



City of Gainesville

City Hall
200 East University Avenue
Gainesville, Florida 32601

Text File

Introduced: 2/19/2007

File Number: 060967.

Version: 0

Status: On Consent Agenda

..Title

Green Building (NB)

..Explanation

The CRA could consider placing language in the redevelopment plans of the four redevelopment districts to ensure that including green building and LEED or equivalent certification are well supported in the plans to include incentive programs and building projects, and to include green building and energy efficiency requirements for all CRA funded projects whether through direct investment or by tax increment recapture. Staff recommends that this item be referred back to the CRA's Redevelopment Advisory Boards.

..Fiscal Note

None

..Recommendation

Executive Director to the CRA: The CRA refer to the Downtown Redevelopment Advisory Board, Fifth Avenue/Pleasant Street Redevelopment Advisory Board and College Park/University Heights Redevelopment Advisory Board to consider whether to incorporate language related to green buildings and energy efficiency into the redevelopment districts plans.

Redevelopment Plan & Implementation

Plan Subareas

During the course of preparing this redevelopment plan, it has become apparent that the Downtown CRA study area is effectively comprised of several sub-areas. These areas have relatively distinct characteristics in terms of their physical and functional role in the downtown, and offer an opportunity to tailor plan recommendations and strategies that are unique to their situation. The four sub-areas are as follows:

Central Business District

The central business district constitutes the majority of the existing CRA. It is the “heart” of the downtown, both in the historic and modern development context of the City of Gainesville. The CBD offers a mixed urban fabric of older, historic buildings that honor the street edge and post-war buildings that are more characteristic of the suburban model – plazas, parking lots and open lawns.

Transitional Industrial

The industrial areas of the CRA are those areas lying generally along Depot Avenue and south Main Street and, to a lesser extent, near the western boundary of the CRA along South 6th Street. The remnant vestige of the original industrial edges of the downtown, these areas include a mix of one and two story warehouse and “heavy” commercial businesses that, to various degrees, relied upon the railroad transportation system and the desire to segregate these businesses from the initial residential neighborhoods.

Downtown Neighborhoods

As noted, neighborhoods in the downtown constitute a large percentage of the land area for the expanded CRA. Two primary areas contain the majority of downtown’s housing stock: the Porter’s neighborhood, in the southwest corner of the CRA; and the southeast Historic District and residential areas immediately north of University Avenue, from Sweetwater Branch east to the CRA’s eastern boundary.

Corridor Commercial

Characterized by commercial development more typical of suburban retail areas, the Corridor Commercial area occupies a relatively small area of the expanded CRA. Businesses in this area that borders Waldo Road and the east University Avenue corridor include fast food stores, auto-related retail business, convenience stores, a rooming house, a bottling and distribution plant, and other similar uses.

Summary Description of the Plan

Clearly, several positive steps have occurred since the inception of the City of Gainesville’s Downtown Redevelopment Area. New businesses have emerged and the downtown has an active day and nightlife. The neighborhood residential areas are, to varying degrees, both desirable and distinct in terms of their population and building mix. Gentrification and the addition of new residential units underscore the relative health of these areas.

On the other hand, the signs of blight and opportunities to make further progress are still apparent. The downtown core is still characterized as a weak retail setting, storefronts remain vacant, the pedestrian ambience is still lost along the signature streets of University Avenue and Main Street. Vagrancy and other signs of neglect permeate the downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods of the study area. Indeed, there are still residential locales in the area where the perception of fear remains a concern.

In very summary terms, this updated Downtown Redevelopment Plan is focused on the continued strengthening of the City’s downtown business district and adjacent residential neighborhoods. It is based upon the strategy of investment in key public infrastructure elements and amenities, and in the funding of related programmatic activities, that can entice the private sector to respond in a similar fashion. In several cases, the Plan provides for the coordinated identification and reaffirmation of the various programs and activities of the City that are presently underway.

The presentation of the Plan has several elements. The following discussion provides a broad description of the nature of solutions that should be considered, or continued, for future implementation. Subsequently, a series of objective statements, or precepts, are offered to summarily guide the direction of individual planning decisions in the redevelopment process.

