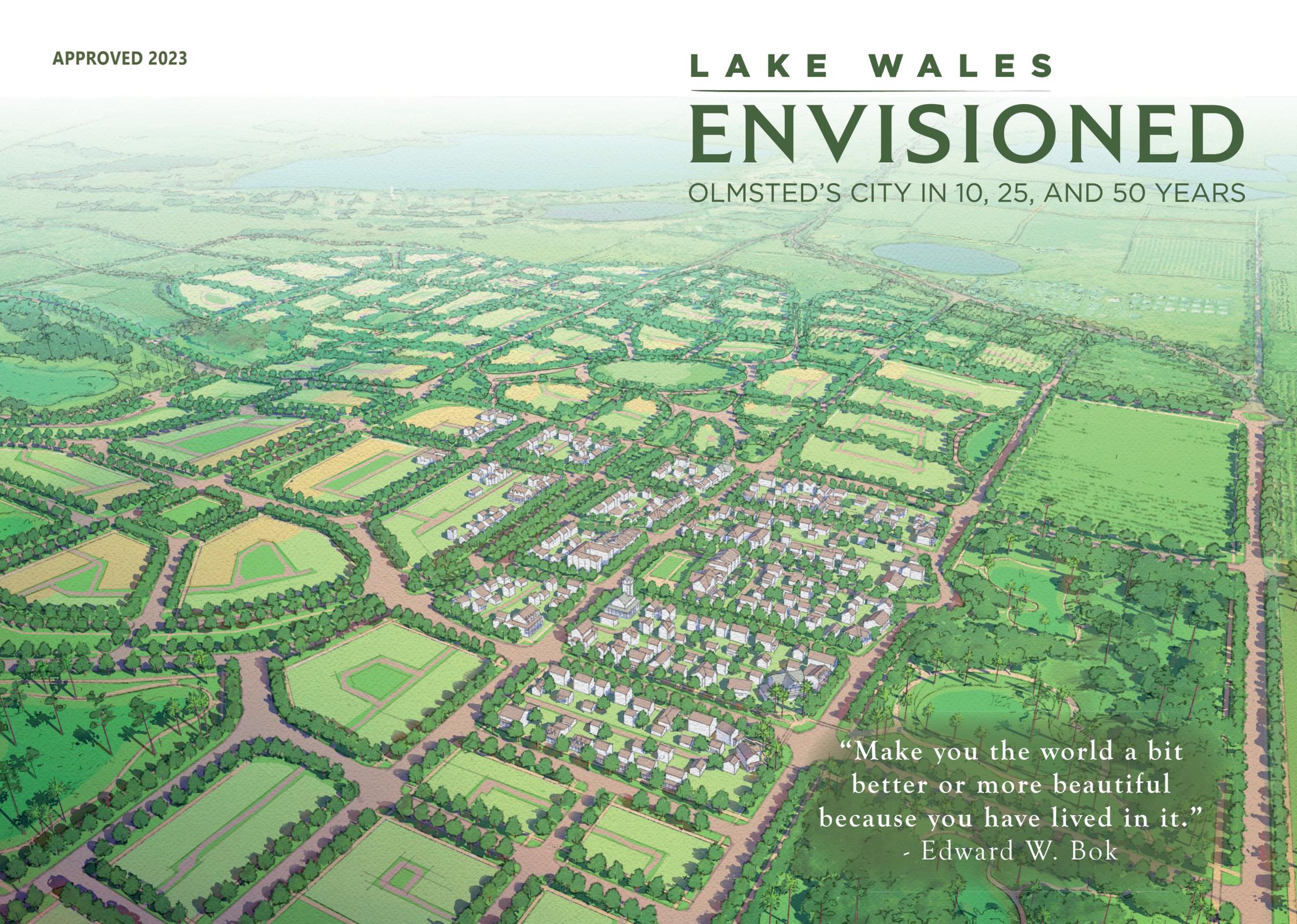


APPROVED 2023

LAKE WALES

ENVISIONED

OLMSTED'S CITY IN 10, 25, AND 50 YEARS



“Make you the world a bit
better or more beautiful
because you have lived in it.”
- Edward W. Bok



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Carrie

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ARE WALKS ENVIIONED

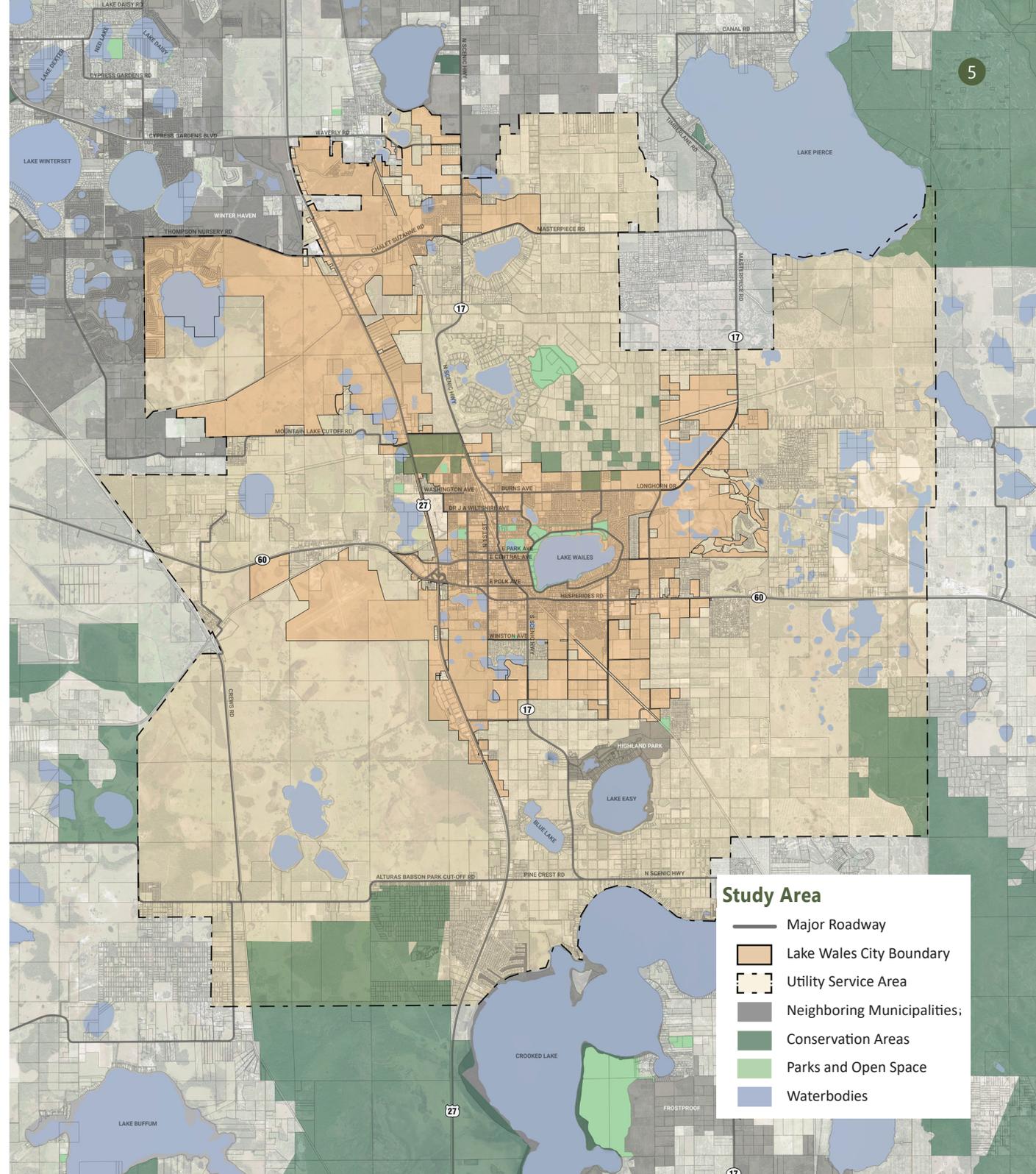
An aerial photograph showing a dirt road that splits into two paths. The road on the left is surrounded by a dense, lush green forest. The road on the right is surrounded by a sparse, dry forest with brownish ground. A small, simple building with a light-colored roof is situated at the junction of the roads, partially obscured by trees. The overall scene is captured from a high angle, looking down on the landscape.

the mission

The Crown Jewel of the Ridge

With a historic downtown set amongst picturesque rural landscapes and rolling citrus groves, Lake Wales is a city rich in natural beauty, history, and community. The famous Olmsted Brothers' landscape architecture firm planned Lake Wales in the 1920s as a "city in a garden", with tree-lined streets, memorable parks, and state-ly civic spaces. In 2023 a lot is changing; proposals for thousands of new homes are being discussed along with new industries and ways of working. The critical mission for *Lake Wales Envisioned* is to work together as a community to shape the future of this remarkable place.

The area within city limits is only part of the study area. The Utility Service Area, established under Chapter 180 of Florida Statutes, is an area within which city and county governments work together to set policy and make decisions about future growth. The City has the ability to grant annexation and provide utilities to development within this service area. The purpose of this plan is to establish a coordinated short and long-term vision for development and conservation, for lands within city limits as well as the larger service area, to inform and guide future decisions.



this important moment

We're modern-day Americans, which means we're not really all that good at change, right? We're conditioned to be a little suspicious about change and growth, worried that it could result in a downward trade for residents and business folks who love and value their community. And yet the founders of Lake Wales, and Edward W. Bok and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., once insisted upon change that would make things better and more beautiful. In his typewritten memos to the City, Olmsted devoted four pages to the subjects of Civic Beauty and the Appearance of the City; he knew that Lake Wales would endure and grow more valuable, and the quality of life here would rise, when good design was allowed to flourish.

Lake Wales Envisioned was launched last winter after a triple threat of long-simmering crises reached a boil in the City.

First, the southward march of suburban sprawl development had clearly reached Lake Wales.

A flurry of applications for rezoning to build large, monotonous subdivisions at the edges of town raised concerns, even as the City has so successfully advanced revitalization in the core with its Olmsted-inspired "City in a Garden" theme. In 2022, there were two headlines on the same day: one said Lake Wales is being lauded for rediscovering its Olmsted roots, and the other said "One of the most imperiled Olmsted legacy landscapes faces new threats."

Second, the decline of the citrus industry accelerated mightily with the "citrus greening" epidemic, leaving longtime landowners struggling to hold on until a cure can be found, meanwhile being forced to consider new uses for failing groves. The vulnerable situation has been seized by sprawl developers from out of town.

Third has been a deep need to restore confidence. Lake Wales citizens began openly questioning the City's policies and procedures for land development. "Just papering over ev-

erything with houses is inconsistent with who we are," said one. "Any town can do that. They're all doing that. We ought to be better." This became clear during the Land Use Study for the Utility Service Area. Questions arose about the next hundred years of development and annexations, as proposals for new subdivisions arose. Citizens began asking—how bad will it get? North of us, other communities have metastasized into that asphalt coating sheeting down I-4 in both directions from Tampa and Orlando, now advancing down Highway 27. Neighboring municipalities have already been partially buried under that asphalt coating with bland subdivisions, strip shopping centers, and other forms of forgettable real estate development. Doing the same in Lake Wales isn't consistent with what you're trying to do with the Lake Wales Connected plan for the Downtown and the Northwest Neighborhood, which is all about revitalization and treasuring the real old Florida.

“ How good can Lake Wales get? ”

This year, as we look forward 10, 25, and 50 years, your leaders have changed the question to this: How good can Lake Wales get? The Lake Wales Envisioned plan started with the community; citizens were brought the most extensive public outreach in the City's history, and they responded with an outpouring of civic engagement. The ideas evolved with this local wisdom baked into it, along with good advice from technical experts and knowledgeable members of your City staff. The resulting vision has a radical fundamental idea: that, done well and in reasonable amounts, growth and change will in fact make things better rather than worse, just as Olmsted and Bok foresaw.

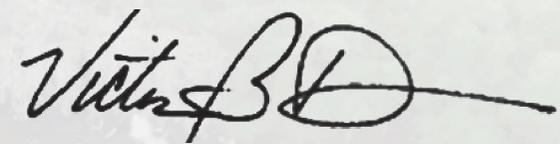
What we've described on the following pages is not easy to accomplish. It's a heavy lift. If

Lake Wales succeeds in implementing every idea, you will be the best in the country at applying your vision to your future. It's big and it's bold, it's beautiful—as Bok would expect. Most importantly, it's within your reach. Lake Wales Envisioned is a doable vision that the City, County and private investors can implement, as opportunities arise, each action making the next step feasible. You will need to commit yourselves and your resources, and be especially thoughtful about updating your rules and regulations to be consistent with the vision, and forging partnerships with the private sector investors who build things.

The thanks should go to the coalition of neighbors, partners and co-sponsors who have added themselves to this effort, letting the City

and community know you're not on your own. These partners have contributed in many ways, lending advice and wisdom, hosting community events, and getting the word out. First partners in planning, now they will become critical future partners in implementation.

