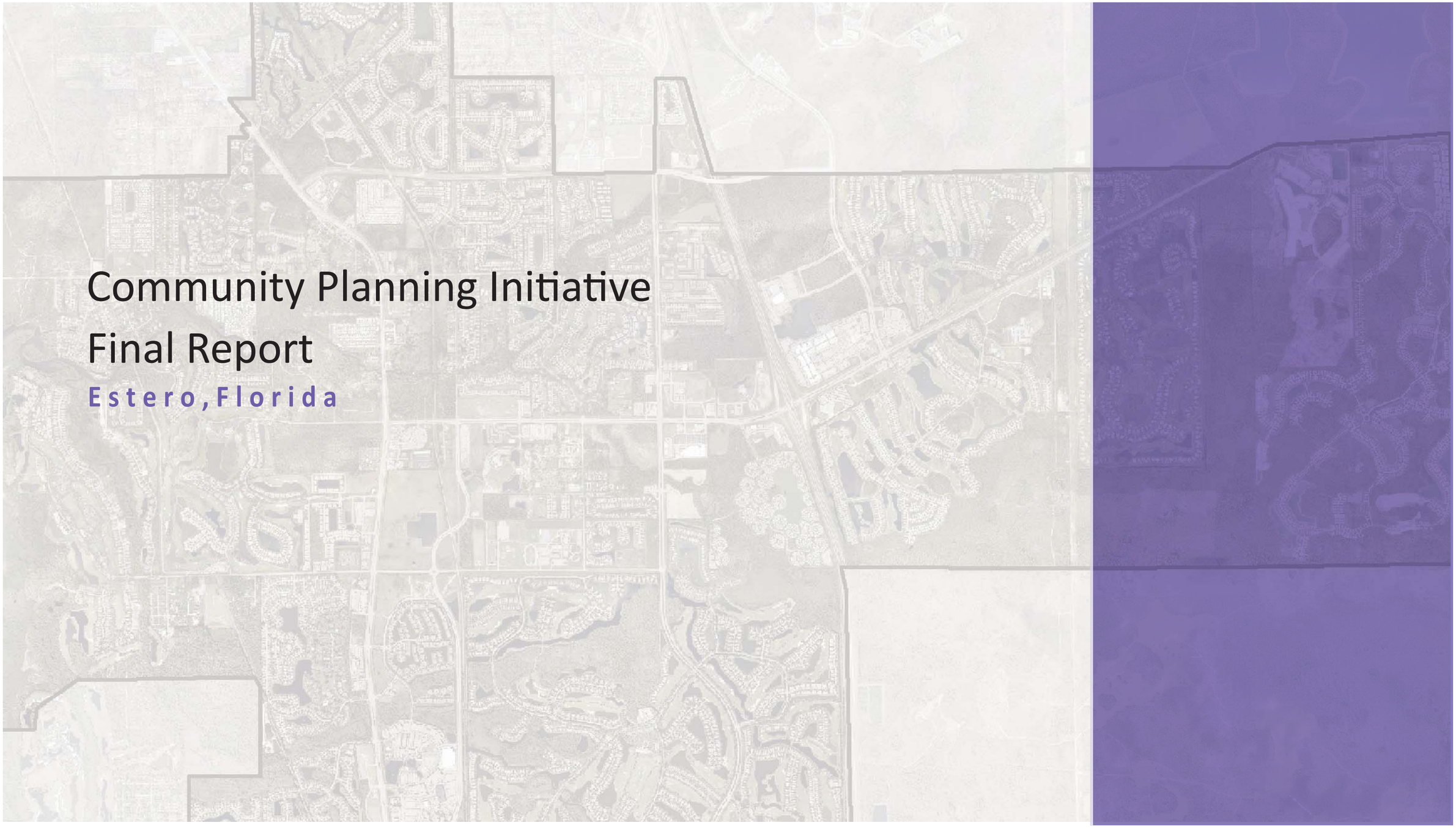


Community Planning Initiative
Final Report

Estero, Florida

January 2015

Seth Harry & Associates, Inc.
Spikowski Planning Associates

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

ESTERO COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY LEADERS (ECCL) BOARD MEMBERS
Nick Batos, Chairman
Howard Levitan, Vice Chairman
Marilyn Edwards, Communications Director
Phil Douglas, Environmental Director
Bob Lienesch, Finance Director
Roger Strelow, Planning Director
Jim Boesch, Transportation Director
Don Eslick, Chairman Emeritus

