

Effective public involvement is critical to the success of any planning process and should be early, continuous and proactive. Community involvement serves the key functions of:

- Building partnerships amongst agencies and stakeholders;
- Enhancing recipient ownership, accountability, and outcomes;
- Addressing the various needs of affected people; and
- Utilizing the skills, experiences, and knowledge of community, local groups and citizenry.

Due to the significance and impact of the City of Wauchula CRA Plan on residents, businesses and visitors within the community as well as the County as a whole, it is important that the public be engaged and actively participate in the review and update of the Plan. The following Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was developed to purposely identify the procedures and operations, as well as targeted stakeholders to facilitate and promote active participation in the review and update process. Specifically, active and engaging public involvement is needed to identify and implement community ideas, visions, goals and also the action items/path necessary to achieve a successful plan. Public involvement is based on the following principles:

- Accessibility
- Transparency
- Communication
- Advocacy

Public involvement consists of several related, and often overlapping, processes, including distribution of information, meetings with key stakeholders and community groups, elected officials and overall participation in the process. Accordingly, the PIP also serves to simplify the public involvement process by providing a systematic approach, maximizing the use of available resources and minimizing delays, by ensuring that public involvement activities are coordinated with project tasks and milestones, as well as CRA and City staff.

The CRA staff, CRA Board, along with the consulting team initiated a public process by which formal targets, vision for the CRA and anticipated outcomes were identified early on. The team



held an informational meeting with the CRA Board and Staff on August 10, 2009, followed by a formal project kick-off on August 27, 2009. These meetings were followed by the identification and acceptance of targeted catalyst sites for development and redevelopment activities through meetings with the staff and CRA Board as part of their regular scheduled meeting on November 2, 2009. Throughout the months of December and January, the team performed multiple on-site reviews and site investigations of the areas within the CRA boundary, and met with stakeholders and staff. These efforts culminated with the first public review and comment meeting on January 28, 2010. Notices of this meeting were distributed to City and County agencies, residents, business owners, civic and social groups (Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Wauchula), as well as the placement of the notice in the local newspaper; in addition a flyer was produced for distribution and posting on the City's website announcing the meeting and seeking input for the plan update.

The January public workshop provided a forum for interested persons to provide input and note issues of concern (positive and negative) impacting the community. Persons unable to attend the public workshop were encouraged to provide comments to the CRA staff via email or telephone. Recognizing resident, business and property owner desires to maintain a core activity area for the City of Wauchula, the City Commission and the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) confirmed as one of its top priorities the update of the community's redevelopment plan. The CRA held a community planning and visioning workshop to begin the process of establishing community consensus on the more critical elements desired as part of the Master Redevelopment Plan update.

The workshop was part of the public planning engagement process that allowed interested members of the community to actively participate in shaping the future vision and implementation of the Redevelopment Plan update. The first phase of this effort included a technical analysis that examined conditions that may hinder or support maintaining the quality of life and services that define Wauchula's unique identity and those needed for successful redevelopment. Invitations were sent to local residents, property owners and business owners asking that they attend the



public planning workshop to help set the vision and goals for the Wauchula CRA Redevelopment Plan update. Notice was provided through the local newspaper and on the CRA website announcing the meeting date, time and location. An evening session was offered to allow for a cross section of the community to participate. At the workshop, members of the community were asked to identify those features of Wauchula that they would like to see improved, areas that should remain unchanged, clarify those elements that each participant would most like to see included in future redevelopment, and to suggest ideas for how the community can move forward with practical ideas for implementation. At the conclusion of the meeting, all participants were asked to identify an item that they would like to see funded if they could each have one feature for the future that may not exist today.

The public planning and visioning workshop included a brief introduction, overview of the process and ultimate goals for defining and encouraging appropriate redevelopment of the CRA. Attendees were able to review the information and maps provided during an informal review session prior to the workshop. The workshop facilitated active engagement and allowed participants the full opportunity to better hear and comment on one another's suggestions and ideas.



The following areas for improvement and enhancement were identified:

- Bring retail anchor to the downtown
- Add whole foods or specialty retail
- Bring "people attractor" to the community
- Add useable/available office space
- Improve existing buildings
- Add an education/college/academic institution to downtown
- Increase capacity/parking to support businesses, within walking distance
- Add a farmer's market
- Develop the northwest corner of U.S. 17 with an attractor but also maintain open visual view corridor
- Develop attractive/consistent architecture
- Develop upper floor residential

- Capture pass-by traffic (U.S. 17)
- Assist with business start-up
- Available space is too big, need smaller spaces to lease
- Improved signage, both public and private
- Add directional signage/wayfinding signage
- Engage local financial institutions for public-private partnerships
- Install decorative lighting
- Develop an art walk
- Extend the sound system east across U.S. 17
- Improve the existing parking areas, make them more inviting



- Provide a full-service hospital
- Develop trails and sidewalks, expand outdoor recreation
- More canoe/kayaking opportunities
- Site ready business opportunities/occupancy ready
- Develop full-spectrum of housing
- Community bulletin board(s) at U.S. 17 and Main Street

Members of the community highlighted their desire to see the City, especially the downtown area become more attractive, pedestrian-friendly, interconnected, business-friendly, architecturally interesting, better landscaped, and family-friendly with a cohesive vision for the future - all without losing its current function and practicality including old Florida heritage and small town feel.

