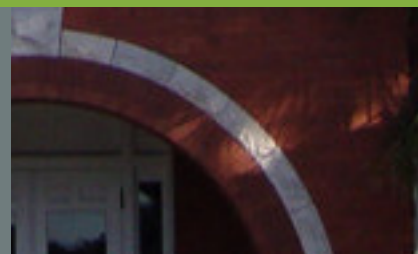


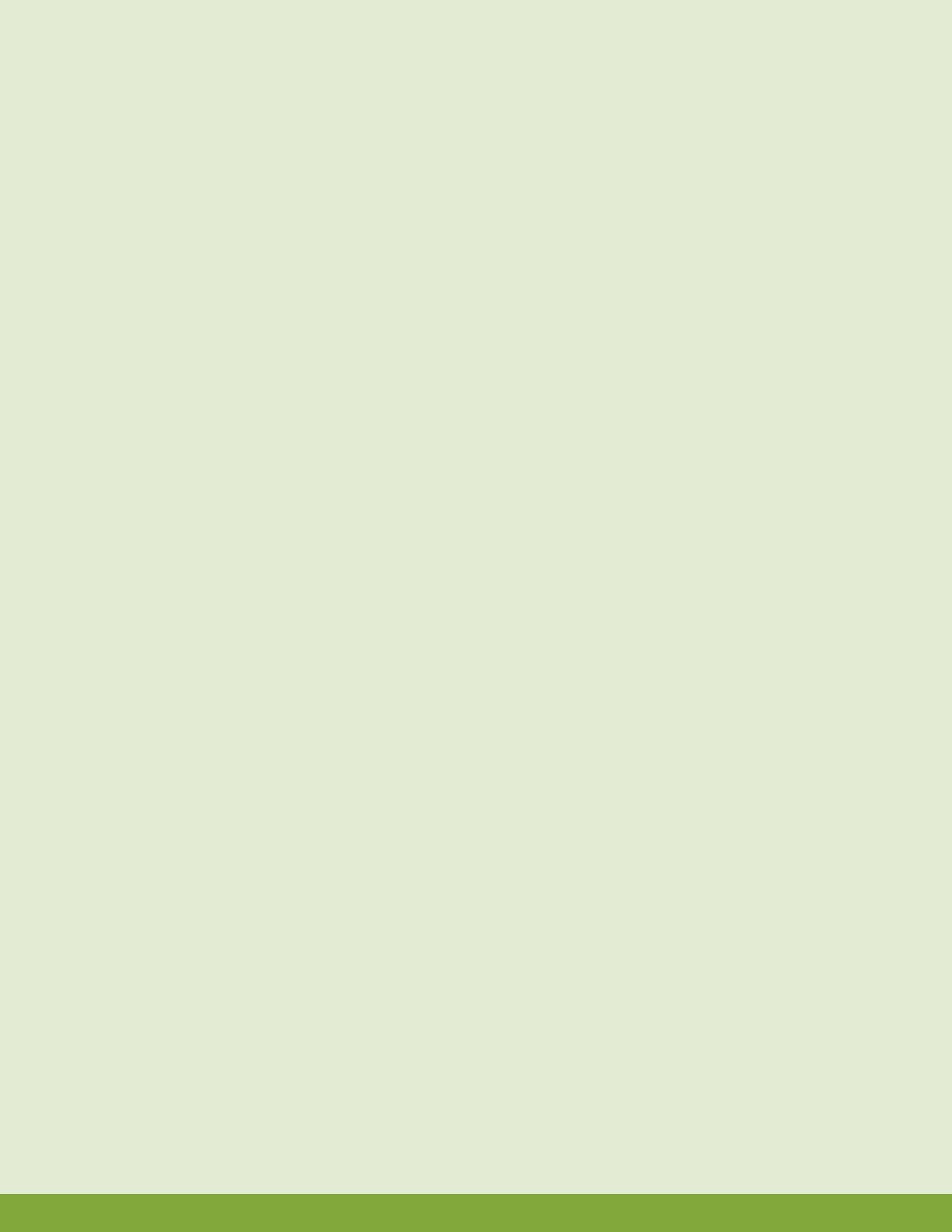


# CITY OF STARKE & BRADFORD COUNTY

mini-Technical Assistance Panel

**ULI North Florida Center for Leadership  
Class of 2019**





# Preface

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## **About ULI**

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a nonprofit education and research institute supported by its members. Its mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities. Established in 1936, ULI has more than 45,000 members worldwide representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines. The North Florida District Council was formed in 2005 and approximately 550 members in 34 counties, including the cities of Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Gainesville, Tallahassee, Panama City and Pensacola.