MEMBERS OF THE ESTERO COMMUNITY PLANNING PANEL (ECPP)
Jack Lienesch, Chairman and Public Member
Neal Noethlich, Chairman Emeritus
Greg Toth, Founding Member Emeritus
John Goodrich, Public Member
Jeff Maas, Development Member
Ned Dewhirst, Development Member
Paul Roberts, Development Member
Roger Strelow, Public Member

MEMBERS OF THE ESTERO DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE (EDRC)
D. Brent Addison, PE
Ryan Binkowski, RLA
Nancy Cohen
Joseph McHarris
Albert O'Donnell
William Prysi, RLA, ASLA, Committee Chairman
Gerard Ripo,PE
Lindsay Rodriquez, Committee Secretary
Gerald Simons
Jim Wallace

CONSULTANT

Seth Harry & Associates, Inc.
Seth Harry, AIA
Ruth Landsman, RA
Patrick Zimmerman

Spikowski Planning Associates
Bill Spikowski, FAICP

The Consultant would like to thank all of the participants for their time and interest in this process, and in particular, both ECCL and the community of Estero.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 PART ONE - Introduction and Background

1.1 Background and Overview
1.2 Village Center Visioning Strategy
1.3 Development Patterns

2.0 PART TWO -Place-Making Principles

2.1 Place-Making
2.2 Neighborhood Structure

3.0 PART THREE - What's Missing from Estero?

3.1 Health Care in a New Era
3.2 Creating the Missing Hub

4.0 PART FOUR - Illustrative Village Center Build Out Scenario

4.1 Illustrative Planning Exercise
4.2 Potential Civic Center

5.0 PART FIVE - Summary

Above: An illustrative model showing a potential build out for the future Village Center.

1.0 PART ONE INTRO AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background and Overview:

In early 2013, as the market continued its long recovery from the recent economic downturn, Seth Harry & Associates, Inc. (SHA) was hired to assist the Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) in redefining Estero's market position, in anticipation of the changing demographic trends, and consumer preferences to follow. This work took place in a three phase process beginning with an initial market overview, followed by a more comprehensive, in-depth market assessment, culminating in a three-day planning workshop which took place in February 2014 led by SHA and attended by ECCL, Estero Design Review Committee (EDRC), local property owners, and other interested parties, to illustrate and explore various development scenarios for a possible Village Center, as identified through the earlier market exercises.

The study area for the February 2014 workshop was chosen from one of three mixed-use nodes well-suited for more intensive development. The three nodes are situated along a central, north-south corridor in Estero, between US 41 to the west and the existing rail corridor to the east, and from the Estero River on the north, to just south of Williams Road on the south, referred to as the Village Center node, the Coconut Point node, and the Medical District node. The Village Center node -- the northernmost of the three -- was chosen as the subject of the workshop because it contained the largest undeveloped parcel within the corridor, and seemed the most well positioned for near-term development within a longer-term strategic context.

In the fall of 2014, as a follow-up to this initial effort, Seth Harry & Associates, Inc. and Spikowski Planning Associates were asked to undertake a series of community presentations to present and discuss a possible framework for the future development in Estero, based on the strategic goals and principles outlined through this process.

The purpose of those community meanings was to develop and support a shared community vision for the development of the proposed Village Center area, based on the underlying principles of compact, walkable, transit supportive, mixed-use development, with an emphasis on employment, housing, recreational and civic uses, and the possibility of using those principles to inform a broader policy framework which could help to guide Estero in shaping a more sustainable model for future development, one that not only served the current residents of Estero, but which anticipated the needs and desires of new residents and future generations to come.