You just have to give yourselves permission to achieve it.

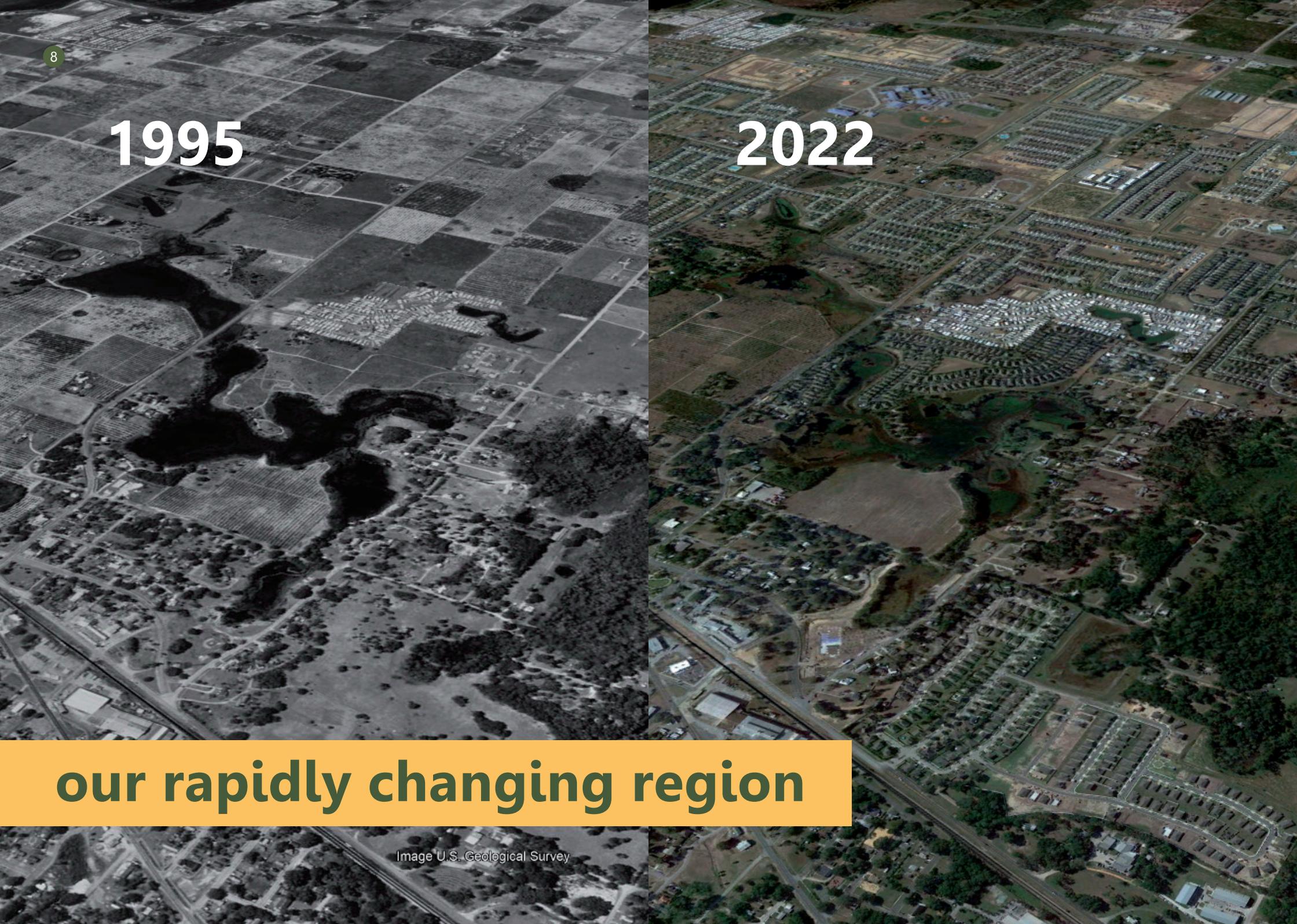


Victor B. Dover, FAICP
Dover, Kohl & Partners

1995

2022

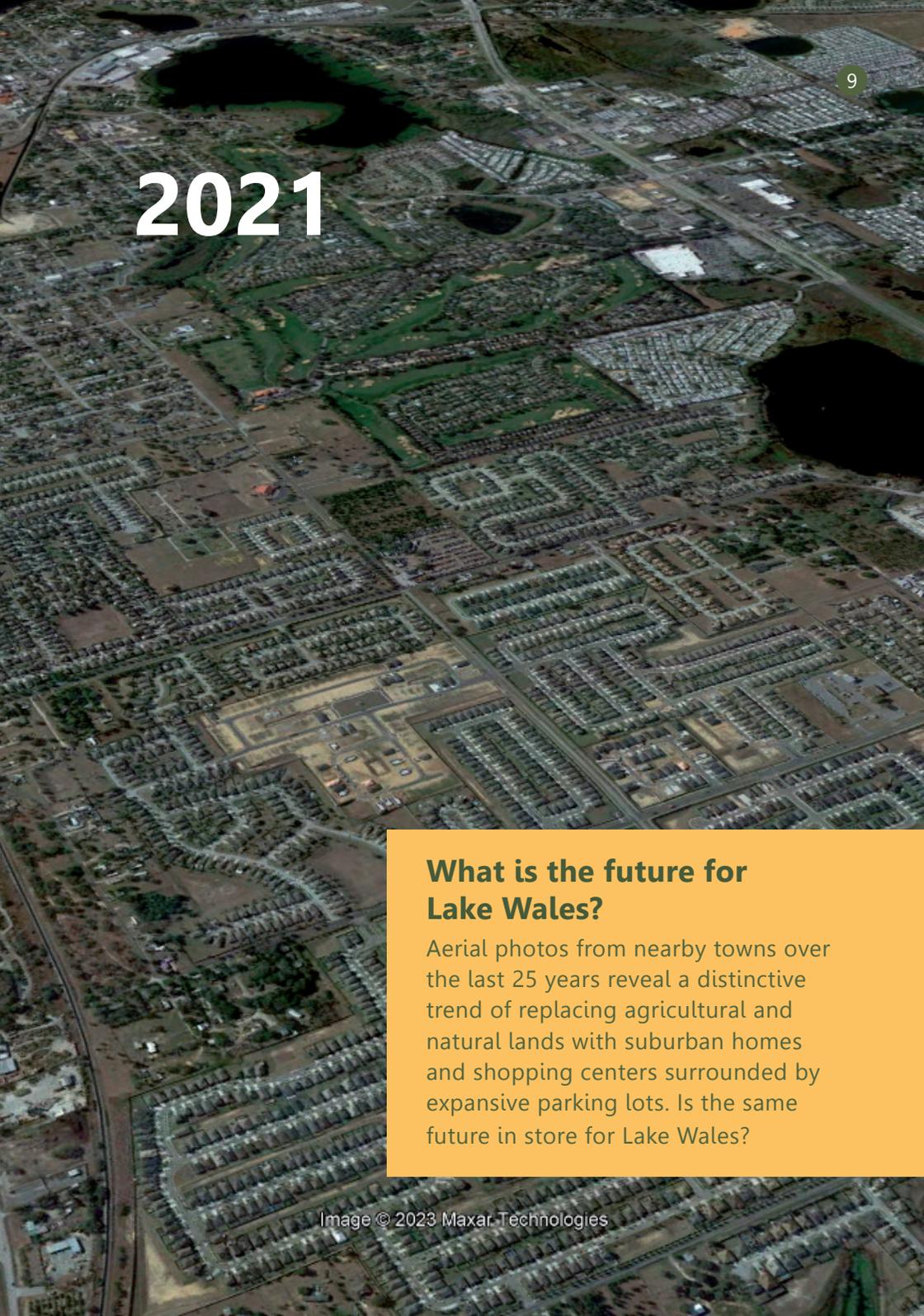
our rapidly changing region





1995

Image U.S. Geological Survey



2021

Image © 2023 Maxar Technologies

What is the future for Lake Wales?

Aerial photos from nearby towns over the last 25 years reveal a distinctive trend of replacing agricultural and natural lands with suburban homes and shopping centers surrounded by expansive parking lots. Is the same future in store for Lake Wales?



all hands on deck

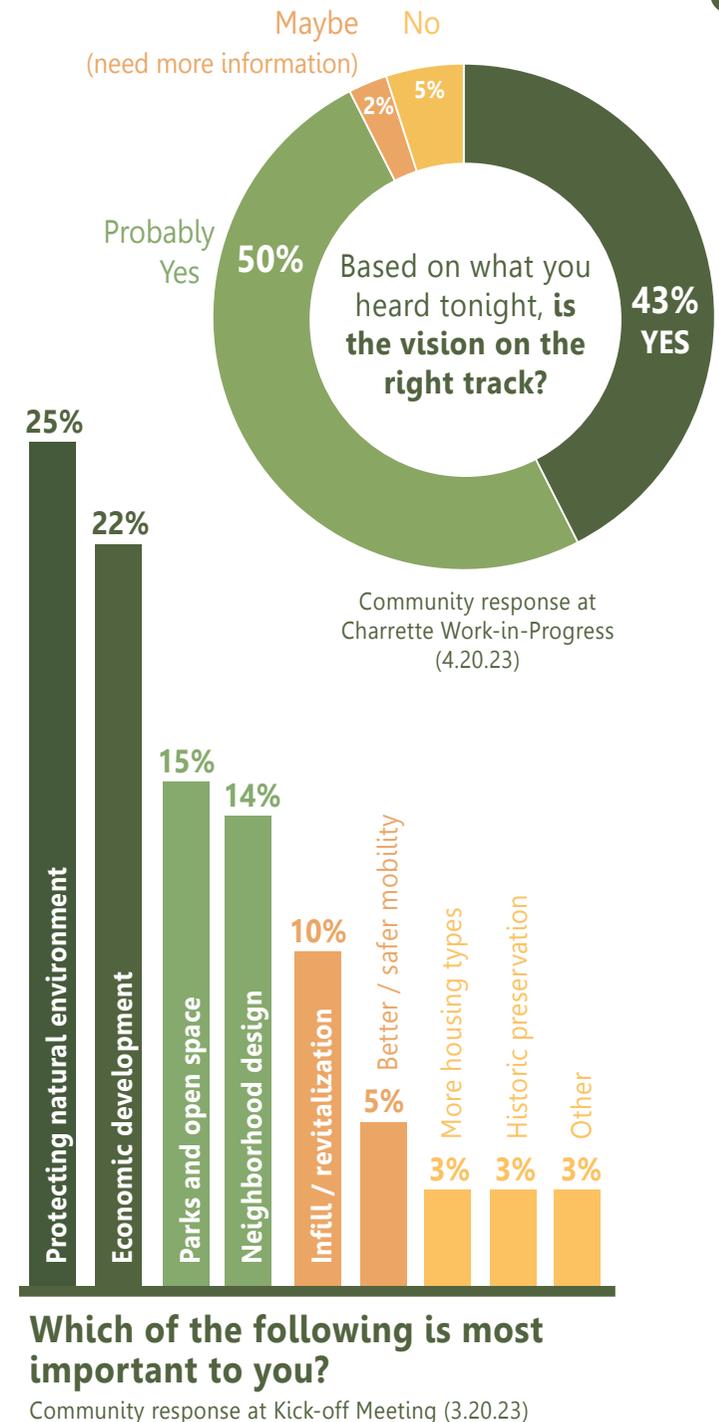
Authored by Citizen Planners

At the outset, the City Commission set high expectations for this new city-wide vision and plan – that it be grounded in community ideas and values gathered through extensive public engagement. Starting with Kick-off Day on March 20th at Bok Tower Gardens, a number of in-person and virtual events have been held, including presentations by national experts on transportation, economics, and land development, opportunities for small and large group conversations, and hands-on input to the plan. The charrette, a week-long series of meetings and events with an on-site design studio, was a key milestone for community input and feedback. A project website, lakewalesenvisioned.com, was created to provide ready access to project documents, videos, and encourage additional opportunities for input. Through these events, hundreds of citizen planners voiced their ideas and contributed their knowledge and opinions in shaping the plan.

There were many interesting things learned through each meeting and conversation. For example, during the kick-off event, community respondents identified protecting the natural environment and economic development as the top

two priorities from a long list of important considerations, revealing that Lake Wales doesn't want to have to choose between economic prosperity and ecological function. During the Hands-on Design Session, citizen planners were asked how and where the city should change and grow; there was consensus about focusing on downtown and areas within city limits, as well as rethinking the design of streets, to make them safer, more beautiful, and to plant more trees. Throughout the process, concerns were voiced about recent development proposals and ideas were shared about what types of development the community would like to see. At the Work-in-Progress Review the audience was asked: "Based on what you have seen and heard tonight, is the vision on the right track?" An overwhelming 93 percent responded yes or probably yes.

