

# WHERE ORLANDO'S ECONOMY IS HEADED IN 2026

*Orlando business leaders discuss growth and uncertainty in the year ahead.*

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**D**anielle Perera has been keeping up the pace with her business' growth.

The co-owner and operator of Jeff's Bagel Run with her husband Jeff Perera just opened the chain's 27th location Jan. 28 in Orlando. The chain began 2025 with eight locations open and now is growing into new markets.

There's a flurry of new stores on the way,

including Atlantic Beach, near Jacksonville; Alabama; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Las Vegas. In total, Jeff's has more than 150 signed agreements with franchisees to expand, she said during the *Orlando Business Journal's* Jan. 29 Economic Forecast event.

"To say we are busy is an understatement," Perera said.

As the chain grows, Perera said the

company is mindful of changing trends, including its supply chain demands in an uncertain economy.

That uncertainty is a key point to the overall state of the U.S. economy, according to a number of national experts. A report from the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research shows consumer spending, rising wages and a "buoyant" stock market fueled a "solid pace" last year – but

there were uncertain factors that continue into this year.

In fact, Sean Snaith, director of the Institute for Economic Forecasting at the University of Central Florida, said this uncertainty continues to shape Orlando's economy.

He said a ruling on tariffs has yet to come out from the Supreme Court, consumer spending is expected to slow down



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and job growth is slowing. At the same time, unemployment is low and gross domestic product growth is solid.

Snaith expects Florida to outperform the national economy and the Orlando economy to be better than the state. Even with a slowdown expected in the national economy, Snaith said Florida will continue to grow, citing its readiness similar to how the state preps for a hurricane.



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Sean Snaith, director of the Institute for Economic Forecasting at the University of Central Florida

“We have the sandbags of population growth and the window shutters of a very strong – and a continuing to be strong – labor market,” Snaith said.

Tourism, a major part of Central Florida’s economy also is expected to grow. November is the most recent month with data available, during which Orange County Tourist Development Tax collections on hotels and short-term rentals were a record \$34.56 million for the month – up 8.7% from November 2024.

Visit Orlando President and CEO Cassandra Matej said first-quarter advance bookings are 1.7% ahead of the prior year, with strong activity in February and March. Those figures suggest demand for travel, which is an important type of discretionary spending, remains strong – at least to start the year.

Meanwhile, businesses also are finding more confidence in their own future performance than the economy as a whole.

The Orlando Economic Partnership found in its fourth-quarter 2025 Orlando MSA Business Conditions Survey that 40% of local businesses indicated confidence in the U.S. economy over the next three months, down from 42% in the prior quarter. At the same time, 76% said they were confident in their own business, up from 72%.

Here is more from experts who participated in the Jan. 29 OBJ panel regarding their outlook and what is next.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



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**Sean Snaithe**, director, UCF Institute for Economic Forecasting

**On the Federal Reserve:**

“Chairman Jerome Powell will step down from being the leader in May, and a new Fed Board Chair will be appointed and confirmed by the Trump administration. I don’t expect any cuts until after the change in leadership. From that point on, I would expect maybe two quarter-point cuts through the end of the year.”

**On the housing market:**

“In Central Florida, that housing shortage is even more profound at 3.8 months of supply. Prices have dipped year-over-year, but still almost \$440,000 for the median price for a single-family home. That is much higher than it was even at the peak of the housing bubble.”



**Gary Huttman**, executive director, MetroPlan Orlando

**On the agency’s plans in 2026:**

“Obviously, there’s a lot of growth, and a lot of that is continuing. We just updated our Long Range Plan, and that anticipates another 1 million people coming to Central Florida between now and 2050. ... We expect ... a lot of transportation projects going on to meet that demand and a fight for resources, that being funding.”

**On the state of transportation in the region:**

“I think we are doing well — not just in Central Florida, but the entire state, because we are less reliant on the federal government. ... Many times when you hear of potential shutdowns, colleagues from around the country go into a real panic ... and that’s less so [here]. We’re looking at things differently now than we did 10 years ago, with rebuilding certain infrastructure and downsizing some of our transportation facilities to make them friendlier and safer. We’re also big into e-mobility.”



PHOTOS BY SPOKEN MOTION STUDIO

**Frank Martz**, city manager, city of Altamonte Springs

**On building ties between government and private sector:**

“We have built a lot of [public-private partnerships] over the years. It’s benefited our residents and the economy, so we are very positive. Sean Snaithe said many things I agree with, but the one thematic part is stability. If we can get to a stabilized place politically and economically, I think there can be tremendous opportunities for the government to think outside the box and learn how to adapt itself to business — instead of having business adapt to it.”

**On the city’s Altamonte Global Innovation Lab (AGiL):**

“From a public-private partnership standpoint, we are not a private equity investor. What we are is a publicly paid-for experimental lab, and the question is, ‘What do you want to do?’ What we want to do with it is attract private sector innovators ... share that information with our public sector colleagues, let everybody learn as we learn ... and it should be used to figure out how to make people’s lives better.”

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**ECONOMIC OUTLOOK**



**Danielle Perera**, co-founder, Jeff's Bagel Run

**On the outlook of the food industry in 2026:**

"In the food/quick-service restaurant space, it's similar to 2025, but you will see a lot of value focus. ... That will really differentiate businesses based on hospitality. People are more thoughtful about where they are spending their money, and value means something different these days. Value does not just mean I get it for a dollar cheaper or in a bundle; value is going to be about the experience that happens in the location for the business."

**How the company adapts to challenges:**

"We're a young business, capital isn't readily available all the time, and so we quickly acknowledged that having a more diverse strategy for paper goods and how we were sourcing was essential. ... To try to get someone to make a plastic cup in America is almost impossible. So I learned that, but we're doing it. What we learned is we need to diversify our supply chain. We found domestic vendors for almost all of our products, which has been a huge win."



**We're experiencing the same problems that most people who develop real estate have in the past couple of years. The difference for us is that my rent is capped for what I can charge, so tax credits and other things I use as equity in my developments become critical."**

Ryan von Weller, COO,  
Wendover Housing Partners



**Ryan von Weller**, COO, Wendover Housing Partners

**On industry challenges and solutions:**

"We are somewhat bullish overall. I believe, for better or for worse, the need for affordable and workforce housing is one of the greatest in the country. What's driving that is we are a service-based economy, Central Florida is built upon tourism and visitation, and the need to live close to where you work is essential — not only for the well being for the resident, but also for the success of the industries they contribute in."

**On the company outlook and activity:**

"I've got projects in Seminole County that are ongoing. I just started one west of downtown Orlando. I've got one in Volusia County. We're continuing to build these more ... vanilla 80- to 120-unit projects all over the state, but we're really trying to get into these larger-scale, regional impact type developments. ... Catchlight Crossings is a great first example. Hopefully, we'll grow that into some other opportunities of similar size and scale."

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Nancy Hecht has been in the financial planning field for 30 years, she is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professional, and an Investment Advisory Representative, Nancy is a frequent contributor to The Orlando Sentinel's "Money Matters," The Orlando Business Journal, the "On the Money" program on 107.3FM/580AM WDBO, Channel 6 WKMG news, and Channel 35 Fox Orlando.

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