A Power Point slide show was presented to the residents of Estero at each of the three meetings, and was updated and refined based on community input and feedback. The presentation began with a review of the findings, policy goals and strategic objectives identified through the initial market evaluation, intended to help restart and strengthen the stalled economy, by focusing on new development which will attract and retain higher-paying jobs and the work force to sustain them. These included:

- Maximizing short-term market potential and appeal, while still working toward a larger strategic vision; that will achieve a more balanced and sustainable economic foundation for the community, moving forward.
- Though residential development will lead the market recovery in the near term, the nature and type of the residential products offered could have a significant impact on how Estero positions itself in the marketplace relative to other uses.
- The physical plan of the community and related building types are critically relevant to achieving the strategic goals of mixed use (greater convenience and reduction in the cost of services), expanded housing choice (responding to demographically-driven lifestyle preferences), and reduced automobile reliance (enhanced mobility choice).
- Managing urban form is just as important as managing use, and both can be managed most effectively through the use of flexible building types that can accommodate a wide range of uses within a well-defined physical plan, based on a coherent and recognizable neighborhood structure (i.e., with an identifiable center and edge, spatially defined by a 5-minute walking radius).
- Development in this form, when done properly, can help to encourage and support the use of transit, reduce congestion, lower the cost of services, and reduce the burden on both natural and man-made systems.

It is possible to achieve these outcomes working within the existing planning and zoning legal framework, using existing entitlements and the recognized benefits of this approach as a basis for negotiation, by adapting the bulk regulations to better serve these strategic purposes. This can be accomplished in a consistent and predictable manner, which can be accurately represented in an easily understood graphic format, such as to encourage legitimate community buy-in and support.

This document is a summary of those presentations, the work that informed them, and the community's input and response to the ideas and concepts contained within them.

Right: Since its founding, ECCL has played a significant role in shaping the attractive and successful community that Estero is today. This most recent effort represents a continuation of that legacy, updated to reflect the current challenges and opportunities facing the community.h

Planning and Zoning Achievements By the Estero Community Planning Panel and the Estero Design Review Committee:

- No "bubble zoning"
- Heavy emphasis on prohibited uses
- Specific signage restrictions
- Upscale landscaping requirements
- Pedestrian/traffic networks
- Architectural standards
- Overlay districts
- Big-box & convenience store standards

Realizing Estero's full potential:

Estero has come a long way in realizing its vision…

The community faces many new challenges in today's dynamic marketplace

What do we need to do during this coming decade to help fully realize this vision?

1.2 Village Center Visioning Strategy:

From the beginning of this process, the visioning strategy for Estero was driven by a couple of big ideas. The first of these was that the market that was coming back, post-downturn, was likely to be very different than the market that had gone away, seven years earlier.

The second was that during the height of Estero's growth spurt over the previous decade, the type of development that occurred was largely one of a rather specific type -- large, gated single-family home communities, centered around a single major recreational amenity, i.e., golf courses, that required a great deal of land relative to the number of households it contained, and the commercial uses that served those communities were, without exception, located outside of those communities, usually at the intersection of two major roadways, and built as an oversized network of connecting arterials.

Third, that the amount of available land left for development would be rapidly reduced if development continued in the form that it had prior to the downturn, meaning that whatever other uses and amenities the citizens of Estero wished to see in their community in the coming years, now was the time to makes sure those uses were accommodated, and the needs of the future residents, whose preferences and expectations might differ significantly from those who currently live in Estero, are met. And finally, that all of this should and could be accomplished without diminishing the value of Estero's hard earned, and well deserved, "brand."

After an informal market assessment, a more detailed market analysis was undertaken to document existing unmet, and future needs, with a particular emphasis on housing types which would attract and retain residents with the skill and knowledge to support a more diversified local economy, long term, as well as identifying the types of employers who would benefit from that workforce.

