

Chapter 3

Community Participation

Public involvement has been an important component of the planning process undertaken during the preparation of this Redevelopment Plan. The community and the City's leadership laid the foundation for this Master Plan Update through an elaborate citizen-driven visioning process and a well orchestrated public involvement effort, in collaboration with the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council (ECFRPC).

The purpose of this citizen-led effort was to obtain insight into the issues and concerns of residents, business owners and property owners, and to determine their vision for the community. Additionally, city staff meetings were scheduled to obtain input from the staff relating to the community's assets, critical issues associated with the project, existing planning efforts and proposed projects that would help define a clear scope for the initiative.

This chapter of the Redevelopment Plan synthesizes the community's feedback solicited during the visioning process conducted by the City and the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and stakeholder meetings and workshops conducted by IBI Group in October, 2007. The information gathered during these community and stakeholder driven meetings form the basis for the analysis contained in Appendix A of this report.



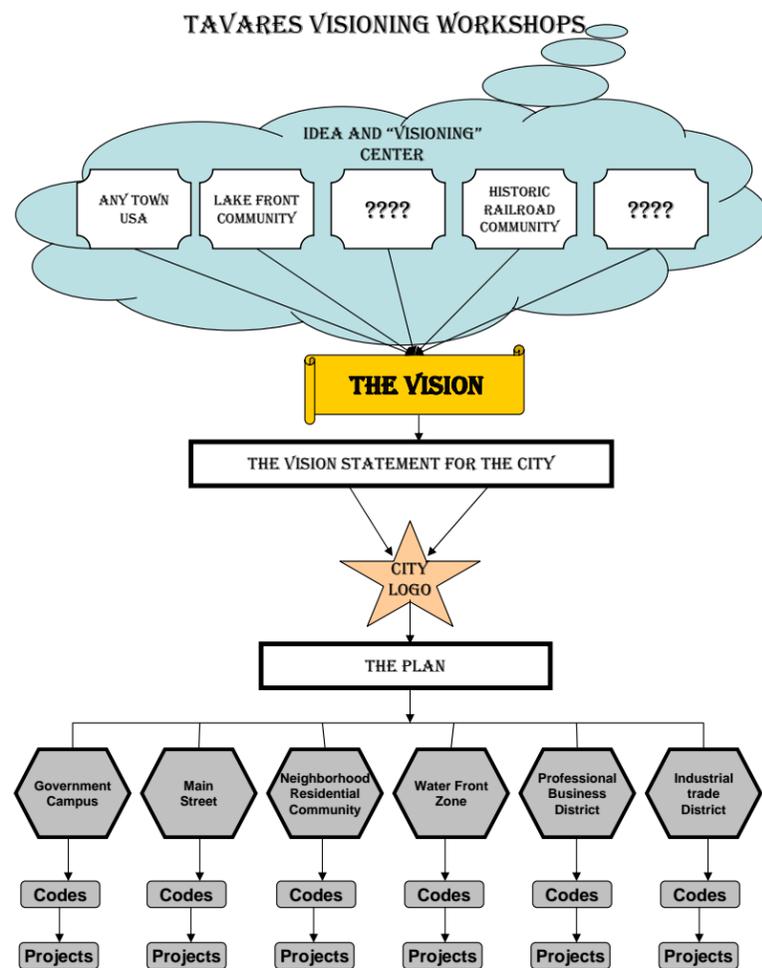
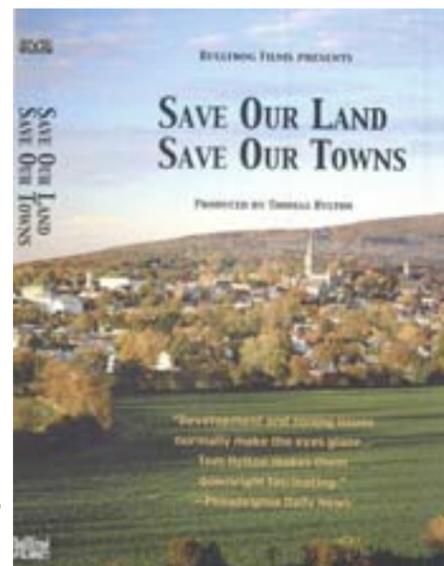


Fig 3.1 Tavares Visioning Process Flowchart
Source: City of Tavares/ East Central Florida Regional Planning Council/ Peggy Fennell (GIS Analyst)



Save our Land, Save Our Towns Video
Source: Phil Laurien, East Central Florida Regional Planning Council

2006-2007 VISIONING WORKSHOPS

The Downtown Tavares Redevelopment Master Plan builds upon the year long community visioning process, facilitated by Mayor Nancy Clutts and Phil Laurien, Executive Director, East Central Florida Regional Planning Council (ECFRPC).

