



# Destination Master Plan

# Steering Committee Members

The New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau would like to thank the regional community leaders who gave of their time and expertise as they served on the Steering Committee, providing guidance, leadership, and support of the development of the Destination Master Plan.

## Steering Committee

**Fred Cleveland**, Mayor, City of New Smyrna Beach

**Donald O. Burnette**, Mayor, City of Port Orange

**Diezel DePew**, Mayor, City of Edgewater

**Douglas A. Gibson**, Mayor, City of Oak Hill

**Wayne Clark**, City Manager, City of Port Orange

**Tim Burman**, Community Development Director, City of Port Orange

**Khalid Resheidat**, City Manager, City of New Smyrna Beach

**Christopher Edwards**, Director of CRA/Economic Development, City of Port Orange

**Glen Irby**, City Manager, City of Edgewater

**Samantha Bergeron**, Economic Development, City of Edgewater

**Bliss Jamison**, Economic Development, SE Volusia Manufacturing Tech Council

**Mike Arman**, Economic Development, City of Oak Hill

**Tracey Barlow**, Real Estate Services, The Barnett Group, Inc

**Helga Van Eckert**, Economic Development, Volusia County Government

**Stephanie Ford**, Executive Director, SE Volusia Chamber of Commerce

**Kathy Lundberg**, Owner, The Wave Restaurant & Grille

**Greg Holbrook**, Executive Director, New Smyrna Museum of History

**Michael Funaro**, President, Little Theatre

**Sherman Reid**, Managing Partner, Flagler Tavern

**Scott Steger**, Broker/Owner, Exit Realty / Flagler Business Merchants

**Liz Jones**, Owner, Nature in Beauty

**Lillian Conrad**, Conrad Business Consulting

**Bob Williams**, Community and Business Consultant

**Nancy Lowden**, Executive Director, Atlantic Center for the Arts

## Project Team

We would like to thank the dedicated project team members who worked diligently to move this project forward, from concept to completion. We want to acknowledge the partnership with our project partner, MMGY NextFactor, the lead agency on the project. The depth of knowledge and focus this team brought to the planning process was appreciated. This plan is, by design, a living document that will continue to deliver exceptional value to the community as we journey through the implementation phase and forge new partnerships along the way.



## New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau:

**Debbie Meihls**, President & CEO, New Smyrna Beach Area Visitor Bureau



## MMGY NextFactor:

**Paul Ouimet**, Partner, President  
MMGY NextFactor

**Cassandra McAuley**, SVP Destination  
Stewardship, MMGY NextFactor

**Teresa Allan**, Project Manager,  
MMGY NextFactor



## Other partners:

**Roberto Schaps**,  
President &  
CEO, Relebrand

# A Message From the New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau



What makes the New Smyrna Beach area special is its beautiful beaches, unique local businesses and restaurants, and a distinctive charm that comes from our proud and active residents. Our community is also special because of the spirit and resilience of those residents. In recent years we have experienced a number of challenges that have put that resiliency to the test. From the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, to the implications of being a Spring Break destination of choice for many young people in 2021, to the devastating impacts of Hurricane Ian and Hurricane Nicole in 2022, our community has collectively built our strength and resilience while proudly caring for one another.

Through it all, as the New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau, our mission of building responsible tourism to elevate economic vitality and quality of life has guided our efforts to support our residents and the tourism and hospitality industry. That mission is put into practice through our commitment to our communities to:

- Promote our destination both domestically and internationally.
- Support tourism industry development through hospitality: lodging, attractions, and restaurants.
- Assist with preserving and protecting the area's unique attributes through sustainable tourism.
- And, activate the community in support of tourism through advocacy.

As we look to the future of the community, we stand by our commitment and feel that its relevance is even greater today with this long-term Destination Master Plan.

Our goal from the outset of this work has been to develop a strategic direction that will support the long-term prosperity of the New Smyrna Beach area and we believe we've achieved that. By collectively implementing the elements of this strategy, we will build an even better place for residents and visitors and enhance the economic benefits of tourism all while being fiercely protective of our unique charm and our beaches, natural areas, and waterways.

