap</b>	<b>\$ 67,039,535</b>	<b>\$ 6,703,913</b>	<b>\$ 300</b>	<b>22,342</b>

## 20-Minute Drive Time Retail Gap

Oak Island				
Primary Trade Area 20-Minute Drive Time Retail Gaps		DOWNTOWN POTENTIAL		
Business Type	Retail Gap	10% of Retail Gap	Sales/SF	SF
		10%	\$300	Needed
Furniture Stores	\$ 8,189,336	\$ 818,934	\$ 300	2,730
Home Furnishings Stores	\$ 7,431,077	\$ 743,108	\$ 300	2,477
Appliance Stores	\$ 3,109,222	\$ 310,922	\$ 300	1,036
Home Centers	\$ 2,198,795	\$ 219,880	\$ 300	733
Paint and Wallpaper Stores	\$ 1,854,813	\$ 185,481	\$ 300	618
Nursery, Garden Center and Farm Supply Stores	\$ 5,924,029	\$ 592,403	\$ 300	1,975
Grocery Stores	\$ 33,054,133	\$ 3,305,413	\$ 300	11,018
Specialty Food Stores	\$ 965,826	\$ 96,583	\$ 300	322
Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores	\$ 821,274	\$ 82,127	\$ 300	274
Cosmetics and Beauty Supplies Stores	\$ 3,692,241	\$ 369,224	\$ 300	1,231
Men's Clothing Stores	\$ 1,267,282	\$ 126,728	\$ 300	422
Women's Clothing Stores	\$ 1,186,555	\$ 118,656	\$ 300	396
Children's and Infants' Clothing	\$ 617,502	\$ 61,750	\$ 300	206
Family Clothing Stores	\$ 17,692,989	\$ 1,769,299	\$ 300	5,898
Clothing Accessories Stores	\$ 1,361,051	\$ 136,105	\$ 300	454
Shoe Stores	\$ 1,422,247	\$ 142,225	\$ 300	474
Jewelry Stores	\$ 1,946,511	\$ 194,651	\$ 300	649
Luggage and Leather Goods Stores	\$ 3,303,090	\$ 330,309	\$ 300	1,101
Sporting Goods Stores	\$ 6,852,273	\$ 685,227	\$ 300	2,284
Hobby, Toy and Game Stores	\$ 2,542,847	\$ 254,285	\$ 300	848
Book Stores	\$ 1,488,477	\$ 148,848	\$ 300	496
Florists	\$ 720,636	\$ 72,064	\$ 300	240
Office Supplies and Stationary Stores	\$ 990,969	\$ 99,097	\$ 300	330
Gift, Novelty and Souvenir Stores	\$ 1,102,098	\$ 110,210	\$ 300	367
Used Merchandise Stores	\$ 2,138,243	\$ 213,824	\$ 300	713
Drinking Places	\$ 1,913,174	\$ 191,317	\$ 300	638
Full-Service Restaurants	\$ 26,310,961	\$ 2,631,096	\$ 300	8,770
Limited-Service Restaurants	\$ 15,013,879	\$ 1,501,388	\$ 300	5,005
<b>Total Gap</b>	<b>\$ 155,111,530</b>	<b>\$ 15,511,153</b>	<b>\$ 300</b>	<b>51,704</b>

## 10-Minute Drive Time Retail Surplus

Category	Retail Surplus
Hardware Stores	\$ 662,609
Grocery Stores	\$ 1,715,398
Beer, Wine and Liquor	\$ 1,852,603
Limited-Service Restaurants	\$ 13,332,126

## 20-Minute Drive Time Retail Surplus

Category	Retail Surplus
Electronics Stores	\$ 10,262,441
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$ 2,275,438
Department Stores	\$ 1,238,005

The retail surpluses confirm that Oak Island is attracting a disproportionate amount of retail sales in these categories and potential exists to attract additional retail and restaurant establishments to take advantage of the additional business potential.

Below are two tables showing the projected sales growth in different commercial categories. This information can help your recruitment process.

