



AGING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: EAST CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

TIP SHEET



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Each year, millions of Americans age out of the workforce and decide to relocate to popular retirement destinations. For the Economic Development Districts (EDDs) that serve the regions to which these folks relocate, the growth of the population of older adults brings both challenges and opportunities that must be carefully considered. Retiree concentrations can enliven communities by creating opportunities for invaluable cross-generational sharing. They can, however, also burden existing assets and public services. The NADO Research Foundation report *[Aging and Economic Development](#)* discusses the economic and social implications of population aging—including retiree concentrations—at some length.

One of the major challenges for economic development planning is to ensure that a region is adaptable to population aging and can accommodate seniors as they age in place—that is, remain independent in their homes for as long as they choose to do so. An overwhelming majority of seniors—as many as 90%—express a desire to remain in their homes as they age rather than relocate or move into an institutional setting.

The planning staff at the [East Central Florida Regional Planning Council](#), an EDD based in Orlando serving an eight-county area with one of the fastest-growing retiree populations in the United States, works with counties and localities to plan for communities that make it easy to age in place. Michelle Morrison, Planner III at ECFRPC, provided the following tips for planners working in communities that may have significant concentrations of older adults.

1. Livability Starts With Land Use

There has been a nationwide trend towards more compact, human scale planning that puts amenities within walking distance of residences and allows a mix of housing types over the past several years. This kind of planning, though age agnostic, can offer particular benefits to older adults.

Connected communities with diverse housing types allow people to maintain their independence without driving to meet all daily needs. Being able to walk to a local park to gather with neighbors or visit a coffee shop or convenience store without getting behind the wheel can improve seniors' social opportunities and feelings of integration into the communities around them. From a purely practical standpoint, it can also reduce the public

services burden on transit and paratransit providers that would otherwise provide these services to folks who are less able to drive than they once were. Morrison notes, *“There are many retirees or seniors here who want to downsize and move into something smaller and more manageable, where they don't have to take care of a yard. It might be in a mixed use environment where they can walk somewhere, because at some point these folks might not be able to drive.”*

Housing typologies like duplexes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs, or ‘granny flats’), and even small apartment buildings—often referred to collectively as the ‘missing middle’—can also help to moderate the cost of housing, a major concern in fast-growing Central Florida. The median home price in the state has doubled in just the past six years, raising cost burdens on retirees, particularly those with fixed or modest retirement incomes.

Speaking about a recent public engagement session around a land use planning project, Morrison comments, *“One of the seniors there raised her hand and said, ‘My friends are moving away. We can't afford these homes. We're getting priced out of what we're renting because people keep moving here. And so our friends, they're moving farther and farther away.’ So aging in place for people like her is more and more difficult to do.”*

2. Take An 8-to-80 Approach

Morrison highlights the 8-to-80 model as one framework informing her planning work. Coined by the noted urban planner Gil Penalosa, the idea is that viewing a community's needs first through the lens of its more vulnerable residents (the 8 and 80 year-olds) ensures that infrastructure is in place to support people of all ages and abilities. Morrison says, *“We try to take a whole population approach. So if you plan for children and seniors—the 8 and the 80—then chances are you'll create a place that works for everyone. For example, if you've designed for an older person who might need assistance walking, whether it's from a wheelchair, cane or something, or an electric scooter, and you have somebody younger who's just learning to navigate on their own, if you can design for safety and access for both those groups you'll have a much better, much more livable city.”*

In practice, the 8-to-80 approach includes emphasizing features such as pedestrian-friendly streets, ample green spaces, reliable public transportation, and community amenities that cater to a diverse population. Morrison notes, for example, that places like community centers can encourage positive cross-generational contact when programmed with this philosophy in mind. ECFRPC's community planning and economic development work incorporates this framework to ensure accessibility and inclusion for all, including older adults.

3. Edge Issues Are Central

Morrison points out some areas peripheral to planning and economic development where ECFRPC is taking a closer look at the needs of older adults. Emergency management workers, for example, need to take seriously the idea that an increasing number of residents may need help evacuating as the community ages. New approaches in those areas should influence planning and economic development work, ensuring synergy between long term physical and economic changes and the needs of older adults during extreme events.

