

RECOMMENDATION & PLAN SUMMARY

It is understood the recommendations of the Plan are based on current information and recommendations received during the Plan review process. The listing of recommendations and projects are not intended to be static but to be dynamic based on available funding including opportunities for state and federal assistance grants, availability of necessary infrastructure to support the recommendation, updated public comment and need(s), and periodic revisions to priorities based on the regulatory environment. The Plan identifies how the TIF projections and economic development strategies may be combined with the development and redevelopment programs to promote the key values and vision of the CRA. This Plan identifies and describes the required components based on applicable state statutes.

The Plan:

- Identifies primary redevelopment (publicly owned) opportunities (commercial/office) and corresponding infrastructure improvements (i.e., off-street parking facilities).
- Identifies primary development (public owned) opportunities for civic and community oriented uses.
- Identifies opportunities for private investment as well as available programs for residential and commercial properties.
- Provides recommendations for incubator space for small/start-up business related entities.
- Provides recommendations for governmental actions necessary to carry-out the plan including updates to the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Land Development Code. Additional City actions include ongoing, proactive code enforcement.

In addition to the recommendations included as part of the Catalyst Sites analysis, this Plan also includes additional recommendations to the current CRA operations and procedures (i.e., residential and commercial grants), as well as amendments to the City's development regulations. The recommendations also include recommended strategies for implementation of the recommended actions and activities. Implementation of this Plan will require the coordination of the CRA, the City of Wauchula and other agencies that are directly affected by the CRA's activities including the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Wauchula and Hardee County Economic Development. These efforts will also require the continued cooperation and involvement of private property owners, residents and businesses located within the CRA.

While the City and CRA are mostly residential in nature, a more effective balance between residential and non-residential uses is possible. The City could achieve more land use diversity without losing its residential character through the promotion of mixed use projects, including either vertical or horizontal integration

of uses. While the City still has a number of large, vacant or agricultural tracts of land, there are a considerable number of smaller vacant lots capable of supporting development and redevelopment efforts. While the larger tracts lend themselves to more mixed use, the majority of the vacant properties are located within the residential areas of the City and could support additional housing opportunities. The Market Analysis identifies the opportunity to develop an additional 10,000 to 16,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space that could be potentially supportable in downtown Wauchula within the next five years. This is based on the current occupancy rate, population and demographics, as well as the amount of pass-by traffic the City experiences along U.S. 17 north and south.

The primary visual focus of the CRA and the City is the intersection of Main Street and U.S. 17. However, as the community has grown, this focus has shifted to more along the U.S. 17 corridor primary based on the amount of traffic, including pass-by traffic that utilizes this route. As this corridor has developed, the areas away from U.S. 17 have not fully developed to their potential. This is not limited to Wauchula but is prevalent within all of the communities along U.S. 17. Wauchula has opportunities for development outside of this area along Florida Avenue, Stenstrom Avenue and also 7th Avenue. The CRA should look to further efforts and support opportunities for development within these areas, both public and private, including the provision of necessary infrastructure.

The success of any specific project is dependent on the identified steps for implementation, coordination of efforts and available resources. Some projects may require the dedicated efforts of both the CRA and City to better leverage available resources/funds as well as the potential for additional investment in the project either through dedicated funds, in-kind services (i.e., land dedications and/or acquisitions) or public-private partnerships. The following is a listing of Master Plan elements and recommendations presented in summary format and are further described and/or identified on the Plan itself.

1. Select expansion of the existing CRA Boundary; minor adjustments may be warranted based on property location(s) and characteristics
2. Extension of CRA operations by 5-years
3. Review and continuation of current CRA assistance programs
 - a. Additional funds for the façade enhancement program (both commercial and residential)
 - b. Current events, festivals and sponsorships of community events
4. Link actions of code enforcement activities with eligible CRA grants and programs
5. Creation of a central information clearing house (i.e., kiosk) within the CRA/Main Street/Economic Development/Chamber office with information specific to new development and redevelopment activities

(i.e., "QuickFacts" series of information)

