

FUTURE FAIRHOPE;  
MOVING  
FORWARD  
TOGETHER





## **Intro**

**Our Past** - Understanding the Vision that Created Fairhope

**Our Present** - Understanding Today's Fairhope and the Area's Impact

**Our Future** - Enhancing and Preserving the Vision for Fairhope

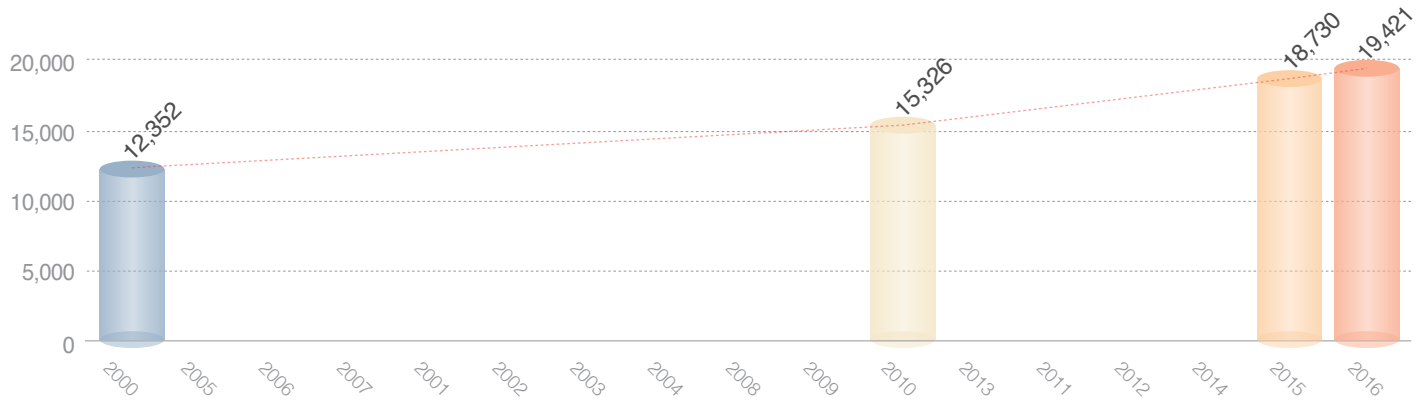
# Introduction

No matter who we are or how long we have lived in Fairhope, I believe there are three things about our city that we can all agree on: our city is beautiful, safe and a desirable place to live; has a rich and interesting history; and faces issues that threaten everything that we love about it.

We know the concerns of our residents. As your mayor, I hear you every day. We love Fairhope but it's the things that are changing our city that bring great concern. We regularly hear your frustrations about traffic and congestion, including how it's hard to find a place to park downtown; we hear about concerns over maintaining and enhancing the quality of our schools; and we hear about the need to protect our overall well-being.

Fairhope had a plan in 1894. We need an innovative plan today. Fairhope needs a clear and concise plan for the future that gives as much weight to protecting the assets in our outlying areas as it does to protecting the assets within the city limits. In addition, our plan must recognize and approach all concerns and issues in the city from the understanding that everything is related to how we handle growth.

No matter what you think is the most important issue though, it all relates to one thing: responsible growth. How we address the continued growth of our city—now the fastest growing city in the state of Alabama—and the growth of our greater region will affect everything we care about most. All the issues concerning growth and how they relate to our lives in Fairhope must be a factor in every decision we make as your elected officials.



We can't stop growth and the business owner in me appreciates the increased sales. I recognize that growth is vital. Everything must grow or die. We can't put a dome over Fairhope and preserve it as it is today or as it was twenty years ago, but we can no longer afford to grow haphazardly. We must acknowledge that every issue and concern in Fairhope is tied to growth both inside and outside our city limits, and we must have a financially and environmentally responsible plan to deal with it. Ultimately that plan must be fully implemented and enforceable.

We need a vision for the future of Fairhope that recognizes the interconnectivity of all concerns, the importance of addressing each issue as they relate to city and regional growth, and the need to make the best use of our City assets to achieve improved fiscal responsibility. The vision many of us have for Fairhope is not so different from what our City's founders held dear in 1894. Like them, we want a city where everyone equally can enjoy the beauty and uniqueness that is Fairhope. ONE Fairhope, ONE culture that respects our unique past and honors our future with a city that works for everyone.