## **ULI's Center for Leadership (CFL)**

In 2018, ULI North Florida developed its inaugural Center for Leadership to cultivate leadership and foster professional growth for real estate professionals from all industry disciplines. The program provides advanced leadership training, inside knowledge of successful real estate projects throughout the region, an opportunity to help mold the future of our communities, and a multilevel network that will boost careers and business.

One component of the Center for Leadership is to incorporate a mini-Technical Assistance Program into the class. This year's case study focused on the economic impacts of the US 301 bypass on both the City of Starke and Bradford County. Class participants were divided into teams and challenged to collaborate and develop a series of recommendations to help with the challenges facing both the City and County.

## **What are Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)?**

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPS) are available as a service to communities, nonprofits, public entities or private enterprises facing real estate or land-use issues.

ULI North Florida assembles a multidisciplinary panel of experts that explore the project, interview stakeholders, and make recommendations. TAP panelists consist of unpaid volunteers from throughout the ULI membership recruited specifically for each assignment. Depending on the issues being tackled, panel member expertise may be comprised of developers and owners, investors, designers, planners, engineers, market and financial analysts, as well as members of the public sector. The strength of ULI North Florida's Technical Assistance Panels lies in bringing together a cross-section of experts who don't have a vested interest in the project to examine the issues from multiple angles and produce recommendations and/or implementation strategies based on sound information, community realities, and best practices.

## **How Does the Program Work?**

TAP members are briefed on the issues facing the Sponsor and receive detailed information relevant to the task, such as the project history, detailed maps of the study area, relevant demographics and other data necessary for an understanding of the task at hand. During the two-day program, TAP members tour the study area, interview stakeholders, and work collaboratively to produce preliminary findings and recommendations which are presented after the TAP workshop in either a private or public forum. A complete report follows within about six to eight weeks with detailed recommendations.

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# Sponsor and ULI Participants

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## Sponsor

**City of Starke & Bradford County**

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# Background

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The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) started work in late February 2016 on an improvement project on the Interstate 10 and U.S. 301 interchange near Baldwin. The reconstruction project is designed to accommodate increased truck traffic and ease traffic backups, allowing US-301 northbound traffic to smoothly exit onto I-10. Northbound trucks using U.S. 301 are primarily heading to Jacksonville or points north.

The FDOT stated purposes of the bypass include:

- Reduce traffic congestion
- Reduce effects from heavy truck traffic (fumes, noise, vibrations)
- Reduce emergency response time
- Improve travel time

Florida is a major player in the global economy. In 2018, Florida companies exported more than \$57 billion worth of goods to more than 200 countries around the world – making it the eighth-largest exporting state in the country, with most of those loads moving on Florida highways. The existing I-10-U.S. 301 interchange features two major truck stops that attract a sizable concentration of truck traffic.

The interchange project includes new ramps and bridges to correct the following deficiencies:

- Substandard loop ramps
- Insufficient deceleration ramp length
- Insufficient queue storage on U.S. 301
- A short weaving distance between loop ramps and southbound U.S. 301
- Substandard vertical clearance under the bridges

Because of these deficiencies, truck traffic often backs up waiting to make the northbound U.S. 301 to eastbound I-10 movement.

The bypass, when completed, will re-route traffic that currently utilizes US 301 around the City of Starke.