6. Regulatory Amendments
 - a. ULDC Code Amendments regarding parking, signage and permitted uses, special exceptions
 - b. Comprehensive Plan (EAR Based Amendment) to expand redevelopment efforts beyond the downtown area - CRA boundary
7. Seek Brownfields grants and assistance for properties within the CRA
8. Catalyst Site Projects:
 - a. Redevelopment/rehabilitation of Coker Fuel Building
 - i. Construction of the parking lot behind Coker Fuel Building and rehabilitation of the existing Heritage Park parking lot
 - b. Development of a Civic/Community Identification Sign and farmer's market/civic area along Main Street/U.S. 17
 - c. Rehabilitation of the Historic City Hall/Civic Auditorium for community use including a potential movie theater.
9. Parking lot rehabilitation west side U.S. 17, behind the CRA office
10. Targeted sidewalk enhancements including Support for a Safe Routes To School (SRTS) program
 - a. Includes an extension of sidewalk and/or other multi-modal connection from Main Street to Peace River Park

1. CRA Boundary Assessment

Based on the current size of the CRA and the number of properties included, the Plan recommends only select expansion of the boundary at this time. There may be opportunities to create a more unified boundary in the South District especially if the expansion of the Florida Hospital and/or the development of a medical campus is pursued or properties east of U.S. 17 are proposed for development. Any expansion of the boundary will require the applicable Finding of Necessity by the City. In addition, boundary adjustments to include parcels under common ownership and control within the CRA may be appropriate.

2. CRA Time Extension

The City of Wauchula CRA was created in 1999 for a period of twenty-five years from the date of adoption. Currently, the CRA is set to expire on June 23, 2022. Chapter 163, Part III, Florida Statutes permits a CRA to operate up to 30 years from the date of adoption in order to complete the redevelopment activities identified in the plan. However, the City of Wauchula is not eligible to extend the expiration date beyond thirty years; only those CRA's created after July 1, 2002 are eligible to extend an additional (up to) 10 years upon approval.



RECOMMENDATION & PLAN SUMMARY

3. *Review of current CRA assistance programs*

Currently, the CRA provides a total of \$50,000 for residential and commercial development projects, \$20,000 for the residential program and \$30,000 for the commercial development program, respectively, with an additional \$30,000 for Developer Incentives. These grants are intended to assist property owners in redeveloping and/or rehabilitating properties. These programs are effective in other communities in spurring economic development by providing a catalyst to private properties to improve their property, thereby making them more attractive for tenants and/or business opportunities. FY 2009-10 is the first year these programs and the grants have been made available and to date, the CRA has provided commercial grants totaling \$42,227.88 and residential grants in the amount of \$7,087.50. Approximately \$15,000 has been awarded in the Developer Incentive program. As these programs become more widely known by the residents and property owners of the community, it is anticipated the popularity of the program will increase. Also, the CRA currently funds or assists with funding community events and festivals which are important to the image and vitality of the community. It is recommended that additional funds be allocated during the next FY with subsequent increases, subject to annual review of the program for effectiveness, throughout the life of the CRA for these programs. The CRA may also want to include certain, conditions of approval, time frames and/or other elements to ensure compliance with and consistency with the intent of the grant programs.

The CRA should also establish a loan pool or assistance program with the local banks to provide low-interest loans for projects qualifying for CRA programs but may not be covered due to limitations in the program (i.e., maximum funding cap) or a lack of available grant funds.

4. *Link actions of code enforcement activities with eligible CRA grants and programs*

Due to the lack of general knowledge and information within the community regarding CRA grants and other assistance programs, the City should develop a program to provide the CRA with a listing of code enforcement activities (within the CRA) to determine if the required remedial action/activities may be covered under one of the CRA programs. Information could be distributed to the resident/property owner to identify the respective program and application/review process.

5. *Creation of a central information clearing house (i.e., kiosk) within the CRA/ Main Street/Economic Development/Chamber office with information specific to new development and redevelopment activities (i.e., "QuickFacts" series of*

information).

Currently, the CRA offices are co-located with the Hardee County Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development office and Main Street Wauchula. There is a close working relationship between these agencies as well as with the City of Wauchula government offices and staff. The CRA could create a central kiosk of information for new/perspective business and residents that includes required processes, key contact(s) and other important information in a simplified, easy to read packet. This information could be presented to both the City and Hardee County as part of a regular update to each respective governing body. The information could also be provided consistent with recommendation #4 above.