Mayor Karin Wilson

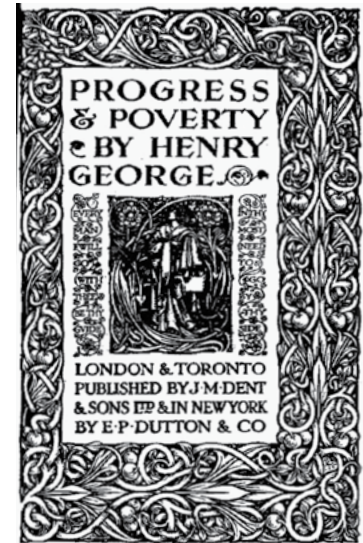


## Our Past:

### Understanding the Vision that Created Fairhope

#### Fairhope Began as a Dream

Unique among most cities, Fairhope was a vision long before it was a town. It began as a dream, an idea: a vision held by a group of dedicated and progressive thinking men and women who wanted a better future. They were motivated to create a community based on a concept, an idea put forward in the book, *Progress and Poverty*, by social and economic reformer Henry George. Like George, Fairhope's founders envisioned a community that gave everyone equal opportunity and the full reward of individual efforts with the benefits of cooperation in areas of mutual concern.





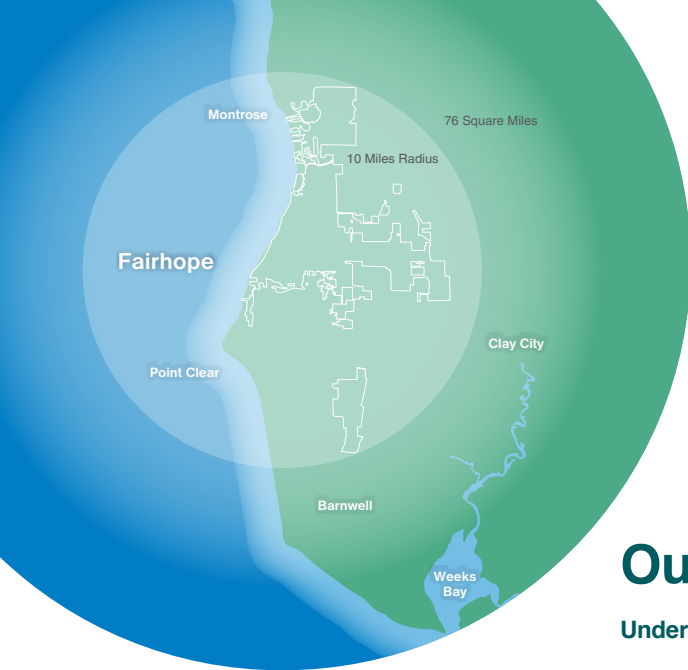


Henry George had a massive following all around the world, but only a handful of his proponents sought to put his theories to test. On November 15, 1894, twenty-eight men, women, and children arrived on the Eastern Shore to do just that. With little more than their dreams for the future, but with a solid plan for how to accomplish those dreams, the men and women of the Fairhope Industrial Association (later the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation) built their community.

Because their vision and plans were sound and the implementation successful, Fairhope attracted talented and interesting people from all backgrounds—just as it does today.

Over time, the vision of the original founders grew to include more than just the members of the FSTC. The City of Fairhope was founded in 1908 to work separately and in tandem with FSTC to contribute to and expand on the dreams and vision of the first settlers.

Fairhope grew and prospered, and in the 100+ years since our town's founding, it has become a special place rich with history and culture: a city that recognizes and honors artists and writers, educators and entrepreneurs, intellectuals and free-thinkers. We have become a city that regularly draws positive national attention for our prized "quality of life," which may be hard to define but is recognized and enjoyed by all our citizens, young and old.



## Our Present:

### Understanding Today's Fairhope and the Area's Impact

#### What Makes Up Fairhope?

In 2016, the population in Fairhope was 16,857—but that's just those who live within the city limits. The population of the greater Fairhope area is nearly double that; more than 32,000. What does that mean? It means that decisions that affect all 32,000 people are made only by about half of the population, only those who live within the city limits. We all want similar things when it comes to our lives here: good schools, controlled traffic, safety, transparency in government, economic development, and protection of our exceptional quality of life. It also means that for all the people who live in the Fairhope area and enjoy many of the benefits Fairhope offers, only half—only those who live within the city limits—support the lion's share of the City financially.