We look forward to reporting on the progress we make with our stakeholders to achieve the goals of this Destination Master Plan. We know that collaboration and partnership will be imperative to implementing this work that so many of our stakeholders and residents had input in creating.

Debbie Meihls

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debbie Meihls", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

President & CEO  
New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau



# Executive Summary

Tourism master planning is about taking a strategic, rather than organic, approach to defining an overarching vision.

To grow the positive impact of the visitor economy in the New Smyrna Beach area while protecting the charm of our community, it must be done with a purposeful approach. That's why we undertook a stakeholder-led approach to our Destination Master Plan. In total, over 1,040 residents, industry stakeholders and partners and government officials had input into this plan.

The strategic goals provide the framework for developing our area for the benefit of our residents and visitors alike. These goals offer guidance on how to achieve the overarching vision to solidify the New Smyrna Beach area as a destination of choice for visitors.

## Strategic Recommendations

### #1 Develop more experiences for visitors to connect with Southeast Volusia

- Develop more indoor experiences
- Encourage visitors to explore the county
- Capitalize on unique attributes

### #2 Develop districts throughout the area to draw visitors with distinct offerings

- Develop districts in New Smyrna Beach
- Support further development of arts districts in Southeast Volusia
- Support the development of corridors in Southeast Volusia

### #3 Focus on enhancing placemaking options to support economic development & tourism

- Create vibrancy
- Create sense of place

### #4 Enhance transportation and mobility options to move visitors throughout the area

- Incorporate transportation options
- Expand public transportation options

### #5 Evolve and expand tourism industry support and collaboration

- Connect with residents
- Champion the needs of the industry
- Support the tourism & hospitality industry



# Imagine It's The Year 2033

Imagine it's the year 2033. The New Smyrna Beach area, inclusive of its five communities, has a well-established unique beach-town charm to it that is the envy of other coastal communities in Florida.

Its charm is expressed through its distinct districts, which welcome visitors and residents for arts and cultural offerings, renowned local dining options and unique shops.

Those districts have become the gathering places of the community. Residents and visitors know that when they venture to a district, they will find safe, walkable areas that always have something to offer, whether that's live music, outdoor patios, night markets, performances, events or simply great local shops and indoor and outdoor dining they can't find elsewhere.

Throughout the year, Southeast Volusia hosts festivals and events that encompass all five communities; Edgewater, New Smyrna Beach, Oak Hill, Osteen, and Port Orange all benefit from the economic impact of these events and the residents appreciate the vibrancy and energy they bring.

In addition to events, Southeast Volusia has welcomed new experiences that are helping visitors experience all the area has to offer, beyond just the beach.

On rainy days residents and visitors have a plethora of choices of activities that suit their interests. The arts district is always busy on these days, but active families also have many experiences to choose from. In fact, the area has so much to do that visitors continue to explore trip after trip.

Getting around the New Smyrna Beach area is easy; there are connected trails for e-bikes, walking, running and traditional bicycles; there are also people-movers that offer a unique Southeast Volusia experience to all passengers. With fewer cars on the road – and better parking options near the beach – traffic congestion isn't the concern it was 10 years ago.

Residents appreciate the additional transportation and parking options, and they feel informed and comfortable about the direction of the visitor economy in Southeast Volusia, because they have a voice in it, and they understand the benefits of tourism to their community.

Residents and visitors respect each other and respect the New Smyrna Beach area. They work together to ensure the beaches, parks and waterways are cared for and protected and that local businesses are supported and celebrated. It's the charm of the area that keeps visitors coming back and keeps residents loving their home.

# State of the Industry

## Local state of the industry

### Visitation to the New Smyrna Beach area in 2022:

- 406,100 visitors
- Over \$3M in tourist development tax collection
- \$318.6 million in direct visitor spending
- 2.7 average party size
- 4.6 days average length of stay
- 80% of visitors drive to New Smyrna Beach



The New Smyrna Beach area experienced a temporary decline in visitor numbers and economic impact in 2020 because of the pandemic but saw a rebound in 2021, and continued growth of over 5% year-over-year in room nights 2022. The fiscal impact of visitors to New Smyrna Beach in 2022 was up 11% over 2021 and it is estimated that 5,500 people are directly employed in jobs supported by the leisure and hospitality industry in the New Smyrna Beach area.

