5. Use of Sustainability Tools for Assessing and Rating Communities ("STAR")

Given Islamorada's commitment to the principles in its Strategic Plan and existing Sustainability Plan, for this planning process the Team used the third-party rating system of STAR to evaluate its sustainability goals and actions. This Plan incorporates the results of the preliminary STAR assessment performed for the Village.

A) Overview of the STAR Framework

STAR is the first national third-party certification program that recognizes sustainable communities and provides a tool for evaluating a community's level of sustainability. STAR is both a framework and formal certification program. Originally released in October 2012, STAR is intended to provide communities with a method for identifying, validating, and supporting the implementation of best practices that improve sustainable community conditions. STAR provides local leaders with a framework for assessing their community's current level of sustainability, setting targets for moving forward, and measuring progress along the way. STAR consists of seven (7) main goal areas broken down into forty-four (44) objectives, 109 outcome level measures, 408 local actions and 526 indicators to assist local governments and communities in more effectively strategizing and defining sustainability planning efforts.

The STAR goal areas and objectives are provided below.

Table 4. STAR Community Rating System Goal Area Matrix[19]

7 Focus Areas
44 Objectives
109 Outcome Measures
408 Local Actions
526 Indicators

Built Environment	Climate & Energy	Economy & Jobs	Education, Arts & Community	Equity & Empowerment	Health & Safety	Natural Systems
Ambient Light & Noise	Climate Adaptation	Business Retention & Development	Arts & Culture	Civic Engagement	Active Living	Green Infrastructure
Community Water Systems	Greenhouse Gas Mitigation	Green Market Development	Community Cohesion	Civil & Human Rights	Community Health & Health Systems	Invasive Species
Compact & Complete Communities	Greening the Energy Supply	Local Economy	Educational Opportunity & Attainment	Environmental Justice	Emergency Prevention & Response	Natural Resource Protection
Housing Affordability	Industrial Sector Resource Efficiency	Quality Jobs & Living Wages	Historic Preservation	Equitable Services & Access	Food Access & Nutrition	Outdoor Air Quality
Infill & Redevelopment	Resource Efficient Buildings	Targeted Industry Development	Social & Cultural Diversity	Human Services	Indoor Air Quality	Water in the Environment
Public Spaces	Resource Efficient Public Infrastructure	Workforce Readiness		Poverty Prevention & Alleviation	Natural & Human Hazards	Working Lands
Transportation Choices	Waste Minimization				Safe Communities	

Because each community addresses sustainability differently, there are three (3) levels of subscription available in STAR: 1) Participating STAR Community; 2) Reporting STAR Community; and 3) Leadership STAR Community. Participating STAR Communities – like Islamorada – are those that conduct a preliminary assessment of their sustainability and establish a "baseline" sustainability score. This introductory level allows the municipality to assess current conditions and set goals and priorities for becoming more sustainable after seeing where they currently stand on the sustainability continuum. Conducting a preliminary assessment results in a preliminary rating score, ranging from 0 to the maximum 720 points. Reporting STAR Communities undergo a more substantive assessment involving the compilation and electronic reporting of data gathered during the assessment process and a formal review of submitted data by STAR technical staff. Once certified, an official STAR score lasts three (3) years, though a local government can submit an application for re-certification to update their rating score within that time period if so desired (this requires an annual subscription renewal and additional cost to re-certify).

There are four (4) certification rating levels under STAR

5-STAR Community

4-STAR Community

3-STAR Community

Reporting STAR Community

There are four (4) certification rating levels under STAR, including the 5-STAR Community (600-720 points), 4-STAR Community (400-599 points), 3-STAR Community (200-399 points), and Reporting STAR Community (<200 points).

B) STAR Outcomes and Actions

Within STAR, each of the forty-four (44) Objectives contains two (2) types of evaluation measures: Community Level Outcomes and Local Actions.

» Community Level Outcomes: more quantitative, measurable, condition-level indicators that show community progress on a STAR Objective. Examples include reductions in energy use or increased transportation access.

» Local Actions: more qualitative actions a government takes to move toward the Community Level Outcomes – the range of decisions, investments, programs, plans, and codes that a local community puts in place. Local actions focus on deliverables that move towards Outcomes, and can be done by both the local government and other community groups and partners. Examples include policies, codes and regulations, as well partnerships and specific education and outreach programs to achieve desired results.