LIFE STAGE INFLUENCES HOUSING CHOICE
GEN Y MOVES TO HOME OWNERSHIP IN NEAR FUTURE

Year	Student Housing	Single & Roommate Rental	Rent as Couple / 1st Home	Young Family Own	Mature Family Own	Empty Nester Downsize Own	Retiree Senior Housing
2008	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen X	Gen X	Baby B	Baby B	Eisen Baby B
2010	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen X Gen Y	Baby B Gen X	Baby B	Eisen Baby B
2015	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen X	Baby B Gen X	Eisen Baby B
2020	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen X Gen Y	Gen X Baby B	Baby B

Demographic trends are showing an unprecedented convergence in demand for walkable, mixed-use development

Regional-scale retail market is already well served. Need to balance any new retail supply with new consumer demand

Above: This slide, showing a study produced by RCLCO, shows an unprecedented convergence in consumer housing preferences around compact, walkable, transit-supportive community formats. Millenials (Generation Y), which is just now entering its primary household formation stage, eschews the generic suburban lifestyles of its Baby Boomer generation parents, while aging Boomers and Gen Xers are actively downsizing and looking for more convenient, amenity-rich urban communities to retire to, as they plan for a future in which driving may no longer be an option....

Above Right: There are a number of key market segments that have been largely underserved which creates both a critical need and an opportunity.

Below Right: Estero needs to be strategically proactive in anticipating market changes, and in leverage niche opportunities to maximum effect, both from an economic perspective, but also in supporting ongoing policy objectives.

Unmet Needs Shown By Local Market Research:

Opportunity/need for rental & workforce housing
(housing types to attract/retain desired workforce)

Need for senior housing/continuing care
(by 2017: 14% will be over 75; 46% will be over 65)

Opportunity for critical care medical services
(large population influx needs medical services)

Realizing Estero's full potential:

Estero has come a long way in realizing its vision…

But the community still faces many new challenges in today's dynamic marketplace

What do we need to do during this coming decade to keep Estero moving forward?

1.3 Development Patterns

To better understand both the urgency and need to get this right, a quick review of the development that has taken place in Estero over the past twenty years, and the past 10 years in particular, is in order.

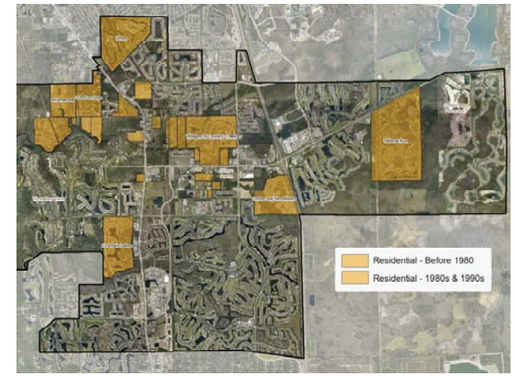
Up until the late eighties and early nineties, development in Estero proceeded in a fairly ad hoc manner, and a fairly leisurely pace. Starting in the late nineties and in the early 2000s, the pace of residential development picked up dramatically, but even more important, the scale of the developments changed dramatically as well, with very large, master-planned gated communities consuming very large parcels of land in fairly rapid succession.

On the commercial side, retail typically follows rooftops, and the rapid increase in the size of the local consumer market certainly helped to support a corresponding level of activity in commercial development. In addition, however, Estero's strategic regional location between Naples and Ft. Meyers, proximity to I-75, excellent infrastructure, and well located, readily available, commercially-zoned parcels attracted several large-scale regional retail projects, supported, in part, but the region's strong seasonal tourist market and second-home market, as well as growing Gulf Coast University.

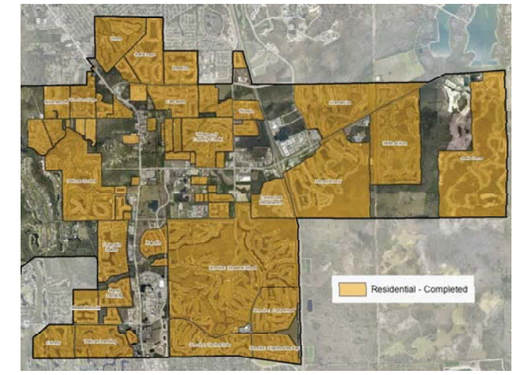
All of this peaked in the mid-to-late 2000s, before the dramatic slowdown triggered by the international economic crises. However, even before that occurred, there were a number of large parcels already entitled and ready to go, before the market collapse. Taking even these entitled parcels into consideration, the proportional amount of remaining land for development is very small in relation to what has already been developed, making the question of how these remaining parcels are developed critical to rebalancing Estero's offerings to better reflect changing consumer preferences, and in attracting and supporting uses which may have been overlooked prior the downturn.