6. *Regulatory Amendments*

- a. ULDC Code Amendments regarding parking, signage and permitted uses, special exceptions
- b. Comprehensive Plan (EAR Based Amendment) to expand redevelopment efforts beyond the downtown area - CRA boundary

The Plan recommends certain modifications to the City's current regulatory documents including the Comprehensive Plan and the Unified Land Development Code. These recommendations are necessary to further support the development and redevelopment efforts of the City and the CRA while maintaining certain levels of protection for these (catalyst sites) efforts. The recommendations include the addition of language to the City's Comprehensive Plan regarding redevelopment efforts beyond just the downtown area and providing the necessary language to support (provide) development incentives for certain types of redevelopment projects. The recommendations also include amendments to the City's current parking, signage and land use table. The recommendations will further support the development/redevelopment of the catalyst sites and provide the necessary mechanism to encourage additional use opportunities within the City.

The regulatory amendments must be based on and consistent with this Plan, and, in particular, with the Comprehensive Plan. The ULDC should be updated to provide elements of Form Based Codes or a similar development mechanism that looks at the design and integration of uses rather than standard zoning language. The new ordinance should contain components of a hybrid, form-based code and or other modern, proven zoning and land use management techniques. Specific design standards should be utilized where feasible in lieu of greater use and restrictions on

density.

- ### 7. *Seek Brownfields grants and assistance for properties within the CRA*
- Based on available information from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, there are approximately 112 potential sites within the community. Not all of these sites are located within the CRA and their specific location will need to be identified and verified based. As noted previously, there are state and federal monies available to communities to remediate sites and restore them to productive use. There is currently an initiative through the state to redevelop previous petroleum based facilities (i.e., gas stations) for hospitals and health care sites. This program is called "Highway to Health Care". Although Wauchula's median age is less than surrounding communities, the City has actively pursued expansion of its health care system and looks to attract retirees and other groups to the community. Depending on the subject site's location, size and owner's willingness to pursue funding opportunities, these can provide suitable areas and opportunities for redevelopment.

When combined with possible CRA dollars, the redevelopment costs associated with a site could be greatly reduced and encourage additional redevelopment of similar sites within the community.

8. *Catalyst Site Projects*

- a. Redevelopment/rehabilitation of Coker Fuel Building
 - i. Construction of the parking lot behind Coker Fuel Building and rehabilitation of the existing Heritage Park parking lot
- b. Development of a Civic/Community Identification Sign and farmer's market/civic area along Main Street/U.S. 17
- c. Rehabilitation of the Historic City Hall/Civic Auditorium for community use including a potential multi-media facility/theater.

These sites are further described in the Catalyst Sites section of the Plan

- ### 9. *Parking lot rehabilitation west side U.S. 17, behind the CRA office*
- Based on the community meetings and stakeholder interviews, as well as the analysis from the Transportation & Mobility section of the Plan, additional off-street surface parking facilities are needed within downtown Wauchula. While there are several existing facilities within the downtown area, these facilities are in need of improvements including resurfacing, restriping and some require redesign to utilize the parking facility in a more efficient manner. Several of these facilities also lack adequate landscaping and buffering as required by City code, including interior

RECOMMENDATION & PLAN SUMMARY

landscaping materials. Specific to this Plan, three parking facilities have been identified including: Heritage Park, and U.S. 17 (east and west side) north of Main Street.

10. *Targeted sidewalk enhancements including Support for a Safe Routes To School (SRTS) program; Includes an extension of sidewalk and/or other multi-modal connection from Main Street to Peace River Park.*

As noted in the Transportation & Mobility section of the Plan, including the existing City sidewalk maps, the majority of the City lacks an adequate and efficient pedestrian system. While there downtown area includes multiple sidewalk connections and opportunities, the North, South and East CRA sub-districts do not. In addition, there is currently no ongoing SRTS program within the community. There are two school facilities in close proximity to the majority of the residential population within the City; however, there is no identified program to review and assess sidewalk connections and routes to the schools. It is recommended the City, CRA and County pursue a joint application for grants and other funding options to prepare a SRTS study.

In addition, there are currently no sidewalk or pedestrian opportunities connecting the City with the Peace River Park area. The current sidewalk system along Main Street does not extend beyond 1st Avenue and the sidewalk along Bay Street terminates at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. The natural features and amenities available at both the Peace River Park and Crews Riverside Park are an attractor for both residents and visitors to the community; however, adequate pedestrian facilities are not available.

