

**GREEN AND GRADUAL:**

# NEW OAKS

POCKET NEIGHBORHOOD

L A K E W A L E S F L

A MIXED-USE, POCKET-SIZED NEIGHBORHOOD

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT AT 460 S. SCENIC HIGHWAY, LAKE WALES FLORIDA

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## 1. OVERALL VISION

Essential Places LLC intends to incrementally develop a “**pocket neighborhood**,” a cluster of small buildings around common, landscaped garden space, at 460 South Scenic Highway in Lake Wales.

This urban form is inspired by both the unique site and by historic cluster developments that are sometimes called cottage courts, walk streets, and bungalow courts; like the Methodist retreat camps of the late nineteenth century, a pocket neighborhood can be a green place of refuge from the bustling world, but also a place to learn, create, and grow among friends and neighbors.

Long fallow, and stripped of its tree canopy, today our property urgently calls for re-integration into the street scene of the historic community. We call it **New Oaks** Pocket Neighborhood because our plan is to begin—even before building construction starts—with **replanting the trees along Scenic Highway** that were once a signature feature of Lake Wales, following the Olmsted Brothers’ blueprint to make Lake Wales a green “city in a garden.”

New Oaks is intended as a model for revitalization of Lake Wales via human-scaled, people-centered investments in buildings, shared space, and placemaking. Unlike most developments, our vision is for the property to be developed **very gradually**. This will allow for incremental transitions rather than abrupt change, and will also allow for architectural experimentation, for adaptation to the evolving local marketplace, for learning as we go, and for a reflection of Lake Wales’ emerging businesses, visitors, and households.

**This is an application for MPD approval under Chapter 23 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Lake Wales**, to allow for development and land uses that are in keeping with the vision for a revitalized core and with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

## **2. A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR A SITE OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE**

This MPD encompasses the property known as Parcel ID: 27-30-01-883000-056080, Portion of Block 56. It is a **vacant parcel 2.03 acres** in size.

This site has been vacant for many decades. It is situated at a key "gateway" location that should be welcoming visitors and citizens into the core of Lake Wales. The parcel is within the **Core Improvement Area** identified by the City.

## **3. SPECIFIC PLAN CONCEPTS**

- **Beginning with the green parts:** This planning effort began not with buildings and land uses but with the gardens, the components that will reinforce the impression of Lake Wales as a verdant, natural place.
  - First among these plan components is the replanting of **roadside oaks** along Scenic Highway 17, to restore the vista at this important gateway to core of town from the south, along with a second row of newly planted oaks along the western property line. We urge the city to plan to match our new trees with paired oaks on city property along the other side of Highway 17.
  - Next, the plan establishes a large **central garden** in the middle of the property, around which the buildings will be grouped. More oaks will be planted in a grove in the shady part of the garden, while areas of the garden open to the sun will be reserved for gathering space, flower beds and pots, greenhouses, and growing food.
  - Third, the plan reserves land for the **future Ridge Scenic Highway Trail**, identified in the Polk County Transportation Planning Organization's 2040 Trails map and in keeping with the City's plans and previous FDOT studies of the trail corridor.
  - Fourth, the plan calls for a **deck or terrace** to be created on the eastern side of the parcel, faced by a building to be included in the earliest phase, as a publicly accessible, welcoming "front door" to the development.
  - Fifth, space is set aside for planting areas along the property boundaries to create a partial **visual screen and buffer** for the benefit of adjacent neighbors.
- **Grouping small buildings:** The plan calls for a larger number of small buildings rather than one or two big buildings. These will include a combination of micro-cottages, bungalows, art studio outbuildings, mixed-use buildings, apartment houses, and rowhouses, plus a Quonset-type workshop and accessory structures, all interpreting and adapting architectural styles familiar to historic Lake Wales.
- **Mixing land uses:** To allow for a high quality of life, the plan activates a location where gently mixing land uses is permitted, to a tightly controlled degree. This will support some of life's daily needs within walking or biking distance, and could shorten or even internally

capture some car trips, reducing wasted time, energy consumption, congestion, and pollution.

