

Engagement Report: Open House 1

Event: Open House #1

Date: July 14, 2026

Time: 5:30 - 7:30 PM

Location: 21656 Coastal Gateway Blvd, Gulf Shores, AL, 36542

Attendance: 179 sign-ins



The first public open house for The Gulf Shores Plan was held on Tuesday, July 14, 2026, at the new Gulf Shores High School. The event marked the public launch of the Comprehensive Plan process and introduced residents to the purpose, schedule, and opportunities for participation throughout the project. Participants were invited to learn about existing conditions, explore community trends, meet the project team, and contribute ideas through a series of interactive planning activities designed to capture both broad community values and place-specific priorities.



The open house attracted a large group of residents representing neighborhoods throughout Gulf Shores and generated hundreds of individual comments, map annotations, photographs, and activity responses across five interactive stations. Participants completed neighborhood profiles, translated the City's Vision 2035 values into planning ideas, reacted to existing conditions maps, identified where future investments should occur through a "What Goes Where" mapping exercise, and provided written reactions to photographs depicting neighborhoods, natural areas, commercial corridors, civic spaces, and transportation facilities. Together, these activities produced a rich body of qualitative input that complements the technical analyses prepared for the Comprehensive Plan.



Participant Profile

A total of 179 community members signed in. Many more attended and contributed input through a series of interactive planning activities. The event attracted both newer and long-term residents, although the attendee profile skewed toward homeowners and older adults. Approximately 38% of participants were age 65 or older, while another 50% were between the ages of 45 and 64, reflecting strong participation from long-term community members. Younger adults were represented in smaller numbers, with approximately 12% of participants under the age of 45.

Participants represented a somewhat limited range of residency tenures. Nearly half (47%) had lived in Gulf Shores for ten years or less, while 25% had lived in the community for more than twenty-one years. This mix of participants enriched the discussion somewhat, but more outreach needs to be done to hear from more recent arrivals.

As might be expected for a community open house focused on long-range planning, the vast majority of participants (92%) owned their primary residence. Approximately 5–6% also owned rental property, while only a small number of participants rented or lived with family or friends. The demographic profile was also broadly reflective of Gulf Shores' existing population, with approximately 94–95% of participants identifying as White or Caucasian, 2–3% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, and the remaining participants identifying with another race or ethnicity or choosing not to respond.



Engagement Activities



My Neighborhood Activity

A total of 84 “My Neighborhood” surveys were completed as part of the Open House activity.

Residents overwhelmingly describe Gulf Shores as a collection of quiet, safe, and friendly neighborhoods with strong social ties and exceptional natural assets. Participants consistently expressed appreciation for mature trees, waterways, recreational opportunities, and walkability, along with strong pride of place. Rather than calling for dramatic change, most respondents want future growth to respect neighborhood character, strengthen connections between neighborhoods, protect environmental resources, and address localized traffic concerns, all while preserving the qualities that make Gulf Shores feel like home.

The neighborhood exercise demonstrates that residents generally do not view Gulf Shores’ future as a choice between growth and preservation. Instead, participants consistently emphasized balancing both objectives.

Across neighborhoods, residents envisioned a future in which:

- New housing provides opportunities for local workers and families
- Transportation investments improve mobility for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and golf carts alike
- Parks, trails, and environmental resources become increasingly connected
- Redevelopment enhances commercial districts while preserving community character
- Infrastructure keeps pace with development

Taken together, these responses suggest broad public support for a comprehensive planning approach that accommodates continued growth while protecting the qualities that residents believe make Gulf Shores unique.



From Vision to Action Activity

This exercise asked participants to translate the seven core values from Vision 2035 into concrete planning ideas across six Comprehensive Plan elements: Land Use, Housing, Urban Design & Public Realm, Transportation, Environmental Resilience, and Economic Development.

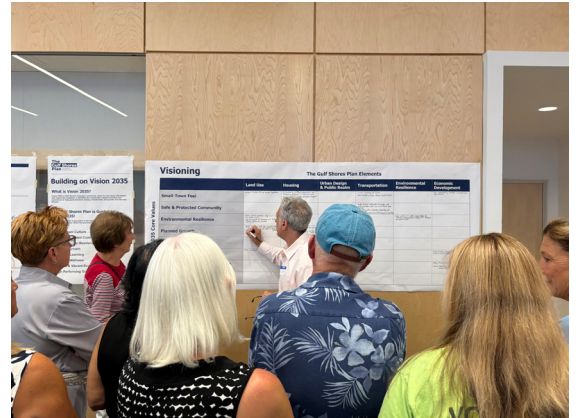
Rather than testing whether participants agreed with the Vision 2035 values themselves, the activity focused on interpretation, asking what these values should actually look like in practice. In doing so, it helped surface the connective tissue between broad community aspirations and the more technical work of shaping specific planning recommendations.

A clear pattern emerged: participants are already thinking about Gulf Shores holistically. Land use, housing, transportation, economic development, and environmental resilience were rarely treated as separate silos. Instead, participants consistently drew connections across topics, filtering each through a shared set of underlying community values.

Perhaps the most significant takeaway is that Vision 2035 already offers the City a strong conceptual foundation for the Comprehensive Plan. The task ahead is not to uncover new community priorities, but to translate these already well-established aspirations into actionable policy: specific land use designations, design standards, infrastructure investments, and implementation strategies.