### 10-Minute Drive Time Measurement

Oak Island Demand Growth by Retail Store Types				
Primary Trade Area: 10-Minute Drive Time				
Business Type	2025	2030	Growth	Compound
	Demand	Demand	\$	Growth Rate (%)
Furniture Stores	\$ 3,857,404	\$ 4,945,023	\$ 1,087,619	5
Home Furnishings Stores	\$ 3,125,430	\$ 3,938,619	\$ 813,189	5
Appliance Stores	\$ 1,069,578	\$ 1,345,977	\$ 276,399	5
Electronics Stores	\$ 3,162,600	\$ 3,951,517	\$ 788,917	5
Home Centers	\$ 11,579,971	\$ 14,724,997	\$ 3,145,027	5
Paint and Wallpaper Stores	\$ 958,615	\$ 1,229,304	\$ 270,688	5
Hardware Stores	\$ 2,145,575	\$ 2,730,461	\$ 584,886	5
Nursery, Garden Center and Farm Supply Stores	\$ 2,453,197	\$ 3,109,718	\$ 656,521	5
Grocery Stores	\$ 36,137,346	\$ 44,616,490	\$ 8,479,143	4
Specialty Food Stores	\$ 1,176,435	\$ 1,454,825	\$ 278,390	4
Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores	\$ 3,403,783	\$ 4,255,282	\$ 851,499	5
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$ 16,684,386	\$ 19,955,659	\$ 3,271,272	4
Cosmetics and Beauty Supplies Stores	\$ 1,396,406	\$ 1,670,180	\$ 273,774	4
Women's Clothing Stores	\$ 1,878,813	\$ 2,104,563	\$ 225,750	2
Family Clothing Stores	\$ 6,460,679	\$ 7,287,278	\$ 826,599	2
Shoe Stores	\$ 1,513,343	\$ 1,720,026	\$ 206,683	3
Jewelry Stores	\$ 1,499,232	\$ 1,733,320	\$ 234,088	3
Luggage and Leather Goods Stores	\$ 1,128,004	\$ 1,258,886	\$ 130,883	2
Hobby, Toy and Game Stores	\$ 883,715	\$ 1,103,797	\$ 220,082	5
Book Stores	\$ 538,861	\$ 655,391	\$ 116,530	4
Department Stores	\$ 2,664,708	\$ 3,001,311	\$ 336,603	2
Florists	\$ 427,349	\$ 543,888	\$ 116,539	5
Gift, Novelty and Souvenir Stores	\$ 919,063	\$ 1,083,220	\$ 164,157	3
Used Merchandise Stores	\$ 1,242,731	\$ 1,404,362	\$ 161,630	2
Pet and Pet Supplies Stores	\$ 1,463,193	\$ 1,845,307	\$ 382,114	5
Drinking Places	\$ 2,049,879	\$ 2,551,243	\$ 501,363	4
Full Service Restaurants	\$ 25,849,387	\$ 31,703,250	\$ 5,853,863	4
Limited Service Restaurants	\$ 21,402,181	\$ 26,151,112	\$ 4,748,931	4
<b>Total Sales</b>	<b>\$ 157,071,864</b>	<b>\$ 192,075,006</b>	<b>\$ 35,003,139</b>	

Note: The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is the annualized average rate of revenue growth between two given years, assuming growth takes place at an exponentially compounded rate. The most important factor in both charts is the amount of projected growth per category.

