

November 12, 1998

To: Gainesville City Commission

Subject: **Final Report on Depot Avenue Eco-Development Project**
 June 10, September 23, and November 4, 1998 6:00 PM – 9:00PM
 Gainesville, FL

Introduction:

This is a summary prepared from Forum #1 - Forum #3 of the Depot Avenue Eco-Development Project. This project was organized by the Center for Construction and Environment, University of Florida, and was sponsored by the Sustainable Communities Network Small Grants Program. Presentations were made at Forum #3, November 4, related to the East Gainesville Sprout Project and the work of Urban Ecology, Inc., in Oakland, CA. The forum provided an opportunity to discuss the proposed Depot Avenue Storm Water Park and the goals for the Depot Avenue area that had been established in previous meetings. This meeting was attended by approximately 50 citizens.

The Depot Avenue Eco-Development Project Forums:

The presentations and discussions regarding the redevelopment of the South Downtown area were attended by approximately 230 citizens over the course of three forums, from June to November, 1998. The following is a summary of the process of citizen input and discussion in the creation of "sustainable" redevelopment goals for the area. The goals, objectives, and possible indicators of progress in reaching those goals were developed through face-to-face discussions among citizens. It is the intention that these recommendations will provide the framework for both short-term and long-term redevelopment in this area and as a model of process and principles for making the Gainesville community a "sustainable community."

Forum # 3 Agenda:

Introduction:

- Presentation by Mr. Michael Rios, Urban Ecology, Inc., "Brownfield Park Development and Rapid Transit Center Design Projects"
- Presentation by Mr. Brad Scott, University of Florida Geoplan Center, "East Gainesville Sprout Project Geographic Information Systems Database"

Group Discussion:

- Goals and Objectives for the Area

Presentation:

- Strategy for Depot Avenue and Storm Water Park Development

Sustainable Community Development:

The fundamental premise of this project is that a sustainable community fulfills social, economic, and environmental goals to the betterment of its citizens and the natural environment that supports them. It does this by efficiently using existing urban land and buildings and creating a livable and quality urban environment. It builds urban places and buildings that make use of natural energy, minimize waste and pollution, facilitate alternative transportation, and constitute a well-designed, compact, and urbane mix of land-uses. It creates environmentally responsible economic development opportunities and seeks to provide education and recreational opportunities in a geographically and demographically balanced manner. It involves the wealth and knowledge of citizens in a process of discussion and dissemination of information including the examples of other communities engaged in similar activities.

Old Depot Neighborhood Gainesville, Florida

PROJECT GOALS:

To educate the community on the principles, practices, and benefits of sustainable development. To build a constituency and political focus for acquiring human and financial capital in redeveloping the Depot Avenue area. To create a conceptual framework for economically sound, socially equitable and environmentally responsible redevelopment in Depot Avenue area. To encourage citizen support and participation in the East Gainesville Sprout Project, the use of the Gainesville Regional Transit System Transportation Center, and the proposed creation of a master storm water basin and park at Depot Avenue and S. Main Street. To begin the process of determining a program and creation of a design for preserving and adaptive reuse of the Old Gainesville Depot as a demonstration of sustainable architecture and as a catalyst for revitalization and expansion of South Downtown Gainesville, in support of the RTS Center, the Depot Park, and the surrounding neighborhoods.

DEPOT AVENUE ECO-DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

- To create a bicycle and pedestrian-oriented environment supporting interaction among people and minimizing the use of automobiles.
- To encourage and facilitate a diversity of residential, business, and cultural uses.
- To “design” a sense of place and high-quality buildings and civic spaces, including streets, parks, public buildings and art.
- To develop a neighborhood identity based on an appreciation of history, cultural, and the natural environment.
- To make the Old Gainesville Depot and the Depot Park “destinations” for the community, for gathering, learning, and recreation.
- The restoration and creation of connections between the Depot Avenue area and downtown and to adjacent neighborhoods through rail to trail, streets, and streams networks.
- To make the area a healthy and safe environment for all citizens.
- To redevelop the area through well-designed higher density in-fill, especially housing, while preserving the neighborhood character.
- To increase private investment in the area in service, technology-oriented, and environmental businesses.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, and INDICATORS for REDEVELOPMENT:

In order to put the goals for redevelopment in the Depot Avenue area into a usable form, each goal is broken down into objectives, or steps to realize the goal. These steps are detailed recommendations that were provided by the participants in the Depot Project Forums. These recommendations act as guides in determining short-term projects and long-term policies. In order to create a mechanism for assessing whether or not these strategies are successful in moving towards the goals, measurable indicators are needed. An indicator is a way of determining the condition of the area in critical areas without knowing every detail. A few indicators together, combining social, environmental, and economic factors, will help to assess the sustainability of the redevelopment of the Depot Avenue area. When the indicators are not moving in the right direction, they provide a warning for creating an alternative strategy. They also help suggest projects and policies that are linked directly with a specific indicator, in order to be as efficient as possible in achieving the goals.