From July 2006 to May 2007, over the course of six sessions, a diverse group of participants including residents, business owners, county officials, elected officials, and government representatives gathered to create a vision that reflected the community's desires related to the future growth of Downtown Tavares. More than one hundred residents and stakeholders participated in the visioning process to explore new concepts and opportunities for the growth of the City and the Downtown. Among the most innovative aspects of this process was the diverse range of community involvement techniques utilized to reach an initial consensus related to the Downtown's future. The following section provides a brief summary of the six sessions, conducted during the visioning process, highlighting the different techniques used.

SESSION 1: COMMUNITY INFORMATION MEETING JULY 25, 2006

During this session, Phil Laurien showed the video, "Save our Land, Save our Town" to familiarize the participants with the historic evolution of neighborhoods and urban growth throughout the country. This was followed by an interactive session related to the participants' comments on the presentation and the definition of development in Tavares' context. The participants also discussed the impact of Lake County's anticipated growth on Downtown Tavares and as a result identified the following characteristics that need to be reinforced in creating a sense of identity for Downtown:

- Interaction of neighbors;
- Pedestrian-friendly environments;
- Importance of history in defining the future vision;
- Provision for open space;
- Creation of the City's identity by visible boundaries.

SESSION 2: SWOT ANALYSIS AND PHOTO- ANALYSIS AUGUST 14, 2006

In the first session, the participants were encouraged to identify characteristics from the City's rich heritage that need to be either preserved or redefined to create a Downtown environment that fosters neighborhood cohesiveness. Session 2 focused on identifying the City's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis). The participants were asked to share their views concerning strategies related to capitalizing on the City's strengths, weaknesses, threats and turning them into opportunities within the context of the following overarching questions:

What kind of town are we?
What kind of town do we want to be?
How do we grow ourselves to achieve that?

Strengths

Grid street system
Downtown Parks
Walkable Downtown Scale
Presence of Community Redevelopment Agency
County Campus and all its employees

Weaknesses

City is reactive, not proactive
Declining interest in the City's history
African American community feels isolated- not a part of Tavares

Opportunities

Potential to be a town center similar to its past
Economics is pushing people back to live/ work neighborhoods
Condos for Downtown lakefront living
Downtown has the basic elements of a traditional neighborhood- needs the return of the butcher, baker, and grocery
Need to identify which laws need to be changed to enhance redevelopment of Downtown
Downtown has assets and infrastructure other places do not possess- can be redeveloped more easily as a transportation hub
Investment comes to small towns with better plans
Need a vision
Wooton Park presents a unique opportunity
Need to communicate ideas and ensure that codes are in place to redevelop
Successful communities had rail, jobs and schools Downtown. Basic core still exists

Threats

Heard talk like visioning before. Saved a 10 year old agenda- none of the elements were implemented.

At the end of the session, disposable cameras were distributed to the participants as an assignment for the next working session. Participants were asked to photograph a variety of elements such as architectural styles, densities, signage, colors, street lighting, furniture, and paving materials.

**SESSION 3: CASE STUDY APPROACH
OCTOBER 9, 2006**

During this session, the facilitators presented display boards containing photographs of different architectural styles, development patterns, and urban design elements. These boards were used as a tool to engage the participants in a discussion about common themes and elements that they considered appropriate to the scale and character of Downtown Tavares. The discussion of the photographs was followed by a Power Point presentation titled "Pizza and Planning" and "The Scale of Great Places", presented by Phil Laurien (ECFRPC) and Mayor Nancy Clutts (City of Tavares). Using Savannah, GA and South Beach, FL, as examples, a collage of visual elements were presented to the participants.