Central Business District

With regard to the City’s central business district, the challenge is to foster a climate of private investment in response to the public initiatives. As noted, one of the major detriments to redevelopment in this core is the ability to provide sufficient on-site stormwater management area to accommodate redevelopment of relatively small sites that were previously developed without any such facilities. The City has made

significant progress in this respect through agency negotiations for “areawide permitting” and the development of common stormwater management areas. The ability to continue this initiative, through projects such as the “Depot” stormwater park and other still-to-be-planned facilities, is a priority of this plan.

Similarly, the provision of sufficient parking areas cannot be left solely to the private property owner to provide on-site. This requirement not only reduces the propensity for a private property owner to even consider the redevelopment of small properties, it sharply reduces the amount of land area that can and should be used for more intensive and vital business activities. With approximately thirty percent of the total parcel area occupied by tax exempt entities, every remaining square foot counts. In this respect, the CRA should continue to promote shared parking facilities, on-street parking and the development of parking garages as various means to accommodate the necessary parking space inventory. Shared public and private investment partnerships and the sale or long term lease utilization of “air-rights” above existing surface lots should continue to be explored to implement this objective.

The development of a safe, environmentally friendly, functionally adequate and aesthetically pleasing pedestrian environment is another critical component to the future success of the downtown core. The restoration of the pedestrian dominant environment along Main Street and University Avenue – their conversion to lower speed boulevards – and additional streetscape improvements to the secondary and local street system must be continued to foster the reemergence of the core as a special place and a true destination. This series of improvements must not only be focused on the look and feel of the downtown – period lighting and furnishings, street trees, and continuous wider sidewalks – it also must include a systematic approach to navigation through gateway, directional and destination/amenity signage. The City’s development regulations also may warrant a review to determine the need, if any, for more specific downtown design guidelines.

Over the last several years, the downtown plaza has been subject to numerous improvements and upgrades. These improvements have been a success in drawing people to the area for periodic nighttime and other special events. However, there is still a need and opportunity to improve this and other important outdoor “rooms” throughout the study area with design

enhancements such as fountains, lighting, walkways, landscaping and seating areas. Such improvements, perhaps in conjunction with one or more unique, downtown “signature” projects, can further the renaissance of the district as a special place for recreation and relaxation on a more continuous basis.

A very clear lesson in redevelopment has been that aesthetic improvements – trees, shrubs, benches and textured pavement – cannot single handedly foster a redevelopment program of any real significance. In contrast, there are several examples of healthy downtowns where the driving force to success was in the business skills, tenacity and relationships of the key stakeholder participants. In this respect, the downtown business district and the balance of the study area can continue to benefit from a variety of existing and future programmatic initiatives to foster additional investment. Such programs may include the use of available funds for building facade improvements, special events, and incentive loans or grants for specific targeted projects such as a downtown hotel.

Finally, one of the often-mentioned impediments to redevelopment in the downtown business district has been the vagrant and transient population. While the problems and management of this population is a complex and trying issue, the City must take a proactive role in determining the most appropriate location for services targeted to this group. A balance must be struck between the compassionate care and assistance offered to this population in need, but not at the expense of deterring or otherwise stifling the ability for the balance of the City’s population to benefit from the continued revitalization of the downtown. In this respect, the City also may care to consider further refinements to regulations governing loitering and panhandling, to the allowable duration of permitted and conditional uses within various zoning districts, and operational licensure requirements for selected types of building occupancy.