# Scope of Work

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ULI North Florida's Center for Leadership class was asked to evaluate the economic impacts of the US 301 bypass on both the City of Starke and Bradford County and recommend proposals that would both mitigate negative impacts and augment economic expansion in the area. Specifically, they were directed to:

- Evaluate and recommend repurposing/redeveloping real estate with a focus on post-by-pass traffic
- Evaluate and recommend avenues to attract new industries/businesses that may thrive despite the bypass
- Address the lack of public transportation
- Address the lack of infrastructure issues, including water/sewer (availability and cost), electricity (reliability and cost), broadband internet and public safety
- Develop "family" destination attractions/Main Street historic/shopping district
- Address the lack of signage and access to travelers
- Focus on redevelopment that does not require regular truck traffic to thrive
- Recommend changes in zoning classifications
- Recommend goals and objectives for economic expansion of the county and city, including ways to enhance intergovernmental cooperation and coordination between the City of Starke and Bradford County to best address the anticipated impacts of the US 301 bypass; and
- Recommend ways to enhance regional coordination with neighboring counties to capitalize on respective resources and/or anticipated growth needs.



# Recommendations

## Capitalize on the Abundant Natural Resources in the Area to Create a Sportsman's Paradise

Bradford County has numerous local outdoor resources and recreational opportunities, many of which are not widely known outside of the area. Outdoor recreation is a \$180 billion a year business in Florida. This includes \$90 billion in direct spending, \$70 billion in visitor spending, and \$20 billion in resident spending annually. A 2017 study of recreational spending by residents conducted by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) showed that 36% of expenditures was for food/beverage, 36% was for transportation and lodging, 16% was for recurring costs such as entrance fees/bait, etc., and 12% was spent on recreational gear.



Bradford County/Starke can capture a part of this industry with a focus on marketing, strategic alliances, and a series of low-cost infrastructure improvements towards attracting outdoor recreationalists. Starke, in particular, can become a regional destination for people from North Florida for outdoors-oriented day-trip activities, such as parks, agritourism and fishing, while also becoming a niche destination for overnight visitation for mountain biking and tournament bass fishing and other family-friendly events.



### Mountain Biking

One trend that can act as a catalyst for economic development is mountain biking tourism. Mountain biking primarily focuses on off-road travel, such as gravel, dirt roads, and uneven terrains, and provides an environment-friendly industry that offers healthy, recreational, and non-polluting sustainable transport to riders. This industry has the potential to generate nearly \$1 million in spending for the local economy, as statistics show that a premier mountain biking event can average \$400 a trip in direct spending.

- Contact the Jacksonville chapter of the Southern Off-road Bicycle Association (SORBA), which has more than 4,000 members, to gauge their members' interest in traveling to Starke for a new premier mountain biking experience.
- Partner with large landowners in the county (i.e., Rayonier) and Camp Blanding to acquire a small mountain biking destination park that can also be linked to linear trail riding on large timberland properties.
- Explore trail connection opportunities to the Florida Trail and Lake Butler Trail in Hampton. The Trail stretches 9.3 miles between Hampton and New River, just southwest of Starke, and is maintained by Florida State Parks.



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## Fishing

Bass fishing is a \$1.2 billion industry annually in Florida. In Putnam County, the Rodman Reservoir hosts bass tournaments that generate several million dollars in economic impact. Bradford County is home to four publicly accessible lakes, which represent a source of untapped potential revenue.

- Perform a recreational resource assessment to determine the adequacy of public resources to support access and utilization of local fisheries.
- Engage Bassmasters and other premier tournament-level hosts to inquire as to whether Kingsley Lake would be a significant tournament draw. Only six miles east of Starke, it is steeped in history and geological significance, as well as being one of the most popular recreational spots in Northeast Florida. It is also the most stable lake in the North Central Florida area, according to U.S. Geological Survey data, seldom fluctuating more than 16 to 18 inches in measurements above sea level. The water remains cool during the summer months, since it is fed by underground springs around the shore, as well as in the lake itself.
- Work with Camp Blanding to see if tournament-only access would be permitted.



## Family-Friendly Outdoors (Agritourism, hiking, picnicking, wildlife)

Consumers are showing more interest in learning where their food comes from (Country of Origin, organic and GMO labeled products are on the rise) and the technology behind producing that food. Agritourism not only provides an excellent opportunity to connect agriculture and the general public, it can also provide additional revenue to a farm and the local economy. Recognizing this, the Florida Legislature has passed several different pieces of legislation to encourage this activity in the state.