Additional Recommendations:

- The City and CRA should promote a mix of housing types in appropriate locations of the City that responds to shifting housing markets emerging in the region. The CRA and the



City, through the Community Development Department should work together to provide solutions that ensure the City meets future housing needs and preferences for various housing types in the community. The focus should be on shifting housing markets in response to changing demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, lifestyle choices, and market conditions; and the opportunities that will result from providing a more stratified housing market in Wauchula

It is important to note that the type of land uses or development patterns assumed in the sub-district analysis are for illustrative purposes only, and could vary significantly based on future landowner interests, development approvals, or location of available infrastructure. However, property owners with similar vision, or with sites sharing similar characteristics, should consider the best development practices highlighted in this chapter when developing or redeveloping their property.

- Support bike & pedestrian accommodations. The City, CRA and the County should pursue grants through FDOT (i.e., LAP) for design and construction of additional streetscape opportunities that include multi-modal design components and opportunities. These groups should also pursue other available sources of funding for bike/ped trails and sidewalks (i.e., Safe Routes to Schools) as well as a comprehensive community wide pathway plan.
- Develop “Complete streets” standards. Complete Streets is a term used nationally to describe the transformation of vehicle-dominated thoroughfares in urban and suburban areas into community-oriented streets that safely and conveniently accommodate all modes of travel, not just motorists. Successful complete street transformations require community support and leadership, as well as coordination between various disciplines. In particular, support must include economic revitalization, business retention and expansion, property owner



involvement, urban planning and design, landscape architecture, roadway design, utility coordination, traffic engineering, transportation planning, architects, graphic artists, and developers. The following information is provided in support of this recommendation and to further detail the concept.

Guiding Principles

The following principles embody the most important aspects of a successful complete streets program:

- Achieve community objectives.
- Blend street design with the character of the area served.
- Capitalize on a public investment by working diligently with property owners, developers, economic development experts, and others to spur private investment in the area.
- Design in balance so that traffic demands do not overshadow the need to walk or bicycle, safely, efficiently, and comfortably. The design should encourage people to walk.
- Empower the residents to create their own sense of ownership in the success of the street and its myriad characters.

Context Realm

The context realm of a complete street is defined by the buildings that frame the major roadway.

Identifying distinct qualities of the context realm requires focusing on key areas including building form and massing, and architectural elements.

Building Form and Massing

To enhance an already high-quality street design and help create a complete street, buildings should be located close enough to the street that they are able to frame the public space enjoyed by pedestrians. In more urbanized areas (i.e., Downtown Core), these buildings should be located directly behind the sidewalk. Buildings with stairs, stoops, or awnings may even encroach into the pedestrian realm to provide visual interest and access to the public space. In more suburban-oriented areas that must incorporate setbacks for adjacent buildings, these should limit this distance to 20 feet or less and avoid off-street parking between buildings and the pedestrian realm.

Larger setbacks in these suburban areas will diminish the sense of enclosure available to the pedestrian and move access to the buildings farther away from the street. In both environments, building heights should measure at least 25% of the corridor width.

RECOMMENDATION & PLAN SUMMARY

Architectural Elements

Careful placement and design of buildings adjacent to the major roadway offer opportunities for meaningful interaction between those traveling along the corridor and those using the corridor for other purposes. These opportunities are greatly enhanced when restaurants, small shops and boutiques, 2nd and 3rd story apartments, and offices are located adjacent to the street. Building scale and design details incorporated into individual buildings promote a comfortable, engaging environment focused on the pedestrian. Common building design treatments generally favored in a pedestrian environment include awnings, porches, balconies, stairs, stoops, windows, appropriate lighting, promenades, and opaque windows.