Central Business District

1. Encourage intensive mix of residential and business uses based on scale, context and contribution to area vitality.



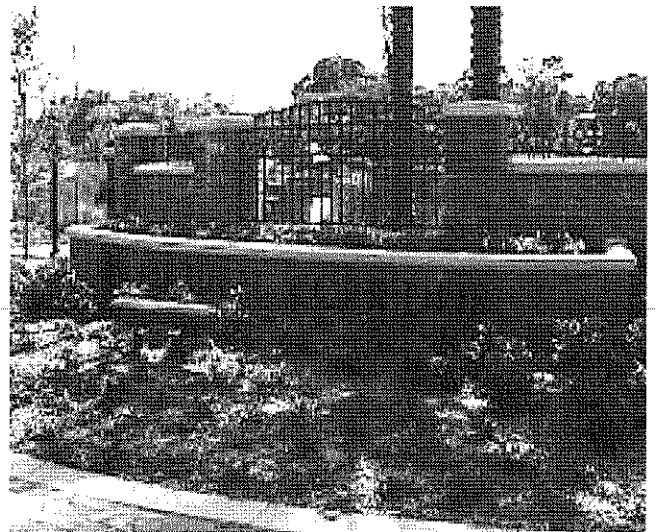
2. Agressively promote buffering or screening of site elements such as dumpsters, grease traps, etc. "Retrofit" existing parking lots to meet minimum requirements for landscape screening and shade.



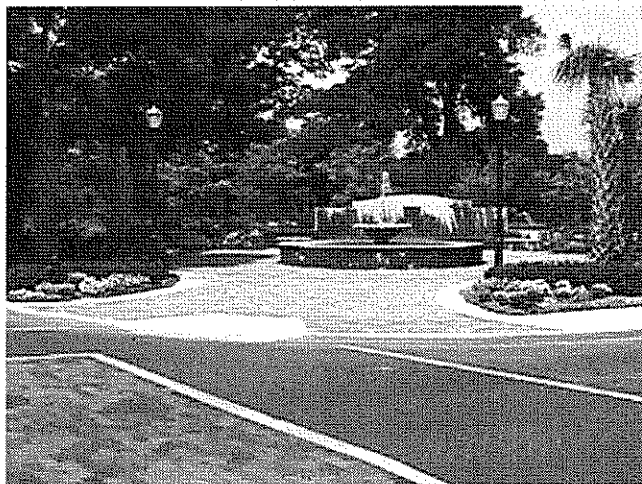
3. Encourage shared parking facilities and parking garages



4. Refine thematic system of entryway and directional signage, street lighting and furnishings.



5. Increase the use of water features as a design element: natural ponds, fountains, and small pools.



6. Aggressively promote a pedestrian dominant environment: continuous and wider sidewalks, streetscape upgrades, building signage, alleyway access, landscaping, etc.
7. Improve parks and develop one or more signature public space projects that are unique to downtown.



8. Continue to aggressively promote the programmatic elements of downtown revitalization: marketing, special events, retail education, area wide stormwater permitting, etc.



9. Continue “brownfield” programs to encourage redevelopment of environmentally compromised sites.
10. Design and position new buildings to reinforce street edge, honor surrounding architectural context, and create pedestrian scale at the street level.
11. Promote adaptive reuse of existing buildings to maintain historic sense of area.
12. Pursue redevelopment opportunities to retrofit aging or undersized utility lines, to improve drainage & stormwater facilities, and to reestablish network of streets and alleyways.
13. Encourage sustainable new development that is energy efficient and built to “green standards”
14. Encourage “green”, and conservation-oriented rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Transitional Industrial Areas

The City's original industrial areas south and west of the CBD offer a unique opportunity for an eclectic mix of residential and non-residential uses. Many of the Plan initiatives of the downtown business district can be applied to these areas, along with some noteworthy additions.

Generally, the previously mentioned concepts related to stormwater management, on-site parking, environmental sustainability, and enhanced pedestrian amenities are directly applicable to this sub-area. However, in so doing, it is important to retain some element of the original industrial flavor of this area through the allowed, albeit conditional, perpetuation of the existing uses and building stock. In this respect, the City should carefully review the specific types of uses allowed in this sub-area in order to ensure all uses can reasonably coexist in a hard-edged, urban setting. Further, the development of design guidelines that underscore the essence of the area should be considered.

