


FORWARD FOCUS
Eastern Alachua County
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER



Dear Eastern Alachua County Residents,

We're excited to share the June issue of the Forward Focus Newsletter, filled with helpful resources and new opportunities.

Last month, we hosted a productive Community Listening Session in the Melrose area. Later in this issue, you'll find a full recap of what we heard from attendees and the valuable insights they shared.

As we head into summer, we're looking forward to our next session, which will focus on the Rochelle, Windsor, and Grove Park communities. In this newsletter, you'll find all the details—we hope to see you there!

Forward Focus is a three-year initiative, and this first year is all about listening, learning, and building a strong foundation. Our focus right now is research and community input, so we can develop a thoughtful, effective plan to implement over the next two years. Your voice is essential in shaping that plan, and we encourage you to explore the opportunities in this issue to get involved and be heard.

Here for you,

The Forward Focus Team

-Rochelle/Windsor/Grove Park Community Listening Session: 6/12-



Melrose Community Listening Session Recap

Melrose is a vibrant community and a distinctive artistic and musical hub in north-central Florida. Its residents deeply value the town's small-town charm and are passionate about the issues that affect their home. Because Melrose spans multiple counties, it faces unique challenges that differ from those in other parts of Eastern Alachua County. The Forward Focus team was especially grateful to hear from residents about how it can better support their needs. From scenic natural drives to rich creative opportunities, Melrose remains a true gem in the region.

Earlier last month, we asked the Melrose community how we could help. Here is what we heard:

Community Engagement & Planning

- Because Melrose is split across multiple counties, there's a need for better coordination through an interlocal agreement.
- Concerns were raised about property appraisals, especially regarding mobile homes and how values are assessed.
- The community wants more transparency and access to appeal property valuations and better communication with the Property Appraiser's Office.

Economic Development

- There is a strong need for living-wage jobs and small business support.
- Residents want access to job training programs and more information about current local businesses to identify economic gaps.
- The community is interested in bringing in a supermarket or local farmer's market, while also ensuring food safety.
- Challenges in farming due to soil conditions and overregulation were raised.
 - Residents are encouraged to explore [small farmer grants and food safety training](#) programs.
- Ideas to revitalize Melrose's downtown include repainting buildings, adding shady trees, and becoming a walkable "sidewalk community."
- Residents want to ensure new businesses fit the small-town character of Melrose and to support existing businesses by promoting them through platforms like [Visit Gainesville](#).
- Other ideas included offering low-interest farm loans and starting a tractor rental service.

Healthcare & Public Safety

- The volunteer fire unit is underfunded, and residents want Alachua County to increase its support.
- 911 response times are a concern, and many residents expressed the need for a pharmacy, doctor's office, and better transportation to Gainesville for medical appointments.
- Melrose is currently a food desert, with the loss of a grocery store to a liquor store.

Music Festival Concerns

- No formal music festival proposal has been submitted yet, but residents want to stay informed if one moves forward.
- Opinions are mixed. Some see opportunities to grow local arts and attract youth, while others worry about noise, safety, traffic, & neighborhood impact.
- Residents asked for transparency in the planning process and a chance for community voices to be heard.

Transportation

- Speeding and reckless driving are major concerns on SR 26, SR 21, 219A.
- Residents suggested more law enforcement presence, better signage, and possibly using old police cars or radar signs to slow traffic.
- Cut-through traffic and large trucks disturb residential neighborhoods like Grove, Center, Quail St., and Hampton.
- There's a need for better traffic flow and timing at key intersections, especially during school and rush hours.
- Transportation challenges also include:
 - Lack of school buses for Melrose students due to the school being in Putnam County.
 - Poor maintenance of limestone roads like Quail Street.
 - No public transportation options and questions about extending RTS.
 - Requests for bike trails, sidewalks, and a crosswalk on Trout Street.

Youth Concerns

- There are few safe spaces for children to play or gather.
- Residents want a public pool and a water safety program to prevent child drownings.
- Community members expressed a strong desire for post-high school opportunities, like a Santa Fe College satellite campus focused on trades such as welding and gunsmithing.
- Many rural students are not attending college, so trade programs are seen as a key path to economic stability.
- The Alachua County startup trade program with Santa Fe should be promoted more in Melrose schools.
- There is no current transportation to Santa Fe, which limits participation.

Did We Miss Something?

Share opportunities and obstacles in your community you would like Alachua County to be aware of!

[Fill Out Our Comment Form](#)

Our Next Stop: The Rochelle, Windsor, & Grove Park Areas



Rochelle/Windsor/Grove Park Community Listening Session

Thursday, June 12th from 6 - 8 PM
At Hall Chapel United Methodist Church
6025 SE County Road 234, Gainesville, FL, 32641

We want to hear from you! This session is open to all residents, businesses, and local leaders, providing an opportunity to share insights and ideas about the future of eastern Alachua County. During this meeting, county staff will outline the project's goals and timeline.