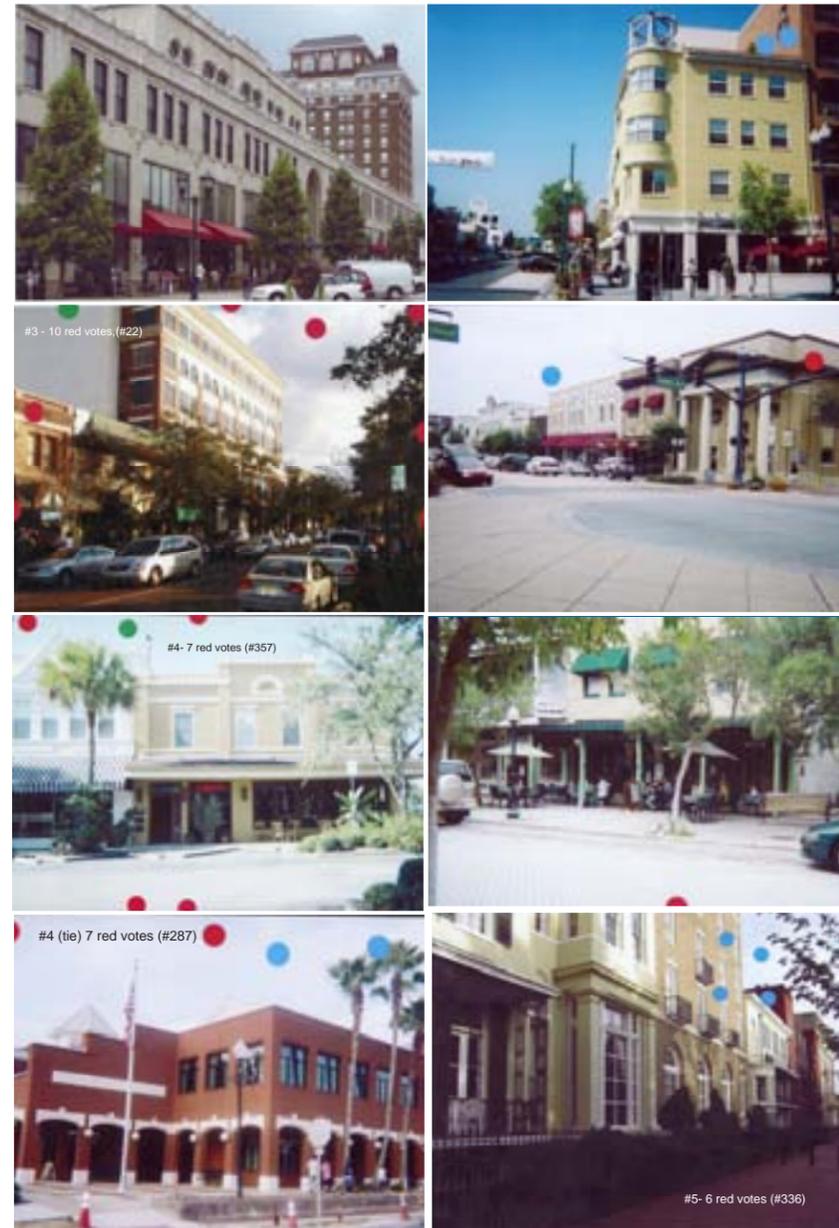
The case studies (Savannah and South Beach) were used to help the community define the term "human scale" in architecture and its impact on urban environments. Other elements that were discussed as a result of this interactive case study approach included street design, height, architectural styles, and the importance of architectural details (steps, doorways, railings, columns, eaves, niches, mouldings, etc.) in designing buildings that are scaled to human proportions.

**SESSION 4: VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY
NOVEMBER 20, 2006**

Session 4 utilized the visual preference survey technique to initiate discussions about the physical character of future development within the Downtown CRA. Participants' homework photographs were randomly clustered and placed on large display boards. Red, blue, green and yellow stickers were distributed to each participant. The participants were then instructed to place dots on an image, that illustrated a visual preference for the types of landscapes, buildings, and intensity, which appropriately represented the community's vision for the Downtown. Red stickers were placed next to the photographs depicting the building type and architectural style of buildings preferred closest to the Downtown, yellow on those preferred next, followed by blue and then green.

