

Chapter I

Introduction



INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this Redevelopment Plan is to develop a vision and strategy for how future growth should occur in the underdeveloped areas of Downtown Tavares in the next twenty years, particularly with the potential opportunity presented by the introduction of rail transit service in the Central Florida region. Since the last redevelopment plan update in early 2006, significant economic and political changes at local and regional levels have occurred, that influenced the City's decision to update its existing redevelopment plan. Some of these factors that provided the key impetus for the preparation of this Master Plan include:

- Over \$8.3 million in planned waterfront improvements including the construction of a Marina and Seaplane basin;
- Intensive community-driven visioning sessions facilitated by the City leadership and the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council;
- Expansion of the Lake County Judicial Center and government complex including the construction of a 7-story parking garage in the heart of Downtown;
- Approval of plans to reconfigure Alfred and Caroline streets as a one-way pair;
- Location of the Florida Hospital Waterman in the City of Tavares as a major employer;
- Regional influences and expansion of the Orlando area growth into the Lake County market;
- Planned transportation improvement projects in Lake County including potential for access to the Central Florida Commuter Rail service in the future; and
- Approval of Tavares Station- a mixed-use waterfront development on the former Lake Region Packing Association site;

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan Update capitalizes on these synergies to ensure that intense development in Downtown Tavares is complemented by an integrated approach to land use planning, transportation planning, and urban design. Downtown's redevelopment strategy, as outlined in this Plan is based on the following basic tenets:

- The Plan identifies, in general, where primary land uses and activity centers will be located in order to best attract prospective businesses and residents, while at the same time being well integrated into desired future transportation and land use patterns.
- The Plan provides a tool for the Redevelopment Agency and the City to promote economic development by showing prospective investors locations that have been designated for their purpose; thereby reducing the developer's risk and permitting hurdles when coming to the community.
- The Plan provides a holistic means for the Redevelopment Agency and the City to provide the approvals of new developments based upon an agreed-upon strategy.
- The Plan allows the Redevelopment Agency and the City to make capital improvements projections based upon known future, public project needs, demands and proposed locations.
- The Plan establishes a framework for policy decisions that anticipate the need for densification of future development patterns.
- The Plan facilitates the preparation of new land development regulations that provide a higher standard of public and private realm design.
- The Plan supports culture and the arts as integral activities in the Downtown through continued support of special events and festivals, while also setting aside locations for artists live work communities as well as a transportation, heritage and natural resource museum.



Lake Dora waterfront, Downtown Tavares
Source: IBI Group



PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PLANNING PROCESS



Top: Artist's Sketch illustrating Lake County facilities in Downtown Tavares
Bottom: Photo-simulation showing potential reconfiguration of Alfred Street in Downtown Tavares
Source: IBI Group/ Genesis

The City of Tavares is located in the Florida Central Highlands along a conspicuous ridge, approximately 30 miles north of Orlando. Its central location in the County gives it easy access to the area's natural amenities and waterways that have in the past twenty years allowed Lake County to become one of the primary destinations for water recreation, boating, fishing, bird-watching, and sailing in the Central Florida region.

The City encompasses 9.6 square miles in area and is home to approximately 13,000 residents (Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission, 2006 Estimates). The seasonal population for the City and Lake County has remained about sixteen percent (16%) of the total population for the past twenty-five years. The assigned Study Area for this Redevelopment Plan contains the Downtown Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) boundaries, encompassing nearly 400 acres of land area including right-of-way, and is comprised of the Central Business District, the Lake Dora waterfront, single-family neighborhoods, and regional commercial corridors. In 1995, the City's first Community Redevelopment Area was designated by City resolution. In 2003, the Community Redevelopment Agency and the University of Florida's Center for Building Better Communities conducted public workshops that led to an update of the CRA Redevelopment Plan the following year. Only two years thereafter, the City Council elected to expand the area of the CRA to its present-day boundaries.

In the fall of 2007, the City retained the services of IBI Group, Inc. to update the existing Downtown Redevelopment Plan with an emphasis on developing an implementation program that includes recommendations for strategic capital improvements, public-private partnerships, developing urban design guidelines, and translating the community's vision into a workable and implementable guiding document for the City.

The phased planning approach used to develop this Redevelopment Plan was integrated into a well orchestrated public involvement effort at the beginning of the process which then continued throughout the life of the project. The purpose of the community driven planning process was to provide a forum for continued dialogue between the City, area residents and the consultants concerning program development and direction. The first step in preparing the plan was the preparation of an inventory of existing conditions in the Downtown, including, but not limited to: existing land use, zoning, infrastructure, transportation and previous plans and programs. Based on the results of the inventory, an analysis of the Downtown Redevelopment Area was conducted that focused on the area's urban design framework and incorporated the results of the visioning workshops conducted by the City in 2006. The analysis phase guided the organization of the redevelopment area into the following seven character districts, each with unique attributes:

Commercial Corridor District

Residential Neighborhoods- Downtown North Neighborhoods; Downtown Transition Mixed-Use Neighborhoods; and West Main Neighborhoods

Downtown Core- Institutional Core; Traditional Main Street District; and Waterfront Entertainment District

The series of staff meetings, focus group meetings, and public workshops that followed generated discussions about the community's assets, concerns and goals. The community-driven process generated a variety of strategies and solutions that have been compiled into this Redevelopment Plan. The Plan identifies the community's vision for the future of its Downtown and serves as a guide to implement this vision through refocusing of the roles, priorities, and connections of the City government with other organizations to leverage additional funds and resources for identified projects.