## 20-Minute Drive Time Measurement

Oak Island Demand Growth by Retail Store Types				
Primary Trade Area 20-Minute Drive Time		DOWNTOWN POTENTIAL		Compound
Business Type	2025	2030	Growth	Growth
	Demand	Demand	\$	Rate (%)
Furniture Stores	\$ 11,780,964	\$ 15,138,004	\$ 3,357,039	5
Home Furnishings Stores	\$ 9,404,662	\$ 11,886,479	\$ 2,481,817	5
Appliance Stores	\$ 3,109,222	\$ 3,929,606	\$ 820,384	5
Electronics Stores	\$ 9,041,662	\$ 11,356,818	\$ 2,315,342	5
Home Centers	\$ 33,996,147	\$ 43,572,901	\$ 9,576,754	5
Paint and Wallpaper Stores	\$ 2,790,613	\$ 3,606,344	\$ 815,731	5
Hardware Stores	\$ 6,297,422	\$ 8,079,282	\$ 1,781,860	5
Nursery, Garden and Farm Supply Stores	\$ 7,188,062	\$ 9,164,009	\$ 1,975,946	5
Grocery Stores	\$ 102,758,887	\$ 127,301,119	\$ 24,542,231	4
Specialty Food Stores	\$ 3,344,432	\$ 4,149,776	\$ 805,344	4
Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores	\$ 9,984,555	\$ 12,564,580	\$ 2,580,025	5
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$ 47,649,145	\$ 57,242,995	\$ 9,593,850	4
Cosmetics and Beauty Supplies	\$ 3,989,503	\$ 4,794,607	\$ 805,304	4
Men's Clothing Stores	\$ 1,267,282	\$ 1,412,830	\$ 145,548	2
Women's Clothing Stores	\$ 5,491,702	\$ 6,164,699	\$ 672,997	2
Shoe Stores	\$ 7,934,221	\$ 8,270,637	\$ 336,415	1
Family Clothing Stores	\$ 18,944,563	\$ 21,473,486	\$ 2,528,923	3
Clothing Accessories Stores	\$ 1,907,189	\$ 2,133,029	\$ 225,840	2
Shoe Stores	\$ 4,381,302	\$ 5,004,756	\$ 623,454	3
Jewelry Stores	\$ 4,406,858	\$ 5,108,943	\$ 702,085	3
Luggage and Leather Goods Stores	\$ 3,303,090	\$ 3,705,951	\$ 402,862	2
Sporting Goods Stores	\$ 8,065,466	\$ 9,961,691	\$ 1,896,224	4
Hobby, Toy and Game Stores	\$ 2,542,847	\$ 3,190,725	\$ 647,879	5
Book Stores	\$ 1,553,563	\$ 1,887,309	\$ 333,746	4
Department Stores	\$ 7,781,163	\$ 8,806,307	\$ 1,025,144	3
Florists	\$ 1,271,932	\$ 1,627,975	\$ 356,043	5
Office Supplies and Stationary Stores	\$ 990,969	\$ 1,224,013	\$ 233,044	4
Gift, Novelty and Souvenir Stores	\$ 2,707,672	\$ 3,202,754	\$ 495,082	3
Used Merchandise Stores	\$ 3,615,820	\$ 4,087,883	\$ 472,063	2
Pet and Pet Supply Stores	\$ 4,147,070	\$ 5,236,718	\$ 1,089,648	5
Drinking Places	\$ 6,129,761	\$ 7,692,974	\$ 1,563,213	5
Full Service Restaurants	\$ 76,115,886	\$ 93,985,112	\$ 17,869,225	4
Limited Service Restaurants	\$ 62,731,094	\$ 77,128,018	\$ 14,396,924	4
<b>Total Sales</b>	<b>\$ 476,624,726</b>	<b>\$ 584,092,330</b>	<b>\$ 107,467,986</b>	

Note: The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is the annualized average rate of revenue growth between two given years, assuming growth takes place at an exponentially compounded rate. The most important factor in both charts is the amount of projected growth per category.