- **Inclusion:** While small, this MPD is intended to result in a variety of housing types and sizes, and will welcome residents, workers and visitors of all backgrounds, emphasizing community over isolation. Therefore, there is to be no “gated community” here.
- **Walkability** will be supported by making both the interior and the edges of the property connected and pleasant. To make the street frontage **beautiful and safe and green**, regularly spaced street trees will be standard, and the street will be faced by the fronts of the adjacent buildings, not garage doors, parking lots or blank walls. The neighborly aspects of architecture (doors, windows, front porches, stoops, storefronts, and balconies) will greet passersby.
- **Bikability** will be supported by reserving space for the future Ridge Scenic Highway Trail, which is envisioned as a 10-12’ wide, separated/protected multiuser path. The vision is that this trail segment will combine with the other trails documented in the plans by the TPO, FDOT, Polk County and City of Lake Wales to fashion a network that accommodates walkers, runners, and cyclists of all ages and abilities.

#### 4. PROJECT’S PLANNING AND ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS

- **Dover, Kohl & Partners**, Town Planning & Neighborhood Design
- **Maricé Chael**, Architect
- **Chastain-Skillman**, Engineer

#### 5. LAND USES

The buildings and grounds will be occupied by any number of land uses that are consistent with the property’s zoning and the comprehensive plan of the City of Lake Wales, including single-family attached and detached houses, accessory dwelling units, multi-family housing, offices, storefront commercial, classroom educational space, maker space and art studio spaces, short-term vacation rentals and other lodging, support structures, and hosting of private indoor and outdoor events.

#### 6. RATIONALE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL FLEXIBILITY

This visionary project uses the flexibility of an MPD to result in higher quality development than can be achieved under the other tools in the City’s standard zoning alone. This MPD will allow the pocket neighborhood founders to apply design conventions and evolve land uses that neatly integrate walkability, compact form, variety in housing, and conservation. In turn, the neighborhood founders will impose upon themselves and all successors and partners a strict standard for quality and architectural design. This is a new practical opportunity to help the City mature in an orderly way that at the same time protects its beauty and tranquility.

This MPD will allow Essential Places to create internal, high-quality shared space not probable under any more typical layout, while still maintaining pleasant outward-facing fronts facing Scenic Highway in this very prominent location in the City. This MPD will also allow us to undertake a significant reforestation effort, cooling and beautifying the City.

**In summary, the benefit of the planned development approach is that the MPD will fold together a predictable pattern for the whole of the property,** combining the architectural vision and variety of buildings and landscapes, the flexibility to adapt the building footprints and land uses gracefully over time, the foreseeable technicalities including variances and/or waivers, the commitment to the management of common spaces, and planning ahead for logical infrastructure.

## 7. PRECEDENTS

Similar developments nationwide illustrate how the proposed MPD can be expected to function and maintain its long-term economic value and community benefit. The approach is beautifully documented in the book *Pocket Neighborhoods: Creating Small-Scale Community in a Large-Scale World* written by the movement's leader, Ross Chapin. Chapin documents the historical foundation for the modern pocket neighborhood, including successful features of **Forest Hills Gardens** (by Frederick Law Olmsted and Grosvenor Atterbury), among others.

Today's pocket neighborhood is an idea that has taken hold across the country. For example, Chapin's **Third Street Cottages, Danielson Grove, and Conover Commons** in the Pacific Northwest, and Tolar/Anderson's **Cottage Square** in Ocean Springs Mississippi, and Dover-Kohl's **Hammonds Ferry** in North Augusta, South Carolina, and many others indicate that this model for development is highly desirable among home seekers and visitors. It is also cost-effective and efficient for the delivery of municipal services, and a strong contributor to a healthy tax base. At the same time, these examples show that the design approach allows for a tremendous range in the creative details and for flexibility to adapt to changing markets and site-specific circumstances.

