



OKALOOSA COUNTY CONTINUES TO AMAZE

Our area is known for its natural beauty and as one of the most military friendly communities in the nation. We are blessed to also have some stellar economic indicators regarding Okaloosa County.

- Okaloosa County's Dec 2024 unemployment rate of 2.8% was tied for the third lowest among Florida's 67 counties. It was also well below Florida's unemployment rate of 3.4% and the U.S. rate of 4.1%.
- Our metro area continues to be highly rated in terms of economic performance by the Milken Institute (non-partisan think tank that ranks communities each year).
- Highest ranked NW Florida metro on the Large City list (#46 Pensacola, # 85 Tallahassee)
- 2nd highest ranked Florida metro (#9 Melbourne)
- Ranked higher than Orlando (#17), Jacksonville (#22), Atlanta (#61), Miami (#64), San Diego (#71), Boston (3119)
- Ranked 18th in Job Growth
- Ranked 21st in Wage Growth last year
- High Tech GDP ranked #19 over past five years
- Housing Affordability improved from #108 to #80

The last bullet point concerns me the most. Those who have lived in Okaloosa County for many years are pleased that their property values have increased. However, especially in the south end of the county, the market has priced out many who must commute long distances for their employment.

We have begun to address the housing affordability difficulties in our county.

- The County hired its first Housing Program Manager in July 2024, focusing on developing community partnerships to encourage affordable housing development, through education campaigns and creating a developers network for those interested in developing affordable housing in Okaloosa County. Community discussions are ongoing regarding the operation of a Community Land Trust in Okaloosa County.
- The County revised its Local Housing Assistance Plan to increase the maximum amount for first time homebuyer assistance in response to the current housing market, and plans to implement the program mid-2025.

- The County completed an Orphan Parcels Master Plan which was accepted by the BCC at the January 7, 2025 meeting.
- The plan can be viewed on the County's website by visiting:
<https://myokaloosa.com/gm/home>
- Okaloosa County will continue to work with community partners, Eglin Air Force Base leadership and the DOD to secure appropriate permissions to utilize orphan parcels for affordable housing and other community needs.
- The County has allocated Local Government Contribution (funding) for affordable housing developments in Crestview and Fort Walton Beach.
- The County has assisted over 30 households with its Homeowner Rehabilitation Program, which provides assistance to homeowners to fix structural or life-threatening issues such as roofs, doors, windows, HVAC and more.
- The County will continue to identify funding opportunities and partnerships to further the development of affordable housing in Okaloosa County. Interested parties can reach out to our Housing Program by calling 850-651-7167 or emailing housing@myokaloosa.com.

It is an honor to serve as your Commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,

*Carolyn N. Ketchel
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