



Q2 25/26 REPORT FOR POLK COUNTY

Building partnerships and pathways for economic development in Polk County.

ORGANIZATIONAL PILLARS



Promote Polk County as Florida's Best Place for Business



Advocate for Key Business Issues



Facilitate Collaborative Partnerships



Advance Strategic Initiatives



PROMOTE POLK COUNTY AS FLORIDA'S BEST PLACE FOR BUSINESS

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

This quarter, CFDC launched **InvestReady Polk**, Polk County's Site Readiness program designed to support the development of **quality sites for quality jobs**. The program supports long-term economic growth by creating a diverse, well-documented database of industrial-ready sites while aligning land use and infrastructure planning efforts across Polk County. InvestReady Polk is designed to reduce development risk, shorten project timelines, and improve the region's competitiveness for industrial and business investment.



INVESTREADY POLK

Further advancing site readiness, two site visits were conducted this quarter within the InvestReady Polk program. CFDC joined partners from Polk County, the City of Fort Meade, Florida Municipal Power Agency, TECO Energy, Comcast, Spectrum and the property owners to initiate the site discovery process for the two sites. Area experts, officials, and site consultants toured the property, evaluating assets and development potential. These efforts ensure that Polk remains a strong contender for future industrial investment and growth.

It was announced this quarter that the **Fort Meade Rail Ready Industrial site** earned a prestigious **Silver-level designation**, placing it among the top tier of rail-served industrial sites in the CSX network. It is one of 21 new rail-served properties across 10 states to be added to the highly selective **CSX Select Site program**. The Silver-level designation of the Fort Meade site positions Polk County as a competitive destination for advanced manufacturing and industrial investment. Rail-served sites offer a critical advantage for companies seeking efficient, cost-effective logistics solutions—especially in today's rapidly evolving supply chain landscape.



Palmer Site Visit



Fort Meade Rail Ready Industrial Site



Fort Meade Rail Ready Site Visit



PROMOTE POLK COUNTY AS FLORIDA'S BEST PLACE FOR BUSINESS

This quarter, the CFDC was pleased to again host its **EconDev Forum** focused on navigating today's competitive marketplace, with a deep dive into site readiness and **site selection in today's market**. The conversation featured **Jeannette Goldsmith**, a Vice President with **Strategic Development Group**. Jeannette explored the critical factors that influence business location decisions, key challenges communities face in preparing competitive sites, and strategies that support sustainable economic growth and long-term community success.



Examining site readiness through a case study Jeannette then moderated a panel highlighting the Frostproof Business Park, one of Polk County's Site Readiness success stories. The panel included project partners **Brandon Clark** (The Ruthvens), **Peveeta Samuel** (Duke Energy), and **Emery Smith** (Ben Hill Griffin). The free event fosters a collaborative space to exchange ideas, gain practical takeaways, and strengthen connections across the region.



FACILITATE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

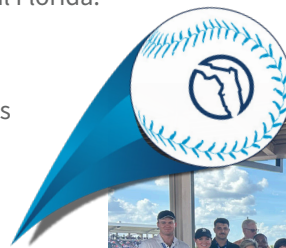


Our **February Investor Meeting** was hosted at the recently completed **Lake Ariana Civic Center** in Auburndale. This beautiful new facility was made possible through collaborative teamwork from City staff and a number of CFDC investor members. Partners on the project included The Lunz Group, SpringerVoss Construction, Chastain-Skillman, LLC (now DCCM) and GMF Steel Group.

Cody McGhee, Director of Parks and Recreation, shared about the history of the space, as well as the tourism and economic impact Polk can look forward to in the world of sports and entertainment. We were also pleased to welcome three new CFDC investor members: GMF Steel Group, KCI Technologies, and United Way of Central Florida.

The CFDC was delighted to host site selectors, developers, and partners from across the region for a **Detroit Tigers spring training game**, showcasing Polk County as Florida's Best Place for Business!

Special thanks to our 2026 sponsors! Bank of Central Florida, Ben Hill Griffin, Cyndeo Wealth Partners, Duke Energy, Florida Polytechnic University, Florida Southern College, Intersect Development Group, Orlando Health, Polk State College, The Ruthvens, Southeastern University, Suncoast Credit Union and TECO Energy.





ADVOCATE FOR KEY BUSINESS ISSUES

We are grateful for the dedication of our members serving on the **Competitiveness and Advocacy Committee**. Their hard work helps shape a strong advocacy agenda that supports economic infrastructure and fosters industry growth. The organization’s legislative agenda includes topics impacting a variety of entities throughout Polk. The agenda includes talent pipeline and infrastructure requests, legislation for Florida’s agriculture industry, data center policy, and funding for statewide economic development programs. Alongside countless other community and business leaders, the CFDC was pleased to participate in **Polk County Day** hosted in Tallahassee this quarter.