Here's one example. Fairhope Schools (for which the City provides approximately \$1 million in annual funding) draw students from within a 76-square-mile area, far beyond our city limits. Since only half of the population lives inside the city limits, only half of those who benefit pay for this subsidy provided by the City.

Also, Fairhope provides police protection within an area much larger than the city limits. The police department is the City's most costly department and currently is not adequately staffed for the population within the City limits let alone including a larger police jurisdiction. Again, it is just the population inside the city limits that pays for most of its operation.



### **We are at a crossroads**

Fairhope's beginning is unique but the issues we face today are all too common. We live in an attractive, healthy, vibrant community and it should be no surprise to anyone that people continue to want to move here to retire or to raise their families. Fairhope is not a place where many people end up by default. It is a place where people choose to live. The number one issue we face as a community is how we continue to grow in a way that welcomes newcomers while also protecting and preserving all the qualities and assets that made Fairhope special for the past 100+ years.

Everything that we do as a City must tie in to what matters most: how we grow in a responsible manner. It is up to us to create a vision for the future, to hold tight to that vision, and to do all that is required to grow within that vision to ensure that Fairhope remains the special place it is today.

### **How do we address this issue?**

Our vision includes active participation by community stakeholders across a broad demographic range together with the development of local leaders and an emphasis on developing and implementing short- and long-term plans to further the implementation of our visions.

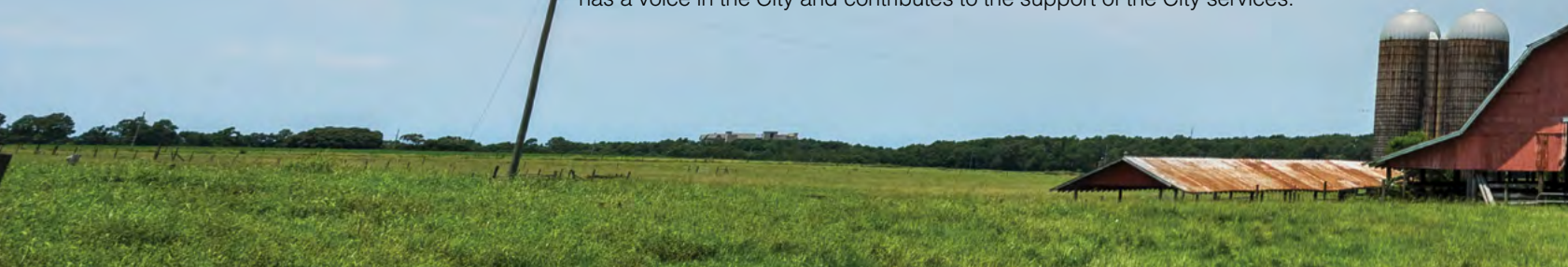


We don't want to turn away people who live outside the city limits or tell them they can't enjoy what Fairhope offers. But we can encourage those outside the city limits to join us. We need to find a way to make that easy and beneficial for them so we can all participate in both funding and protecting what we have.

We must come up with solutions now and plan for long-term effects of this growth. In the future, residents who receive services for free must be brought into the fold to contribute. Right now, half of our residents who do not contribute are being subsidized with city infrastructure and services.



Fairhope is going to continue to grow, and most of the growth is happening outside the City limits. To preserve and protect what we all love and value about our town and our area, we must come up with solutions for today's problems as well as long-term plans to deal with the ongoing effects of growth so that everyone who receives City services has a voice in the City and contributes to the support of the City services.







### **Storm Water knows no boundaries in the rainiest city in the country**

We live in the rainiest places in the country, and dealing with storm water runoff is an issue that must be addressed. For too long, the problems have been allowed to grow unchecked, but this cannot continue. Storm water run-off affects our homes and businesses and our nonrenewable resources: our waterways. Years ago, no one even thought about how storm water could adversely affect our quality of life. Now we know it's one of the issues we face as a city and region, and it's closely tied to other concerns such as new development. We must have current maps that detail water runoff patterns and areas that typically flood in a heavy rain, an understanding of our capacity to manage current storm run-off and deal with it in high-growth areas, and plans for capital improvements to provide relief for areas that regularly experience flooding now and might in the future.