With new development, access and mobility enhancements, additional experiences and visitor draws like events, the potential of the visitor economy in New Smyrna Beach is strong. The area is heavily dependent on vehicle traffic, and as such, giving regional visitors within driving distance continuous reasons to return will be paramount to influencing greater economic impact from tourism.

## Global state of the industry

Looking beyond our local region, New Smyrna Beach is one of many competitive beach destinations on a global scale. Our planning process incorporated insights from tourism communities across the globe and from the broader tourism industry.

In 2021, MMGY NextFactor conducted the largest global survey of tourism industry leaders, with 709 tourism executives from 50 countries participating. Three transformational opportunities for our industry emerged that all relate directly to the New Smyrna Beach area's Destination Master Plan – and to the future of our destination:

1. Destination Alignment; aligning the public, private and civic sectors drives destination performance.
2. Sustainable Development; destination development should marry people, profit, planet and policy.
3. Values Based Marketing; Community values, goals and energy are the new competitive advantage.

The survey also identified the top strategies and trends in the tourism industry, and many align with the New Smyrna Beach area's strategic direction for the visitor economy.



# Area Context



The New Smyrna Beach area's Destination Master Plan was created within the context of existing City and County plans, policies, and regulations. We recognize and respect the work already done and consider it a strong foundation to build upon. The following is a list of some of the organizations and primary planning documents referenced during the project engagement:

- Volusia Forever
- The City of New Smyrna Beach Economic Development Strategic Plan
- The New Smyrna Beach 2020 Strategic Planning Summary
- The Southeast Volusia Manufacturing & Technology Coalition
- New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau

It is also important to note that the New Smyrna Beach area of Florida encompasses the five communities of Edgewater, New Smyrna Beach, Oak Hill, Osteen and Port Orange. Each community had representation on the Steering Committee and the Mayors and/or senior staff of each municipality participated.



# Master Planning Process



The future success of the New Smyrna Beach area visitor economy depends on the public, private and civic sectors co-creating their shared vision for the future of the region. That vision must support a balance of visitor growth, resident quality of life, and overall quality of experience for all who spend time in the New Smyrna Beach area. With that guiding principle at the forefront, this master planning process was designed to engage and collaborate with tourism stakeholders, community stakeholders, and residents of Southeast Volusia.

**3** steering committee sessions

**8** in-depth interviews

**6** focus groups

**77** DestinationNEXT completions

**35** front-line industry survey responses

**835** resident survey responses

**2** resident town halls

## Steering Committee

A Steering Committee of 26 community leaders from Southeast Volusia was formed to guide the process, advise on key considerations, ensure alignment with existing strategies and initiatives, and champion the Master Plan both through development and into implementation. The Steering Committee met for three in-person and virtual working sessions throughout the process.

## Stakeholder Engagement

MMGY NextFactor met with over 40 stakeholders through a series of 6 sector-specific focus groups and conducted 8 in-depth interviews, all which took place between April and August 2022. The primary purpose of this engagement was to identify key opportunities and challenges for the future of Southeast Volusia as a destination for visitors and a quality place for residents to live, work and play.

## Interviews

8 in-depth interviews were conducted in-person and virtually with key stakeholders who provided specific insights into the communities that comprise the New Smyrna Beach area.

## Focus Groups

Focus groups included stakeholders from the following groups:

- Flagler Ave Merchants
- Canal Street Merchants
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave Merchants
- Arts & Culture
- Hotels & Short-term Rentals
- Restaurants & Attractions



## DestinationNEXT Assessment

MMGY NextFactor conducted a detailed assessment of the New Smyrna Beach area visitor economy utilizing a comprehensive stakeholder survey that measures perceptions of destination strength and destination alignment, based on a series of 24 variables. The results were then used to plot the New Smyrna Beach area into a Scenario Model, which shows the specific opportunities for New Smyrna Beach and its communities and their partners to build upon.



77 stakeholders, including Board members, community partners and customers responded to the perception survey.