The question everyone should be asking is, "what's missing?" and making sure it's an integral part of whatever is proposed for the remaining parcels.

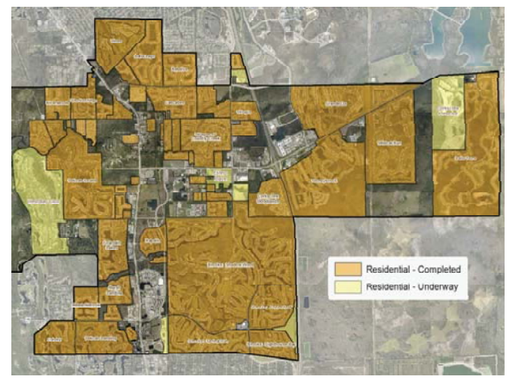
Top: Residential development before 1980



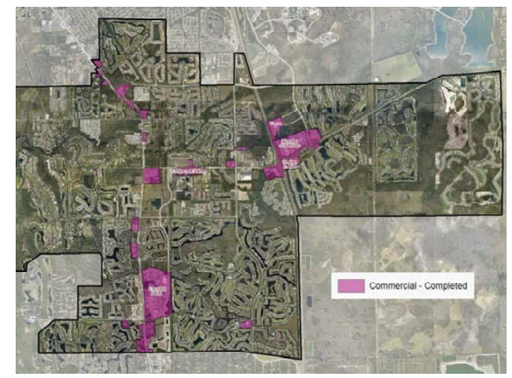
Bottom: Residential development 1980s and 1990s



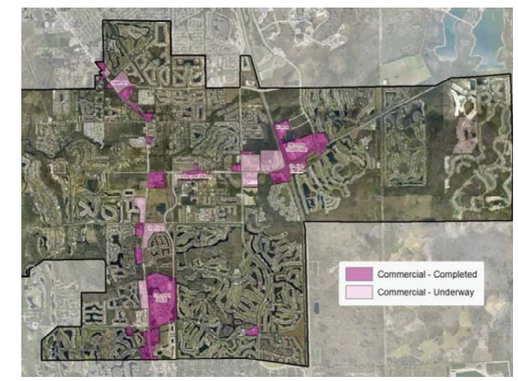
Top: Residential development completed



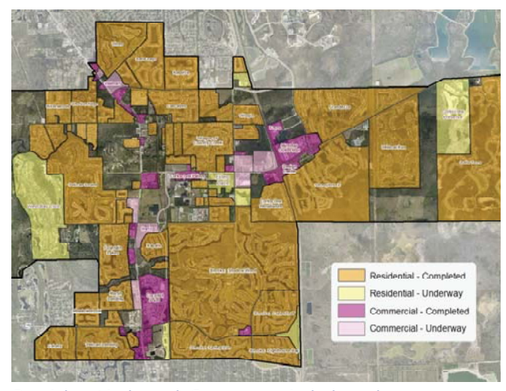
Residential development completed and underway