More importantly, pocket neighborhoods of this kind have proven to be places where people come to know their neighbors, cherish and protect their shared commons, and form strong bonds of community.

## 8. EXCEPTIONS / WAIVERS / VARIANCES / FINDINGS

a. **Flexible Building Types and Locations.** This MPD is based on a fundamental pattern, the ring of small buildings that will be arrayed parallel to the perimeter of the property and surrounding a generous courtyard garden in the center of the property. The attached plan, exhibit PDP 1.4, **Permitted Area for Buildings and Vehicular Circulation**, depicts in gray the three areas in which the future buildings are expected to be located, and the driveway and parking locations. We agree that the exact location of the buildings, the exact building footprints, and deployment of attached versus detached building types in these areas may be adjusted over time as design details and technicalities emerge, and that the buildings and uses shall be interchangeable, as long as they are restricted to these Permitted Areas.

b. **Setbacks.** This MPD calls for building setbacks that vary along South Scenic Highway 17, deeper in some locations and shallower in others. Because of the diagonal alignment of the road, and the desired building-to-street relationships in keeping with the traditional neighborhood design approach, there are small points at which the corners of buildings will be located up to 12 feet closer to the street than is permitted in the underlying zoning. However, parcel-wide, the total setback area acreage is *much greater* than the minimum requirement, and the setbacks are still generous and sufficient despite this deviation. This is graphically documented in Exhibit PDP 1.4. All the future buildings closest to Scenic Highway are affected by the small setback *distance* waiver documented by the *Permitted Area for Buildings* diagram on sheet PDP 1.4, to some minor degree. In the conceptual *Development Concept Plan* diagram on sheet PDP 1.2, future buildings S, Z, A, C and D are each shown with some form of small setback encroachment. This results largely from the diagonal geometry of Scenic Highway. Note that in all cases the overall setback *areas* are significantly *larger* than required:

- Corners on future buildings S and C require 12 feet and 11 feet of setback relief, respectively, in order to allow the rectangular buildings to have a normal building-to-street relationship with the diagonal street (as is the case with numerous historic buildings seen further north along the same street).
- One corner of building A potentially has an encroachment of just enough for the roof overhang and ADA ramp (26").
- Future buildings C and D have small encroachments of 22" each to allow for the storefront overhang and for a proper front porch depth. None of these small setback waivers constitute a material deviation from the intent of the code or the comprehensive plan.

c. **Heights.** While the majority of buildings will be one, two and three stories tall, for design flexibility this MPD stipulates that all buildings are to be limited to 4 stories maximum. This MPD grants the right for the tallest portions of buildings, such as chimneys, roof ridges and cupolas, to reach up to a maximum of 51' in height.

The request has been made in order to allow for a future building that has a pitched roof with cathedral ceiling on its upper floor. Such a building would have a roof ridge at a height of 48' and chimney heights of 50', so the request was written rounded up to 51 feet to allow for any unexpected details. This minor exception to the maximum building height has not been made to secure any additional habitable or leasable area, merely to improve the quality of the built result, and is reasonable in light of how, overall, the development consisting of mostly one- and two-story buildings falls well below the permitted height and scale already allowed by the underlying zoning.

d. **Land Uses.** This MPD confirms the right to use any and all buildings erected on the property and any and all outdoor areas on the property for any temporary or permitted use permitted within the adopted RO future land use category and the PF zoning category, in any combination, in an intensity of up to a floor area ratio (FAR) of .25; the method for calculating building square footages is documented on Exhibit PDP 1.2, **Development Concept Plan**. This includes the right to develop residential uses along with non-residential uses, and the right to interchange the uses within and between buildings over time, provided that the residential units will be governed by a maximum residential density of 12 principal dwelling units to the acre, or 24 units, with this calculation exempting accessory dwelling units.

Accessory buildings and accessory dwelling units are permitted and do not count toward the maximum allowable residential density. Each principal dwelling unit is allowed to be paired with one designated accessory dwelling unit, located anywhere on the property within the Permitted Area for Buildings.