Because of the qualitative nature of STAR and the multi-disciplinary input into its development, STAR serves as a sound basis for developing recommendations in this planning process. The STAR framework provides a robust metric of outcomes and actions that local governments can use to evaluate current and previous planning initiatives. It can also be used to track performance for the planning process. Outcome level measures provide quantitative measures for determining the effectiveness of initiative implementation. Additionally, the suite of local actions within the STAR framework provides ideas that local governments can use in implementing new initiatives to achieve desired outcome level measures.

In addition to guiding recommendations in this Plan, the STAR framework can also be used to guide future Comprehensive Plan update processes. STAR's comprehensive metrics provide local governments with a methodical approach to identifying strengths and weaknesses in the existing Comprehensive Plan. There is significant overlap between the goal areas within the STAR framework and recommended Comprehensive Plan principles created by the American Planning Association ("APA") as part of its Sustaining Places initiative. APA's recommended Comprehensive Plan principles include: 1) Livable Built Environment, 2) Harmony with Nature, 3) Resilient Economy, 4) Interwoven Equity, 5) Healthy Community, and 6) Responsible Regionalism. Of the forty-four (44) STAR Objectives, the following dovetail best with APA's recommended principles and the overall Comprehensive Planning process:

- Compact & Complete Communities

- Housing Affordability

- Infill & Redevelopment

- Public Spaces

- Transportation Choices

- Climate Adaptation

- GHG Mitigation

- Local Economy

- Community Cohesion

- Historic Preservation

- Environmental Justice

- Equitable Services & Access

- Active Living

- Food Access & Nutrition

- Natural & Human Hazards

- Green Infrastructure

- Natural Resources Protection

C) Islamorada's Preliminary Assessment

The preliminary assessment allows a community to research and document gaps in their sustainability planning efforts, establishing a "baseline" score. Establishing this baseline allows communities to strategize ways to effectively improve their services, policies and procedures to strengthen their community and work towards a higher level of sustainability.

Beginning in February of 2014, Islamorada conducted a preliminary STAR assessment of current policies, practices and services previously initiated and implemented using the STAR framework. Over the course of several months, research was conducted to identify initiatives in each of the seven (7) STAR goal areas. In instances where Islamorada was affiliated with, supportive of or otherwise involved in programs, services and planning initiatives conducted by other entities on a regional scale, Islamorada was credited for that participation. This is consistent with the STAR guidance and includes initiatives outside of Islamorada's formal jurisdiction, but where there is cross collaboration and there are co-benefits, so that points are credited where appropriate.

Hurricane Monument, Islamorada, FL
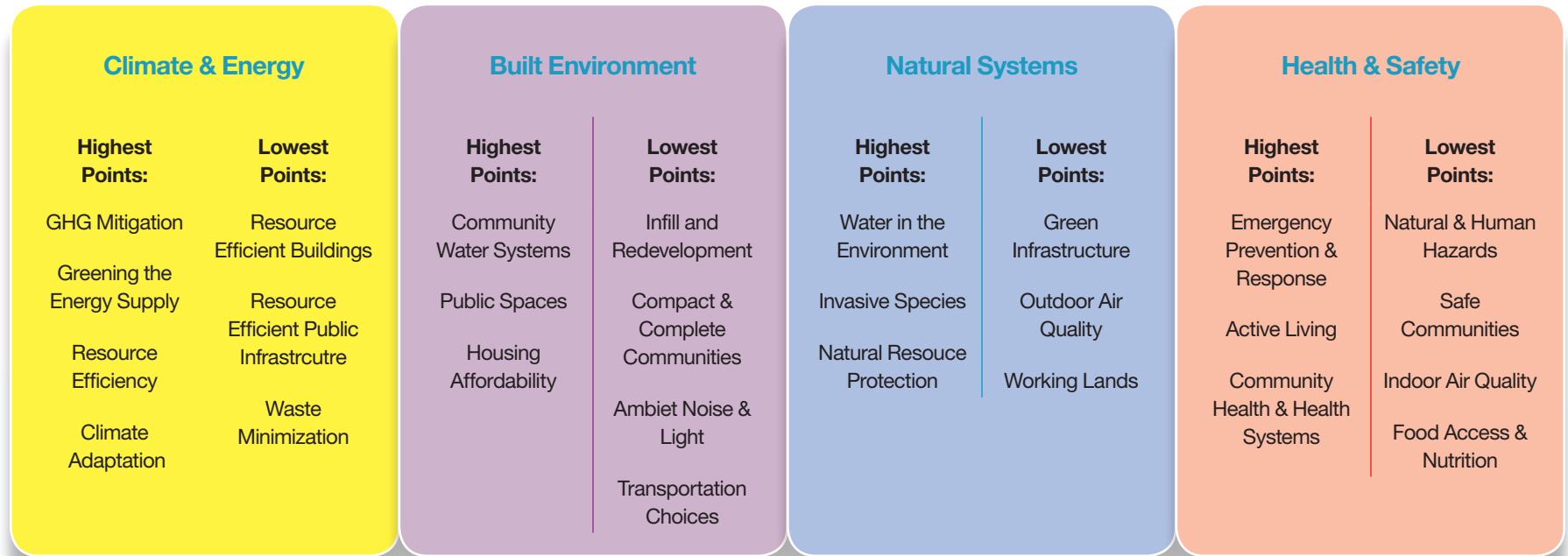Photo Source: Project Team