Hiking, wildlife viewing and picnicking, in addition to beach activities and biking, were the top five outdoor activities cited in the 2017 Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) study. Taking advantage of North Florida's more moderate temperatures than South Florida in the fall, winter and spring, investment in infrastructure to support these activities could provide additional economic activity for the area.

- Promote family-friendly agritourism activities with local farms, including beef cattle and berry farms.
- Request technical assistance from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and inquire about the availability of USDA or state grants/loans to develop the infrastructure for this endeavor.

- Contact Florida’s agritourism association (Visitfloridafarms.com) for marketing assistance. The association entered into an agreement with Visit Florida to promote the activity through the agency.
- Develop nature parks and greenspaces throughout the region. Identify areas near downtown Starke that can offer hiking and picnicking opportunities, thereby increasing stay time in Starke.
- Work with Camp Blanding and the North Florida Land Trust on identifying a park property that could be purchased in the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program. The ACUB program allows installations to work with partners to encumber off-post land to protect habitat and buffer training without acquiring any new land for Army ownership. Through ACUB, the Army reaches out to partners to identify mutual objectives of land conservation and to prevent development of critical open areas. The Army can contribute funds to the partner’s purchase of easements or properties from willing landowners. These partnerships preserve high-value habitat and limit incompatible development in the vicinity of military installations. Establishing buffer areas around Army installations limits the effects of encroachment and maximizes land inside the installation that can be used to support the installation’s mission.
- Review the city’s flood and water control study to determine if there are opportunities to acquire land along Alligator Creek for a linear park.

## Use Agricultural Land to Grow Industrial Hemp

Sustainable Agriculture is an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will over the long term satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends; make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources; sustain the economic vitality of farm operations; and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole. This type of agriculture provides tangible benefits to the community, environment and planet, while also providing significant monetary resources to agriculture producers.

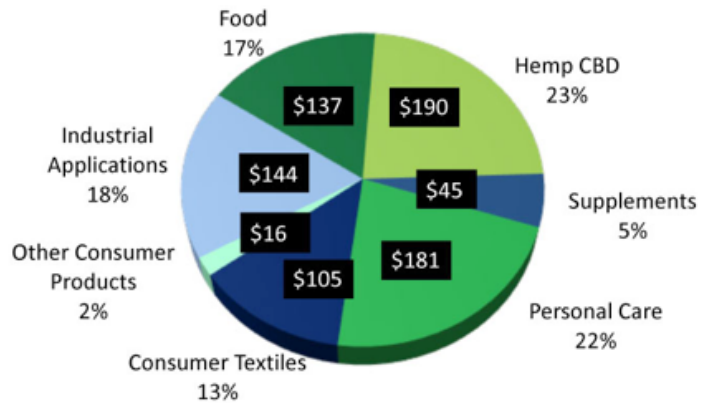


Industrial hemp is a type of sustainable agricultural product that thrives in humid climates, making Florida a logical growing location for the plant. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) estimates hemp will eventually be a \$20 billion to \$30 billion industry in the state. If realized, hemp would become Florida’s highest-grossing agricultural commodity, overtaking citrus and nursery crops. The University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) has heard from more than 200 growers expressing an interest in converting their crops to hemp. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2017 Bradford County had 490 farms totaling 58,841 acres with a net farm income of \$506,000. The market value of Bradford County agriculture in 2017 was \$13 million. With the U.S. importing 150 million tons of raw hemp annually, cultivating a domestic source of hemp could increase that value substantially.