### **The “Problem” with Tourism**

We regularly hear jokes about “closing the gate” to Fairhope. That's not going to happen. Fairhope has attracted tourists from the beginning. People want to visit our beautiful city and the number who come is steadily increasing. Many of these visitors become valued residents who have much to offer. The question is not how do we handle tourism; the question is how does the City benefit from all the people who want to spend time here? We need better ways to capitalize on tourism. We need more accommodations that will provide an increase in lodging tax funds, and we need to increase tourism sales tax revenue to help support the amenities that not only draw the tourists but are enjoyed by our residents.

### **Our City Infrastructure**

We've already begun creating our vision with three key hires for the City in our Planning Department, at Public Utilities and Economic and Community Development. These individuals work together to advance internal changes that allow us to move our vision forward openly and with community input and support. Economic growth is community development. Responsible economic growth is resilient, capable of responding to changing times and conditions. Our vision allows us to do that.

Our Economic and Community Development will fulfill our vision by growing a sustainable City, preserving the City's cultural heritage, being good stewards of the environment, creating opportunities for entrepreneurs, embracing innovation in development and land use planning, and engaging the citizens of Fairhope to encourage their participation in civic activities. We will create and maintain a climate that attracts and sustains businesses and other opportunities that can support our managed growth vision.

We will develop a means by which the city and citizens can form a partnership so our economic development reflects the best we have to offer at every level – business, life style, heritage, culture, education, governance....




A photograph of a wooden pier extending into a body of water at dusk. The pier is made of dark wood and has a small white tower with a green roof on a post in the foreground. The sky is dark, and the water is calm. In the background, there are some buildings and trees on the shore.

Tourism will drive our vision in growing opportunities primarily from the existing tourism base rather than significantly growing the number of visitors, while generating new areas of revenue for the City. We will launch programs which will engage the community in areas from small business opportunities to sustainable agriculture to land use to resilient and sustainable principles like FORTIFIED Homes™. We will partner with universities in areas of architecture, engineering planning, landscape architecture and GIS services to enhance and protect our built and natural environments.

Our Planning Department will provide protocols for an environment for sustainable growth while maintaining a high quality of life and protecting our unique environment. We will work to maintain and enhance Fairhope's small town charm and scenic beauty. Our focus will be on promoting quality development that enhances the character, history and the beauty of Fairhope, while protecting our important natural resources. Our achievements will be based on the development and implementation of visionary plans from collaboration with citizens and elected officials to carry out the vision for the City. These visions will be administered fairly and effectively for all stakeholders by a professional staff who are knowledgeable and considered leaders in their field and who have determined for themselves that this vision for Fairhope is right.





At the heart of our infrastructure are our Public Utilities - electric, gas, water and wastewater services. Our objective is to evaluate the services needed to meet our growth and to improve our infrastructure to efficiently and appropriately support it while providing maximum benefits to our customers. We must provide the manpower and the resources to match the needs of each system. Our vision for these service commitments are both short- and long-term and are targeted to improve our employee capabilities and thus our customer service. We envision improvements in our use of technology, such as a dispatch center for emergency response and maintenance, smart metering on the electric system and high speed internet with fiber to home service. Imagine an added waste water facility in the Quail Creek area where we can utilize the process water for irrigation on the course and residential applications. A series of features on the golf course can include constructed wetlands, rain gardens, wet ponds and flowing water features that enhance the golfing experience and water quality. A reuse water system can add a source of revenue to the utility system while conserving our drinking water supplies. A storm water utility service could accept the maintenance requirements of detention/retention ponds that are scattered within



our city and do more to enhance the capabilities of these systems. This utility could maintain drainage capacities in minor drainage ways, such as the gully-defined watersheds, perform repair needs to damaged culverts and upgrade existing and aging drainage systems within the City. A storm water utility service could be more focused on the storm water issues within the City that promote erosion, minor flooding and illicit discharges that affect overall water quality in the Bay.

### **Our City Assets**

Fairhope has many assets that we all enjoy: quality schools, a state-of-the-art hospital, a unique downtown district, a respected arts community, plentiful parks and green spaces, safe streets, and a healthy level of volunteer support for our institutions.