Attendees also placed stickers on the redevelopment area map to indicate development patterns based on intensity.

- Red stickers: Highest intensity development
- Blue: Medium- high Intensity development
- Green stickers: Medium-intensity development
- Yellow stickers: Least intense development



red zone preferences

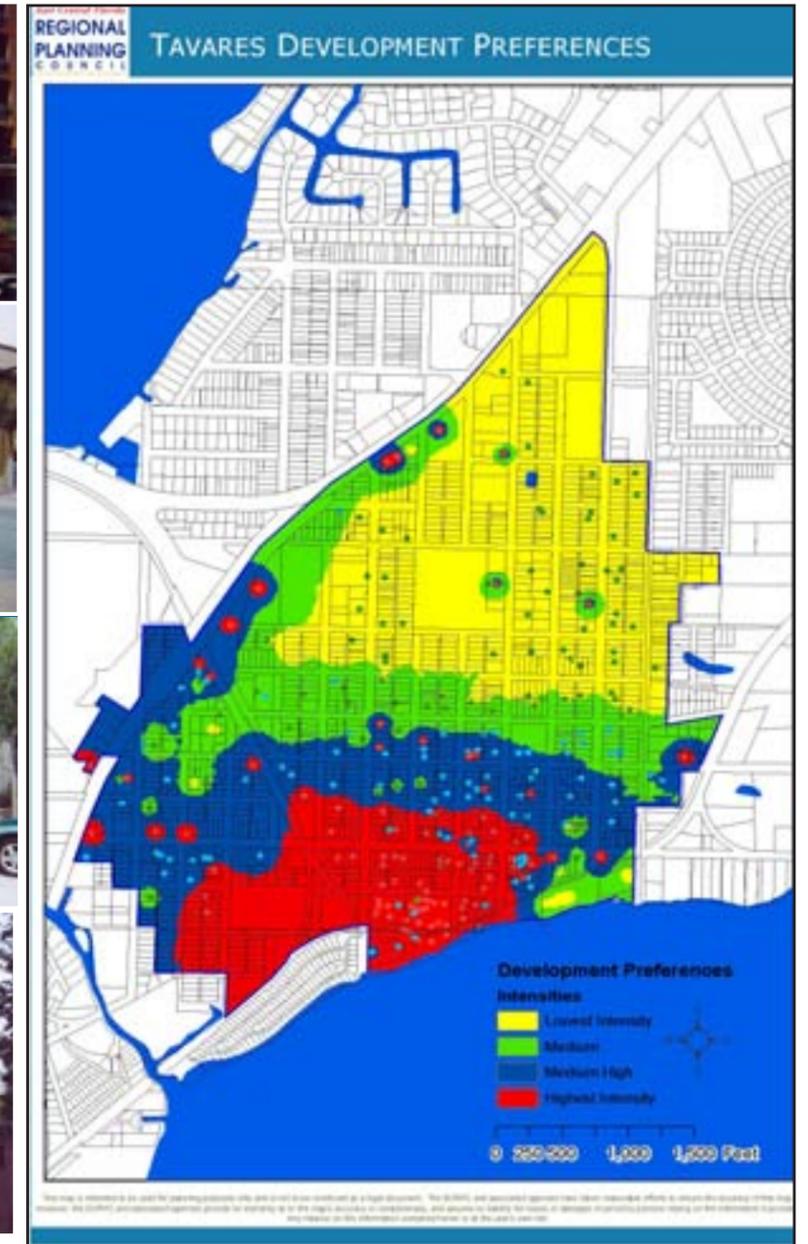


Fig. 3.2 Development Preferences (Intensities) Map
Source: Phil Laurien, East Central Florida Regional Planning Council