## \$820 Million U.S. Hemp-Based Product Sales by Category in 2017

There are currently more than 25,000 known uses for hemp including:

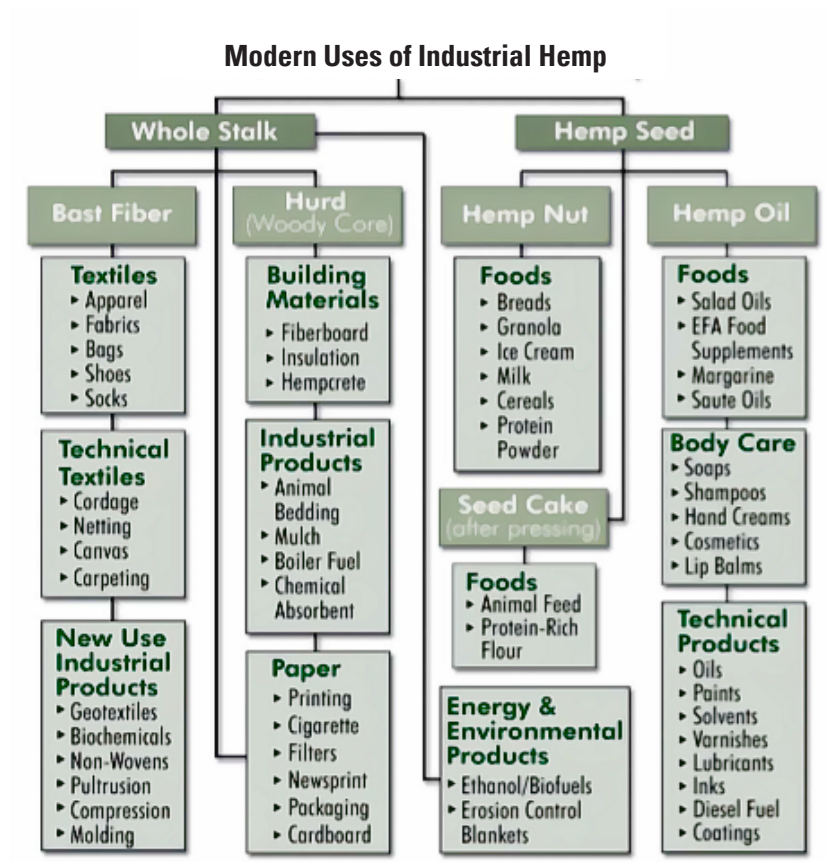
- Textiles
- Building Materials
- Industrial Products
- Foods
- Energy
- Environmental Products
- Body Care
- Technical Products
- Hempcrete (A Green Building Product)



Source: Hemp Business Journal estimates (\$mil., consumer sales)

The 2018 federal Farm Bill allows states to create a hemp regulatory program that meets certain criteria. FDACS anticipates issuing cultivation permits as soon as October 2019. Cultivation will be overseen by FDACS' Division of Plant Industry.

- Contact UF/IFAS to assess the viability of hemp growth in Bradford County.
- Ask UF/IFAS to conduct a hemp workshop for agricultural producers in the area.
- Work closely with FDACS to apply for cultivation permits and assist with other technical issues.



## Activate Call Street

Create a “place” where people want to gather. Focus on programming in the area to bring people downtown from the outlying areas.

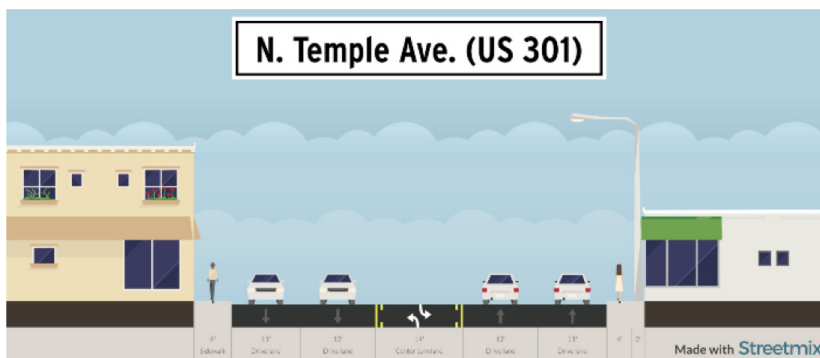
- Clean, paint and upgrade existing façades and landscaping.
- Control vehicle access in the area to encourage walking and provide easy access to parking areas.
- Purchase and have readily available town event materials for display.
- Hire a program/marketing coordinator responsible for:
  - Overseeing the re-design of the City of Starke’s website. This will be the first impression of Starke for most people outside of the area.
  - Digital Marketing
  - Weekly Events
  - Call Street Shutdowns
  - Call Street Improvements
  - Enhancing Downtown Businesses
  - Façade Grant Assistance
- Seed an account to initially fund the program/marketing coordinator position. Solicit local stakeholders, including business owners, the city, and other affected stakeholders, to contribute funds for start-up costs and other costs (mutually agreed upon) until increased economic activity is realized.