We asked you to tell us what you appreciate about our city and specifically, where you take visitors. The answers were as you would expect: Residents love our beautiful pier and bay front, our bluff top parks, and our flower-filled and vibrant downtown. Fairhope has more than that, of course, including a City-owned marina, airport, library and municipal golf course: how can we better utilize all of our many assets to not only give our residents more enjoyment but also help support our City financially? If we find the best way to use our City assets, we can increase the City's revenue and continue to give our residents what they want and need.





### **What is the City's Responsibility?**

Among the many responsibilities a city has, one is to provide the climate for businesses to start up, prosper and positively affect the lives of the residents. This means providing such things as reliable utilities (including new investments in fiber optics) and safe streets, and it also means providing clear communication so that entrepreneurs, business owners and citizens know what is required of them to do business in Fairhope. Given proper support and clear information, businesses and other organizations will flourish and we will all benefit.

### **What Do We Need to Do?**

The City of Fairhope can support and encourage economic development in many ways by supporting tourism, arts, our parks and sports: all of this can increase the economic and cultural success of our community.

Since Fairhope's beginning, the city has attracted entrepreneurs and independent thinkers: educators, shop owners, inventors, artists, writers, musicians, professionals, and others. Many cities spend considerable effort to develop "think tanks." Our City has always been a think tank—an innovation district. And Fairhope has always been citizen-driven. The people who live here—whether they moved here recently or are longtime residents—want to contribute their time, ideas, and energy. Together we can educate, create, support and protect this think-tank mentality which will give us a firmer economic footing and maintain what is so special about Fairhope.







## Our Future:

### Enhancing and Preserving a Vision for Fairhope

Fairhope was a vision before it was a town. It was a dream for a better future, and we have now come full circle. For Fairhope to continue to prosper in a way that honors our history and protects our unique assets and our quality of life, we must refocus the vision. We must continue to dream of a better future.

Obviously, we've done something right. Fairhope constantly ranks at the top of many national surveys. Cities all across the country would love to have these accolades. So, the word is out: we have tourism. Our job as a city is to capitalize on this. Our city needs more accommodations to ensure that when people come to our area they're not staying in Gulf Shores or on the outskirts of town. With more lodging options in town, we can collect a lodging tax that helps offset what citizens and utilities now have to pay to make up the city's shortfall.



## What Must We Do to Enhance and Support a Vision for Fairhope?

- We must honor our diversity and unite to address our biggest concerns. For our quality of life and economy to grow, we have to deliver efficient services through government investment at all levels.
- We must build partnerships with entrepreneurs and nonprofits, and work across sectors to find new solutions, remove barriers, and develop innovative responses to the challenges faced by our City.
- We must strengthen bonds between communities and police. Our communities are safest when our public safety officers are part of the community, intrinsic to our neighborhoods, working with faith-based leaders, nonprofits, educators, and small businesses.
- We must invest in upkeep on our City-owned buildings and other assets and rebuild failing infrastructure to benefit our citizens, promote economic development, and create more efficiency.
- We must work together to support small business growth and encourage inclusion and diversity.
- We must all participate in making our schools the best they can be.
- We must invest in our own municipal broadband infrastructure, in concert with private companies if necessary, to ensure affordable broadband reaches every resident and ensure we are supporting industry and quality growth.
- We should work together to make the best use of Fairhope's "gateway" entrances with a performing arts center or other facility for the benefit of all residents.
- We should support STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education as an investment in our youth and to build a stronger workforce for tomorrow.
- We can support summer job programs that link youth employment to student pathways, through our schools, City and private sector, so that work is relevant to what students are studying. This maximizes the positive return on the investment for both employers and students.







The Mayor and Council know what the residents of Fairhope want. You want to preserve and protect the special aspects of Fairhope. You want to do this with effective, responsible, transparent government that reflects the wishes and meets the needs of all citizens of our City. Our responsibility is to ensure the effectiveness of basic city services and to plan for the future so that these services and more can continue to be enjoyed by all.

The original founders arrived with a plan and a vision. They knew what they wanted to accomplish and together they worked toward those goals. With the help and support of all citizens, we can accomplish that again today.







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