Challenges that need to be overcome were identified by participants and included a lack of housing diversity, needed community directional signage, insufficient parking areas, insufficient pedestrian design elements and routes, lack of available business start-up space, feeling of isolation in the downtown area after dark, and the availability of retail, office and residential spaces. The need for additional funding for private projects, including possible public-private partnerships was also highlighted as a critical item.

The following areas for improvement and enhancement were identified:

- Redevelop the Coker Building
- Add more activities including movies in the civic auditorium
- Improve right-of-way maintenance
- Increase store hours (sidewalks roll up at dark)
- Improve on traditional Florida heritage
- Need more amenities
- Sufficiency/type of housing (more workforce)
- Improve the appearance of northbound U.S. 17
- Build on the railroad legacy of U.S. 17
- Improved property "pride"
- Assist with business relocation costs
- Redevelop 7th, 8th and 9th Streets
- More shopping
- Improve/install sidewalks along Bay Street and throughout the community
- Expand restaurant variety in the downtown
- Recognize important presence of religious institutions and community organizations
- Look for opportunities to reach across ethnic and social groups
- Marketing to attract young professionals and retirees
- Expand wastewater treatment plant to build capacity
- Develop a town center/multi-purpose area

The CRA and team held follow up public review meetings on June 7, 2010, and June 14, 2010 to provide the CRA Board, City officials, residents, business owners and the targeted stakeholders with an update of the Plan's development and also review the findings of the analysis performed since the January public meeting. This hands-on review meeting allowed the community to assist the team to further refine the vision and goals of the Redevelopment Plan and also allow for the community's reaction and interaction to the proposed development and redevelopment projects included in the Plan, including the identified catalyst sites.



The team presented its findings and recommendations, including recommended catalyst site development options and proposed CRA projects and plans on June 7, 2010. Similar to the January public workshop, notices of this meeting were

distributed to City and County agencies, residents, business owners, civic and social groups (Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Wauchula). The notice was also placed in the local newspaper and a flyer was produced for distribution and posting on the City's website. Similar to the January public workshop, the goal was to present the findings and recommendations, and receive public input for incorporation into the plan.

An evening session was offered to allow for greater public involvement. At the workshop, members of the community provided the following comments:

- Explore pooled community investment between public and private entities.
- Investigation of possible expansion of the CRA boundary based on property owner requests.
- Analyze the current private property incentives.
- Financial feasibility of the multi-media (movie) theater.
- Focus efforts on the U.S. 17 and Main Street intersection and develop a community corner.
 - The Community Identification Sign was supported with limitations on the type of message and timing (i.e., how often can the message change?).
- The City should explore utility extensions to the east from the current location (i.e., Peace River) to the City owned property (old airport property).
- Investigate a land swap between the City and County for the old airport property and current County public works vehicle building.



- Expand the vision of the plan and look for opportunities to work with the County/Sheriff's office for facilities.

CRA Board Workshop (June 14)

The team presented the CRA Board with the Executive Summary of the Master Plan Update and map/graphic series. The team also presented an overview of the Plan Update including a summary of the on-site investigations, stakeholder interviews, public workshops, review of available/existing CRA and City policies including the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Land Development Code. Recommended improvement projects and practices were reviewed with the Board as well as projected TIF revenues through the existing CRA period. Public comments received included funding options and opportunities within the CRA and a determination (explanation) of how CRA revenues are generated. Additional comments included possible extension of the CRA time period, expansion of the current CRA boundaries including processes and procedures necessary to pursue these items. Summary comments were presented to the Board for consideration in preparation of the Board's review on July 12, 2010.

City of Wauchula Planning and Zoning Board (June 21)

The team presented the CRA Master Redevelopment Plan update to the City's Planning Board on June 21, 2010, for review and finding of consistency with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan. Following a presentation regarding components of the Plan including proposed recommendations for projects and programmatic changes to the CRA as included within the Regulatory Evaluation and the Capital Improvements Plan & Programming of Projects sections of the Plan. The team reviewed the specific elements of the Comprehensive Plan and their relevance to the Plan. The applicable goals, objectives and policies from the Comprehensive Plan are included in the Appendix and include consistency with the following Elements:

- Future Land Use
- Transportation
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Recreation and Open Space
- Intergovernmental Coordination

The team also included provisions contained within the City's 2010 Evaluation and Appraisal Report. The Planning Board noted their interests in development and expansion of existing infrastructure including sidewalks and parks and recreation facilities. The Board asked about portability of the Plan's

recommendations, funding of improvements and opportunities for wayfinding/community oriented signage. Additional comments received during the public hearing included ensuring a link between the Master Redevelopment Plan and the Hardee County Long Term Recovery Plan, opportunities for additional community events and festivals, parks/trail head facilities installation and/or improvements, targeted parking lot improvements. Additional comments were also received regarding implementation of the plan and recommended review opportunities and community outreach programs.

The Planning Board concluded the public hearing and upon motion and second, the Board unanimously recommended approval of the Master Redevelopment Plan update finding the Plan consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

CRA Board Meeting, City Commission Meeting and Plan Adoption (July 13 and August 9)

The team presented the CRA Master Redevelopment Plan update to the CRA Board on July 13, 2010, for review and finding of consistency with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan and final adoption. Following a summary presentation of the Plan's elements including recommended projects, including potential CRA boundary expansion and timing extension, the Board continued

the review to the August 9, 2010 meeting.

The CRA Board and the City Commission adopted Resolution 2010-24 on August 9, 2010, approving the CRA Master Redevelopment Plan update.