Results of Islamorada's preliminary assessment indicate that Islamorada obtained a preliminary score of 256.9 out of the available 720 points. This equates to a 3-Star Community ranking under STAR. Note however that according to STAR, the final certified score after review by STAR technical staff decreases on average 60-100 points due to data discrepancies. Communities are then allowed to resubmit additional information to address data gaps which is then reviewed by technical staff typically resulting in an improved score. Because of the preliminary score indicated by this research, if the Village ever pursues formal STAR certification it will be critical to ensure accuracy and completeness in all data submitted for review to ensure that a 3-STAR Community ranking is ultimately achieved. A breakdown of Islamorada's preliminary score by goal area is depicted below.

Table 5. Preliminary STAR Assessment Points Breakdown

Goal Area	Points Scored	Points Available	% of Total Points Earned
Built Environment	40.2	100	40.2%
Climate & Energy	52.3	100	52.3%
Economy & Jobs	11.4	100	11.4%
Education, Arts & Community	39.6	70	56.5%
Equity & Empowerment	18.1	100	18.1%
Health & Safety	51.6	100	51.6%
Natural Systems	38.8	100	38.8%
Innovation & Process Credits	5	50	10%
TOTAL	**256.9**	**720**	**35.5%**

Islamorada scored the highest in the goal areas of Education, Arts & Community, Climate & Energy and Health & Safety, respectively. Islamorada's participation in this planning process, participation in the SFRCCC, implementation of Sustainability Plan goals and its progressive BPAS incentive program all helped Islamorada gain points. Similarly, open space and shoreline protection policies, as well as stormwater infrastructure improvements, also helped increase the Village's score. Islamorada's Fire and Emergency Management efforts, in combination with similar services provided by the County, also helped the Village attain a higher score. Islamorada scored fewer points in the Natural Systems, Economy & Job and Equity & Empowerment goal areas in large part due to its unique geography and smaller population and somewhat limited access to services in these areas which are typically more robust in areas with larger population.

In the four (4) goal areas with the greatest relationship to this planning effort (Climate & Energy, Built Environment, Natural Systems, and Health & Safety), Islamorada scored fairly well. The highest and lowest point breakdowns for these goal areas are depicted in the graphic below. The STAR Crosswalk Excel spreadsheet illustrating the results of Islamorada's preliminary assessment is provided in Appendix E.

Climate & Energy

Highest Points:

GHG Mitigation

Greening the Energy Supply

Resource Efficiency

Climate Adaptation

Lowest Points:

Resource Efficient Buildings

Resource Efficient Public Infrastrcutre

Waste Minimization

Built Environment

Highest Points:

Community Water Systems

Public Spaces

Housing Affordability

Lowest Points:

Infill and Redevelopment

Compact & Complete Communities

Ambiet Noise & Light

Transportation Choices

Natural Systems

Highest Points:

Water in the Environment

Invasive Species

Natural Resouce Protection

Lowest Points:

Green Infrastructure

Outdoor Air Quality

Working Lands

Health & Safety

Highest Points:

Emergency Prevention & Response

Active Living

Community Health & Health Systems

Lowest Points:

Natural & Human Hazards

Safe Communities

Indoor Air Quality

Food Access & Nutrition

D) How Islamorada's Preliminary Score Compares to Other Certified STAR Communities

Islamorada's preliminary score of 256.9 out of 720 points is high for a community of its size. For comparative purposes, the Team reviewed scores of other communities that also received certified scores within the 3-STAR Community range. Other communities achieving a 3-STAR Community rating are much larger than Islamorada, with populations ranging from 22,000 to 100,000 (as compared to the Village's population of 6,000).