### Oak Island Demographics

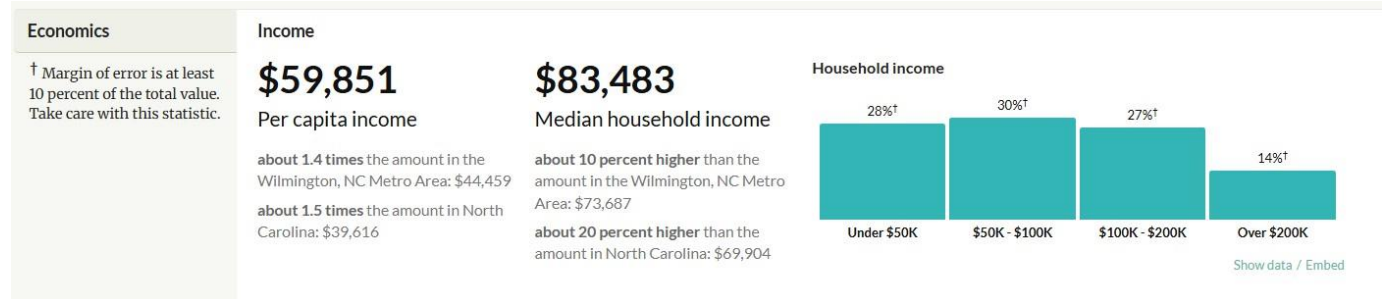
#### **Population (Source: U.S. Census)**

- 9,322 (2024)
- 8,396 (2020)
  - +11.0% in four years.

## Retail Sales per Capita (Source: U.S. Census QuickFacts and Placer.ai mobile location data)

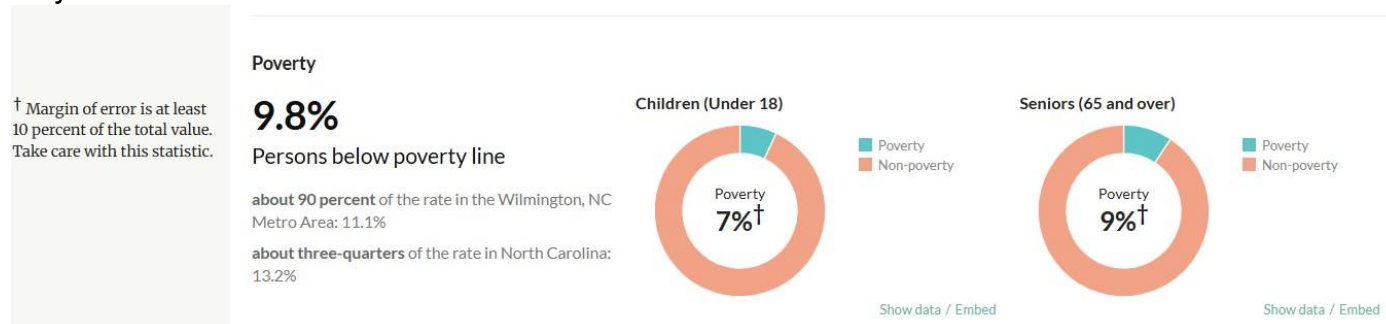
- \$13.93 retail sales per capita for Oak Island
  - \$14.54 retail sales per capita for Brunswick County
- 5.8% of Brunswick County retail sales are produced by Oak Island.
  - Oak Island accounts for 6.0% of the county population.
  - This indicates the need for additional retail and restaurant opportunities.
- 4.2 million annual visitors enter the two Oak Island commercial areas.

## Income



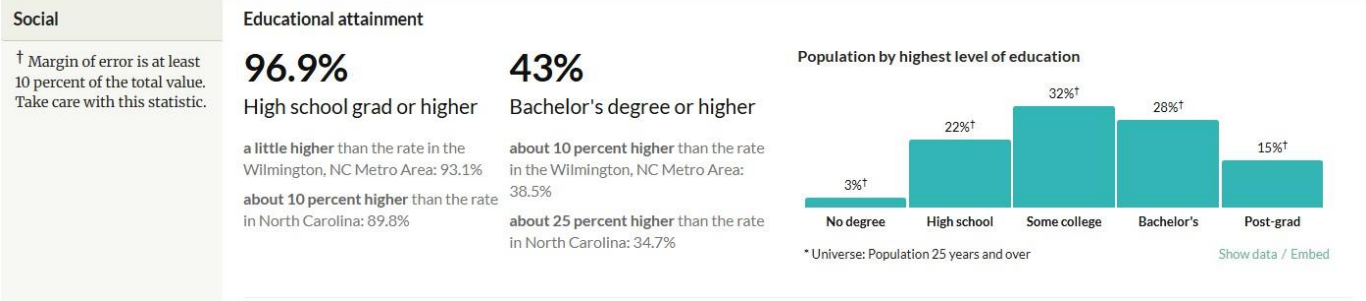
- \$83,483 Median Household Income
- 30% earn between \$50,000 and \$100,000.
- 27% earn between \$100,000 and \$200,000.
- 14% earn over \$200,000.