This MUPDP allows a number of ADUs to be permitted as-of-right with administrative approval, in keeping with the overall advance planning of the site under MUPDP, rather than piecemeal requests at future times. The maximum number of 24 ADUs reflects a one-to-one correspondence with the number of permitted principal units, and in any event the combined total of all buildings will not exceed the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) permitted as-of-right. No deviation from the code standard regarding ADU size is necessary; all ADUs will be less than or equal to 600 SF.

**e. Rental Occupancy and Owner Occupancy, Subdivision, Sale and Amendments.** Under this MPD, it is understood buildings may be occupied by renters and/or owner-occupants. The regulatory effect, property rights and requirements of this MPD, and any amendments thereof mutually agreed upon by the owners and the City, will pass to any future owners of the whole or any part of the property. This MPD does not restrict the right to subdivide the property in the future, or to arrange cooperatives or condominium arrangements, or to sell or transfer any part of the property, or to sell or transfer the whole property.

**f. Events.** Under this MPD, the property owner is permitted to host occasional events for the enjoyment of private groups and/or the public, including events with outdoor education and/or music, provided these events are managed in compliance with the requirements established by the City of Lake Wales for noise control, hours of permitted operation, traffic control and waste management. Essential Places LLC wishes to cooperate with the City to produce occasional events that are successful in drawing families and visitors to the Core of Lake Wales. Essential Places LLC will reach out to City leaders to explore the potential of incorporating the City-owned property east of Highway 17 as potential overflow parking or other support space, if needed.

**g. Vehicular Access: Ingress, Egress, City Alley, and On-street Parking.** The plan envisions using the existing driveway curb cut on Highway 17 as the entry point for vehicles entering the property. From there, the driveway becomes a private alley that encircles the south and west sides of the property, leading to three off-street parking areas and to the platted city alley along the north side of the property. The plan proposes a new curb cut to be created in the northeast corner of the property, associated with the city alley. The plan proposes to improve the city alley by constructing the new curb cut (pending approval by FDOT), laying down the driving surface, planting landscaping on the north side of the alley, and positioning the driving surface largely on the New Oaks private property to minimize any impact upon the neighboring property. Pending approval by FDOT, the plan also proposes to eventually modify a short segment of the roadway edge of Highway 17, realigning the sidewalk to implement a segment of the Ridge Highway Scenic Trail, plant additional street trees, achieve traffic calming, and create three additional on-street parking spaces.

**h. Parking Areas and Parking Ratios.** Unlike conventional suburban development, where parking spaces are oversupplied and driveways are immediately adjacent to (and sometimes within) the buildings, the pocket neighborhood concept calls for locating parking at the periphery and for limiting the proliferation of parking to just what is necessary. The goal is creating a car-free, pedestrian-dominated area in the

cluster and its courtyards; however, the walk from parking to buildings will nonetheless be very short. Parking will be provided in three parking areas located in the southeast, southwest, and northwest corners of the property; these three parking areas will be implemented gradually, as needed, as the development grows in. This MPD confirms City approval of the proposed supply of 31 off-street parking spaces as sufficient for the proposed development, per the following analysis:

- New Oaks applies a market-driven solution to the parking, taking into account the walkable core context, the internal and surrounding mix of land uses, the shared parking approach, and the low parking demands that come with very small dwelling units and STRs. If actual future parking demand falls well below what is typically seen today, given changes in technology and consumer preferences, the development would have the option to expand the number of ADUs, but only within limits set by this MUPDP.
- 31 offstreet parking spaces thus allows for a reasonable starter parking ratio: one parking space per unit, for the 31 units described in the Development Concept Plan. Some of these units will be target-marketed to students and seniors, who have lower parking demand. Others will be operated as STRs, some of whom will have the option for ride-hailing and car-sharing instead of parking rental cars or personal cars.
- Rent for parking spaces will be unbundled from the rent for each dwelling unit, further incentivizing lower car ownership.
- A substantial number of principal units are within what are envisioned as the final buildings, in the very last phases of buildout. Since the development will be phased and occur gradually, if higher parking ratios prove to actually be needed, there is the possibility that some future buildings will have to be eliminated or postponed so as not to exceed the parking supplied. In the event that larger parking facilities are ever needed, at that time a site plan revision will be applied for, under the provisions of MUPDP.
- Similarly, if in actual practice parking demand falls below these ratios, New Oaks would conceivably be able to exercise the right to construct some number of additional ADUs without adding more parking, by reallocating space and/or reducing the size of certain principal units, but in no such event would New Oaks be permitted to exceed the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) permitted by the underlying zoning without amendment to the MUPDP.

i. **Pervious Materials & Stormwater Management.** To limit environmental impact, improve water quality by discouraging non-point-source runoff pollution, reduce the urban heat island effect, and improve the character of development, this MPD confirms City approval for the driveways, alley, and parking areas to be maintained as gravel surfaces rather than asphalt or other pavements, to the extent feasible.

Preliminary review by the civil engineer indicates the soils on this site have very high percolation rates, a favorable condition for stormwater management and water quality, and no significant ponds are expected to be required. Our understanding is that the City will accept whatever stormwater solutions are accepted by the Water Management District; we will undertake review with the District once the zoning is certain. The impervious surfaces will be minimized, as described in the application narrative, and other low-impact development solutions including rain gardens will be employed. In addition, some areas in the garden will be recessed slightly, allowing for dry retention in the center of the site. If

additional stormwater devices are required (although this is not expected to be the case), we anticipate these would be placed under the new private alley and/or parking areas.]

j. **“Placeholder” Use of Recreational Vehicles; Food Trucks.** To allow for early activation of the site, this MPD allows for a limited number of high-design recreational vehicles (RV’s), such as Airstream travel-trailers, to be positioned initially on the sites of future permanent buildings. These “placeholder” RV’s would be phased out or relocated as they are replaced by permanent buildings. In these interim positions, these RV’s can help give a shape to the courtyard garden spaces, allowing for quicker population of the site and testing of lodging marketing concepts. Similarly, to bring people to the site and to support events, this MPD confirms that food trucks may be deployed on the parcel, provided it is done in a manner that is consistent with County health department protocols and City policies. At least one permanent building will be constructed prior to the installation of any RV’s. RV’s used for this purpose shall be travel-trailers that are sufficiently well-maintained, clean, and adequately new or carefully restored in such a manner that is deemed sufficient to the Planning Director. We agree that up to **four** such RVs may be installed on site and remain for a period of up to **five years** after their installation or re-installation, unless an extension of time is granted by the appropriate authority such as the Planning Director or the Planning Board.

## 9. ASSURANCE

Essential Places LLC and/or its successors or assigns shall retain **perpetual ownership of and maintenance responsibility for the common areas** at New Oaks.

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## APPENDIX: RELEVANT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

### Comp Plan Policy I.1.1.5:

*The adopted land development regulations shall permit and encourage the use, where appropriate, of **innovative development techniques** such as **mixed-use development** projects, **traditional neighborhood development (TND)** projects, **zero-lot-line home subdivisions**, and **cluster housing**.*

### Comp Plan Policy I.1.2.11:

*Residential-Office (RO):*

*The primary function of the Residential-Office (RO) classification is **to permit low intensity office and commercial uses in conjunction with residential use**.*

*Location criteria: This classification may serve as a transition between commercial and residential use or **as a buffer where a major highway intersects an existing residential neighborhood**. The RO classification is intended primarily for developed areas to provide viable economic use and redevelopment option for residential areas that have declined in value because of their location on major roadways.*

*Typical uses/intensity: Professional offices, medical facilities, institutional and educational uses and public facilities. Single family dwellings, two- and three-family units, and multi-family units up to 12 units per gross acre. Up to a maximum FAR of .25.*