Are you Prepared for Hurricane Season?

As hurricane season approaches, Alachua County wants to make sure all residents are prepared and have access to important resources from our Emergency Management Office. You can find helpful tips, storm updates, and emergency contact information by visiting its [website](#). View more information about preparing for Hurricane Season in our **Forward Focus Newsletter: Issue #5**.

Text ALACHUA to 888-777 to receive real-time County updates

Forward Focus Highlight:

*Alachua County Selected for Prestigious
ICMA Economic Mobility & Opportunity Cohort*

We're proud to share that Alachua County has been chosen as one of only 15 communities nationwide to join a special program focused on emphasizing **economic mobility**.

ICMA 2025 EMO Cohort Members



Made possible by the Gates Foundation, Alachua County's participation in the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) 2025 Economic Mobility and Opportunity Peer Learning Cohort & Mini Grant Program will allow the impact and quality of the Forward Focus initiative to extend beyond its original scope.

Through this program, Alachua County will receive a **\$20,000 grant** and access to professional development, networking opportunities, coaching, and expert resources to better serve its communities. In the latter half of May, representatives from the Forward Focus Team were invited to attend a conference in Baltimore, Maryland, to meet with the cohort and begin their work in this space.

Specifically, this grant will be used to:

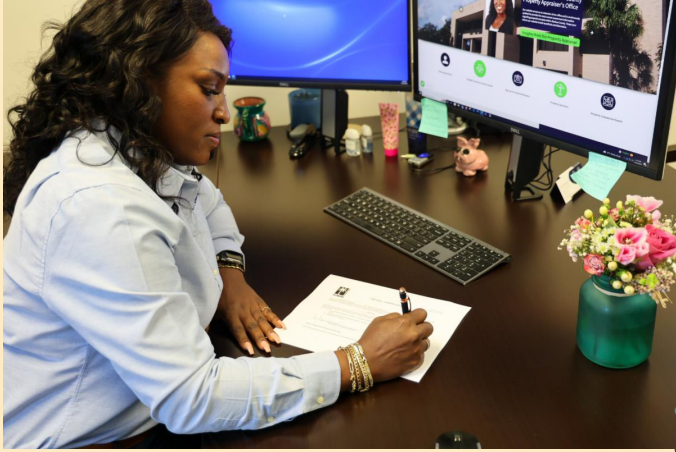
- Support the **Forward Focus Eastern Alachua County Project**, which aims to reduce economic challenges in underserved areas
- Study local needs more closely through **community feedback/data analysis**
- Create a detailed plan to guide improvements over the next few years
- Focus on important areas the community has identified, such as:
 - Early childhood support
 - Post-secondary education and training
 - Workforce development
 - Access to healthcare

As our work under this grant continues, we will be sure to update Eastern Alachua County with our progress. To follow along, stay updated with our [Forward Focus website](#) and learn more about the ICMA [here](#).

Forward Focus Early Win Spotlight:

Connecting You with our Property Appraisers Office

During our Community Listening Session in Montechocha, we heard a request to help explain what the **Alachua County Property Appraiser's Office** does and how residents in Eastern Alachua County can connect with it. In response, we've put together this



quick guide.

The Property Appraiser's Office is responsible for figuring out how much property is worth in Alachua County. These values help determine how much property tax you pay.

The office offers several helpful tools to:

- [Understand your property taxes](#)
- [Search for Alachua County](#)

[properties](#)

- [Apply for a Homestead Exemption](#)
- [Apply for an Agricultural Classification](#)
- [Monitor changes to your property ownership and title](#)
- [Report a property issue](#)
- [Report storm/calamity damage](#)
- [Understand what a 'Denial' means](#)
- [Make an appointment with the office](#)

Stay Connected!

- Call the office at (352) 374-5230
- Sign up for important email updates [here](#)
- Visit the Property Appraiser's Office website [here](#)
- Learn about & attend [community outreach events](#)

These resources are meant to make the process more transparent and help you feel more confident when it comes to your property taxes. We encourage you to connect with the Alachua County Property Appraiser's Office to answer more specific questions!

Resources



Organization Registration

Complete this form to register your organization to assist in identifying services and programs available in Eastern Alachua County.

Individual Assistance

Please complete the Individual Assistance Form to request household assistance for specific needs and services.



Development Projects



Use this link to see which projects are currently in development throughout Alachua County. To avoid technological issues, we recommend clearing your cache.

Public Comments Table

View the comments the Forward Focus Team has collected from previous Community Listening Sessions and our online form.



Fill Out Our Comment Form

352-374-5204 | forwardfocus@alachuacounty.us

[FORWARDFOCUS.ALACHUACOUNTY.US](https://forwardfocus.alachuacounty.us)



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