blue zone preferences



green zone preferences



yellow zone preferences



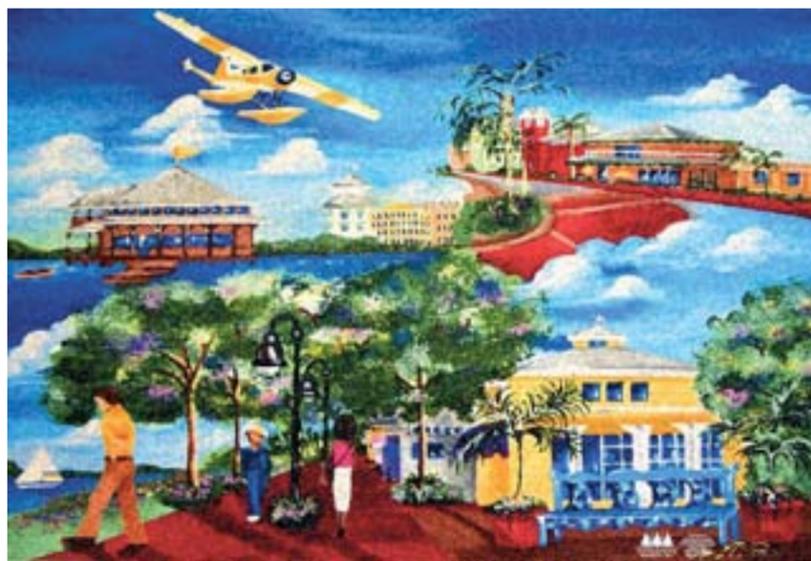


Illustration depicting proposed vision statement
Source: Nancy Clutts, Vice-Mayor, City of Tavares

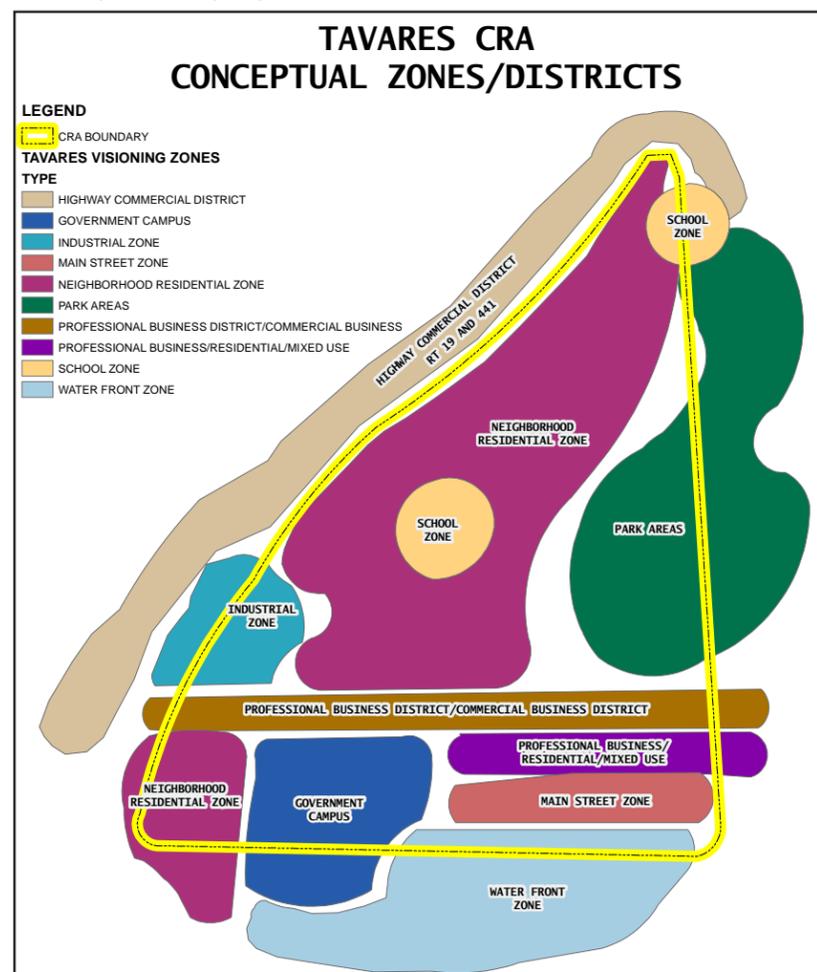


Fig. 3.3 Conceptual Zones Map, Tavares CRA
Source: East Central Florida Regional Planning Council/ Peggy Fennell, GIS Analyst, City of Tavares