## Poverty



- 9.8% poverty rate
  - 90% of the Wilmington, NC rate of 11.1%
  - ¾ of the North Carolina poverty rate of 13.2%.

## Educational attainment



- 43% of residents have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher.
  - 10% higher than the Wilmington NC Metro Area of 38.5%
  - 25% higher than the North Carolina rate of 34.7%
    - This translates into higher spending power.



U.S. Census on the Map

- 1,346 workers enter Oak Island daily for employment.
- 393 workers both live and work in Oak Island.
- 2,583 workers exit Oak Island daily for employment.
  - 1,739 workers both enter and live and work in Oak Island daily.
    - These are potential local consumers.

### Summary

- 11% population growth over four years.
- 4.2 million annual visitors to Oak Island commercial areas.
- \$83,483 median household income.

- 43% of residents have earned bachelor's degree or higher education.
- Retail sales per capita are lower than in Brunswick County.
- With such positive demographics, Oak Island should seek potential retail and restaurant opportunities to help capture business escaping to neighboring communities.

The above data can be used to help recruit businesses to Oak Island to meet the unmet potential and reduce the retail gap or leakage. The priorities are to first retain, then expand and finally to recruit new businesses. The categories that show the most potential should be focused on first, especially within the 10-minute drive time to Oak Island. This data can help existing businesses realize there may be potential to expand to capture additional retail sales.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

### **1. Retail Gap**

At both the 10-and 20-minute drive time measurements, retail gaps are seen in furniture, home furnishings, appliances, home centers, paint and wallpaper, nursery, garden center and farm supplies, cosmetics and beauty supplies, women's clothing, family clothing, shoes, jewelry, luggage and leather goods, sporting goods, hobbies, toys and games, books, used merchandise, and full-service restaurants. At only the 10-minute drive time measurement, retail gaps are seen in electronics, pharmacies and drug stores, department stores, and pet and pet supplies. At only the 20-minute drive time measurement, retail gaps are seen in groceries, specialty foods, beer, wine and liquor, men's clothing, children's and infants' clothing, clothing accessories, florists, office supplies and stationery, gifts, novelties and souvenirs, drinking places and limited-service restaurants.

### **2. Retail Surplus**

At the 10-minute drive time measurement, retail surpluses are seen in hardware, groceries, beer, wine and liquor and limited-service restaurants. At the 20-minute drive time measurements, retail surpluses are seen in electronics, pharmacies and drugs and department stores.