Pedestrian Realm

The pedestrian realm of a complete street extends between the outside edge of sidewalk and the face-of-curb located along the street. Safety and mobility for pedestrians within this realm is predicated upon the presence of continuous sidewalks along both sides of the street built to a sufficient width for accommodating the street's needs as defined by the environment. For example, suburban settings will require different widths than downtown settings. The quality of the pedestrian realm also is greatly enhanced by the presence of high-quality buffers between pedestrians and moving traffic, safe and convenient opportunities to cross the street, and consideration for shade and lighting needs. The pedestrian realm may consist of up to four distinct functional zones: frontage zone, throughway zone, furnishing zone, and edge zone. The frontage zone is located near the back of the sidewalk and varies in width to accommodate potential window shoppers, stairs, stoops, planters, marquees, outdoor displays, awnings, or café tables. The throughway zone provides clear space for pedestrians to move between destinations and varies between 5 and 16 feet wide, based on the anticipated demand for unimpeded walking area. The furnishing zone provides a key buffering between pedestrians and moving traffic. It generally measures at least 4 to 6 feet wide to accommodate street trees, planting strips, street furniture, utility poles, sign poles, signal and electrical cabinets, phone booths, fire hydrants, bicycle racks, or retail kiosks targeted for the pedestrian realm. The edge zone is incorporated into the pedestrian realm concurrent with the presence of on-street parking to allow sufficient room for opening car doors.

Incorporation of one or more of these function zones in the pedestrian realm of a street generally is based upon the context of the surrounding built environment. For example, a more urban, downtown environment will include all four zones in the pedestrian realm and could measure up to 24 feet wide. An equally important

link the pedestrian network that is located in a more suburban setting may omit one or more of the function zones listed above, resulting in an overall minimum width of 11 feet.

Recommended design elements for promoting a healthy pedestrian realm generally focus on one of four areas of concentration: pedestrian mobility, quality buffers, vertical elements, and public open space. Together, these best practices can be implemented in both urban and suburban environments, to varying degrees, for promoting healthy pedestrian environments.

Vertical Elements

Vertical elements traditionally incorporated into the pedestrian realm include street trees, pedestrian-scale street lighting, and utilities. Street trees provide necessary shade to pedestrians and soften the character of the surrounding built environment. They should be spaced between 15 and 30 feet apart, be adapted to the local environment, and fit the scale and character of the surrounding area. Pedestrian-scale street lighting incorporated into the pedestrian realm should use metal halide fixtures mounted between 12 and 20 feet high. Utilities should not interfere with pedestrian circulation or block entrances to buildings, curb cuts, or interfere with sight distance triangles. In some cases, burying utilities underground avoids conflicts and clutter caused by utility poles and overhead wires. Relocation of overhead utilities to tall poles on just one side of the roadway, however, can be a cost-effective aesthetic alternative to burial of utilities in a duct bank under the road.

Public Open Space

The pedestrian realm serves a dual purpose within the built environment, acting as both a transportation corridor and a public open space accessible to the entire community. As a result, specific design elements incorporated into the pedestrian environment should reinforce this area as a public space. Properly planned, these design elements could provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the unique character of the corridor in both formal and informal seating areas.

Public art and/or specialized surfaces, including murals, introduced into the pedestrian realm are appreciated by pedestrians. In more urban areas like Main Street, street furniture and/or outdoor cafes provide opportunities that encourage community ownership. Furthermore, building encroachments, such as stairs and stoops, provide for interesting points of access to the pedestrian realm. Lastly, awnings and canopy trees provide shade which is helpful in the temperate climate of the region.

Successful implementation of the Wauchula CRA Plan will depend greatly on the ability of local, private, and governmental entities to work together in collaboration. This Plan provides a framework for achieving the CRA's desired future vision. It builds on the successes of previous studies and projects, and provides an implementation framework for future decision-making. The Plan summarizes recommendations, a timeframe for completion of the action, and potential funding sources (if applicable).

The intent of the Plan is two-fold. First, it provides the CRA and City leaders with a blueprint for implementation that will enable them to track progress and schedule future year improvements. Second, clearly defined action items enable the CRA and City to identify public and private investment opportunities that are healthy, sustainable, and achievable through well-guided land use and transportation policies that encourage quality design and environmental stewardship.

The structure and recommendations of the Plan do not require all recommendations be completed in unison. Instead, the recommendations promote flexibility and partnership between the City and the private community to implement the vision of the Plan in several phases as development occurs and funding sources become available. Local, regional, and state partnerships can also be levied to ensure strategic and timely improvements. Working together is especially important, given the amount of development anticipated for the CRA area.