*Development criteria: **Mixed use developments are encouraged.** Off-site residential uses shall be buffered from non-residential uses. **Access to major collector and arterial roadways.***

**Comp Plan Objective I.1.5.1:**

*Desired Urban Growth Pattern: A **compact, efficient, and sustainable pattern of development that provides convenient access for residents to urban services and amenities, avoids urban sprawl, strip development and leap-frog development, protects natural and historic resources, is compatible with existing land uses and is coordinated with and consistent with the adopted growth management plans of Polk County, adjacent municipalities, and with applicable regional and state agency plans and regulations.***

**Comp Plan Objective I.1.5.3:**

*Infill and redevelopment: **Promote infill development** and redevelopment of urban areas through flexible land use regulations and quick turn-around times for reuse inspections and permit reviews, and **financial incentives such as development impact fee exemptions for desirable uses. Land use regulations for redevelopment target areas shall promote affordable housing** and make liberal use of the special permit process to allow a wide range of uses without compromising neighborhood integrity and land use compatibility.*

**Comp Plan Objective I.1.5.8:**

***Promote compact urban growth through the location of public facility expansions contiguous to existing developed areas** through policies in the Sanitary Sewer Sub-Element, Potable Water Sub-Element, and Drainage SubElement.*

**Comp Plan Objective I.1.5.9:**

***Direct public facility investments in and near existing urban areas through capital improvement funding priorities** as established in Capital Improvements Element.*

**Comp Plan Objective I.1.5.10:**

*The utility regulations shall discourage the establishment of new private on-site wastewater treatment systems as called for in Sanitary Sewer SubElement policies.*

**Comp Plan Objective I.1.5.11:**

*Encourage the use of centralized water and wastewater systems through an interlocal utility service agreement with Polk County.*

**Comp Plan Objective I.1.5.18:**

*Consider the adoption of a zoning district which permits a density not to exceed 12 dwelling units per acre to **facilitate the development of townhomes** which assist the City and Polk County in increasing local housing diversity and type.*

**Comp Plan Objective III.1.1.7:**

*In accordance with the schedule outlined in the Capital Improvements Element, **provide supporting infrastructure to new residential neighborhoods and special needs housing.***

**Comp Plan Objective III.1.1.10:**

*Work with private sector housing providers to **reexamine and adopt new and attractive incentives for infill residential development and redevelopment projects within the City's existing urbanized areas***

**Comp Plan Objective IV.1.2:**

*Expansion of System to Meet Future Needs: **Expand the municipal sanitary sewer system as needed to meet the needs of future residents and businesses in such a manner as to maximize the use of existing facilities and discourage urban sprawl.***

**Comp Plan Objective IV.1.2.9:**

*Require all new and existing wastewater generators within the city's corporate limits or within service areas established under Chapter 180 of Florida statutes to connect to the municipal sanitary sewer system when lines are available and in the opinion of the Director of Utilities it is economically feasible for the city to provide such service.*

**Comp Plan Objective VIII.1.1.2:**

*Continue to evaluate and rank proposed capital improvement project is order of priority according to the following guidelines.*

*a. Whether the project is needed to: correct an existing level of service deficiency, protect the public health and safety, serve developments for which development orders were issued prior to the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, or fulfill a legal commitment of the city;*

*b. Whether the project is needed to: replace worn-out or obsolete facilities to maintain the adopted level of service standard, improve operating efficiency, reduce costs, **serve developed areas lacking full service, or promote in-fill development or redevelopment;** [continues]*

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--Components: Garden (kitchen, sun, partly shady)/Bldgs arrayed about garden/ Site circulation+parking+alley/Hwy 17 frontage/future Scenic Hwy Trail/ Buffers & edges/ waivers, exceptions, variances & other agreements/ setbacks, heights/ bldg. type interchangeability/ parking/ units & accessory uses/ events/ permitted uses (agriculture, small scale mfr)