Following the charrette week, the planning team worked to consolidate and refine ideas, and document the vision. Additional meetings were held to review updated ideas and implementation concepts. The resulting vision and plan represents the many voices that participated and gave input throughout the year.



An Historic Undertaking for Lake Wales

**MAR
20**

**COMMUNITY
KICK-OFF MEETING**

This interactive kick-off meeting at the Bok Tower Gardens Auditorium included a review of initial project goals and discussion of the community's ideas for the future of Lake Wales.

**MAR
20**

**BEST PRACTICES
SYMPOSIUM**

Experts in land development, neighborhood planning, urban design, and green infrastructure shared best practices and lessons learned from peer communities that could be applicable to Lake Wales.

**MAR
29**

**DOLLARS AND SENSE:
WHY WELL-DESIGNED
NEIGHBORHOODS PAY THE BILLS -
WITH JOE MINICOZZI (WEBINAR)**

This lecture by Joe Minicozzi explained and helped visualize market dynamics created by tax and land use policies. Attendees learned why well-designed communities are more fiscally sustainable.

**APR
14**

**CHARRETTE WEEK:
OPENING RECEPTION**

On the eve of the *Lake Wales Envisioned* charrette, Lake Wales Main Street hosted a tent reception in downtown, to meet the planning team and begin the community dialogue.

**APR
15**

**CHARRETTE
WEEK: HANDS-
ON DESIGN
SESSION**

The morning after the Opening Reception, the Hands-On Design Session gave citizen planners the chance to draw and share their ideas.



MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

APR
16-19

**CHARRETTE WEEK:
OPEN PLANNING
STUDIO**

The Open Planning Studio is where the planning team refined draft concepts, updated maps, generated visualizations, and hosted a series of meetings with City staff and important stakeholders.

APR
20

**CHARRETTE WEEK:
WORK-IN-PROGRESS
REVIEW**

The Work-in-Progress Review was the conclusion of the charrette week. The presentation included a summary of community input heard so far, and draft ideas for the *Lake Wales Envisioned Plan*.

JUN
21 & 29

**DEEP DIVES
CONSERVATION AND COMPLETE
STREETS WITH DR. JAY EXUM AND
WADE WALKER P.E.**

The team reviewed details of the plans conservation and open space strategy, as well as complete streets, mobility, and transportation concepts integral to the *Lake Wales Envisioned Plan*.

JUL
11

**COMMUNITY
UPDATE
PRESENTATION**

The *Lake Wales Envisioned* team presented the work to date at the Community Update Presentation, which was paired with an open house exhibition highlighting new renderings, maps, and implementation ideas.

OCT
17

**APPROVED BY
CITY COMMISSION**

The Lake Wales City Commission unanimously voted to approve *Lake Wales Envisioned* with significant public support.



JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

lines of effort



economy

Economic growth strategies include identifying sites for industry, establishing innovative workforce training partnerships, investing in technology and support for local businesses, all the while creating a strong sense of place through improving local infrastructure, such as complete streets, well-designed walkable and affordable neighborhoods, and parks and public spaces. Combined, these strategies will create and attract new jobs that will support Lake Wales' local economy.



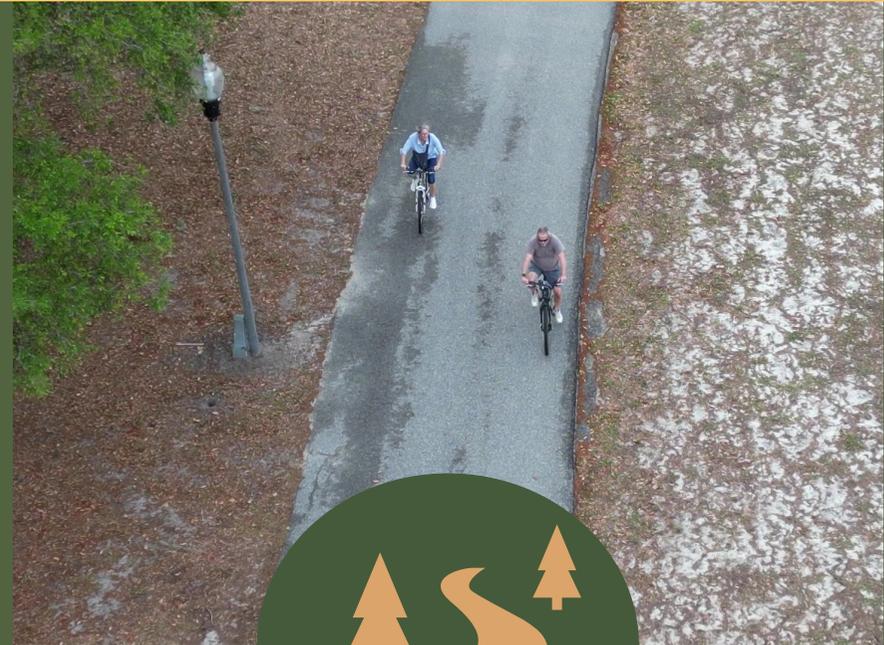
green

The Olmsted Brothers outlined a bold vision for Lake Wales, a "city in a garden" surrounded by expansive scenic vistas unique to this part of Florida. Our challenge is to bring this vision into the 21st century, and identify tools to achieve the vision. Connecting existing state and private conservation lands with an interconnected network of neighborhood parks, trails, and greenways will allow the community to protect its namesake Lake Wales Ridge.



neighborhoods

Well-designed neighborhoods support healthy living by encouraging physical activity and social interaction, providing spaces for residents to connect and support local businesses. Walkable neighborhoods enhance overall quality of life by offering convenient access to parks and trails, everyday needs, and community services all within a short distance. None of this is new, it is about rediscovering the principles that created the well-loved historic neighborhoods of Lake Wales.



mobility

The city's most important physical assets are its streets. How can the City leverage this asset to create value in the form of an interconnected network that adds rather than takes away value? Looking at every street through a utilitarian lens of moving cars is a common mistake cities across the country have made. The impacts of street design touch every aspect of community life from public health to quality of life, affordability, and economic development.



economy

Building Prosperity in the 21st Century

Building prosperity in the 21st century is about connecting and creating places to bring people and jobs together, and providing the needed infrastructure for opportunity. Economic growth requires a forward-looking, multifaceted approach. Investments in small businesses, incremental infill and reuse in downtown, retrofit of suburban shopping areas to better fit today's needs, enhancing technology to attract remote workers, as well as creating larger new job campuses can all be part of the solution.

Identify sites for industry

New job centers could be built in a way that would allow them to adapt to a variety of economic trends, with flexible workspaces that could accommodate offices, light industrial uses, small scale manufacturing, and distribution together. *Lake Wales Envisioned's* illustrative maps iden-

tify locations for large and small business development. Design is important; larger job campuses can improve upon the standard suburban model by including interconnected streets and prioritizing the public realm. Job-centered neighborhoods, which bring people closer to workplaces (something our communities used to be very good at), can once again become the norm.

Provide a variety of housing to attract employees/industry

Perhaps the most important economic development strategy is a good housing strategy—industry needs access to employees and employees need access to desirable, affordable housing. Building quality new neighborhoods and retaining Lake Wales' historic core will increase employee quality of life and make the area more attractive to business investors.

“Indicators show that everything from life expectancy, to crime, to student test scores, to social mobility are not only correlated with each other but are directly impacted by the physical environment in which people live ... Strong neighborhoods will help us attract major community investors and a wide variety of residents eager to be part of our awesome community.”

— Skip Alford, President & CEO, Lake Wales Area Chamber of Commerce



Attract remote workers

Remote work is the new normal for many, with freedom to choose where they live based on quality of life rather than proximity to the office. This shift in the traditional workplace represents an opportunity to attract new residents with disposable income to spend in local shops and businesses, strengthening the community.

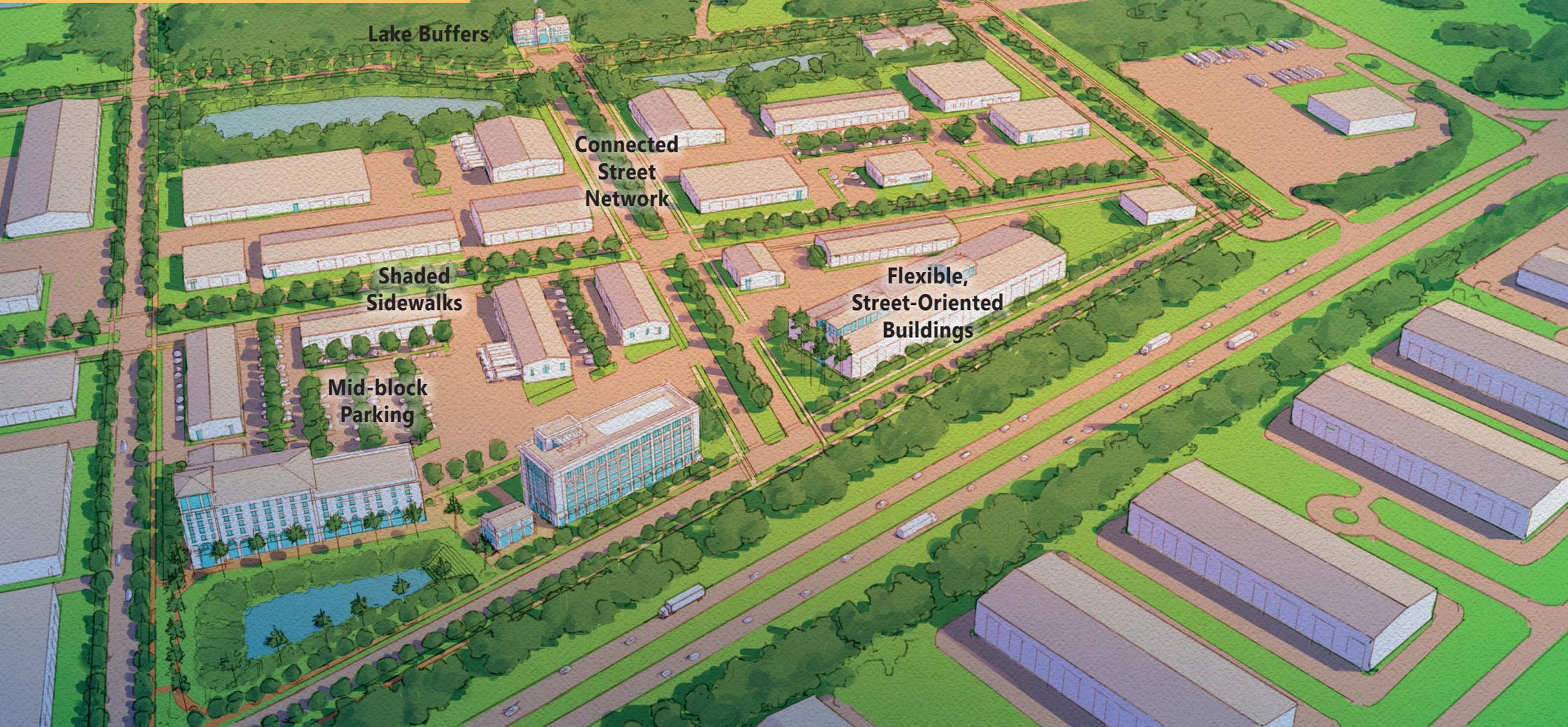
Job incubators/training

Lake Wales Connected, the plan for the core of Lake Wales, includes ideas for job training programs; a new incubator space recently opened in the Northwest Neighborhood. Implementation of additional programs and facilities will provide continued opportunities for residents and attract youth to stay in Lake Wales.

Update zoning and other City policy to attract businesses

Updating development regulations and other City policy will demonstrate commitment to the vision for jobs, housing and quality of life, attracting new employers.

21st Century **Job Centers** are well-designed, well-connected, and make good neighbors to surrounding streets, settlements, and natural areas.



Job Centers may include offices, labs, small-scale manufacturing, or any number of commercial uses. Buildings should be flexible to change over time; the same site design principles of connected, walkable streets, mid-block parking, and buildings facing public spaces apply.



Lake Buffers

Connected Street Network

Shaded Sidewalks

Mid-block Parking

Flexible, Street-Oriented Buildings

LAND USE LEGEND:

- Hospital
- Medical Office
- Retail/Commercial
- Residential
- Multi-family
- Civic
- School



The Health District



EXISTING



“WHAT IF?”

Attract infill and growth

Opportunities for economic growth and new job-centered development does not require an undeveloped greenfield site. The Health District is an opportunity for economic growth and change within existing city limits, providing new jobs and homes in a close-in location.