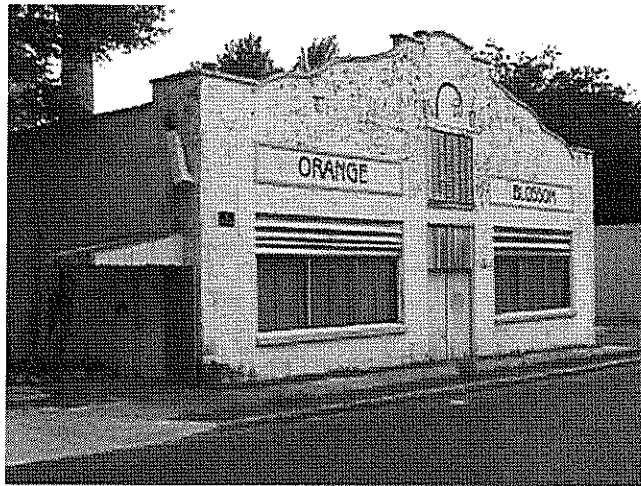
A pressing problem with several sites in this area is environmental contamination. In the southern extreme of the study area, the "Depot" stormwater park project has been conceived, in part, as a major remedial solution for this circumstance. To the extent that funds are available to further remedy this problem, continued efforts to catalogue and improve the environmental disposition of the existing properties of the area should be a priority of this Plan.

Another component of this redevelopment plan is the recognition of the role of the transitional industrial areas in the history of Gainesville and their ability to serve as an intermediate linkage between the downtown business district and surrounding areas. However, the nature of land uses and the historic railroad "edge" has, ironically, resulted in the areas' comparative isolation from neighboring uses. With the removal of the railroad lines, and the rehabilitation of sites such as the Train Depot, the City can consider specific opportunities to open up the grid street system to and through this locale. In addition, this area offers a unique opportunity to promote a wide range of projects that can serve the existing resident population and, perhaps, add to the inventory of enticements to lure more people downtown. Noting the relatively large size of some vacant parcels in this sub-area, an example of a desirable transitional use may be a grocery store.

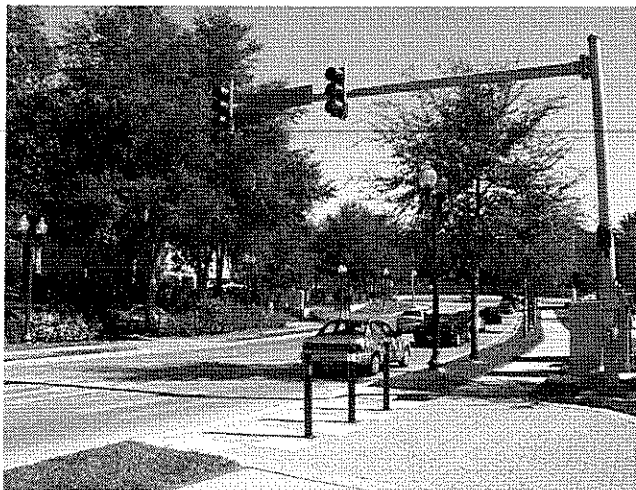
In order to encourage a broader and higher valued mix of uses in the area, the City must invest in a variety of public amenity improvements to service the potential population. The Railway Depot rehabilitation and stormwater park projects are two such efforts. The recent streetscape edge added to the GRU facility, as well as a proposed linear park near University Avenue and West 6th Street, are two others. Continued strategic investments in the park facilities, as well as related improvements for parking areas, street lighting, pedestrian linkages and other intermediate public spaces, can serve to entice private investment and reinvestment in adjacent properties. Ultimately, these actions can improve the locale and establish gateways that are an asset for the entire City.

Transitional Industrial Areas

1. Encourage a broad mix of residential and business uses based on scale, context and contribution to area vitality
2. Promote adaptive reuse of existing buildings to maintain historic sense of area.



3. Design and position new buildings in a fashion to reinforce the street edge, honor the surrounding architectural context, and create a pedestrian scale at the street level.



4. Promote concentrated buffering or screening between incompatible uses or negative site elements such as parking lots, material storage yards, outdoor fabrication or work areas.



5. Promote transit and pedestrian facility improvements where appropriate with increased headways, bus stop amenities, sidewalks, and other pedestrian amenities.