From a destination strength perspective, the New Smyrna Beach area exceeded industry averages related to attractions and experiences, dining, shopping and entertainment, arts, culture and heritage, outdoor recreation and health and safety. It ranked below industry average on factors including local mobility and access, events and festivals, destination access and sporting events.

From a destination alignment perspective, the New Smyrna Beach area was above industry average on sustainability and resilience, economic development, emergency preparedness and organizational governance. It did however rank below average on workforce development, which is a significant issue for many cities and destinations post-pandemic.

Overall, New Smyrna Beach and area landed in the Voyagers quadrant of the DestinationNEXT scenario model, meaning the destination has strong alignment amongst stakeholders, however is weaker in terms of strength of assets and experiences.



### Industry Survey

35 members of the tourism and hospitality industry participated in a survey between June 20 and August 15, 2022. The intention of the industry survey was to give opportunity to those on the frontlines opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences on their own time. 85% of respondents work in New Smyrna Beach and over 60% are working with a reduced staff (compared to pre-pandemic times).

Approximately 90% of respondents say that regional visitors are important to their business, while 80% say that investment in promoting tourism is important to them. 68% cite direct flights as important to their business.

### Resident Survey

In consultation with the New Smyrna Beach Visitors Bureau staff, MMGY NextFactor developed an online survey to identify and gauge residents' perceptions on a variety of key characteristics with respect to livability, culture, economy, and sense of place. 835 residents of Southeast Volusia participated in the survey between March 31 and April 19.

Over 90% of residents agree that tourism is good for Southeast Volusia and 80% will recommend it to friends and family as a place to visit.

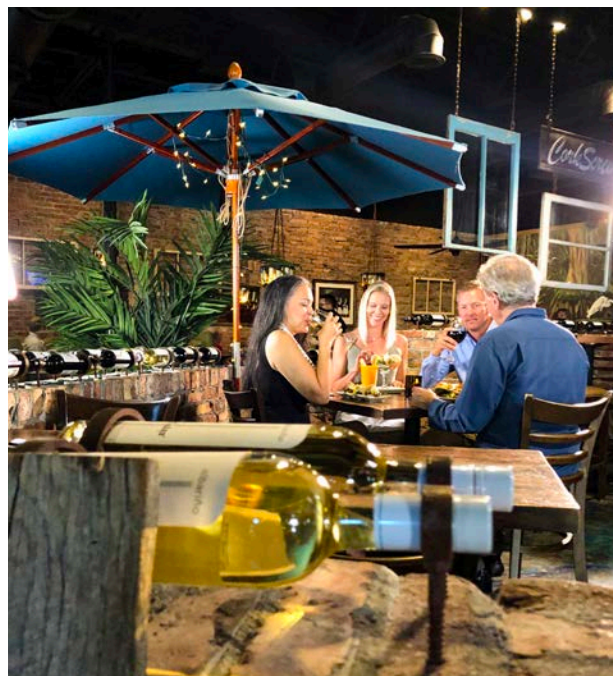
Residents overwhelmingly see tourism as creating traffic congestion and as an opportunity to make visitors want to protect our beach resources.

Most residents also strongly agreed that tourism should encourage locals to explore their area more, and the benefits of tourism outweigh the negatives.

### Town Halls

MMGY NextFactor facilitated two in-person resident town halls in New Smyrna Beach and Port Orange, giving residents further opportunity to share their input for the future of the visitor economy in Southeast Volusia. These sessions were attended by more than 40 residents.





### Key Findings

The compiled data, along with key findings and recommendations, were presented to the Steering Committee in a series of three on-site working sessions throughout the project. Taken together, the sum of all the engagement uncovered 10 key findings.

1. Southeast Volusia has more to offer than the beach. Residents are very keen on this being known.
2. More visitor experiences are needed to tell Southeast Volusia's story and to move people throughout the region.
3. Environmental sustainability initiatives contribute to the quality of place and will draw younger demographics.
4. Strategic collaboration with local business areas (Flagler Ave, Canal Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave) is critical to overcoming perceived and real silos and fostering new opportunities.
5. Better transportation mobility options are key to enhancing the experience for visitors and locals.
6. Additional tourism industry support, training and connections will help grow pride, consistency, and alignment.
7. The arts and cultural offerings of the region can be further leveraged as a draw.
8. Placemaking and district development can enhance the experience and promote pride of locals.
9. Festivals, events and sport tourism will support quality of life, place and experience.
10. Residents want the beach-town vibe to be protected and celebrated.

