



From Small Town to Growing Community: How EDA Helped Shape Pike Road's Future

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In 1997, Pike Road was a quiet, rural Alabama town of just 200 residents nestled on the outskirts of the state's capital city of Montgomery. Today, it has grown into one of Alabama's fastest-growing municipalities, with more than 10,000 residents calling it home. This transformation reflects the town's mission: "Maintaining Our Character While Planning For Progress."

Though incorporated in 1997, Pike Road's roots date back to the early 1800s, when families such as the Meriwethers, Mathews and Marks built a farming community around a toll road. The road, where travelers paid a "pike" to pass, gave the town its name. Today, Pike Road celebrates its history while embracing growth, hosting events such as SummerFest for Independence Day and a plein air event hosted by its arts council that attract artists from across the eastern United States.

In 2005, the citizens of Pike Road participated in a visioning exercise, which created the four pillars they aim to live by: quality of life, public services, planning and education.

Education has played a central role in Pike Road's transformation. After years of strategic analysis, determined grassroots work and outcome-driven research, the Pike Road School System was established in 2010. Starting with no buildings, Pike Road Schools now boasts four campus locations, including a 6A high school. The system has scored "A's" on state report cards and houses active, award-winning extracurricular programs for music, robotics, theater, agriscience as well as high-level competition athletics programs. The town takes pride in their commitment to furthering lifelong learning, which is evidenced in the fact that 80% of the 2023-2024 high school graduates are pursuing additional higher education.

Furthermore, the town's ENHANCE Initiative promotes exercise, nutrition, health, agriculture, nature, community and education through volunteer-led projects. Developing community based trails, athletic facilities and a performing arts center are among the most notable accomplishments, further demonstrating Pike Road's commitment to enriching residents' lives.



Left: The Alpha Elite Academy is just one of the many successful youth programs that distinguish Pike Road's community in positive ways. The mayor and town council are always proud to celebrate accomplishments within the community. Right: Councilman Chris Dunn meets with engaged residents at one of six community input sessions for the 2024 comprehensive plan update.

The town's progress reflects the pride and dedication of its residents, who embrace a "Welcome Home" attitude. Known for its hospitality, faithful people, work ethic and quality of life, Pike Road has grown while preserving its small-town charm.

To support its rapid growth, Pike Road participated in the Alabama League of Municipalities' Economic Development Academy (EDA) in 2021. The program, developed in partnership with the Alabama Community College System, equips municipal officials with tools for sustainable growth and tailored economic strategies. Through collaborative sessions, leaders from across Alabama share insights and best practices.

Pike Road's leadership viewed the EDA as an opportunity to refine their growth strategy while maintaining their focus on community values. Participation in the program provided officials with insights to strengthen the economic base, attract new businesses and enhance residents' quality of life.

One of the first steps in Pike Road's EDA participation was conducting a community economic vitality survey. The survey identified opportunities to expand the town's retail, professional and industrial base, aligning with its comprehensive plan. First developed in 2007 and updated in 2017, the plan provides a roadmap for growth while balancing new development with Pike Road's character.

Participation in the EDA also strengthened collaboration among Pike Road's leaders. Mayor Gordon Stone, a key advocate for Pike Road's development, has led the town's involvement in the program. "We wanted to learn from the experts in the field of economic development so we could apply their work in our town," Stone said.

Stone began his journey with Pike Road in 1997 by signing the incorporation petition back when the town had 350 residents and only spanned two square miles. Shortly after, he was elected to the town council in 2000 and then as mayor in 2004. In addition to serving as mayor, he leads Alabama's Higher Education Partnership, which advocates for public universities and their economic contributions. Stone, a former Auburn football walk-on with degrees in agricultural economics and business, has guided Pike Road's growth with a vision for balancing opportunity and community character.

Stone joined Pike Road teammates Doug Fuhrman, Robert Gilpin, Chris Myers, Liz Craig and Rob Steindorff in attending the program. Together, they refined their approach to economic planning, business recruitment and community-focused strategies. Building on the lessons learned from the EDA, Pike Road launched the ONWARD Town of Pike Road initiative in 2024. This multi-project capital improvement plan aims to sustain growth momentum while enhancing the town's infrastructure, recreation facilities and accessibility.

Key projects under ONWARD include an economic development park; a recreation facility expansion, including new tennis and pickle-ball courts and The Children's Depot for Inclusive Play; and multiple road improvements. The mayor



Left: In partnership with Innovate Alabama, Pike Road hosted four dynamic college interns through its Innovative Intensive Internship. **Right:** Over 1,200 Pike Road residents participate in their annual Hay, Look at Us! hay bale decorating competition! Pictured are members of The Villages of Pike Road neighborhood working on their "sweet" creation.

shared the town is also engaged in securing retail in their five town centers. These developments align with Pike Road's commitment to ensuring its growth benefits all residents and highlights how the town has integrated EDA insights into workable projects that enhance quality of life and support sustainable progress.

"Pike Road is a community that has been blessed to have wonderful engagement and active support from its citizens. The energy created by residents who enthusiastically participate in the support of local business, agriculture, arts, and education has been amazing," Stone said. "The evidence is shown through residents attending local theater productions, greeting visiting plein air artists, cheering for the Pike Road Patriot athletics and exercising on the trails."

As Pike Road continues to grow, its leaders are focused on ensuring future projects align with the town's mission. The town has hired a director of economic development to build on the EDA's momentum and oversee business recruitment and community engagement.

This strategic approach has positioned Pike Road as a model for other municipalities navigating growth. The town's comprehensive plans, informed by data and guided by community values, demonstrate how thoughtful planning can balance progress with preservation.

With a focus on education, community-driven projects and sustainable development, Pike Road has become a standard for success for other municipalities. As its leaders look to the future, they remain committed to ensuring that the town's growth benefits current and future generations alike. ■



Dozens of Pike Road residents and local officials gathered enthusiastically for the ground breaking of the new Pike Road High School campus on May 23, 2024.

For more information
about the EDA program,
scan this QR code.



The Children's Depot was dedicated as part of Pike Road's Founders Day events on Oct. 24, 2024. The park is an inclusive playground, designed with every child in mind.