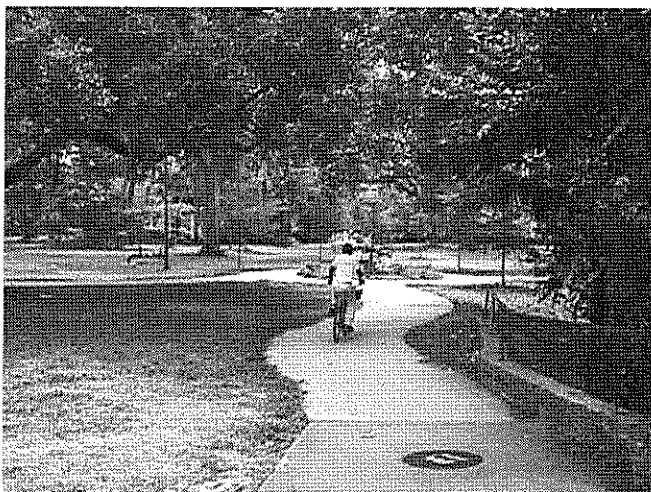


6. Consider redevelopment opportunities to retrofit aging or undersized utility lines and improve drainage.
7. Continue “brownfield” programs to encourage redevelopment of environmentally compromised sites.

8. Promote shared parking facilities and garages.



9. Improve public spaces and parks.



10. Park enhancements and parking are important elements to include with the stormwater facilities planned for the new depot park.
11. Encourage sustainable new development to be built to “green standards”,
12. Encourage “green”, conservation-oriented rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Downtown Neighborhoods

The Porters neighborhood and southeast residential area constitute the largest share of the downtown CRA expansion area. Both of these residential locales are characterized by a variety of housing types and styles, and include a substantial share of the City’s historic and older, vernacular style residential architecture.

Due to the age and pattern of development within the downtown residential areas, many of the amenities that are found in contemporary subdivisions – paved driveways, sidewalks and pedestrian lighting – are missing or otherwise underrepresented. Further, the development of the local street system in these areas predates many of current engineering design requirements and the now standard provisions for stormwater management.

Within the downtown residential areas, a priority of this redevelopment plan is to systematically upgrade the local street network and supporting pedestrian, utility and stormwater infrastructure. This broad initiative will take quite some time to complete and, as with other long range planning initiatives, will be dependent on the availability of funds. However, the public street system is a principal defining element of a neighborhood and in the characterization of an area as a secure and navigable place during the day and night. Ultimately, it can serve to instigate or deter the maintenance and rehabilitation of older residential properties. In conjunction with this effort, the City should consider opportunities to augment the existing grid system wherever feasible, and should consider a funding program to retrofit existing properties with permanent driveways.

As noted in the blight study, the upkeep and condition of homes and properties in the downtown residential areas also varies considerably. While one or two problem structures or sites may be occasionally intermingled among nicer properties, notable pockets of relatively derelict structures can be found in the southeastern and southwestern periphery of the study neighborhoods. The City has been active in monitoring housing conditions and, where necessary, undertaking condemnation and demolition actions. Along with the City proper, several quasi-public and private entities have participated in the rehabilitation and/or replacement of the original housing stock. This subject is further discussed elsewhere in this document.

The Downtown Redevelopment Plan clearly recognizes that code enforcement and housing supply

Downtown Neighborhoods

activities of the City and other providers must be a continued priority for implementation. Such actions can and should include programs in site acquisition and new construction, as well as structural rehabilitation, façade improvements and total site maintenance. Two specific undertakings of the City also should be focused upon the material and character of yard fences, particularly front yards, and unimproved residential driveways.

Two additional items of particular concern for the downtown residential areas are the status of local parks and recreation facilities and public schools.

With respect to park facilities, the main summary observation that can be made is that the existing parks in the greater downtown study area are not positioned or functioning as well as they could. As discussed in the parks inventory, most existing facilities are either passive in character or are located at the periphery of the study area. There are very few “tot lots” or other true neighborhood parks in the study area.