### 3. Intersection of Retail Gaps and Projected Sales Growth (2025-2030)

Oak Island Retail Gaps and Projected Sales Growth (2025-30)				
	Retail Gaps		Projected Growth	
	10-Minute	20-Minute	10-Minute	20-Minute
Category	Drive Time	Drive Time	Drive Time	Drive Time
Furniture	\$2,480,237	\$8,183,336	\$1,087,619	\$3,357,039
Home Furnishings	\$1,594,404	\$7,431,077	\$813,189	\$2,481,817
Appliances	\$1,069,578	\$3,109,222	\$276,399	\$820,384
Electronics	\$3,067,380		\$788,917	\$2,315,342
Home Centers	\$11,579,971	\$2,198,795	\$3,145,027	\$9,576,754
Paint and Wallpaper	\$727,389	\$1,854,813	\$270,688	\$815,731
Nursery, Garden Centers and Farm Supplies	\$2,453,197	\$5,924,029	\$656,521	\$1,975,946
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$13,365,911		\$3,271,272	\$9,593,850
Cosmetics and Beauty Supplies	\$1,216,705	\$3,692,241	\$273,774	\$805,304
Women's Clothing	\$1,873,267	\$1,186,555	\$225,750	\$672,997
Family Clothing	\$6,037,363	\$17,692,989	\$826,599	\$2,528,923
Shoes	\$1,512,121	\$1,422,247	\$206,683	\$623,454
Jewelry	\$1,499,232	\$1,946,511	\$234,088	\$702,085
Luggage and Leather Goods	\$1,128,004	\$3,303,090	\$130,883	\$402,862
Sporting Goods	\$1,807,181	\$6,852,273		\$1,896,224
Hobbies, Toys and Games	\$883,715	\$2,542,847	\$220,082	\$647,879
Books	\$538,861	\$1,488,477	\$116,530	\$333,746
Department Stores	\$2,664,708		\$336,603	\$1,025,144
Used Merchandise	\$701,525	\$2,138,243	\$161,630	\$472,063
Pet and Pet Supplies	\$1,463,193		\$382,114	\$1,089,648
Full-Service Restaurants	\$9,375,593	\$26,310,961	\$5,853,863	\$17,869,225
Groceries		\$33,054,133	\$8,749,143	\$24,542,231
Specialty Foods		\$965,826	\$278,390	\$805,344
Beer, Wine and Liquor		\$821,274	\$851,499	\$2,580,025
Men's Clothing		\$1,267,282		\$145,548
Children's and Infants' Clothing		\$617,502		
Clothing Accessories		\$1,361,051		\$225,840
Florists		\$720,636	\$116,539	\$356,043
Office Supplies and Stationary		\$990,969		\$233,044
Gifts, Novelties and Souvenirs		\$1,102,098	\$164,157	\$495,082
Drinking Places		\$1,913,174	\$501,363	\$1,563,213
Limited-Service Restaurants		\$15,013,879	\$4,748,931	\$14,396,924

The combination of current retail gaps and projected sales growth will provide confidence of the potential success of prospective Oak Island business owners.

#### **4. Business Resources**

Former Main Street Director Diane Young created the Downtown Directors' Guide to Working with Development Projects--<https://www.ncmainstreetandplanning.com/economic-vitality>-- an invaluable resource for downtown revitalization. Hilary Greenburg of Greenburg Development Services has created business recruitment and retention guides. They are both available on the Main Street and Rural Planning Center web site. All these resources are recommended.

There is additional Claritas retail data and the U.S. Census Quickfacts report to support your retail recruitment efforts.

If you have any questions concerning the above information, do not hesitate to contact Downtown Development Specialist Mike Dougherty at [mike.dougherty@commerce.nc.gov](mailto:mike.dougherty@commerce.nc.gov) or 919-923-6645.

Sources: Claritas Retail Data

<http://doc.arcgis.com/en/esri-demographics/data/tapestry-segmentation>

Brunswick County map—Glen Locascio, NC Department of Commerce

## Appendix 3: Project Development Vision Boards

**Project/Action 2.4:** Host an annual “State of Oak Island Business” forum to share data, gather feedback, and strengthen dialogue between businesses, residents, and Town leadership.

An annual “**State of Oak Island Business**” forum could be structured as a community-oriented event where Town leadership shares key economic indicators such as visitation trends, business licensing data, redevelopment projects, and tourism activity. The event could include a short presentation followed by facilitated discussion tables where business owners and residents provide feedback on issues such as parking, marketing, infrastructure, or workforce needs. Informational displays or booths could highlight business resources, grant opportunities, and upcoming Town initiatives. The renderings illustrate a format commonly used for these events, with presentation space, informational displays, and breakout discussion areas that encourage direct conversation between businesses, residents, and Town leadership.