The analysis phase and public workshops established the baseline for development of the specific redevelopment objectives, action strategies and proposals contained in the Redevelopment Plan section of this Plan. The Redevelopment Plan is organized by the six overall themes identified during the course of the planning process, which encompass the full spectrum of the planning systems that constitute Downtown's urban structure- Land Use and Development Characteristics; Urban Design and Historic Preservation; Circulation and Mobility; Public Facilities and Amenities; Environment; and Economic Development.

Finally, the Plan identifies a phased capital improvements program that identifies specific action strategies and prioritized projects to help the City move forward with public realm improvements that will support future private sector investment. It should be noted that the Downtown Redevelopment Plan will not be implemented all at once, and it is likely that all elements of the plan will not occur within the time sequence described. The Redevelopment Plan is intended to be a guiding document for actions designed to overcome deterrents to desired future growth and development in order to stimulate private investment. The plan is not intended to be static. Over time, portions of the plan may be updated and revised to reflect changes in the economy, public concerns and opportunities associated with public development proposals.

PLAN ORGANIZATION

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan intends to serve as a comprehensive resource for community leaders and stakeholders that are engaged in shaping the social, economic, and physical form of the area. Future actions targeted in this area are anticipated to follow the recommendations of the Redevelopment Plan through continued discussions with the residents, community stakeholders, and City agencies. The purpose of this document is to establish measurable benchmarks for the community's future growth and identify strategies that will provide guidance for successful implementation of the overall theme to create seamless neighborhoods throughout the City.

Throughout the document, the terms "the Plan", "Redevelopment Plan", "Master Plan", and "Redevelopment Master Plan" are used interchangeably and refer to this Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan document. The Plan is organized into four parts and ten chapters, as described below.

Part I: Overview

Chapter 1: Introduction

Project Background and Planning Process

Chapter 2: Context

Historic Context

Geographic Context

Relationship to Previous Plans and Programs

Chapter 3: Community Involvement

This chapter of the Downtown Master Plan synthesizes the community's feedback received during the visioning process conducted by the City and the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and focus group meetings, and community workshops conducted by the IBI Group in October, 2007.

Part II: Redevelopment Master Plan

Chapter 4: Land Use and Development Characteristics

This chapter addresses the key attributes of the Downtown's physical character: future land use composition; proposed development projects; development intensities and densities; affordable housing; open space system; overview of Downtown's neighborhoods and districts.

Chapter 5: Urban Design and Historic Preservation

The primary issues addressed in this chapter relate to the public and private realm design guidelines including: streetscape design; gateways; open space and waterfront design; transit oriented development principles; street grid and views; pedestrian connectivity; wayfinding and signage; site planning; building massing and bulk control criteria; architecture and historic preservation guideline.

Chapter 6: Circulation and Mobility

This chapter includes proposed improvements to the street and alley network; bicycle and pedestrian connectivity; trail network; multimodal transportation; and parking management.

Chapter 7: Public Facilities and Amenities

This chapter addresses issues impacting the provision of the primary civic realm infrastructure-utility network, stormwater systems, telecommunications; community facilities related to educational and cultural resources -civic center, library, schools, public safety, parks, restrooms, arts and culture, and other civic amenities.

Chapter 8: Environment

Issues addressed in this chapter include conservation and preservation of wetlands and natural resources; sustainable development including green buildings and site planning, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND), and zero-emission transportation modes.

Chapter 9: Economic Development

The primary focus of this chapter is related to Downtown's economic positioning within a regional context. The chapter addresses essential economic development components such as employment base, tourism and related events, marketing and promotion, strategies related to retaining and attracting employment and visitor oriented land uses, and potential impacts of the transit service provision.

Part III: Implementation

Chapter 10: Program Administration and Financing

This chapter presents the organizational framework and financial strategies that will be required for successful implementation of the Redevelopment Plan program. It defines the roles and responsibilities that should be undertaken by the various agencies and stakeholders that are involved in shaping the future development of Downtown Tavares.

Chapter 11: Implementation Plan

This chapter builds on projects outlined in Part II, to prioritize actions that will need to be pursued in the short-term (5 years) and long-term (6+ years) for successful implementation of the redevelopment program. The chapter also present a 5-year preliminary budget for the proposed improvements, and identifies funding sources to assist the CRA with budgeting and financial planning.

Part IV: Appendices

The appendices provide resources that contain information required by Section 163.362 F.S. and supplemental data that was utilized in the preparation of the Redevelopment Plan. Appendix A contains the inventory and analysis report that served as the foundation for the recommendations contained in the Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan. Appendix B of the Plan contains a section that addresses the specific requirements of Section 163.362 of the Florida Statutes related to Community Redevelopment Plans. Appendix C lists the funding sources referenced in the document. Appendix D contains the legal description of the boundary as required by the Florida Statute. Appendix E presents additional reference information related to smart growth development and LEED-ND. Finally, Appendix F provides a demographic snapshot of Tavares and Lake County.