SESSION 5: COMMUNITY VALIDATION JANUARY 22, 2007

Results from the November 2006 visual preference survey were compiled and presented by East Central Florida Regional Planning Council (ECFRPC). In this session, those in attendance also received a color coded map that depicted the preferences of community residents for development patterns within the Downtown Redevelopment Area. The participants engaged in an interactive exercise by identifying areas of varying intensities, based upon selected photographs that represented different neighborhoods in the CRA district. The participants determined that the following action steps were critical in the successful realization of the community's vision:

- Establish visual preferences for all four "intensity" districts in the CRA
- Establish vision statement
- Amend comprehensive plan to reflect vision
- Adopt form based codes that assure the "look"

SESSION 6: VISIONING SESSION MAY 15, 2007

Session #6 focussed on involving the community to develop a vision statement that builds upon the consensus achieved in the previous community meetings. Participants recommended three common themes to be included in the City's final vision statement:

- History/ Authenticity*
- Utilization of the waterfront*
- Provision of diverse uses*

The participants presented the following draft visioning statements that reflected the community's core beliefs and desired vision for the future of Downtown Tavares:

- Group #1
- Historic walkable, lakeside community in the scenic heart of Lake County with an eye on the past and vision for the future.
 - Emphasize Florida vernacular architecture.
 - Attract commerce, including shoreline restaurants and cultural attractions.
 - Desirable commerce would include spas, coffee shops, entertainment and concerts.

- Group #2
- Tavares, a community of diverse passions, anchoring on our heritage and environment, bringing synergy to our culture, residential, business, government and visiting public, capturing an atmosphere of Old Florida or southern hospitality.
 - Would like to see citrus trees planted in various parks—northern visitors and children would like to see citrus trees—blossoms—full of fruit, etc.
 - Downtown—authentic—old Downtowns had drugstores, grocers, barbershops, ice cream, soda shops, etc.

- Group #3
- Tavares, the historic hub City with fantastic roads, rail, trails, and water that lead our City in the past and will lead us into the future. Our southern heritage and incredible waterfront are the centerpiece of government, recreation, business, and cultural activities.

- Key concerns:
- Public access to waterfront;
 - Protection of waterfront;
 - Celebration of heritage;
 - Active Downtown with shops, businesses, restaurants, and activities;
 - Multiple modes of transportation—walking, biking, boating, etc. throughout the area;
 - Southern charm retained.

- Group #4
- Tavares possesses an authentic Downtown community enriched by centers of activity where folks can walk, bike, take the train or utilize the water; our architectural standards reflect waterfront community with a focus on its history; our community works in partnership with the business community, focuses on quality-of-life, and emphasizes parks and public places.

- Group #5
- A traditional, vibrant, waterfront City that promotes strong business, creates a sense of community and preserves its heritage

"Tavares – a community that cherishes and protects its historical roots and Southern heritage; constructively uses, enhances and protects its waterfront and lake assets for the benefit of all its citizens; and actively serves as the focal centerpiece to foster the mutual prosperity for a diversity of activities including business, government, recreational and cultural interests."

"Tavares – a community that cherishes its past; relishes and builds on its present foundation to encourage the future prosperity of a waterfront oriented community where a diversity of business, government, cultural and recreational interests interact to find common ground and mutually prosper for the benefit of all."

"Tavares - is a community that possesses a distinct and authentic Downtown enriched by centers of activity where residents and guests can walk, bike, take the train, gather for events, and utilize the water; a community which attracts desirable commerce such as spas, coffee shops, specialty boutiques, shoreline restaurants, cultural attractions, entertainment and concerts; a community which places a priority on redeveloping the Downtown with a mix of live and work uses; a lake-side community in the scenic heart of Lake County whose architectural standards reflect a waterfront and Florida vernacular with a focus on history and an eye on the future."

In June 2007, the CRAAC drafted the following vision statement that was unanimously endorsed by Tavares City Council:

"TAVARES—the capital waterfront city of Lake County; building on a historic foundation; creating an authentic, accessible community of neighborhoods, businesses, and citizen services; distinguishing itself as the defining vision of where you want to be."

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS



In October 2007, the community involvement process was continued further through a series of focus group meetings intended to obtain input from those who will be responsible in the implementation of the Downtown Tavares Redevelopment Master Plan. City staff meetings were scheduled to obtain input relating to the community's assets, critical issues that needed to be addressed during the redevelopment planning process, existing planning efforts and proposed projects that would help define a clear scope for the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan. The groups invited to participate in these meetings included governmental representatives, City staff, key property owners and business groups, civic groups.