By leveraging a potential partnership with AdventHealth, the area near the hospital could be transformed to a new mixed-use neighborhood. The Orange Grove Shopping Center (currently a strip center with an expansive parking lot along Highway 60) could be re-imagined to include medical facilities, clinics, wellness centers, and assisted living spaces, all within a pedestrian-friendly layout with walkable streets and public open spaces. By re-purposing underutilized parking lots, this health-focused retrofit provides convenient access to medical care and integrates housing options that appeal to many, such as healthcare workers and patients’ families.



reviewing precedents



Springdale General, Austin, TX

This newly constructed job center accommodates light industrial, small-scale manufacturing, office space, and retail uses in conventional warehouse buildings arranged in small blocks with sidewalks, street trees, and stub-outs to support an interconnected street network. The versatility of the warehouse buildings in this development will continue to support a variety of uses into the future with highly functional and adaptable spaces.



AdventHealth Orlando Health Village

Connecting medical facilities, offices, labs, assisted living, and residential uses to the surrounding community support the creation of a complete mixed-use neighborhood.



EXISTING



Eagle Ridge Mall & Its Environs

Due to their inefficient layouts and economic under-performance, suburban malls have been undergoing transformations into new walkable neighborhood centers in communities across the country. The Eagle Ridge Mall, located near Highway 27 and Chalet Suzanne Road, is a potential candidate with large, underutilized parking lots that could be converted into mixed-use spaces featuring housing, offices, and green spaces. A successful retrofit project would prioritize diverse housing options to accommodate various income levels while integrating a variety of commercial spaces, including shops, workplaces and lodging, to boost economic activity. Portions of asphalt could be recovered as wet or dry retention and be part of the regional stormwater solution. New buildings would face tree-lined streets and public spaces, with parking to the side or rear, just like in the historic core. Over time, structured parking may be desirable to fully utilize more of the property. A transformation into a walkable center fosters social interaction, reduces dependency on cars, and can rejuvenate local economies by restoring the site's central role in community life.

A complete transformation would likely not happen quickly. However, there is a lot of area on this property, and the idea for a new mixed-use center could begin on a small scale, with just a portion of one parking lot becoming a little more green and less grey, a short row of street-oriented buildings around a new public space (as shown in image 2). The western edge of the site is potentially the most likely area for this because of the proximity/visibility to Highway 27. If that investment proves to be successful, over time, additional areas could be added and the site can become more like a village, as shown in images 3 and 4.

4



Public Space /
Retention
Areas

Existing Building
Reuse

Public Space /
Retention
Areas

Street-Oriented
Mixed-use
Buildings

Community
Square

Walkable
Tree-lined
Streets

reviewing precedents



Winter Park Village

One of the first sprawl retrofit projects, Winter Park Village is a former suburban mall that is now a walkable commercial center in Central Florida. It has served as a model for other similar projects around the country since the mid-1990's.



Belmar, Colorado

The former Villa Italia Mall in Lakewood, Colorado is today the Belmar District, with a mix of retail, housing, office, entertainment, and public spaces arranged on a network of walkable streets.



green

A Network of Conservation Lands & Open Spaces

One of the aspirations adopted by the Lake Wales City Commission in early 2023 was to “assemble an enduring green network of open spaces and conservation lands”. As a part of the comprehensive approach to envisioning appropriate growth and protection of natural resources within the municipal service area of Lake Wales, a large-scale conservation strategy called the *Big Green Network* has emerged. **The expectation of the Big Green Network is that natural lands in the study area will connect with existing conservation lands and form a network of protected areas that would preserve biological diversity, protect wetlands and listed species, store floodwaters, provide recreation opportunities, and serve as a boundary for growth for the city.** Conservation of tracts of relict scrub habitat, open spaces in parks, and native landscaping along trails and roadways will also create a neighborhood green network that will connect humans and wildlife to the Big Green Network.

Creating the Big Green Network

The objective is to protect large swaths of high-value natural lands, focusing on three priority areas:

- **The River to Ridge Corridor:** Protects existing and relict scrub and sandhill habitat between Tiger Creek Preserve and Catfish Creek Preserve with conservation lands associated with the Kissimmee River corridor.
- **Peace River Headwaters Corridor:** Protects a natural landscape from Crooked Lake Prairie across agricultural lands in the watershed with Peace Creek and the Peace River.
- **Peace Creek Linkage Conservation Strategy.** Protects wetlands and the floodway in disturbed and developed lands surrounding Peace Creek and the Peace Creek canal system.

Protection of these resources will require a sustained, multi-faceted approach using many tools over a long period of time.

“The overarching objective for what has now been termed the big green network is to protect large swaths of high-value natural lands ... this is a big-picture scenario that we think the City can drive, that’s important locally, regionally and even to the state, in terms of protecting big scale conservation lands.”

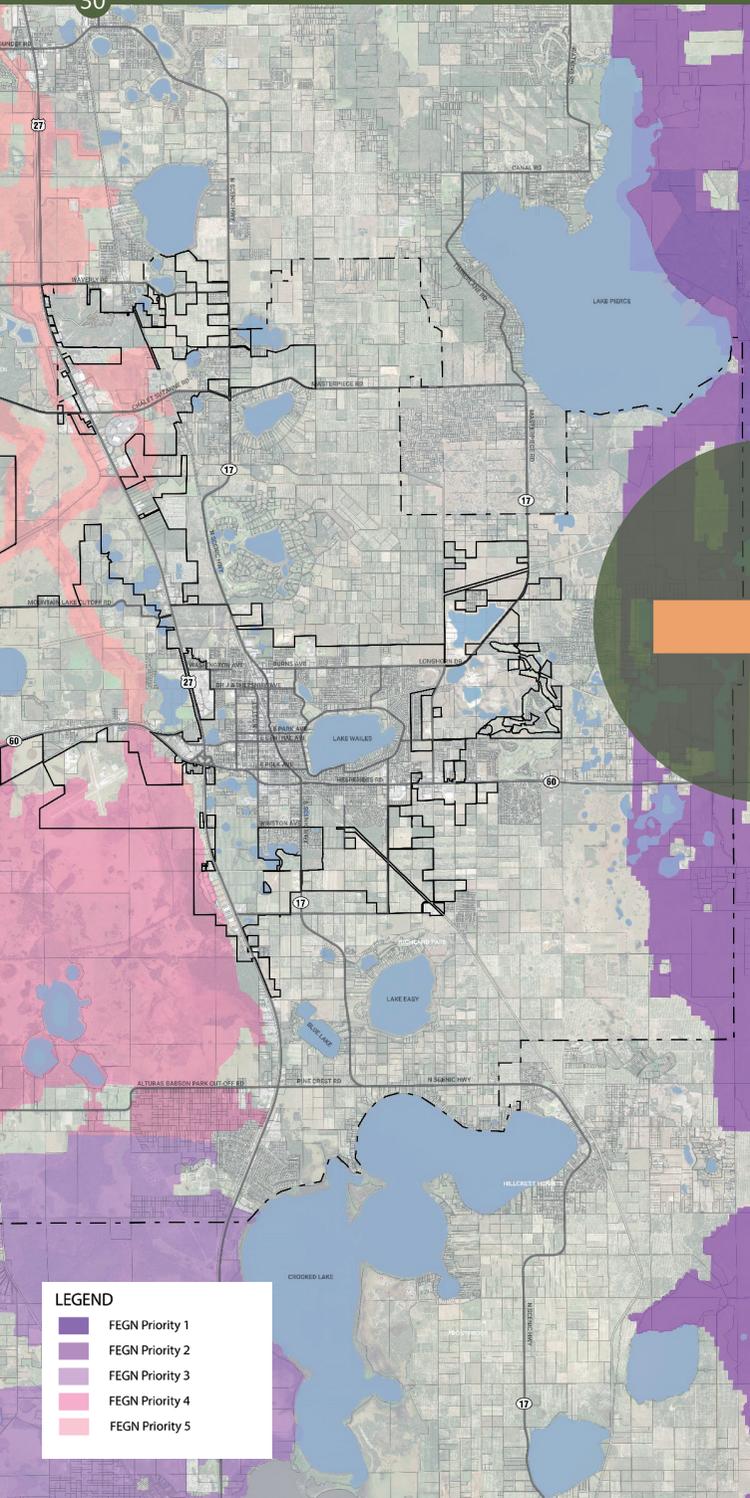
— Dr. Jay Exum, Principal Ecologist, Exum Associates, Inc.



During the Charrette, the planning team and stakeholders toured the **Tiger Creek Preserve** and learned about opportunities to connect to large-scale conservation lands.

FEGN

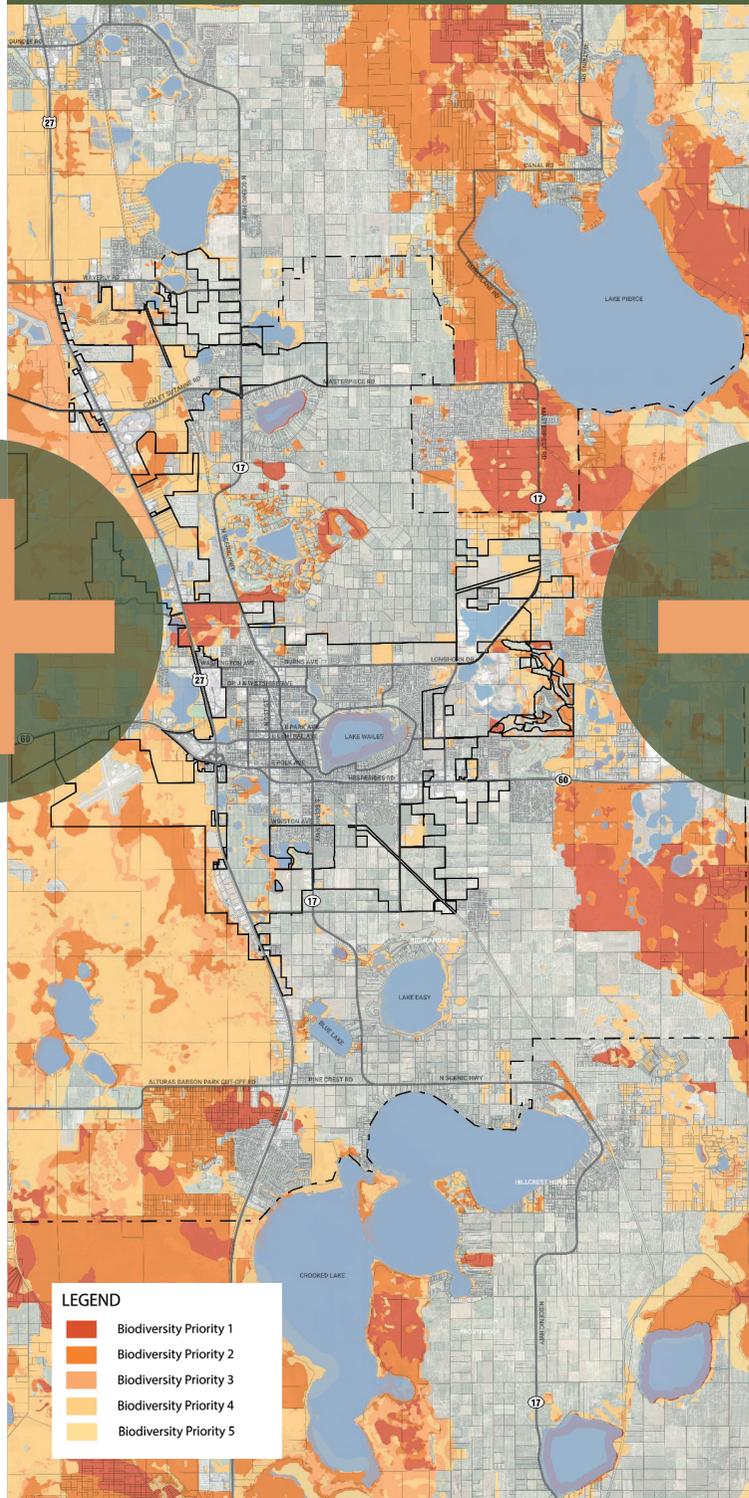
30



LEGEND

- FEGN Priority 1
- FEGN Priority 2
- FEGN Priority 3
- FEGN Priority 4
- FEGN Priority 5