GOAL:

- **A bicycle and pedestrian-oriented environment**

Objectives:

- Make local streets traffic-unfriendly
- Provide bicycle facilities and bicycle-related businesses in the area
- Create a physical environment that is accessible and safe for children
- Make shaded pedestrian connections between the RTS Center and downtown businesses

Indicators:

- ✓ % of the public street right-of-way (ROW) that is dedicated to sidewalks and bike paths within the area formed by both sides of South Main Street, SE 4th Avenue, Depot Avenue and SE 7th Street
- ✓ % of brick-paved streets relative to baseline year
- ✓ # of linear feet of barriers to pedestrians adjacent to public right-of-way
- ✓ % of businesses that do not require an automobile to make a purchase or conduct business

GOAL:

- **Diversity of residential, business, and cultural uses**

Objectives:

- Create well-designed infill housing of varied types and affordability
- Create a balance of jobs and housing in the area
- Provide for the diversity of residents' needs including children's needs

Indicators

- ✓ % of City-wide fair-share of affordable housing units within 1 mile of the Old Depot Neighborhood boundary
- ✓ % of area businesses or service companies whose owners and/or 50% of the employees live within ¼ mile of the Old Depot Neighborhood boundary or within the Old Depot Neighborhood
- ✓ # of culture and education-serving facilities in the area relative to baseline year

GOAL:

□ A sense of place

Objectives:

- Create a “master plan” and design guidelines for the neighborhood
- Create intersection of S. Main Street and Depot Avenue as “gateway” to area
- Promote and provide incentives for meeting design guidelines
- Design the “Depot Park” as a neighborhood and community recreation park

Indicators

- ✓ # of square feet of City-owned public space (excluding streets)
- ✓ # of new shade trees relative to baseline year
- ✓ # of people perceiving the south edge of downtown as East Depot Avenue
- ✓ \$ spent on architectural/engineering design fees for new buildings in the area

GOAL:

□ A neighborhood identity of history, cultural, and natural environment

Objectives:

- Create distinctive signage and landmark features
- Create “district” with arts/history focus and guidelines for design and planning
- Create public art and landscape strategy and plan for the area
- Define the Old Depot Neighborhood

Indicators

- ✓ % of pervious to impervious area (excluding streets, sidewalks and bicycle paths, but not excluding parking area)
- ✓ # of historic buildings restored
- ✓ # of public art, distinct signage, or community garden sites in the area
- ✓ % of neighborhood people participating in planning meetings

GOAL:

□ Old Gainesville Depot and Depot Park “destinations”

Objectives:

- Conduct a market study for the Old Depot examining both commercial and public uses
- Preserve and renovate the Old Depot
- Old Depot serves the Depot Avenue Rail-to-Trail
- Make the Old Depot an “anchor” building for area economic redevelopment
- Provide public uses at the Depot Park

Indicators

- ✓ # of visitors to the Old Gainesville Depot and the Depot Park
- ✓ % of Gainesville residents who can identify the Old Gainesville Depot

- ✓ % of revenues generated by Old Depot relative to costs of community services provided
- ✓ \$ spent on development of Old Depot
- ✓ # of public events held in the area
- ✓ # of new jobs created by the Old Depot and the Depot Park

GOAL:

□ **Connections through rail to trail, streets, and streams**

Objectives:

- Create SE 3rd Street and SE 5th Avenue bikeway
- Main Street as a multi-modal and enjoyable public space
- Enhancement of the Sweetwater Branch and Trail
- Crosswalks on Depot Avenue and Main Street

Indicators

- ✓ # of users of the Depot Avenue Rail to Trail
- ✓ % of area residents who perceive what is currently called the Depot Avenue area as Downtown Gainesville
- ✓ # of linear feet of architectural pedestrian crosswalks
- ✓ # of linear feet of Sweetwater Branch accessible to the public

GOAL:

□ **Healthy and safe environment**

Objectives:

- Design and build the Depot Park according to contaminant locations and clean-up levels
- Clean up contamination in the area to scientifically valid standards
- Provide buses at the RTS Center that use non-polluting alternative fuels
- Buildings that are energy and water efficient, healthy, use native landscape and “green” materials
- Reduce real and perceived crime and sense of lack of safety in the area

Indicators

- ✓ % of buildings in the Old Depot Neighborhood that meet “sustainable” planning and building standards
- ✓ # of crimes within ¼ mile of the Old Depot Neighborhood
- ✓ % of pollution in the Sweetwater Branch downstream of the Depot Park relative to the levels of water pollution upstream of the Park.
- ✓ Groundwater pollution levels under the Old Depot Neighborhood relative to original clean-up goals
- ✓ # of incidences of illnesses or health related problems of the residents within ¼ mile of the Old Depot Neighborhood attributed to environmental contaminants

GOAL:

□ Well-designed and higher density in-fill

Objectives:

- Assemble property for redevelopment
- Create consensus and goals for increasing density
- Remove regulatory and attitudinal barriers to higher density
- Build two and more story buildings

Indicators

- ✓ # of property transactions
- ✓ Average # of dwelling units per acre in the Old Depot Neighborhood to baseline year
- ✓ % energy consumption per area of housing and commercial uses relative to average per area consumption of energy in Gainesville
- ✓ # of square feet of occupied building space above one-story

GOAL:

□ Increased investment in businesses

Objectives:

- Develop tax increment financing and other economic development support strategies
- Develop partnerships between City, University and private interests
- Provide information on the area to wide audience
- Conduct market study for the area, especially NW corner of Main and Depot

Indicators

- ✓ % change in property values within ¼ mile of the Old Depot Neighborhood and Depot Park and within the Old Depot Neighborhood relative to baseline year
- ✓ # of new retail businesses in area
- ✓ % of new technology, environmental, or arts-related businesses in the Old Depot Neighborhood
- ✓ # of hours worked to meet the basic necessities of life for a family of four on the median salary of the residents of within ¼ mile of the Old Depot Neighborhood.

RECOMMENDED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:

Based upon research and comments provided by the Depot Forum participants, a series of possible strategies emerged for continuing the “design” of the Depot Neighborhood and the key public building and spaces in the area. With the understanding that both public and private interests will undertake projects and development initiatives within the area, these recommended strategies can be utilized to encourage these projects and create a framework for the creation of a distinct and attractive environment.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT:

- Create a “design and development” timeline in conjunction with the East Gainesville Sprout Project, the Main Street renovation, and the Gainesville Regional Utilities site improvements.
- Formalize neighborhood representation via Neighborhood Works, Inc., and coordinate with Porters Neighborhood and East Gainesville Development Task Force.
- Conduct a community design charrette focusing on the Old Depot Neighborhood, the Depot Park, South Main Street, and Depot Avenue from Waldo Road to SW 11th Street.
- Develop historic and “sustainable” planning and design guidelines for the Old Depot Neighborhood.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Seek funds for design and construction of signature public places, buildings, landmarks, and signage, focusing on the Old Gainesville Depot and the Depot Park.
- Conduct a market study for the area and create an “image” development and marketing campaign.
- Examine environmental, legal, economic, and perceptual barriers to urban redevelopment, higher density, brownfield reuse, and “good design” and seek to have them removed.
- Adopt and utilize a wide array of creative investment incentives, such as tax increment financing, tax abatement, historic designation, Main Street designation, façade grants, special grants.

The Center for Construction and Environment’s mission is the implementation of sustainability principles in the built environment Florida, nationally, and internationally. It seeks to continue community education and outreach, provide professional planning and design services, conduct design-charrettes, analysis urban redevelopment barriers and opportunities, and create “sustainable” planning and building guidelines for new and renovation construction in the Old Depot Neighborhood and throughout the Gainesville, Florida community. The Center wishes to acknowledge the funding support provided by the Sustainable Communities Network and the staff support of the City of Gainesville in conducting this project. The staff of the Center includes; Dr. Charles Kibert, Director; Bradley Guy, Gisela Bosch, Pegeen Hanrahan, Dottie Beaupied, and Steve Schell. Additional assistance was provide by Sean McClendon and Eric Amundson of the non-profit Neighborhood Works, Inc. Outreach support was provided by Ms. Alice Bojanowski, Executive Director, Sustainable Alachua County, Inc. and Ms. Maggi Davison, Executive Assistant, East Gainesville Development Task Force.

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To be appended. List of all signed-in participants in the project forums