### Visioning

The results and insights gleaned from these research activities were then used in a visioning workshop with the Steering Committee to envision the future of the visitor economy in Southeast Volusia and to develop priorities to be addressed by the project.

### Validation

The results of the workshop were then compiled into a Draft Recommendations Report, which was presented to the Steering Committee and New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau team for feedback and validation.



# Vision



The shared vision for New Smyrna Beach and area is an aspiration for the year 2033.

In 2033, the New Smyrna Beach area will be...

**A vibrant coastal community that celebrates  
our diverse local experiences, businesses, and unique charm.**

Throughout the process of developing this Master Plan, the importance of maintaining the unique charm of New Smyrna Beach has emerged from all stakeholder groups. It is important to have that articulated in our future vision to ensure our community sees the value that has been placed on protecting and celebrating our charm and as a way of holding ourselves accountable.

This vision also considers our desire to develop new experiences that are authentic to our region and are rooted in our local entrepreneurs. These experiences will advance the New Smyrna Beach area as a destination for families and will ensure there is plenty to do beyond the beach.

Finally, our shared vision reflects who we are at our core – a coastal community. The intention in articulating that element in our shared vision is to keep our coast top-of-mind. We want to be deliberate about continuing to be leaders in environmental sustainability and stewardship and caring for our beaches and waterways. Including this in our vision is another way of ensuring action and accountability.



# Strategic Recommendations



The strategic recommendations provide the framework for decision making regarding efforts and potential investments to enhance the visitor economy in the New Smyrna Beach area. These goals offer guidance on how to achieve the overarching vision and develop a competitive positioning for Southeast Volusia as a destination.

## Recommendations for the New Smyrna Beach area:

- #1 Develop more experiences for visitors to connect with Southeast Volusia
- #2 Develop districts throughout the area to draw visitors with distinct offerings
- #3 Focus on enhancing placemaking options to support economic development & tourism
- #4 Enhance transportation and mobility options to move visitors throughout the area
- #5 Evolve and expand tourism industry support and collaboration



# Develop more experiences for visitors to connect with Southeast Volusia



In Southeast Volusia, the primary experience has long been the beach – and for good reason. However, moving visitors around the New Smyrna Beach area to experience local businesses, attractions, events and more will increase the economic impact of the visitor economy.

New Smyrna Beach area residents are keen for their communities to be known for more than just the beach. Having a variety of experiences also gives travelers a reason to visit – and to come back.

## 1. Develop more indoor experiences

- Develop additional indoor experiences for active families / rainy days

## 2. Encourage visitors to explore the county

- Expand support for arts, culture, and historical groups to develop and operate visitor-focused experiences
- Grow sustainability and conservation programs to become experiential opportunities for visitors

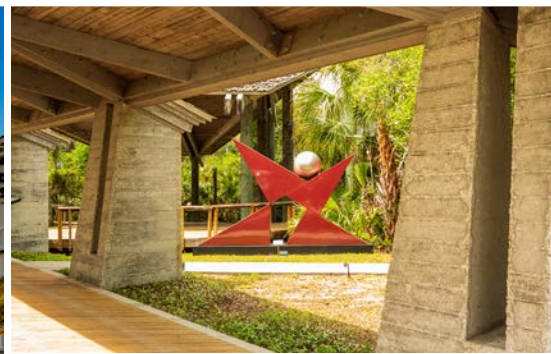
## 3. Capitalize on unique attributes

- Capitalize on rocket launches with programming, packaging, and events
- Consider developing or attracting a signature event that encompasses multiple communities
- Develop experiences focused on fishing and catch & cook experiences





# Develop districts throughout the area to draw visitors with distinct offerings



The concept of distinct districts is popular amongst residents and visitors. Districts showcase the best of a community's niche offerings, including arts & culture, and offer visitors reasons to explore areas they may not otherwise.