### Small-Town North Carolina Examples

#### Elizabeth City

Elizabeth City regularly hosts economic development briefings and “State of the Community” events through the city and local chamber where leaders present updates on business growth, downtown investment, and tourism data. These meetings bring together business owners, local officials, and residents to review progress and discuss priorities for the upcoming year.

#### Edenton

The Town of Edenton and the Edenton Chowan Partnership periodically host business roundtables and economic development updates that share tourism trends, downtown revitalization initiatives, and investment activity while gathering feedback from local businesses and property owners.

#### Hillsborough

Hillsborough holds stakeholder meetings and downtown business forums through the Hillsborough/Orange County Chamber of Commerce, where municipal leaders and business organizations present economic updates and facilitate discussion about downtown vitality, small business support, and tourism.

#### New Bern

Organizations such as Swiss Bear, Inc. host annual meetings and stakeholder forums that share downtown economic data, highlight development projects, and provide a structured opportunity for business owners and residents to engage directly with local leadership.



Annual forums like these create a consistent feedback loop between local government and the business community. By sharing data transparently and providing structured discussion opportunities, communities strengthen trust, identify challenges early, and align economic development priorities. For Oak Island, establishing a recurring “State of Oak Island Business” forum would help maintain open communication with local businesses while reinforcing the Town’s commitment to supporting a resilient and collaborative local economy.

**Goal 3:** Host an annual street festival or activation event to engage at least 30 businesses and attract 1000 attendees each year by 2030.

The envisioned corridor festival is designed as a collaborative event between the Town and local businesses to celebrate and strengthen Oak Island’s commercial areas while bringing residents and visitors directly into storefronts. Ideally scheduled just before the tourism season begins or shortly after it ends, the event would focus primarily on engaging residents, local customers, and existing businesses rather than peak-season visitors. The festival would connect the two commercial clusters along East Oak Island Drive by activating adjacent parking lots and side streets, creating a walkable network of activity that encourages attendees to explore multiple businesses.



Temporary elements such as vendor tents, pop-up retail, local art displays, live demonstrations, and small educational booths could highlight corridor revitalization efforts, available storefront opportunities, and future improvements. Wayfinding signs and programming would guide attendees between businesses and festival areas, ensuring the event supports storefront activity rather than concentrating solely in one location. By partnering closely with business owners and spreading activities across the corridor, the festival can showcase Oak Island’s local economy, build community pride, and introduce residents to businesses they may not normally visit.

**Project/Action 4.2:** Advance corridor revitalization along East Oak Island Drive through streetscape planning, design standards, and priority safety and placemaking improvements.