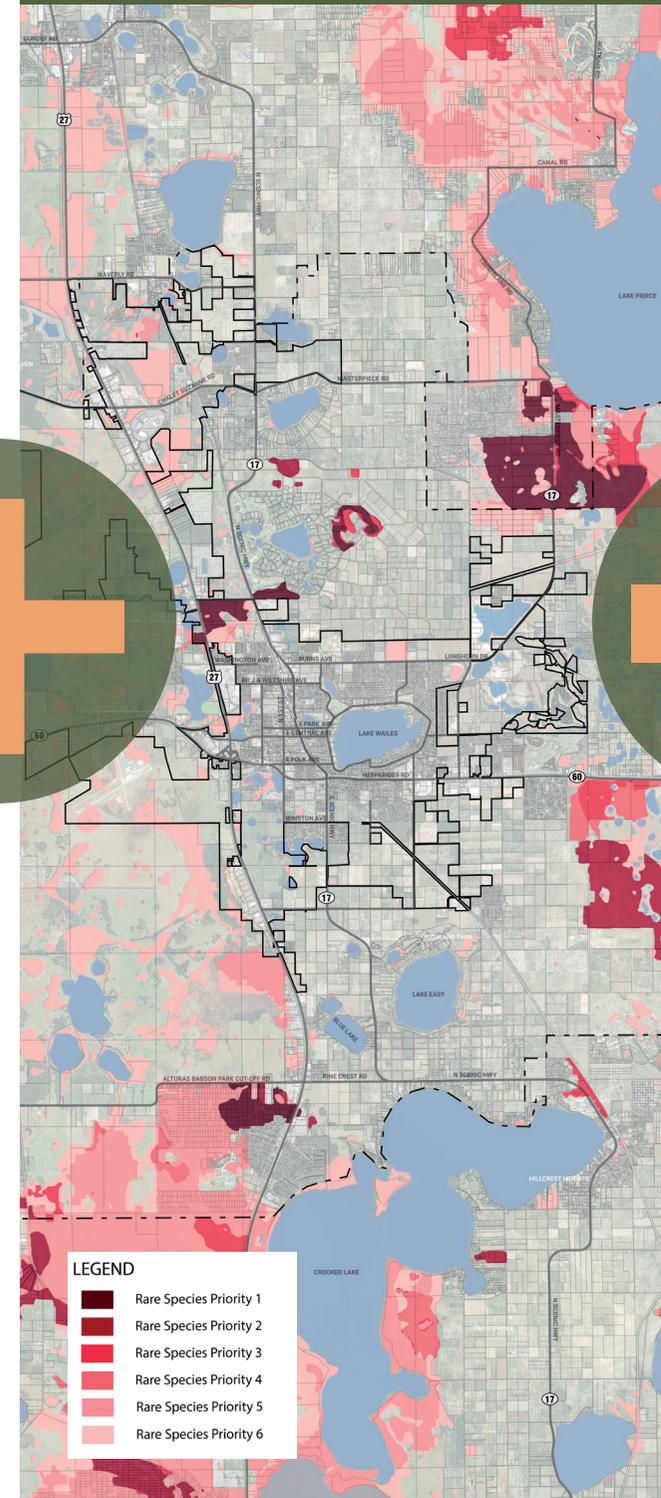
BIODIVERSITY



LEGEND

- Biodiversity Priority 1
- Biodiversity Priority 2
- Biodiversity Priority 3
- Biodiversity Priority 4
- Biodiversity Priority 5

RARE SPECIES

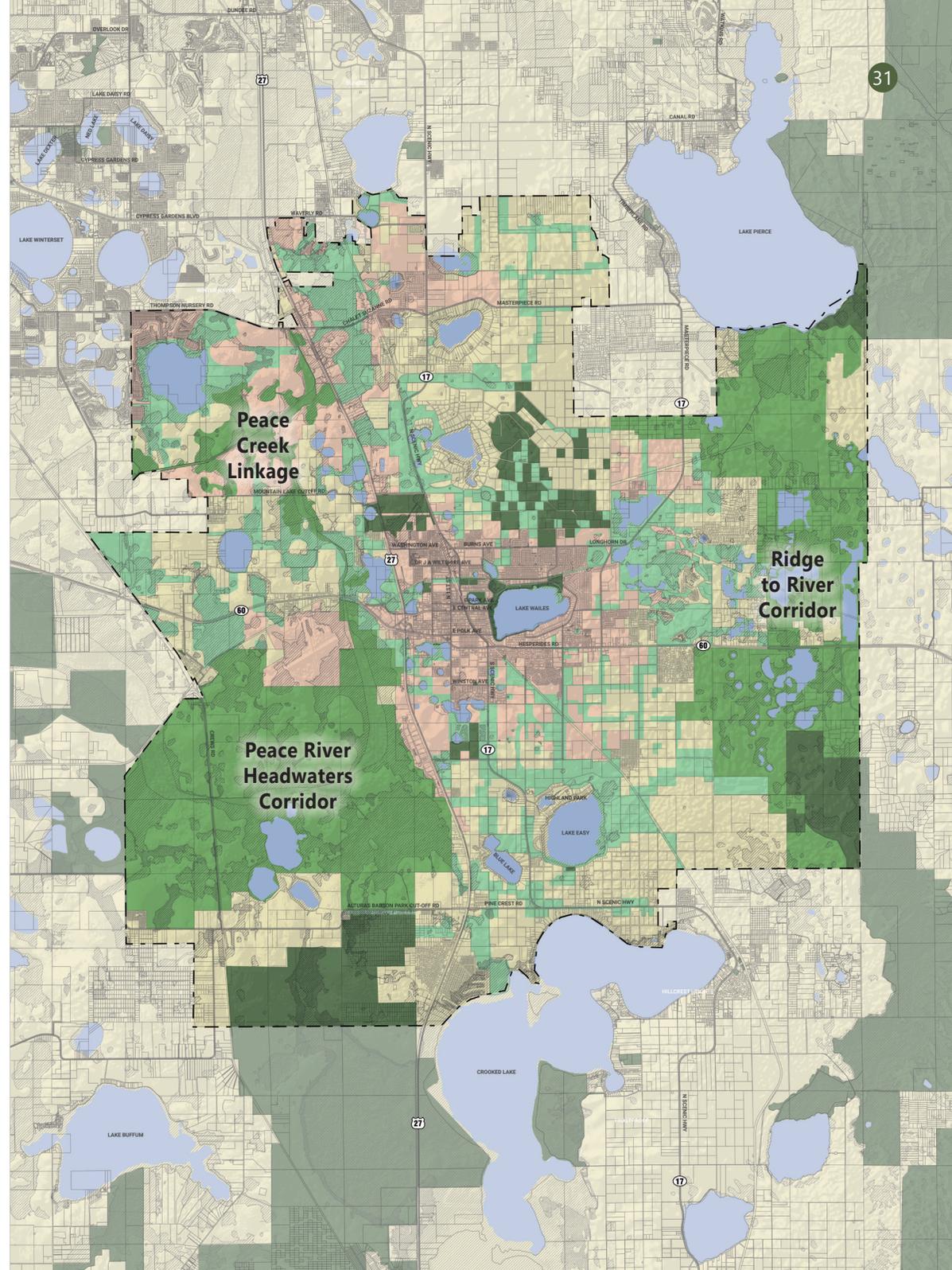
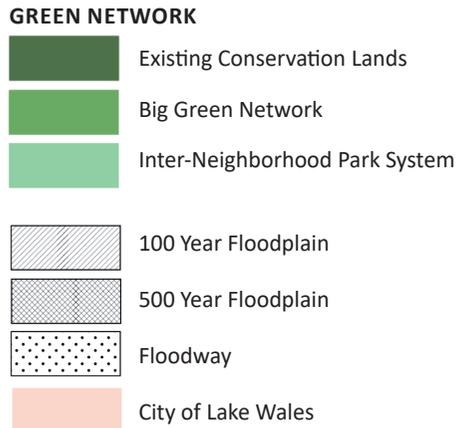


LEGEND

- Rare Species Priority 1
- Rare Species Priority 2
- Rare Species Priority 3
- Rare Species Priority 4
- Rare Species Priority 5
- Rare Species Priority 6

Backed by Data Analysis

The proposed Big Green Network is a science-based conservation strategy backed by statewide conservation efforts. Combining the Florida Ecological Greenways Network (FEGN) and other state priority lands and datasets show where the most important areas to conserve are located and how they connect to the larger statewide conservation strategy. Data layers reviewed included biological diversity, rare species habitat, landscape linkage, floodplain, and wetlands. Within the study area, the goal was to: 1) connect historic scrub and sandhill habitats with the Kissimmee River corridor, 2) protect water resources and habitat in the headwaters of the Peace River, and 3) protect wetlands and water resources along the Peace Creek canal system. If combined, 17,500 acres of lands around Lake Wales could be protected and connect the area to the Florida Wildlife Corridor.



Winter Haven's
Sapphire Necklace

Big Green
Network

Potential
Neighborhood
Green Network

Potential
Neighborhood
Green Network

Big Green
Network



The Neighborhood Green Network

The Big Green Network is only part of the *Lake Wales Envisioned* green strategy. Continuing Olmsted's "city in a garden" vision means connecting every neighborhood with complete streets, parks, trails, and greenways; access to green space should be just a short walk away for everyone.

The Neighborhood Green Network is the patchwork of smaller green spaces that will link with each other, and with walkable streets and trails, to connect people, wildlife and habitat to the Big Green Network. Much of the layout of the Neighborhood Green Network is dependent on the decisions of private property owners, who will locate new open spaces in conjunction with future development. A certain percentage of open space is required as a part of new development applications; the key is that they should be located in a way that they contribute to this larger network. Neighborhood green network spaces are drawn where they may logically occur, such as along the Scenic Highway corridor, and in areas with identified natural constraints such as land within the floodplain, low-lying areas, those with relict scrub habitat, and those that have been identified in pre-

vious plans such as Winter Haven's Sapphire Necklace. The maps in *Lake Wales Envisioned* should be used as guidance for property owners as they prepare plans for development.

If well designed, neighborhood green spaces can provide a big benefit to the overall ecological function of Lake Wales. New neighborhoods with mature street trees can be connected to public open spaces vegetated with native plants that would provide shaded habitat for humans and urban wildlife. The form of future development could also result in larger patches of viable habitat using a conservation village approach. In a conservation village, land on one portion of a site is developed more intensely, in exchange for a larger portion of the site (usually more than half) devoted to open space. This open space could include habitat restoration, storm-water management, and trails. These areas would serve as hubs to the internal green network and connections to the Big Green Network.

Green Network Implementation

Conservation of the 17,500-acre Big Green Network and connecting it to the core of Lake Wales will require a long-term effort by the City, Polk County, other public agencies, the private sector, and non-profits. It is likely to be achieved using multiple tools, including:

Acquisition

- Fee Simple
- Conservation Easements, including
- Protection of Sentinel Landscapes around the Avon Park Air Force Range
- Agricultural Easements

Regulations

- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Listed species

Incentives for private landowners

- Tax Breaks (including Agriculture as a Land Use in the City)
- Wetland mitigation banks
- Listed species conservation banks
- Gopher tortoise recipient sites

Comprehensive Policy Guidance

- Future land use
- Urban service boundary/rural areas

Land Development Regulations

- Transfer of development rights
- Wetland protection
- Habitat protection
- Development form

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS!



neighborhoods

Designing the Lake Wales Way

When Lake Wales was formed, the founders were trying to make a great human habitat optimized for health, happiness, and prosperity. The design of architecture, the layout of streets in a connected block and street network, the planting of street trees, the mix of building types, the design of neighborhoods were all done in a thoughtful, intentional way. There's a predictable relationship between the public street and the façades of private buildings, with doors and windows, front porches and shopfronts that create a quality public realm. It's set up to be not just practical but memorable. This is *The Lake Wales Way*.

If we look at what's been happening in the development industry in the region and beyond, other habits have evolved with new neighborhoods that look more like habitats for cars than for people. Streets and other public spaces are faced by garages or rear privacy walls rather than

front porches. Street trees and sidewalks are the exception rather than the norm. Sprawling subdivisions of single-family homes are disconnected from auto-oriented, commercial-only strip centers and office parks. Each new development produces exponentially more vehicular traffic using the same few roads that connect between subdivisions and land uses.

With changes in the citrus industry and recent population trends in Polk County, growth and new development is coming to Lake Wales. However, when new subdivisions designed according to conventional suburban practices were proposed in recent months, there was sharp push-back from many in the community. *Lake Wales Envisioned* lays out a path forward according to the Lake Wales Way, where each new addition will add value to the community and contribute to a legacy of strong neighborhoods.

“Now there’s enough data, enough evidence from enough developments, where the more you add to it the more valuable it gets, the more wealth it creates, the more begets more. In a typical suburban pattern it’s the opposite, it’s the first one out there wins, and every new development thereafter takes away the value of the place because it becomes more hostile to walk or drive around.”

— Joe Minicozzi, Principal, Urban3
(from *Dollars and Sense: Why Well-Designed Neighborhoods Pay the Bills*, 03/29/23)





like this...

How Should Lake Wales Grow?



...not like this

The Lake Wales envisioned for 10, 25, 50, even 100 years from now is one that is worthy of its Olmsted heritage. It is envisioned that Lake Wales will promote complete and interconnected neighborhoods that are designed according to The Lake Wales Way.

Growing with complete, traditional neighborhoods is a return to the roots of urbanism – honoring the wisdom of the past while embracing the potential of the future. Complete neighborhoods are a stark contrast to conventional suburban sprawl that has taken hold of other communities in recent decades, producing a homogenization of the landscape and threatening quality of life. Growth with new, complete neighborhoods will preserve the city's uniqueness even as it grows to meet the needs of the future community.

New neighborhoods should be located within a framework of conservation lands within the Big Green Network and lower density, rural lands. Taking a step back to look at the big picture is necessary to understand *where* Lake Wales should grow.

