

INTRODUCTION, HISTORICAL CONTEXT & COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

Wauchula was incorporated in 1902 along the Florida Southern railroad, north of old Fort Hartsuff. Wauchula, the county seat of Hardee County, boasts a population of nearly 5,000 people. The community initially grew up around Fort Hartsuff, one of the many military forts during the Seminole Wars. The town was an economic and social center in rural central Florida in the early settlement days.

The Florida Southern Railway named Wauchula in 1886 when it extended its route and set up a depot. The name was derived from the Miccosoukee Indian word *Wa-tu-la-ha-kee*, meaning “*call of the sand hill crane*”. Banks and stores opened quickly, and like many railroad towns along the Peace River, Wauchula benefited from the phosphate boom, the endless citrus groves, and the roving cattle. Wauchula’s City Hall, a Mediterranean revival treasure still standing near the train station, was built in 1926.



Greetings from Wauchula, Florida

Photograph courtesy of the Hardee County Cracker Trail Museum

The City of Wauchula is centrally located in Hardee County and is situated along U.S. Highway 17 which extends north-south connecting the adjacent communities including Lakeland, Bartow, and Bowling Green to the north, Zolfo Springs, Arcadia, and Punta Gorda/Port Charlotte to the south. Wauchula is the largest city in the county and serves as the county seat for Hardee County. Per the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR), Wauchula had an estimated population of 4,560 persons in 2009, up from 4,368 persons in 2000 (U.S. Census). The City is approximately 3.19 square miles in size and has annexed approximately 459 acres since 1998.

The City of Wauchula CRA currently contains over 1,536 acres (over 2.4 square miles) encompassing approximately 1,673 properties or approximately 75 percent of the City. In contrast, the current City of Wauchula includes over 2,043 acres. The CRA boundary was established in 1997 as part of the initial CRA Master Plan adoption and implementation, and included the majority of the City of Wauchula. The CRA was established to address deteriorated and blighted conditions existing within the City. Since 1997, no properties have been added or removed from the CRA boundary. A map identifying the current location of the City Limits and the CRA Boundary is included in the Boundary Assessment-Recommendation section. The City of Wauchula adopted Resolutions 97-09 and 97-10 which included the City’s intent to create a Community Redevelopment Area, as well as the finding of necessity that certain conditions existed within the City to qualify under required State Statutes.

The initial CRA boundary was based on, at that time, the full extent of the City of Wauchula, and identified conditions consistent with the definitions contained in Chapter 163, Part III, Florida Statutes. While there has been limited growth and development within the City of Wauchula since the adoption of that Plan, including annexations to the west, northeast and south of the City, many of those areas are not experiencing development conditions or characteristics consistent with the definitions per the Statutes that would warrant additional review and or expansion of the CRA during this planning period. In addition, most of those areas are primarily vacant, large lot residential and/or proposed for future development including provisions for adequate urban infrastructure meeting the current development standards adopted by the City of Wauchula. However, potential additions have been identified where the property has been annexed but still meets several of the criteria necessary for inclusion with the CRA.