Table 6. Other 3-STAR Certified Communities

Community	Population	Score	Date of Certification	Community	Population	Score	Date of Certification
Albany, NY	97,000	215.2	6/1/2014	Fayetteville, AR	75,000	271.9	8/10/2014
Woodbridge Township, NJ	99,585	219.5	2/2/2015	El Cerrito, CA	23,549	274.6	5/27/2014
Reading, PA	87,893	234.1	5/4/2015	Rosemount, MN	22,000	325	3/8/2015

E) Certification and Scoring

If desired, Islamorada can leverage the work done in completing the preliminary STAR assessment to undergo the formal STAR certification process if there is interest in doing so. To pursue formal certification, the Village would need to subscribe to STAR as a Reporting STAR Community, a year-long subscription which provides access to an online data storage and reporting tool. Formal certification would require additional data compilation and input of the collected data into the STAR online reporting tool. At the conclusion of data compilation and input activities, a formal verification would be requested from STAR's technical staff to verify the data submitted for accuracy and assign a formal score and rating based upon the total points achieved. Once certified, the score is valid for three (3) years.

Case Study: Baltimore, Maryland STAR Integration

The City of Baltimore ("City") faces a wide range of natural hazards like flooding, coastal storms and extreme heat. In 2013, the City prepared a Disaster Preparedness Project and Plan ("DP3"), combining hazard mitigation and climate adaptation into a single plan. Their DP3 included an innovative flood vulnerability assessment showing the estimated flooding, sea level rise and coastal storm influence of climate change, coastal hazards assessment showing how urban forests, parks and green space provide a storm buffer and heat vulnerability assessment identifying urban heat islands and hot spots.

The City is currently in the implementation phase, taking actions to strengthen their resilience based on the results of the DP3. High priority actions include:

- New floodplain regulations more stringent than FEMA;
- Growing Green Initiative which uses vacant lots for stormwater management and coastal buffering;
- Installation of 200 Urban Heat Island Sensors in hot spot communities where over thirty (30) tree plantings have been conducted;
- Integration of resilience considerations into the City's Capital Improvements Process;
- Citizen and business education about emergency preparedness and the impacts of climate change; and
- Development of a tree database that considers climate change impacts and identifies which tree species are best to plant in specific areas to help mitigate the impacts.

The City's climate adaptation efforts and current implementation strategy helped contribute to the 5-STAR rating obtained by the City of Baltimore in April 2015 (one of only three 5-STAR Communities in the U.S.).

F) Future Use of STAR and Key Areas for Improvement

Given the comprehensive nature of STAR across all seven (7) goal areas that span from economic development to social values, there are many uses for this information beyond just this planning process. It can be used as a roadmap, as a planning tool, as a way to organize/guide public engagement processes, to aid in decision-making, for performance-based budgeting, and as a measuring stick to determine whether investments are achieving outcomes. Communities have used STAR for strategic planning purposes as well as comprehensive planning purposes.

The Islamorada Matters planning effort focuses on integrating four (4) main STAR goal areas for future efforts, including: Climate & Energy, Built Environment, Natural Systems and Health & Safety, as well as the formulation of additional recommendations outside of the STAR framework. These STAR goal areas have been incorporated into the main Focus Areas of this Plan specific to the Village (as discussed in Section 6) to assure this planning process is tailored to the Village's goal of focusing on sea level rise. After completion of the STAR preliminary assessment, Islamorada staff and the Team prioritized the remaining local actions and outcome level measures that seemed most applicable or practical to Islamorada and in the greatest alignment with future Village goals for increasing overall sustainability. Only those local actions and outcome level measures most applicable to Islamorada were prioritized and are therefore included in this Plan. These recommendations reflect local actions and/or outcome level measures within the STAR framework that have yet to be implemented by Islamorada and can be found in Appendix E. The three (3) remaining goal areas from STAR (Equity & Empowerment, Economy & Jobs and Education, Arts & Community) are not discussed in the body of this document; however goal priorities for these areas are provided in the Goal Prioritization Memorandum included in Appendix E.

> **Always plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.**
>
> **Richard C. Cushing**