GROWTH AREAS

-  Limited Growth Area
-  Planned Growth Area
-  Preservation and Infill Area
-  Employment Center

 Potential New Neighborhood

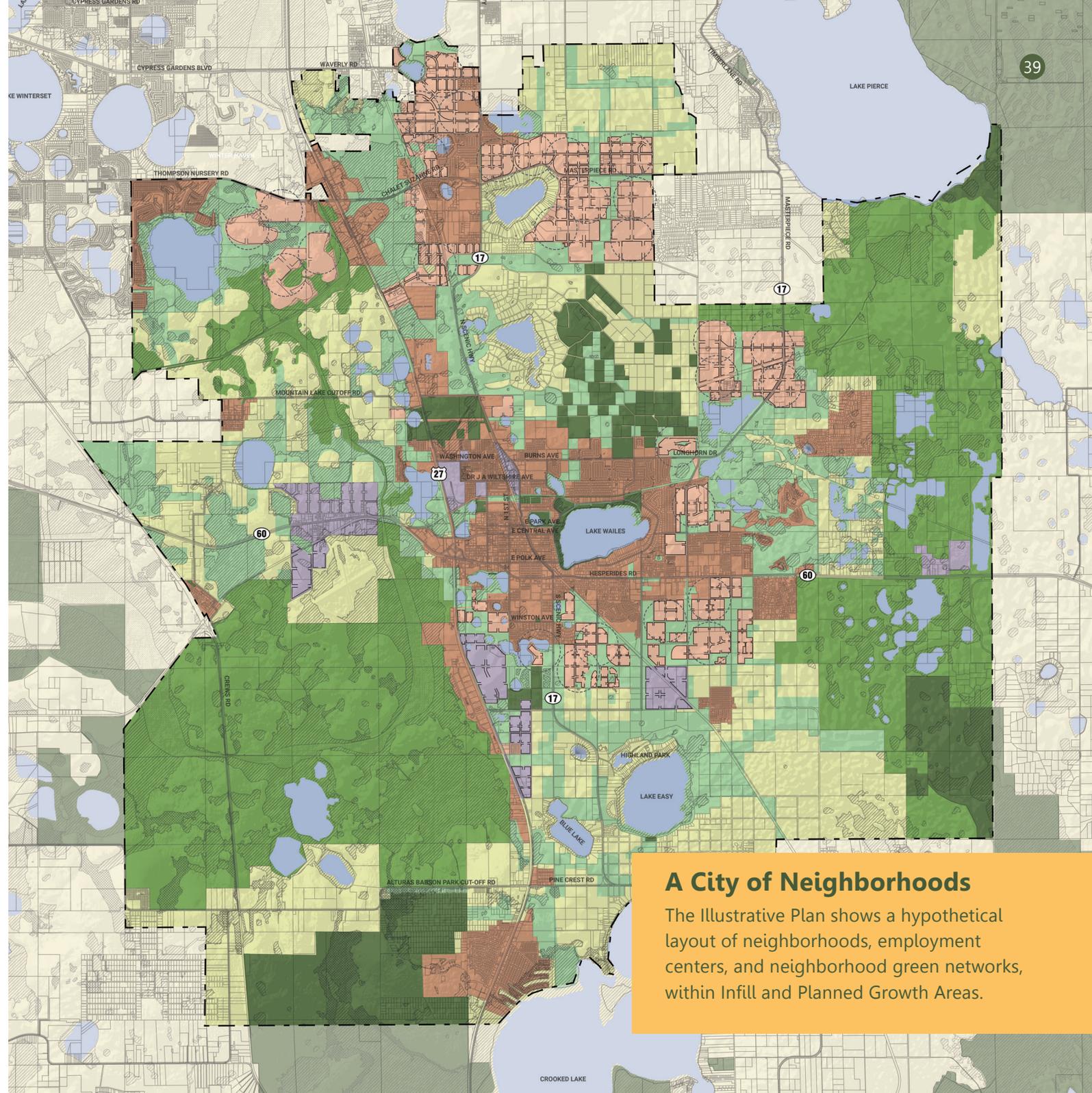
 1/4 mile Pedestrian Shed

FLOOD ZONES

-  100 year Floodplain
-  500 year Floodplain

GREEN NETWORK

-  Existing Conservation Lands
-  Big Green Network
-  Neighborhood Green Network



A City of Neighborhoods

The Illustrative Plan shows a hypothetical layout of neighborhoods, employment centers, and neighborhood green networks, within Infill and Planned Growth Areas.



Lake Wales / Highland Park Greenbelt

New Neighborhoods
(Redesigned)

Passion Play Rd

Hunt Brothers Rd

Highway 27

Health
District

Grove Ave

Scenic Hwy

Highway 60

Lake Wales

First St

Park Ave

Downtown

With a focus on infill and planned growth areas near the core, new development should be in the form of complete, traditional neighborhoods, with an interconnected green network.

Traditional Neighborhoods

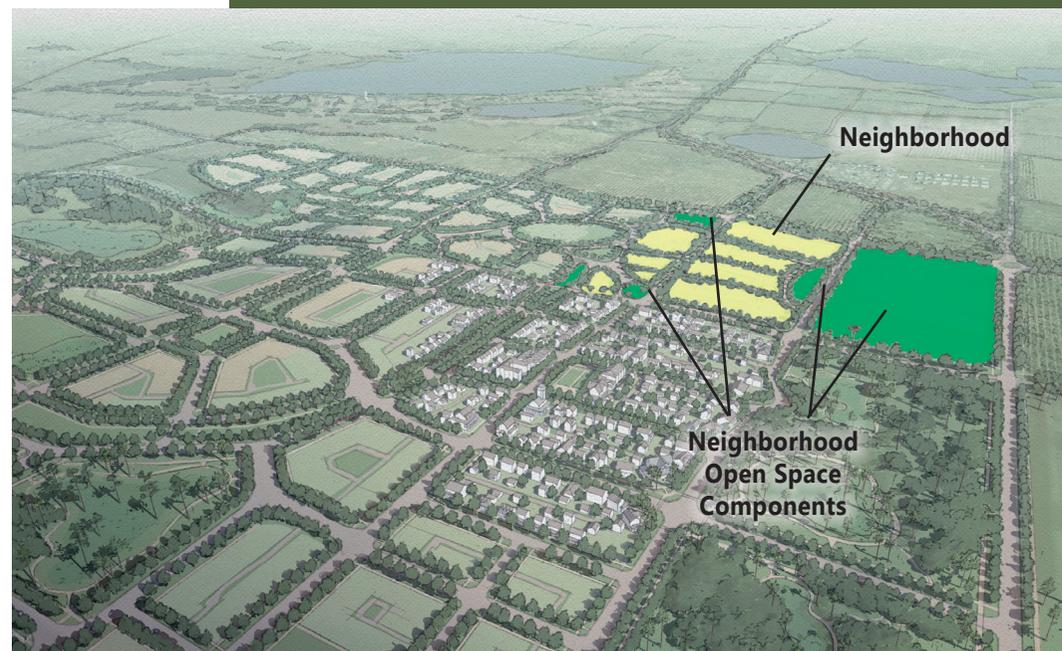
It is envisioned that Lake Wales can grow as a series of complete, traditional neighborhoods, but what exactly does that mean? Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) has common design features that set it apart from conventional suburban development, including:

- Neighborhoods are a walkable size, typically around 1/4 mile (5 minute walk) from center to edge.
- The center is designed different from the edge. Typically, at the center, building types are more attached / more intense / and with a greater mix of uses.
- There is an interconnected networks of walkable, bikeable, tree-lined streets. Blocks are right-sized, typically not more than 600 feet on each side.
- Buildings face public spaces, with parking lots located to the side or rear. Alleys are required for narrow parcels, to reduce curb cuts that interrupt the sidewalk.
- There is a mix of land uses, and a mix of housing types, sizes, and prices. This includes special sites reserved for civic purposes and community gathering.
- There is a connected network of open spaces included as part of the neighborhood design, including greenways and trails.

To encourage and stimulate new development in this form, the City should adopt and incentivize use of a TND Ordinance as part of the zoning code to provide basic standards and metrics for new traditional neighborhoods. For example, the ordinance should have a requirement for maximum block size and for alleys, prescriptive standards for where the fronts of buildings are placed, and requirements for a mix of building types. Such an ordinance should contain standards for buildings as well as street design. Incentives to encourage use of the new code option could include reduced fees, streamlined approvals, or greater permitted uses/building types/density.



Visualizing change over time: Growing the city with a series of neighborhoods with connected open spaces



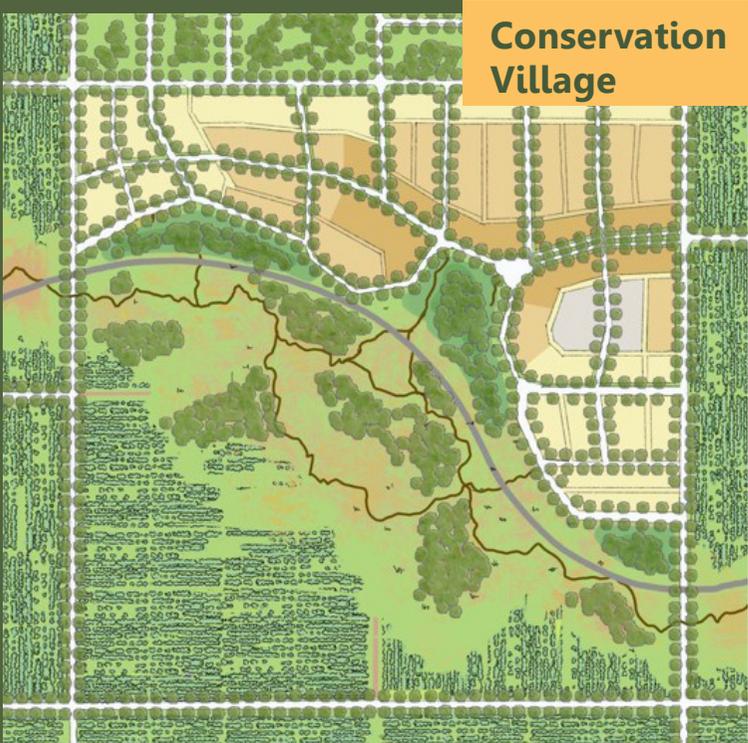
Traditional Neighborhoods have connected, walkable streets, a mix of land uses and building types, special sites for civic purposes, an identifiable center and edge, and buildings that face streets and public spaces.





Traditional Neighborhood

The entire *Lake Wales Envisioned* study area is not suited to be filled by new neighborhoods. There are some lands, based on their existing natural features and distance from the core of town, that are not well-suited for intense development. These areas could become part of the Big Green Network; they could remain in rural / agricultural uses; or they could become a new Conservation Village. A Conservation Village is a type of neighborhood that clusters development on a portion of a site, leaving a large portion (typically more than 50%) as natural lands. The Conservation Village should include the same design features as a Traditional Neighborhood (such as connected/walkable streets, mix of building types, quality public spaces). This type of development provides for quality settlements, efficient use of land, and preservation of property rights, while also providing greater connectivity of the neighborhood green network and improved ecological function.



Conservation Village

Update Zoning and Comp Plan

To implement these ideas, City policy must align with the vision. The TND Ordinance can shape the design of new neighborhoods as well as Conservation Villages. Other updates should include:

- Update the Comprehensive Plan to match the vision.
- Add a rural designation to the zoning code so that newly annexed lands receive a density/assignment consistent with existing development rights.
- Incorporate FDOT's context classifications to the zoning code to coordinate land use context with street design.

Joint Planning with Polk County

Much of the study area is outside current city limits. Entering a Joint Planning Agreement with Polk County is important for consistency and partnership in implementation of plan ideas.

Incentivize Development According to the Vision

Removing barriers and streamlining approval for investment that is consistent with the vision will facilitate implementation for infill and historic preservation/re-use as well as development of new neighborhoods. **The following pages take a closer look at what it means to grow the Lake Wales Way.**

“It turns out the casual interactions are really good for our brain; we stop, we think, we are walking, we are exposed to greenness...”

— Professor Joanna Lombard,
University of Miami School of
Architecture & School of Medicine

like this...

The Lake Wales Way

The Public Realm

A well-designed public realm contributes to a more livable and engaging built environment by fostering a sense of community, promoting interaction among residents, and enhancing overall quality of life. Front porches in conversation distance with shady sidewalks lined by street trees is better than rows of garages and asphalt baking in the Florida sun. Front porches encourage residents to spend time outside their homes, providing opportunities for casual interactions with neighbors passing by. This helps build a sense of community and belonging. Porches extend the living space beyond the home's interior, blurring the boundary between private and public space. They contribute to a vibrant public life where people engage with their surroundings.