Districts also support placemaking and economic development through investment, entrepreneurial ventures, and collaborations. They can also be incubators for creativity and authentically local innovation.

## 1. Develop districts in New Smyrna Beach

- Work with business groups from Flagler Ave, Canal Street, and 3rd Ave to expand to districts with unique attributes and experiences
- Support further development of the arts district.
- Develop connected signage, entry signage and sense of place in districts

## 2. Develop districts in Southeast Volusia

- Work with four communities (Edgewater, Osteen, Port Orange, and Oak Hill) to develop downtowns / main streets as experiences

## 3. Support the development of corridors in Southeast Volusia

- In partnership with existing plans, advocate and support the development of manufacturing, tech, and aerospace corridors in the county







# Focus on enhancing placemaking options to support economic development & tourism



Placemaking is a key attribute in creating a welcoming and vibrant destination. Intentional focus on placemaking to create spaces that are well lit, vibrant, pedestrian friendly and unique, creates a natural draw.

It also creates the opportunity for creative activation. In a year-round destination like New Smyrna Beach, having deliberate places that are always in use will support further economic development and spur investment, visitation, and talent attraction.

## 1. Create vibrancy

- a) Focus on attracting more retail and dining options to key districts
- b) Develop & enhance pedestrian zones and extended patios
- c) Collaborate with municipalities to support placemaking initiatives

## 2. Create sense of place

- a) Improve streetscapes, paths & physical/digital wayfinding
- b) Develop more architectural draws with landscaping, sidewalks, lighting, and murals
- c) Incorporate mobility accessibility
- d) Focus on sustainability features in sense-of-place development





# Enhance transportation and mobility options to move visitors throughout the area

Ease of access and local transportation options are key drivers to attracting visitors beyond the regional drive market.

By increasing transportation options within the area that consider multiple modes of transportation (driving, electrical vehicles, water, and people powered options), it will address the concern of residents about traffic and offer multiple options for visitor and residents.

There is also the opportunity to make transportation options “experiences” for visitors and locals. When fun and unique experiences are built into transportation options, the usage increases as does public sentiment and visitor interest.

## 1. Incorporate transportation options

- Develop business opportunities for water taxis
- Revisit the opportunity for a “people-mover” to move people from the beach and Flagler Ave throughout the area
- Add bike lanes to busy districts / areas to reduce congestion on roads and sidewalks
- Add EV charging stations
- Support efforts for the completion of connected trails that are safe for walking, running, and cycling
- Develop a parking and wayfinding strategy
- Consider requiring access / parking payment by non-local visitors

## 2. Expand public transportation options

- Include all communities in public transportation options







# Evolve and expand tourism industry support and collaboration



## Strategic Recommendation #5

The New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau works hard to ensure the local tourism and hospitality industry has a champion. As the needs of the industry change and evolve, whether that's with trends or due to specific events (natural disasters, pandemics, etc), the support of the championing organization must as well.

Resident connection is more important than ever and is a trend MMYG NextFactor is seeing in its Futures Studies. Ensuring the needs of residents are heard, understood, and acted upon will support the growth of the visitor economy. Similarly, sharing the goals, objectives, and outputs of the industry with residents is key to creating a two-way dialogue and mutual relationship.

### 1. Connect with residents

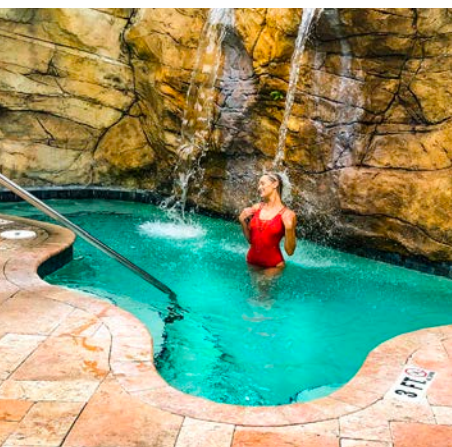
- a) Launch a community facing portal
- b) Create a consistent communication strategy for residents
- c) Conduct an annual resident sentiment survey
- d) Form a resident advisory panel