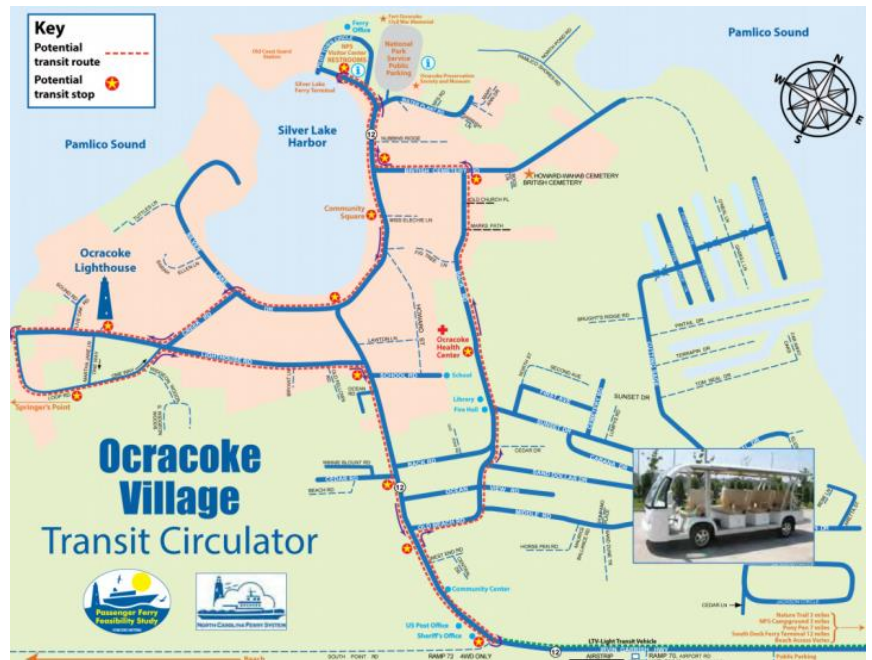


The conceptual streetscape renderings illustrate how East Oak Island Drive could become a safer and more attractive commercial corridor through targeted improvements that do not require roadway widening. Potential enhancements include adding sidewalks where gaps exist, clearly marked crosswalks, decorative lighting, landscaping, and other small streetscape elements that improve walkability and create a more welcoming environment. Because East Oak Island Drive is a state-maintained roadway, coordination with the North Carolina Department of Transportation will be essential for improvements within the right-of-way. Property owner participation will also be important, as façade upgrades, landscaping, and consistent design can help create a cohesive corridor identity. Many communities implement these types of improvements incrementally by leveraging available transportation, infrastructure, and placemaking grant programs.



**Project/Action 5.2:** Implement parking and pedestrian wayfinding signage to improve visibility of existing public parking and strengthen connections between parking areas and businesses. **AND Project/Action 5.3:** Explore shuttle services, golf-cart rentals, or micro-transit partnerships with local businesses.

A useful case study for seasonal micro-transit in coastal communities is the tram system on Ocracoke Island. Because parking in the village is limited and many visitors arrive by ferry, the community encourages travelers to park once and use alternative transportation such as walking, biking, golf carts, or the free village tram. The open-air tram operates on a continuous loop through the village with clearly marked stops and runs approximately every 30 minutes during the peak tourism season, allowing visitors to easily move between shops, restaurants, lodging, and waterfront destinations without needing a car. This approach reduces congestion, improves visitor mobility, and supports local businesses by making it easier for people to circulate throughout the commercial district. A similar seasonal shuttle or micro-transit approach along East Oak Island Drive could help connect parking areas, beach access points, and commercial destinations while enhancing the overall visitor experience and reducing traffic pressure during peak tourism periods.



The conceptual renderings illustrate how this type of system could function locally, showing small shuttle vehicles stopping along the corridor, improved sidewalks and crosswalks for safe pedestrian access, and visitors traveling by bike, golf cart, or on foot between businesses and nearby parking areas.



**Project Action 7.6:** Implement signature gateway improvements—including landscaping, lighting, and streetscape upgrades—by FY 2028-29.

Creating a welcoming and clearly identifiable entrance into the Town of Oak Island is an important part of shaping visitors’ first impressions and helping people orient themselves as they arrive. Many travelers pass through this corridor before crossing the bridges onto the island, making it a key opportunity to communicate community identity and guide visitors toward local businesses, parks, and recreational opportunities that may not be immediately visible from the main roadway. Thoughtful streetscape elements such as coordinated signage, landscaping, and wayfinding can help signal that travelers are entering the town while also directing them to commercial areas, recreation areas, and other destinations. Improving the visual quality and clarity of this approach corridor supports local businesses by increasing awareness of nearby amenities and encourages visitors to explore beyond the main travel route.

The renderings illustrate potential streetscape improvements that could enhance the visual quality and functionality of this corridor without altering the roadway or adjacent buildings. Improvements may include coordinated landscaping using low-maintenance coastal plantings, organized and upgraded signage to better highlight nearby businesses and destinations, and clearly marked pedestrian crossings where appropriate to improve connectivity between commercial areas. Additional elements such as decorative planters, defined planting beds, and consolidated wayfinding can help reduce visual clutter while creating a more cohesive and attractive streetscape. These types of improvements are generally lower-cost and can often be implemented incrementally, allowing the Town to improve the appearance and usability of the corridor while minimizing construction impacts and maintaining compatibility with existing transportation infrastructure.