While there are very clear successes in local recreation facilities – the Porter’s Community Center and GRU Garden – the City needs to consider the development of one or two small, centrally located “focal point” parks as yet another long-term neighborhood building block. Ideally, the provision of these facilities, and the upgrading of existing parks such as Lynch Park, would be based upon the precept of strategically flanking these sites with residential or appropriate commercial/service uses to provide a day and nighttime monitoring mechanism. A similar detailed site study of the adjunct Tumbling Creek Park also is necessary. In this respect, while it is possible that this park could become a focus for additional stormwater management initiatives serving the downtown study area, the underlying site and social problems must be resolved.

With respect to school facilities, it is noteworthy to recognize that there are no public school facilities in the downtown study area. One of the City’s original elementary schools, Kirby Smith, has been converted to administrative offices of the Alachua County School Board. While it is indeed creditable that the School Board would choose to renovate the Kirby Smith school and thus maintain a downtown presence, the loss of the school as an educational facility has created another void in the downtown fabric. As funds permit, an ideal long term solution is to reestablish a local elementary school within the greater downtown study area.

1. Promote residential as the dominant land use. Promote neighborhood identity through unique entryway treatments, signage, and other signature elements. Improve street, sidewalk and stormwater infrastructures in residential areas.



2. Limit non-residential uses (office & retail) based on scale, context and contribution to neighborhood vitality.



3. Promote neighborhood appearance with reasonable, deliberate code enforcement, periodic clean up, and “amnesty” events.

4. Promote various types of housing products (rehabilitation, grants, and other programs) to accommodate different demographic groups. Discourage new concentrations of low and very low-income products.



5. Continue to promote existing public, quasi-public and private housing supply programs.



6. Increase percentage of home ownership through low interest loans, down payment grants and work equity programs.

7. Discourage concentrations of “through” traffic on local streets with multiple traffic calming techniques and route choices.



8. Promote transit and pedestrian facility improvements on primary routes: increased headways, bus stop amenities, sidewalks, and other pedestrian amenities.



9. Where possible, incorporate stormwater improvement projects with other redevelopment projects.
10. Encourage green building practices in new residential development and in the rehabilitation of existing buildings to maximize energy conservation and affordability.

Corridor Commercial

As noted in the inventory of existing uses, examples of this more suburban style development pattern occur along East University Avenue and other key arterial entries adjacent to the study area. Generally, this type of vehicular oriented development - large lot retail, fast food and/or shopping centers - is physically out of character with that of the balance of the downtown core. However, to the extent that it fills an arguably desirable and necessary niche in the marketplace, the key to accommodating this use is to promote site design and signage attributes that can contribute to the physical elements of a traditional downtown place.

As opportunities for redevelopment and new development occur in this area, developers should be strongly encouraged to implement “green” building techniques and to practice several of the following tenets of good urban design:

- reinforce the street edge of adjacent roadways with architecturally interesting and open, inviting building faces,
- provide high profile direct pedestrian connections and enhanced landscape features,
- minimize driveways,
- aggressively regulate the number, size, height and material of signs, and, above all,
- shield, buffer or otherwise hide the interior parking and circulation fields from the street

Corridor Commercial

1. Refine thematic system of entryway and directional signage, street lighting and furnishings.
2. Establish coordinated streetscape elements with entryways, street trees and provisions for other modes. Add bike lanes, sidewalks, bus stops, street furniture and pedestrian lighting and other streetscape elements.



3. Manage site access along approaches to strategic peripheral intersections.
4. Encourage intensive mix of business uses based on scale and context.
5. Design and position new buildings to suggest architectural "permanence." Reinforce street edge through building placement, and street walls.



6. Where feasible, promote adaptive reuse of existing buildings that contribute to historic sense of area. Aggressively promote buffering or screening of site elements such as dumpsters, grease traps, etc. "Retrofit" existing parking lots to meet minimum requirements for landscape screening and shade.
7. Implement "boulevard" entry on Main Street and West University Avenue



8. Promote ground mounted and externally lit signs on approach roadways.
9. Encourage green building and conservation principles in new commercial, office, and mixed-use developments to maximize economic/environmental sustainability.
10. Encourage green building and conservation principles in the rehabilitation of existing structures.