### 2. Champion the needs of the industry

- a) Develop an advocacy strategy

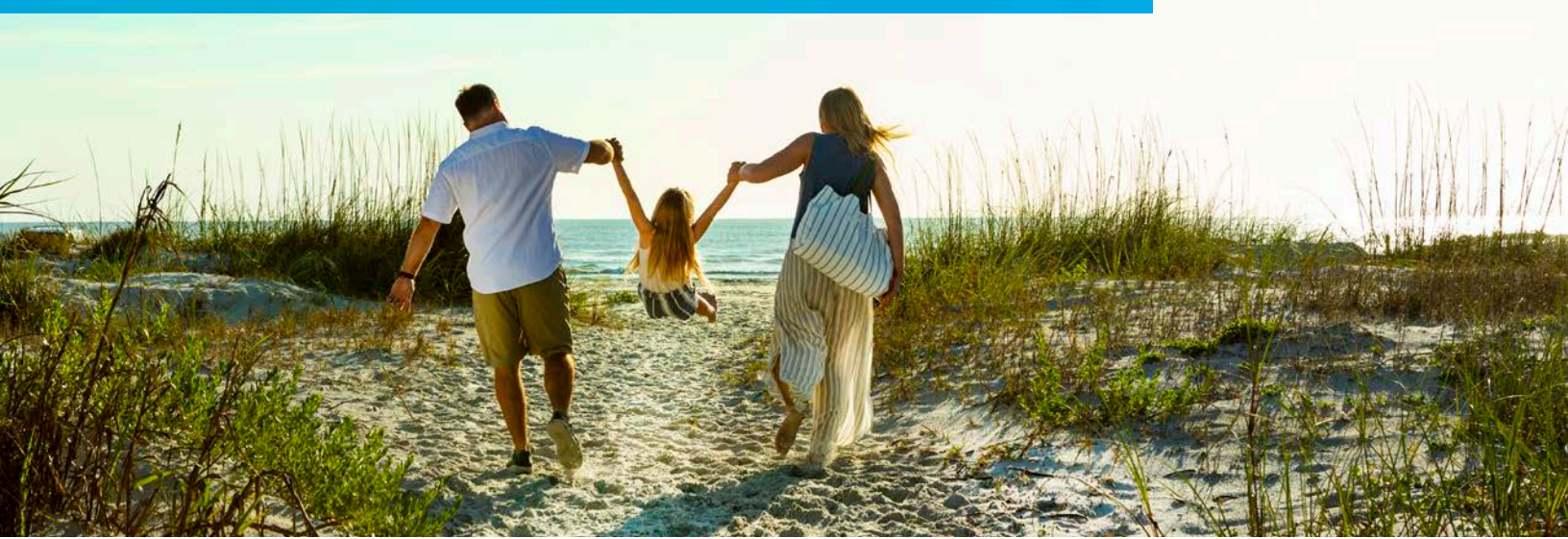
### 3. Support tourism & hospitality industry

- a) Develop an industry advisory panel
- b) Develop a consistent and inclusive Southeast Volusia training program





# Next Steps



From the outset of the Destination Master Planning process, the community was engaged and excited to support the implementation of the strategic recommendations.

The New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau doesn't own the assets and experiences related to the visitor economy, and therefore, they cannot single-handedly move this Master Plan forward. Their roles in the implementation of the Destination Master Plan will take several forms including:

## **Advocate**

There will be instances where the Visitors Bureau will advocate for the advancement of strategic initiatives that will advance the New Smyrna Beach area for the benefit of visitors and residents.

## **Convener**

The Visitors Bureau may be the conveners of groups and those in positions to advance initiatives.

## **Leader**

There will be instances where the Visitors Bureau takes the lead as the organization to advance initiatives.

## **Support**

Finally, the Visitors Bureau will be the supporting or partnering organization on initiatives with other leading organizations.