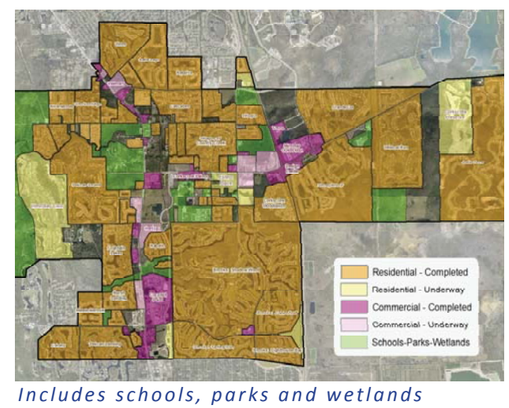
Commercial development completed



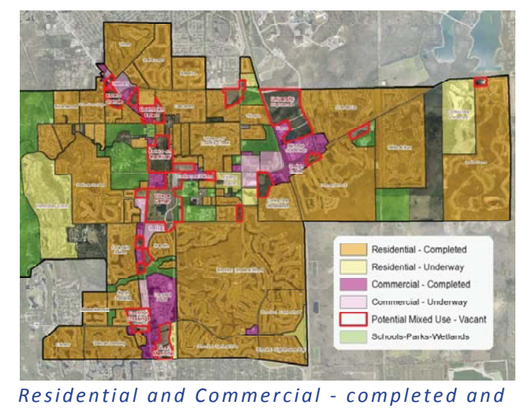
Commercial development completed and underway



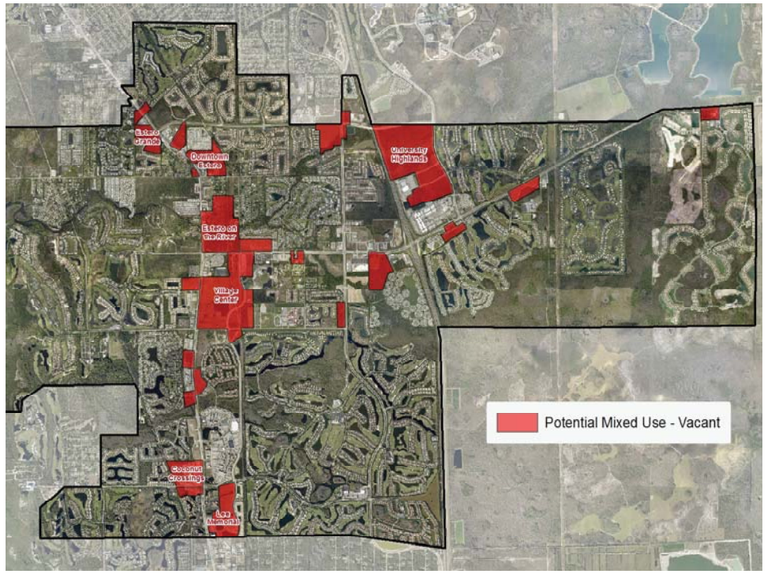
Residential and Commercial development completed and underway



Includes schools, parks and wetlands



Residential and Commercial - completed and underway, parks, schools, wetlands, and Potential Mixed Use



Potential Mixed-Use - Vacant

How is What's Left Different?

Much smaller development tracts

The image at left shows the remaining parcels available for mixed-use development, in relation to Estero as a whole. When compared to the parcels in the previous images, one can see that they more closely resemble infill development opportunities, rather than the kind of large planned gated community sites that were more typical pre-downturn.

Looked at in the context of the current market, and given their proximity to major transportation assets, it makes sense that these sites be more intensively developed to meet long term needs.

Given the well-served regional market for retail uses, the initial focus on these infill parcels will be primarily residential, though employment remains a viable option within nodes specifically identified and marketed for that use.

Residential Communities	Size	Vacant Tracts
Brooks: Shadow Wood	1750 acres	
Bella Terra	1000 acres	
Stoneybrook	800 acres	
Wildcat Run	600 acres	
Grandezza	575 acres	
West Bay Club	565 acres	
Pelican Sound	560 acres	
Brooks: Spring Run	315 acres	
Villages at Country Creek	290 acres	
Vines	280 acres	
Brooks: Copperleaf	255 acres	
Bella Lago	245 acres	
Fountain lakes	235 acres	
	230 acres	Univ. Highlands
	210 acres	Village Center area
Cascades	200 acres	