October 03, 2007

10:00am- 12:00pm

Government Representatives

List of Participants: Nancy Clutts, Phil Laurien, Derieth Sutton,

Dotty A. Keedy, Anna M. Lawver, Sandy Minkoff, Cindy Hall, Bob Williams, Bill Neron, Alisha Sullivan, Kurt Easton, Bankim Kalra.



Input from staff members and stakeholders was pivotal in formulation of the recommendations presented in this Plan.

Planning and Development

- Destination based development
- Attract people from the region (at least 25 miles)
- Niche markets: Seaplane basin/ Historic Downtown
- Capitalize on the County Campus Downtown (over 1,000 employees work Downtown)
- Employees drive to US Highway 441 during lunch hours- need to cater to this market Downtown
- Need the residential critical mass to support the restaurants
- Consolidation of County offices presents an opportunity for infill development
- Examine opportunities to redevelop and better utilize vacant/ underutilized church owned property Downtown and nurturing the relationships with the faith-based organizations
- Employee base (County/ Hospital) exists but no residential to support this workforce
- Promote multimodal "Downtown"

- Create a "let's make a deal" scenario with developers- offer incentives in exchange for adherence to design guidelines
- Create more angled parking spaces on Main Street, instead of parallel parking
- Visual Appeal
- Implementation and financing
- Liberal alcoholic beverages rules
- Consider providing Fiber Optics/ area- wide stormwater permitting as a public service
- Maintain balance between regulations and incentives
- CRA should retain landscape architects and architects that understand the City's priorities to provide on-going services to interested property developers while at the same time maintaining high standards for quality development
- Vision is not typical of existing Tavares landowners
- Need to establish relationship between UF and UCF students and City

Urban Design

- How can we integrate form-based codes as part of the master planning process?
- Use Tavares Station as a signature project showcasing implementation of form-based codes
- Allow vertical development
- Opportunity to create entertainment district along Ruby Street
- Codes should facilitate density while at the same time keep the architectural character intact
- Downtown enclaves should be created based on architecture; create mixed-use village type development
- The community, through the visioning process and visual preference survey, has already defined the Downtown core with densities and character districts marked

Circulation

- Connect Ruby and Main Street
- Alfred Street Corridor (one-way pair)
 - Predominantly institutional/ commercial uses
 - North-south streets need to become commercial corridors complementing Alfred Street
 - Alternative seems the best out of all other options available
 - Need more research into one-way alternative, especially at the intersections
 - Traffic circles should also be explored as an option
 - Crossing Alfred Street is a problem

General Observations

Precedents: Delaware, Ohio; Cocoa Village

October 03, 2007

2:00pm- 4:00pm

Department Heads

List of Participants: Lori Houghton, Nancy Barnett, Don Griffin, Tamera Rogers, Jacques Skutt, Heath Frederick, Stoney M. Lubins, Richard Keith, Bill Neron, Alisha Sullivan, Kurt Easton, Bankim Kalra.

Planning and Development

- County campus as an employment base is an asset
- Events are seasonal- need permanent population Downtown to support development
- Shortage of affordable housing/ workforce housing in Downtown
- Hospital is also a pivotal employment base and should be capitalized for pursuing enhanced partnership opportunities
- Research into innovative financing mechanisms
- Redevelopment of church owned properties and vacant lots

Urban Design

- Need gateway/ directional signage
- Community Policing
- No designated officer in the Downtown area
- 15,000 sq.ft. minimum space needed for a station-shortage of land Downtown
- Consider having an assigned presence Downtown
- Replicate Woodley House at Wooton Park (maybe use it as the ship store, marina and museum)
- Establish connection to Aesop's Park

Circulation

- Intersections
- Parking
- Alfred Street Corridor
- Proposed circulation behind Judicial Center
- Traffic Signal (at Joanna and Sinclair)
- Change Ruby Street back to two-way; currently used as one-way parking for Sheriff's Department
- Parking meters is a disincentive for tourists