These three themes surfaced repeatedly across the exercise:

- Preserve identity while accommodating growth. Maintain Gulf Shores' small-town character even as the city continues to grow.
- Design for connection, not isolation. Prioritize walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods over conventional, disconnected suburban patterns.
- Treat natural resources as infrastructure. Protect the environment not only for its intrinsic value, but as the long-term foundation of the city's economy and quality of life.



Existing Conditions Activity

Participants reviewed a series of maps illustrating current conditions across Gulf Shores, including land use, housing, transportation, environmental features, parks, flooding, and development patterns. Using sticky notes, they marked concerns, opportunities, missing information, and specific locations where they hoped to see change. The result was a wealth of highly place-specific feedback that, taken together, also pointed to several broader citywide priorities.

The exercise surfaced a number of themes that will help shape the direction of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Expand housing options that better serve year-round residents and the local workforce.
- Strengthen the sidewalk, trail, and bicycle network to make neighborhoods safer and more walkable.
- Protect wetlands, dunes, tree canopy, and flood-prone areas, while building resilience into future development.
- Grow the availability of parks, recreational facilities, and public access to natural spaces.
- Encourage redevelopment and commercial growth that complements surrounding neighborhoods and reinforces Gulf Shores' character.
- Continue evaluating transportation solutions that improve mobility while reducing reliance on private automobiles.

Overall, participants demonstrated broad support for managing growth in ways that strengthen everyday quality of life, preserve the city's environmental assets, and ensure that future development reflects the values of the Gulf Shores community.



Seeing Gulf Shores Activity

Participants reviewed a series of photographs depicting neighborhoods, commercial corridors, parks, natural areas, and civic spaces throughout Gulf Shores, reacting with positive or negative stickers and short captions.

Several consistent themes emerged. Residents value Gulf Shores' natural environment above all else, with images of marshes, waterways, dunes, and forests receiving overwhelmingly positive responses. Participants showed mild support for growth but favored development that reinforces the city's character, praising thoughtful design over generic or oversized buildings. Housing feedback was nuanced: residents want more affordable, varied housing that fits Gulf Shores' identity, while criticizing "cookie-cutter" subdivisions and large condo developments.

Mobility concerns extended beyond congestion (especially along Highway 59 and Fort Morgan Road) to include safer bike and pedestrian infrastructure and more attractive corridors. Parks, trails, and waterfronts were consistently praised as some of the city's greatest assets, with residents seeking more gathering spaces and everyday amenities. Local identity, including locally owned businesses and distinctive community destinations, was strongly valued over generic resort development. Finally, opinions on the airport reflected a desire to balance its economic benefits with compatibility for surrounding neighborhoods.



What Should Go Where Activity

Participants were invited to place desired improvements, land uses, and community amenities directly onto a large map of Gulf Shores using color-coded labels representing housing, transportation, parks, businesses, environmental improvements, public spaces, and civic amenities. The exercise identified both geographic priorities and broader community preferences for future growth and investment.

Several distinct patterns emerged. Downtown and Waterway Village attracted the greatest concentration of restaurants, shops, entertainment, public art, civic spaces, streetscape improvements, and mixed-use activity. Highway 59 and surrounding corridors were viewed as priorities for safer streets, traffic improvements, walking, bicycling, and redevelopment. Existing residential neighborhoods were commonly identified as appropriate for affordable housing, neighborhood services, additional trees, parks, and pedestrian improvements. The Gulf shoreline, Little Lagoon, and Bon Secour watershed were consistently associated with habitat restoration, preserved land, healthier wetlands, wildlife protection, and coastal resilience. The eastern portions of the city received relatively few development-oriented suggestions and were instead dominated by environmental enhancement and conservation priorities.

The exercise shows that participants generally support directing future growth toward existing developed areas while preserving Gulf Shores' most environmentally sensitive landscapes. Participants reinforced the city's existing framework, identifying downtown, Waterway Village, and Highway 59 as primary locations for new investment, while overwhelmingly supporting protection of beaches, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and coastal resources as defining elements of Gulf Shores' identity.

Notably, participants did not treat environmental conservation and economic development as mutually exclusive. Walkable neighborhoods, mixed-use districts, parks, restored wetlands, and safer streets were repeatedly paired together, reflecting a shared vision of growth that improves both livability and environmental health.



Share Your Slogan Activity

Participants were invited to propose a secondary title or tagline for The Gulf Shores Plan. Rather than simply brainstorming a memorable name, many used the exercise to express what they believe Gulf Shores represents and the values they hope the Comprehensive Plan will protect and strengthen. The activity became less about branding the plan and more about articulating a shared community identity.

Across submissions, a few clear priorities stood out:

- Preserve Gulf Shores' small-town identity while planning for continued growth.
- Continue to balance the needs of residents and visitors
- Protect the city's beaches, dunes, waterways, and natural landscapes.
- Prioritize quality of life, safety, and family-oriented neighborhoods.
- Guide growth in a way that strengthens, rather than dilutes, the community's unique character.
- Reinforce Gulf Shores as a community defined by both its natural beauty and its residents, not by tourism alone.