4. Older Adults Are Eager to Engage

As a planner with experience working on in-depth, innovative public engagement processes, Morrison knows firsthand that older adults are disproportionately likely to engage with her work. *“What we see is that when we have public engagement and response opportunities—coming to a workshop, sitting on a focus group panel, participating in a survey, attending a council meeting—who’s going to be there? The retirees,”* notes Morrison. *“They have the time and the resources, and they’re interested.”* She sees this as an important opportunity, not just to hear about their challenges, but to plan for communities that truly respond to them.

Engaging older adults in community and economic development planning is as much about seeing who is in front of you as it is trying new approaches. Still, Morrison credits ECFRPC’s success at engaging older adults in part to some of those new approaches, like talking to folks at community events or tabling near local grocery stores. These engagement sessions have contributed to the development of high-quality, responsive community plans in the ECFRPC region.

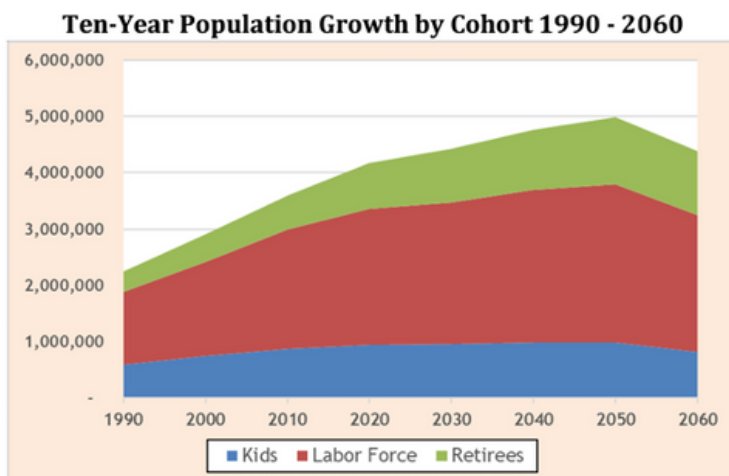
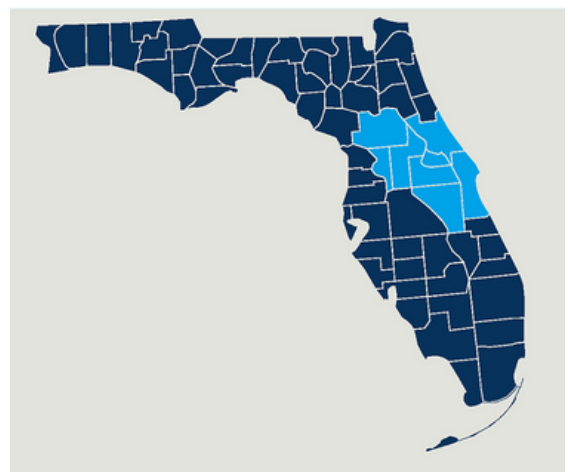


Chart showing the growth of the ECFRPC population, including future projections. Credit: ECFRPC CEDS.



ECFRPC Service Area. Credit: ECFRPC

About the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council

ECFPRC is an association of governments and an EDD serving an eight-county region of central Florida that is home to more than four million people. One of the largest and fastest growing EDDs in the country, it has added more than 1.8 million residents over just the past 20 years. A disproportionate number of those arrivals—nearly 1 in 5—have been retirees. In its CEDS, ECFRPC notes *“The main challenge for East Central Florida will be to identify ways in which these migrants can be best integrated into the community’s fabric. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that some members of these migrant populations will also require specialized services.”*



About Michelle Morrison

Michelle Morrison is a Planner III at ECFRPC, where she works with member localities on comprehensive planning and other major initiatives. A community planner with extensive experience working on public health and environmental resilience initiatives, Morrison came to ECFRPC after receiving her Masters Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Central Florida. In 2022, Morrison was selected as a member of the Urban Land Institute’s prestigious Health Leaders Network.



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