Infrastructure

- **Stormwater**
 Flooding Location: Maud Street/ Alfred Street/ St. Clair Abrams
 Find a place for a regional/ area-wide stormwater retention pond
 Need to clean runoff into lake
 11 outfalls in the area
 Work with St. Johns Water Management District to create innovative strategies to address stormwater issues
- **Water**
 Old sewer pipes Downtown
 Downtown is not designated for reclaimed water treatment
 Lake could be a good irrigation source
- **Streetscape**
 Alley Improvements: get rid of dirt roads/ stormwater/ aesthetic improvements
 Pilot project with pervious surfaces is underway

October 04, 2007

9:00pm- 11:00pm

Civic Groups

List of Participants: Bob Grenier, Brenda Smith, T.J. Fish, Robert Johnson, Bill Neron, Alisha Sullivan, Kurt Easton, Bankim Kalra.

Planning and Development

- Vision has not changed in 15 years; grounded in reality- market/ demographic/ location factors
- Need for policy to guide development
- Tavares Station should not be the identifying image of the community. Instead, the community should build on efforts such as Tavares Station to maintain and rejuvenate its historic identity.
- Women's Club at Wooton Park was an important community meeting space historically
- Traffic counts are high but does not stop/ retain population
- Street grid network is an asset
- Where does Tavares fit in the new regional market?
- CRA District should be expanded
- Need to create feasible programs
- Development potential hindered due to substandard lot sizes
- Need a survey of Lake County employees and their commuting patterns
- Consider acquisition of properties around SR 19
- Rezone properties along St. Clair Abrams to commercial
- Get design and performance standards in place before development
- Mixed-Use District- define appropriate density (12 units per acre?); Workforce Affordable Housing
- Westside of judicial center: African American neighborhood/ need for a community center

October 4, 2007

Business Groups and Property Owners

3:00-5:00 pm

List of Participants: Ann White, Chris White, Gene Smith, Lloyd Atkins Jr., Joanna Scott, Ralph Smith, Rick Golab, Ken Mattison, Jim Ellrodt, Rodger Kooser, Rick Gonzales, Bob Ern, Freddie Belton, Andrew O'Keefe, Bill Neron, Alisha Sullivan, Kurt Easton, Bankim Kalra.

Planning and Development

- Right of way width on Sinclair is much wider than needed
- Caroline Street should accommodate more commercial uses
- Sinclair should be invigorated near Downtown
- Visit zoning changes along Caroline Street
- National food chains concerned about how friendly is the City government (user-friendly cities)
- City's development review process has improved
- Duplexes and rentals need to be avoided along St. Clair Abrams
- Code enforcement issues need to be addressed
- Sensitivity towards existing businesses
- Coordinate economic development and business retention strategies with the hospital's future growth plans
- Pursue infill development strategies
- Historic preservation
- Public improvements
- Vacant parcels
- Walk-in clinic Downtown in conjunction with government complex

Urban Design

- View on Sinclair from 441 needs to be improved
- Need landscaping and on-street parking
- Gateways- US 19 and Main Street/ Old 441 from Mt. Dora/ St. Clair Abrams and Sinclair
- Improvement investment image along commercial corridors
- Sinclair (Linear Park) with bike trail to beautify
- Improvements should be of high quality

Infrastructure

- Consider establishing an area-wide stormwater permit

Circulation

- lanthe Street could be a mess with Caroline one-way
- No left turn on Sinclair
- Architectural character standards are both an incentive and a deterrent
- Ingress and egress problems on both sides of SR 19

HANDS-ON PLANNING WORKSHOP

On April 17, 2008 the Tavares community gathered to review the draft composite plan and establish consensus on the general objectives and preliminary strategies identified by IBI Group for the future of Downtown Tavares. Following a summary of the CRA's redevelopment efforts by Mayor Clutts, the consultant presented an overview of the planning process, the issues and concerns identified during the initial workshops, and the final recommendations of the Redevelopment Plan.

The participants were then divided into groups and asked to review and provide feedback on the Plan elements displayed on boards. The purpose of the workshop was two-fold: 1) to develop consensus on the Plan's recommendations; 2) to obtain community feedback on the Plan's recommendations and missing information that needed attention. Information obtained in the workshop was used to make final adjustments to the plan prior to completion and presentation to the City Council.