## Implement a Complete Streets Approach to Roadway Design

Complete Streets is a transportation design approach that ensures streets are planned, designed, operated, and maintained to enable safe, convenient and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities, regardless of their mode of transportation—pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders. A change from the older model of transportation planning, Complete Streets facilitates the creation of livable communities and significantly improves equity, safety and public health in the area. As part of a Complete Streets strategy:

- Implement a “road diet.” A road diet, also called a lane reduction or road rechannelization, reduces the number of travel lanes and/or effective width of a road in order to achieve systemic improvements.



### Existing Conditions

- Five Lane Section
- Two-way left turn lanes (TWLTL)
- Very small sidewalks
- Buildings close to roadway



### Proposed Road Diet

- Two-lane section
- Wide sidewalks
- Landscaping
- Lighting
- Transit
- Wayfinding signage
- Buffered bike lanes

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Example Components of Complete Streets:



**Sidewalk Cafes**



**Large Pedestrian Areas with Landscaping**



**Buffered Bike Lanes**

- Create a Roundabout at N. Temple Avenue (US 301) and W. Call Street. Roundabouts, versus traditional traffic signals, have been shown to improve safety, reduce collisions by up to 37%, reduce delays and improve traffic flow. They complement Complete Streets initiatives and are aesthetically pleasing. A roundabout here can serve as a gateway to Call Street and can be enhanced with landscaping, fountains and statues.



**Existing Conditions**



**Proposed Conditions**

Starke currently lacks public transportation. Consider implementing a small fleet of buses to provide efficient transportation for citizens connecting the downtown area to the Walmart area to the south and to the government facilities/courthouse area to the north.

## Rethink Future Land Use and Zoning

The City of Starke is largely zoned residential, with commercial land use in a linear pattern on the US 301 corridor and SR 100. Two relatively small industrial areas exist east and southeast of the City's core downtown area. Growth will migrate westerly toward the Limited-Access 301 Bypass, which connects north and south of the City limits; the connection points do not contain planned commercial land use or zoning. In addition, there are no municipal services, such as potable water, sanitary sewer or high-speed internet available along the Limited-Access Bypass route.

- Revise zoning to limit future linear commercial strips in downtown. Cluster retail around major intersections and create more inclusive options for new businesses.
- Review zoning in the industrial areas east and southeast of the City to determine the need for more diverse uses.
- Consider strategic zoning along the Limited-Access 301 Bypass for a balanced commercial zoning node once utilities are present.
- Coordinate zoning with municipal services, such as potable water, sanitary sewer or high-speed internet.
- Strengthen the partnership between the bypass and Starke through signage to direct people to the city.