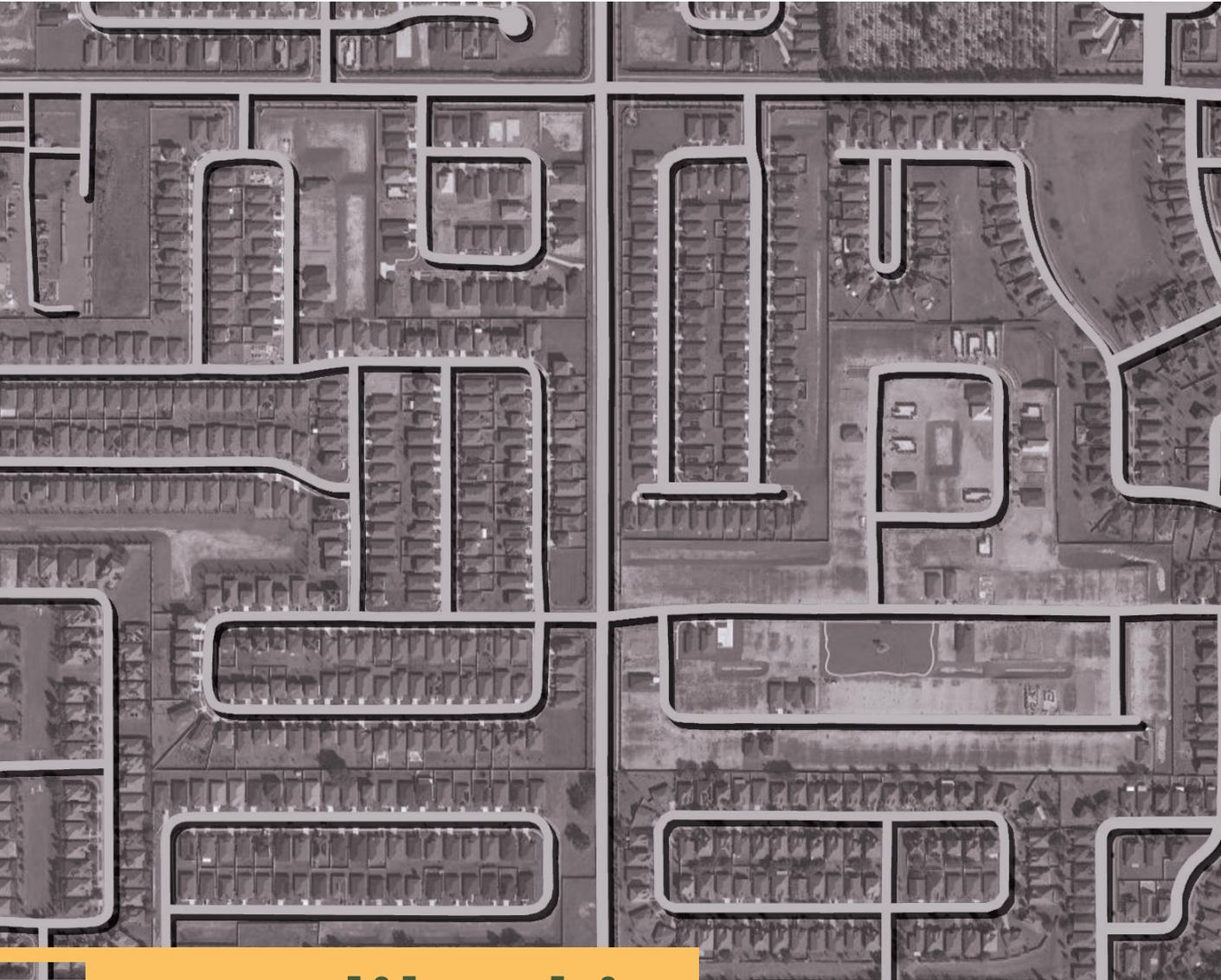
...not like this



like this...

The Lake Wales Way Street Network

An interconnected street network fosters walkability and reduces congestion by providing efficient and direct routes for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. It creates a more dynamic and accessible urban environment that improves public health by allowing residents the ability to walk and bike more if they choose. Strong street networks feature shorter blocks which reduces the walking distance between intersections making it easier for people to get to their destination. Interconnected streets provide multiple route options, distributing traffic more evenly and alleviating congestion by avoiding bottlenecks. This network design promotes walkability by offering direct pedestrian routes and reducing the need for lengthy detours, making it easier and more appealing for people to walk, bike, or drive to their destinations.



...not like this



The Lake Wales Way The Building- to-Street Relationship

Having buildings front the street is crucial for fostering a vibrant and people-oriented urban environment. When buildings align with a consistent setback in proximity to the sidewalk along the street, they create a sense of enclosure, define public space, and promote a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. This design principle contributes to the overall walkability of a neighborhood. The continuous façade of buildings creates a coherent architectural rhythm. Parking lots can be located to the side or rear, but never in front of buildings where they interrupt this important relationship of building-to-street. This design approach helps establish a strong sense of place and identity, rooted in the history and culture of Lake Wales. Improving the relationship between buildings and the street ensures that urban spaces are designed for people's well-being, social interaction, and a higher quality of life.



The Lake Wales Way Buildings Face Public Spaces

Neighborhood parks, streets, trails, and greenways serve as community amenities where residents can connect with each other and nature. These spaces facilitate social interaction, community events, and neighborhood cohesion, all part of the Lake Wales Way. It is essential that these spaces are faced by the fronts of buildings to reinforce their public nature, improving access for all, rather than by rear privacy fences or private back yards.

The neighborhood green network of parks, trails, and greenways can serve as wildlife habitats, support biodiversity, and help manage stormwater runoff. These interconnected green spaces mitigate the urban heat island effect, reduce air pollution, and improve overall air and water quality. Proximity to quality parks, trails, and greenways are regularly identified as the number one amenity homebuyers seek, thereby increasing property values and boosting the local housing market.

The Lake Wales Way Preserving Scenic Vistas

Scenic viewsheds of iconic landmarks, natural landscapes, or architecturally significant structures offer a unique visual identity and define a community's character. Bok Tower and the surrounding agricultural lands is a great example of a culturally significant viewshed that defines Lake Wales; another is the view across rolling farmland from Highway 17. These visual landmarks become part of the shared experience of the residents, helping to create a strong sense of place. There are tools in place to protect these cultural landmarks, including a constellation of existing conservation lands near Bok Tower and the County's Scenic Highway landscape buffer requirements. Future policy decisions and land development standards should build upon these by considering scenic vistas and historic landscapes in the form and placement of new development as well as proposed street improvements.

"Lake Wales has all these great attributes; we can do it here. It does take planning, it takes involvement by the citizens, it takes planning by the city, it takes having good standards set."

— David Price, President,
Bok Tower Gardens

The Lake Wales Way Preserving History

Preserved buildings and historic districts possess distinct character and charm that attract residents, visitors, and businesses, providing a link to the past as well as an important economic development tool for the City. The preservation and reuse of buildings in Downtown Lake Wales was a focus of the Lake Wales Connected plan. Implementation of that vision, including the newly-adopted Downtown Mixed-Use (D-MU) zoning district and investment in public spaces such as the Park Avenue street redesign, is encouraging preservation along with building reuse, façade enhancements, and renewed activity in downtown. During the Hands-on Design session, focusing preservation, infill and investment in Lake Wales' core was a consistent theme among participants. Next steps to provide a framework for preservation and infill include pursuing Certified Local Government and a new Historic Preservation Ordinance, as well as potentially expanding the historic district boundary.



“Historic preservation is essential to what the future of our community will have because we bring the past with us.”

— Tommy Frank, Executive Director,
Lake Wales Arts Council



ALLEY SIDE

like this...

Alleys Make Better Neighborhoods

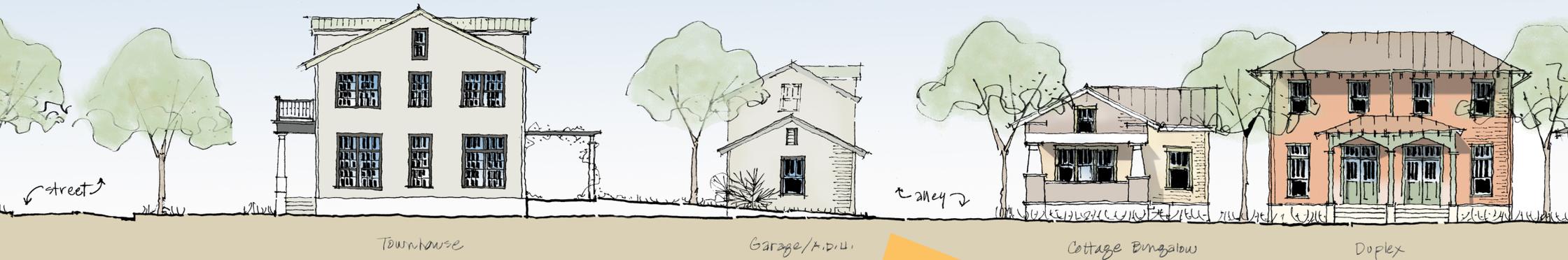
Alleys play a crucial role in a well-designed, walkable neighborhood. Alleys offer a range of benefits that contribute to a safer, more attractive, and better connected community. Alleys provide alternative slow-speed routes for pedestrians and cyclists and hide parking, utilities, and waste collection. By housing vehicular and service needs to the rear of lots or mid-block, a high-quality public realm is formed along the street with the opportunity for a continuous sidewalk uninterrupted by driveway curbcuts. Alleys are essential when lots are narrow – 50' wide or less – to reduce the continuous interruption of sidewalks by driveway access. Alleys can also be used as primary vehicular access to a lot when street curb cuts are not possible, such as when a lot is directly facing a neighborhood green or trail. When done right, alleys can dramatically reduce the amount of asphalt and impervious surfaces in a neighborhood.



...not like this

The Lake Wales Way

A Variety of Housing Types



like this...

Providing a variety of housing types within the neighborhood, rather than a monoculture of detached houses, offers numerous benefits for both individuals and communities. Different housing types allow for greater choice, including affordable options and units that suit different household types and life stages. Some households may require smaller apartments while others may prefer larger single-family homes. By offering a mix of housing types, cities can accommodate a broader range of income levels and lifestyles, fostering economic and social diversity. Mixed housing types also reduce the overall footprint of new development and make more mobility choices feasible, ultimately contributing to a greener and healthier neighborhood.



S.F. Residence

Live/Walks

Estate Residence

Apartment House

...not like this





like this...

Daily Needs Within Walking Distance



...not like this

When people can walk to local shops or community centers, they are more likely to interact with their neighbors and contribute to the local economy. These interactions are vital for building a sense of belonging and support networks within communities. Strong social connections have been linked to a lower risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, anxiety, depression, and memory issues. Local businesses see higher foot traffic and increases in sales in walkable environments. Creating these spaces helps local small businesses flourish.

Reducing car dependence is another significant benefit of having daily needs within walking distance. It not only reduces traffic congestion and air pollution by taking some of the trips off local roads, but less reliance on cars for every trip means reduced expenses for individuals and families who may be able to adopt a car-free lifestyle, or reduce the number of cars per household.



mobility

Great Streets and Trails

Lake Wales Envisioned provides a comprehensive rethink of how people move in and around Lake Wales. Growth in communities to the north of the city has not only been dominated by single-use and auto-oriented development, it has yielded a transportation system with streets geared toward moving as much automobile traffic as quickly as possible, often at the expense of those who walk, ride bicycles, or use transit. It has also created a system where roads are repeatedly widened to accommodate growth rather than one where networks of many streets can facilitate movement.

Lake Wales Envisioned looks to flip that script of wider, faster, and more dangerous to one that moves people rather than simply moves cars, balancing the needs of the motorist, pedestrian, and cyclist in a better-connected network of smaller, tamer, and more attractive streets and trails.