ADVANCE STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Continuing to advance opportunities for Polk County manufacturers, CFDC was pleased to partner with SelectFlorida for the **ABC’s of Exporting Roadshow**. Thank you to Polk State College for hosting the event. SelectFlorida spent time with local manufacturers and service providers to explore the latest exporting best practices designed to help grow their businesses in international markets.

POLK COUNTY ECONOMIC UPDATE



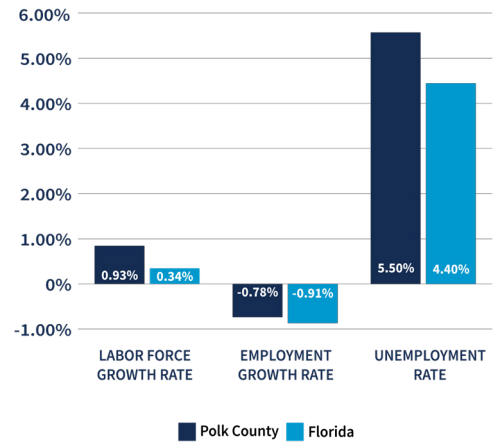
*Prepared by Jim Farrell, Ph.D., CFA,
Florida Southern College*

At the county and state levels, the labor market has shown continued stagnation. Unemployment remained above the 5% level for the county, while remaining below 5% at the state level. Total employment in the county remained just under 342,000 people. The state and local labor markets continue to be in a period of low to negative growth following several years of solid growth, it remains too early to tell if this is a temporary pause or a sign of reversal from peak employment levels.

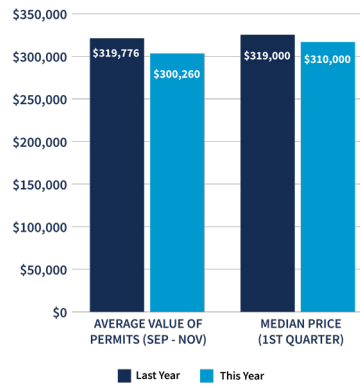
The Federal Reserve has maintained a stable interest rate through the beginning of the year and expectations are for one cut during 2026 as inflation has stabilized below 3% and 4th quarter GDP growth came in at 0.5%. The Federal Reserve currently expects GDP to grow only 2.4% for 2026. These are all signs of a stabilized, but slow-growing economy.

From December 2025 through February 2026, according to My Florida Regional MLS, home sales were down 4.6% while median sales prices were down 2.8% year-over-year, with days-on-market holding steady around 76 days. According to the Census for September through November, new single-family permit requests decreased 9.4% while the average value of each permit decreased by 6.1%, year-over-year. Multi-family construction also slowed down, with only 87 new permits, compared to 660 for the same period last year. The decline in prices of both new and existing homes, coupled with slowing sales and permit requests, reflects the overall decline in real estate activity driven by affordability challenges still present in the market.

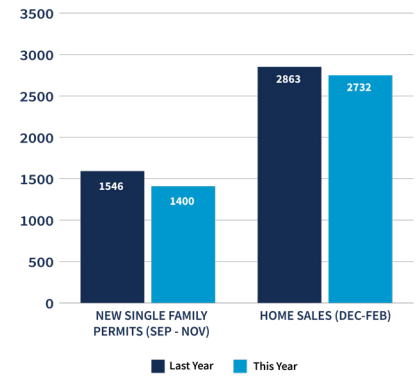
Labor Market Statistics (Dec 2025)



Housing Value



Housing Volume



In Quarter 2, CFDC hosted and attended the following events:

- Competitiveness & Advocacy Committee Meeting
- EconDev Forum
- February Investor Meeting
- Lay of the Land Conference
- Investor Relations Committee Meeting
- Polk County Day
- SelectFlorida's ABC of Exporting
- SelectFlorida EDAC & Board Meeting
- Spring Training Site Selector & Developer Event

Thank you to our Renewing Investors!

JANUARY 1 - MARCH 31

Visionary

Orlando Health
Polk State College

Municipal

City of Auburndale
Town of Dundee

Innovator

CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen LLP)
Crews Bank & Trust ↑
Peterson & Myers, P.A.
Visit Central Florida

Connector

A-C-T Environmental and Infrastructure, Inc.
Camp Margaritaville
FleischmanGarciaMaslowski (FG+M) Architecture
Hancock Whitney Bank
Kimley-Horn & Associates, Inc.
Publix Super Markets, Inc.
Register Construction
Saunders Real Estate

Southern States Material Handling
Straight-Line LLC
Summit Real Estate Group
The Mosaic Company
The Story Companies
Webber International University

Upgraded Investors



About CFDC The Central Florida Development Council is Polk County's economic development partnership responsible for recruiting new businesses to Polk County and helping existing businesses expand.

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CENTRAL FLORIDA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Polk County's Economic Partnership