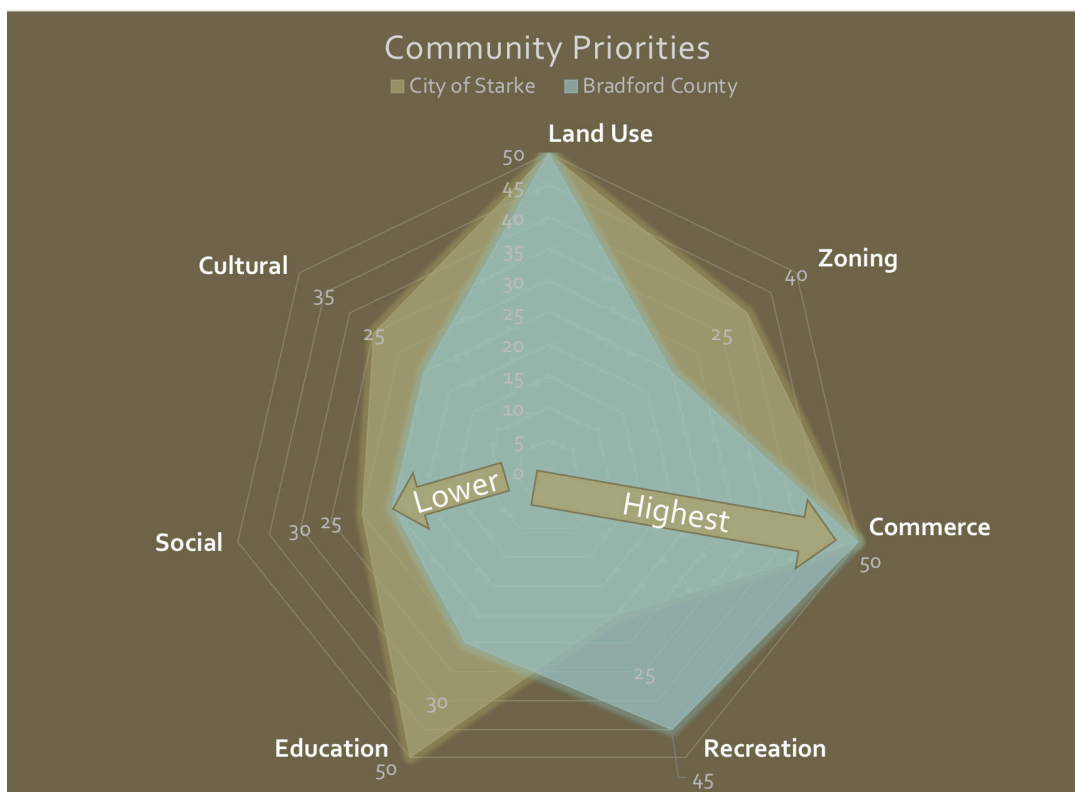
## Attract A New Audience Through A Master Planned Retirement Community

An active adult retirement community is not dependent on employment centers and can generate additional economic growth in hospitality, medical and other professional/service industries. The area's low cost of living is appealing to retirees, and the community can be differentiated from other Florida retirement communities based on a lower price point. The community can also capitalize on the outdoor lifestyle and natural amenities. To finance the infrastructure for the development, consider funding through a Community Development District (CDD).

## Seek alignment between City of Starke and Bradford County on shared goals

Starke is the county seat of Bradford County. As such, the two must align their present and future priorities and agree on mutual goals. These goals should incorporate preserving and capitalizing on the many intrinsic community assets: its residents, beautiful landscape and strong work ethic. Working together, the city and county can attract new employers and accommodate existing business expansion.

- Both entities should review current land usage and consider rezoning to support new businesses.
- Enhance the reliability of water, sewer, electric and broadband in order to attract new businesses.
- Ensure steps are taken to prepare a stable workforce.
- Develop a plan and ensure accountability.





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## Create a Vision Plan

Elected officials, community leaders, stakeholders and the public should be engaged to create a common Strategic Vision. A vision plan will require the city to analyze its current conditions, convene the objectives and goals into a strategy, create a plan of action, and review and revise the plan as needed.

- Conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. Points to consider include:
  - What is the occupancy rate of commercially zoned property in downtown Starke?
  - What factors have influenced, either positively or negatively, the viability of the downtown as a place for commerce, professional offices and social uses?
  - What has history shown around the state and country when a bypass is constructed around a city or town?
- Define a strategy, aligning city and county goals. Include education, job training and job placement processes to ensure a stable workforce.
- Determine priority projects and “easy wins” for earliest implementation such as branding and wayfinding signage.
- Develop a timeline for each milestone with accountability for each action.
- After implementation include reviews at critical junctures to incorporate revisions as needed.

## Conclusion

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Ensuring the continued vitality of Starke and Bradford County after completion of the bypass will take a long-term commitment. To succeed, a collaborative approach between governmental agencies, the business community and residents is critical. When fully realized, implementation of the recommendations contained in this report can result in greater economic development for Starke and Bradford County.



The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.