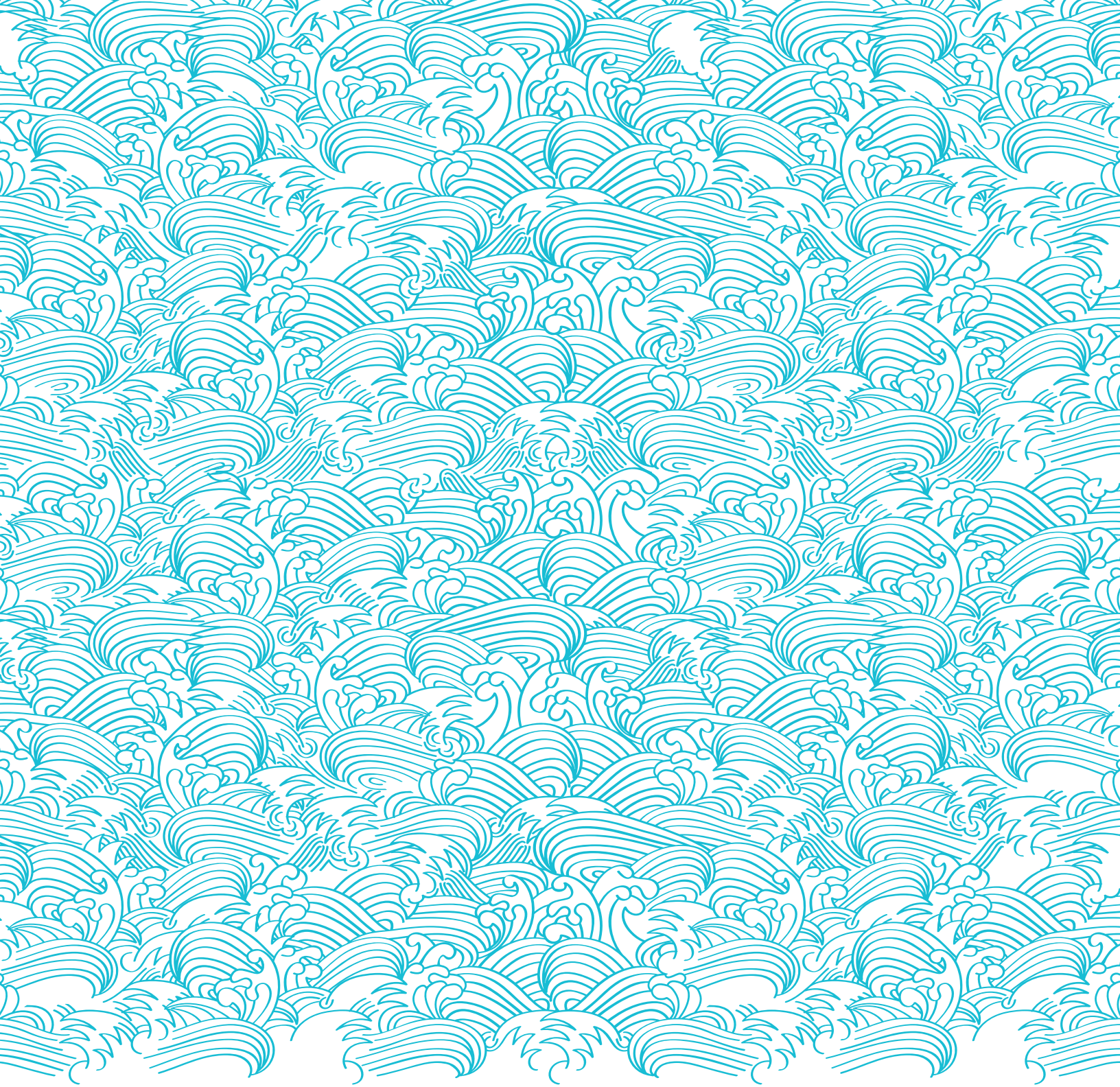
Several initiatives within the plan will be incorporated into the New Smyrna Beach Area Visitors Bureau strategic plan to ensure implementation is giving organizational focus, support, and resources.

It is recommended that subcommittees and working groups be convened with members of the Steering Committee and other community leaders and tasked with guiding implementation, collaborating to execute on initiatives and report on progress and other performance measures.

With a collaborative, focused and original approach to the implementation of this Destination Master Plan, it will result in the growth of the visitor economy and its widespread benefits for the entire region.

The visitor economy in the New Smyrna Beach area has unlimited potential and we're excited to welcome more visitors to our great area!





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