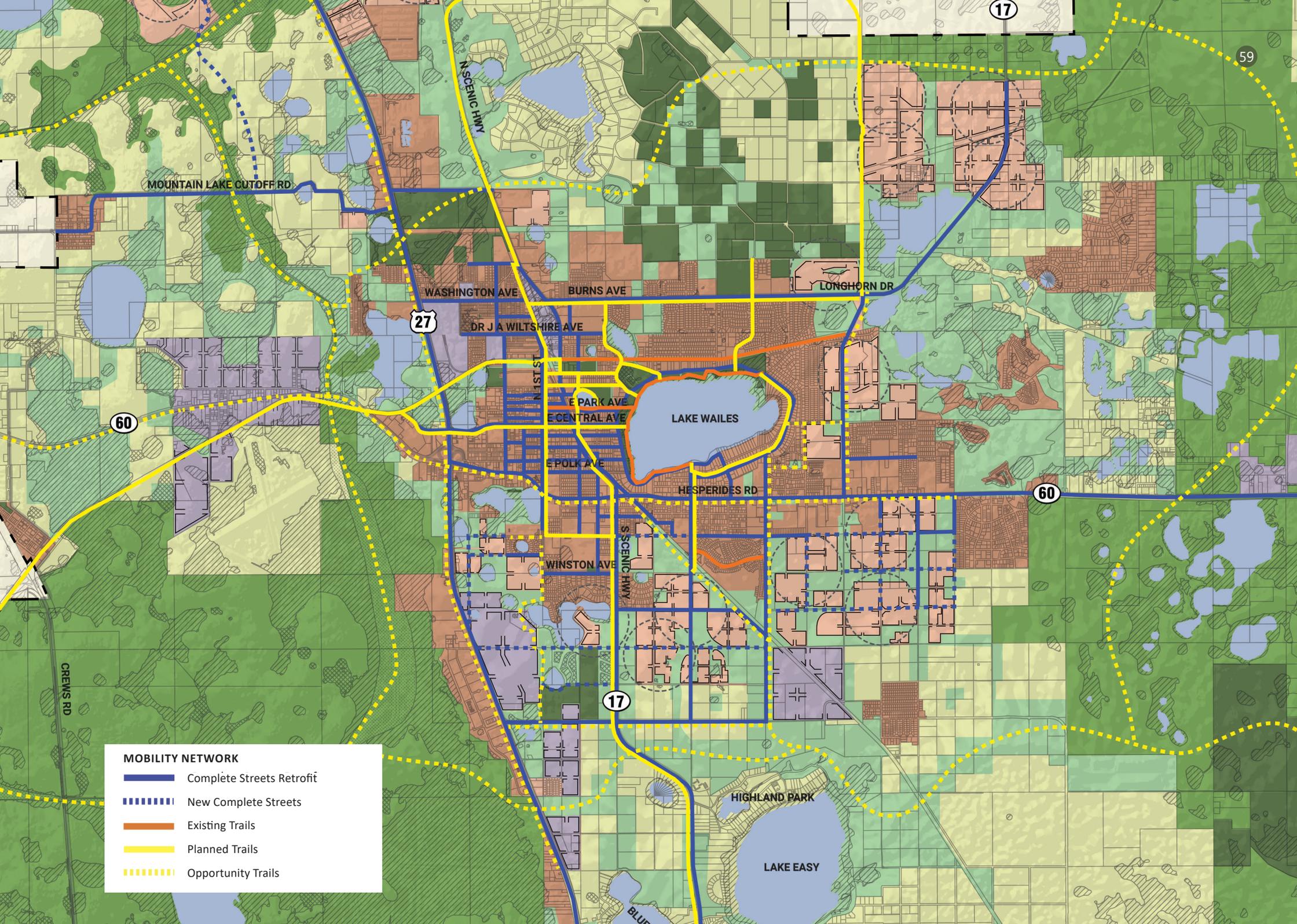
Design Great City Streets

Last year, the City adopted a Mobility Plan that calls for “Complete Streets” that accommodate all modes of mobility (driving, walking, cycling, and transit). *Lake Wales Envisioned* gives further direction about what those Complete Streets should look and feel like. Typical cross sections with elements such as travel lanes, sidewalks, shared use paths, streetscape, and dedicated bike facilities have been developed. The City should adopt a Complete Streets Policy and follow that up with a set of City street design guidelines that will result in the construction of high-quality walkable and complete streets.

There are a number of important connector streets in the mobility network such as Burns Avenue, Masterpiece Road, Buck Moore/Hunt Brothers Road, Mountain Lake Cutoff Road and Thompson Nurs-

“We may ask ourselves, why is this happening? Why am I stuck in traffic all the time? ... It’s not just about one thing, it’s about land use, and the way we design our streets, and with having network versus isolated streets.”

— Wade Walker, PE, Senior Principal Engineer, Kittelson & Associates, Inc.



MOBILITY NETWORK

- Complete Streets Retrofit
- - - New Complete Streets
- Existing Trails
- Planned Trails
- · · Opportunity Trails

MOUNTAIN LAKE CUTOFF RD

N SCENIC HWY

WASHINGTON AVE

BURNS AVE

LONGHORN DR

DR J A WILTSHIRE AVE

1ST ST

E PARK AVE

E CENTRAL AVE

LAKE WAILES

E POLK AVE

HESPERIDES RD

WINSTON AVE

S SCENIC HWY

CREWS RD

HIGHLAND PARK

LAKE EASY

BLUE

27

60

17

17

59

60

ery/Chalet Suzanne Road, which should be retrofit to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists. This can be accomplished through the use of multi-use pathways separated from the road, as well as landscape treatments to signal to motorists when they are entering a place where they should expect pedestrian activity. New streets built to accommodate new neighborhoods in the Planned Growth Area should be designed in a similar manner.

Upgrade State Roads

US 27, State Road (SR) 60, and State Road 17/Scenic Highway are regional state-maintained roadways within Lake Wales. All three of these facilities are scheduled for resurfacing in FDOT's five-year work program; in recent years, FDOT has incorporated safety enhancements in the scope of work for resurfacings, with the ability to address deficiencies in pedestrian and bicycle facilities as well as speed management. Plan recommended enhancements include protected mid-block pedestrian crossings due to the long distance between traffic signals, lane narrowing, provision of shared use paths, and landscape. These recommendations will create better connectivity, and signal to

drivers that they have entered Lake Wales and should be aware of pedestrian activity. All of the recommendations fall within the context of items being included in resurfacing projects in FDOT District One and statewide; the City should reach out to FDOT to express the desire that these initiatives be included.

Transit Circulator Pilot Project

The Mobility Plan envisioned a transit circulator to connect various locations within Lake Wales. Identification of a pilot project such as a limited time service (weekends initially) to connect Downtown to Bok Tower Gardens should be prioritized. This route could likely be served by a small shuttle bus and could even be a contracted service to be provided by a private entity through a City contract. Any transit routes or facilities should be connected to the rest of the multimodal network proposed as part of the Mobility Plan and *Lake Wales Envisioned*.

Burns Avenue is a 5-lane street that runs east-west and provides access between Scenic Highway and Buck Moore Road. It serves as the front door access to Bok Tower Gardens, two schools and several adjacent neighborhoods. Burns Avenue carries a volume of approximately 8,000 vehicles per day, which is far less than the capacity it is designed for; speeding and continuous privacy walls make it an uncomfortable street to walk or bike. If the street was right-sized, from 5 vehicular lanes to 3, it could accommodate existing vehicle traffic in addition to projected future demand while also serving as a community amenity with an attractive streetscape and comfortable sidewalks.





Burns Avenue can be a great street, where people can drive, bike, and walk comfortably. With a design like this, future development could face Burns with the fronts of buildings rather than rear privacy walls.

The intersection of Burns Avenue and Tower Road, at the entrance to Bok Tower, could be redesigned as a roundabout. This will not only provide a grander civic entrance and improve the appearance and pedestrian / bicycle realm, it will slow vehicle speeds, increasing safety for all.





Trails and Active Transportation

One of the guiding principles for the mobility network is to provide true choices about how people move; the ability to provide this kind of network is a direct result of the neighborhood development pattern proposed in the Plan. There are several trail facilities recommended in the Mobility Plan; these are all included in the trails network for *Lake Wales Envisioned*. In addition, as the Big Green Network was created for the plan, additional trail opportunities emerged as a means to connect conservation and preservation areas, and to connect regional trail facilities to Lake Wales. New connections are proposed to the Catfish Creek and Tiger Creek Preserves, as well as a new trail connection along Peace Creek to better connect the northern parts of Lake Wales to the planned Bartow to Lake Wales trail system. Funding can be accomplished through the state SUNTrail grant program and federal grants as well as through Lake Wales' Multimodal Transportation Impact Fee revenue.



implementation

How Do We Get There?

The community has come together, the planning team has illustrated the vision, City leaders have a path forward to guide growth, development, preservation, and conservation, but how do we get there? The table below identifies the key action steps related to the lines of effort, the expected timeline, and who is responsible for getting it done. It's meant to be a guide for the community to refer back to and help work together towards this common vision. Understanding that change does not happen overnight, what is important is that Lake Wales now has a collective vision for the future of Olmsted's City in 10, 25, and 50 years – *Lake Wales Envisioned*.

Description		Timeframe			Responsible Party and Partners
		Intermediate (year 1-3)	Mid-Term (year 4-6)	Long-Term (year 7+)	
ECONOMY	E1 Identify new sites for industry; update zoning and other City policy to attract new businesses and users	X			City of Lake Wales / Chamber of Commerce & EDC
	E2 Provide job incubators / training programs	X			City of Lake Wales / Non-Profits / Private Sector
	E3 Provide a variety of housing to attract employees and industry	X	X	X	City of Lake Wales / CRA / Private Sector
	E4 Concentrate on employee quality of life; promote Lake Wales for remote workers	X			City of Lake Wales / Chamber of Commerce / EDC
	E5 Promote the vision	X	X	X	City of Lake Wales / Main Street / Chamber of Commerce / EDC
GREEN	G1 Pursue "Big Green Network" conservation and land protection strategy Potential tools include: Acquisition; Regulations; Incentives for private property owners; Comprehensive Policy Guidance; Land Development Regulations; and COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	X	X	X	City of Lake Wales / Polk County / Nearby Municipalities / Non-Profits / Local and State Agencies / Private Sector
	G2 Pursue parks/trails improvements identified in the "Neighborhood Green Network"	X	X	X	City of Lake Wales / Polk County / Nearby Municipalities / Non-Profits / Local and State Agencies / Private Sector
	G3 Restore habitat and native landscaping along trail networks leading to conservation lands	X	X	X	City of Lake Wales / Polk County / Non-Profits
	G4 Update parks and recreation plan with a focus on connecting open spaces and accommodating anticipated growth	X			City of Lake Wales
	G5 Pursue "Green Building" approaches Adopt incentives and Florida Friendly Landscaping certification; encourage backyard habitat programs from National Wildlife Federation and others	X			City of Lake Wales

Description		Timeframe			Responsible Party and Partners
		Intermediate (year 1-3)	Mid-Term (year 4-6)	Long-Term (year 7+)	
NEIGHBORHOODS	N1 Promote historic preservation and establish incentives for infill / new investment in "Preservation and Infill Area" Includes pursuing Certified Local Government and Historic Preservation Ordinance; Expand downtown historic district boundary; Expand permitted uses/building types, remove barriers and streamline approvals for infill in identified areas according to community vision	X			City of Lake Wales / Main Street
	N2 Create and adopt traditional neighborhood development (TND) ordinance that will specify requirements for neighborhood design, and streamline approval for development that meets the code	X			City of Lake Wales
	N3 Update zoning and comprehensive plan to fit the vision Includes these zoning updates: a. Add rural zoning designation b. Add TND ordinance c. Revise PDP and MDP ordinances to incorporate additional quality-control standards and improved procedures d. Incorporate FDOT's context classifications Includes these Comprehensive Plan updates: e. Fix inconsistencies (such as Low Density Residential designation for annexed parcels)	X			City of Lake Wales
	N4 Pursue Joint Planning Agreement with Polk County	X			City of Lake Wales / Polk County
MOBILITY	M1 Adopt Complete Street design standards for new or improved streets	X			City of Lake Wales / Polk County / FDOT
	M2 Pursue Complete Street improvements for identified non-state streets Includes Thompson Nursery/Chalet Suzanne and Masterpiece Road; Mountain Lake Cutoff Road; Buck Moore/Hunt Brothers Road; 11th Street South		X	X	City of Lake Wales / Polk County / Private Sector
	M3 Design and construct Burns Avenue redesign Includes road diet, separated bike lanes, spot medians, lighting, canopy landscape, roundabout at Tower Road		X		City of Lake Wales / Polk County
	M4 Implement speed management, landscape, pedestrian enhancements on SR 60 and US 27				FDOT / City of Lake Wales
	M5 Implement SR 17 / Scenic Highway Enhancement and Trail		X		FDOT / City of Lake Wales / Polk County / Nearby Municipalities
	M6 Pursue Lake Wales Transit Circulator Initial Route: Immediate Timeframe Expansions: Mid- to Long-Term Timeframe	X	X	X	City of Lake Wales / FTA



City Commission

Jack Hilligoss, Mayor

Daniel Williams, Commissioner Seat 2

Terrye Howell, Commissioner Seat 3 (through 5/23)

Keith Thompson, Commissioner Seat 3 (5/23-present)

Daniel Krueger, Commissioner Seat 4

Robin Gibson, Commissioner Seat 5

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Dover, Kohl & Partners Town Planning

Inspire Placemaking Collective

Exum Associates, Inc.

Kittelson & Associates, Inc.



MOUNTAIN LAKE



An aerial photograph of a forest, showing rows of trees with varying shades of green and brown. The trees are arranged in a somewhat regular pattern, with some rows appearing more densely packed than others. The ground between the trees is a mix of dark brown and light tan, suggesting a mix of soil and leaf litter. The overall scene is a dense, natural landscape.

lakewalesenvisioned.com