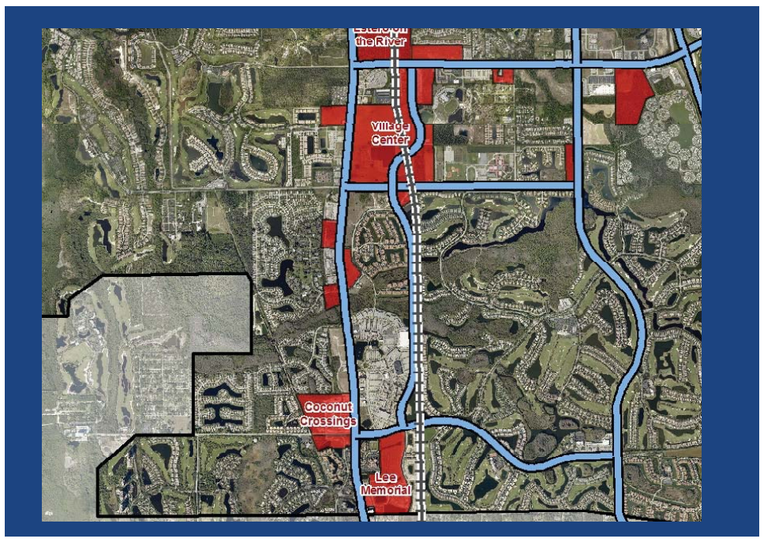
Above: Comparing currently vacant sites to existing developed sites shows how much smaller the remaining parcels are relative to most of the previously developed site.

How is What's Left Different?

Much smaller development tracts

Adjacent to major thoroughfares& infrastructure

The image below shows how strategically located most of the remaining parcels are relative to major transportation infrastructure. When combined with the existing Coconut Point site, which still has significant infill opportunities, it is easy to image a linear development pattern along the US 41 corridor, based on higher-density mixed-use development, also capable of supporting future rail transit.



Above: Lee County undertook a Rail Corridor Feasibility Study to explore the potential for a coordinated rail network serving designated mixed-use centers. Three of those possible station locations correspond with the infill development nodes identified in the strategic market Study

How is What's Left Different?

Much smaller development tracts

Adjacent to major thoroughfares& infrastructure

Fundamentally different market context – what are the alternatives, and is there space?

And finally -- given the changes in market context and demographically driven consumer preferences discussed earlier, and the smaller sizes of the remaining parcels, large scale, gated communities are not a practical option (and they are already well represented in the market), and the regional-scale retail needs are well served for the foreseeable future. So then, what are the viable alternatives, and can those alternatives fit within the remaining parcels while still providing the kind of investment returns and the incremental long-term build-out potential of a larger site?

The short answer is compact, walkable, mixed-use transit supportive development of the type previously discussed, with a proportional and flexible mix of uses within each site, strategically tailored to maximum market capture and value potential within the regional market as a whole.

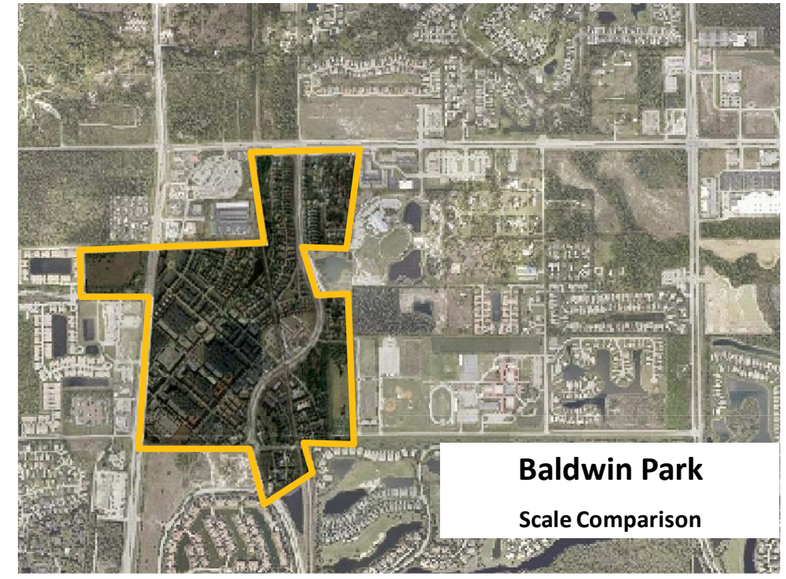
Scale Comparisons:

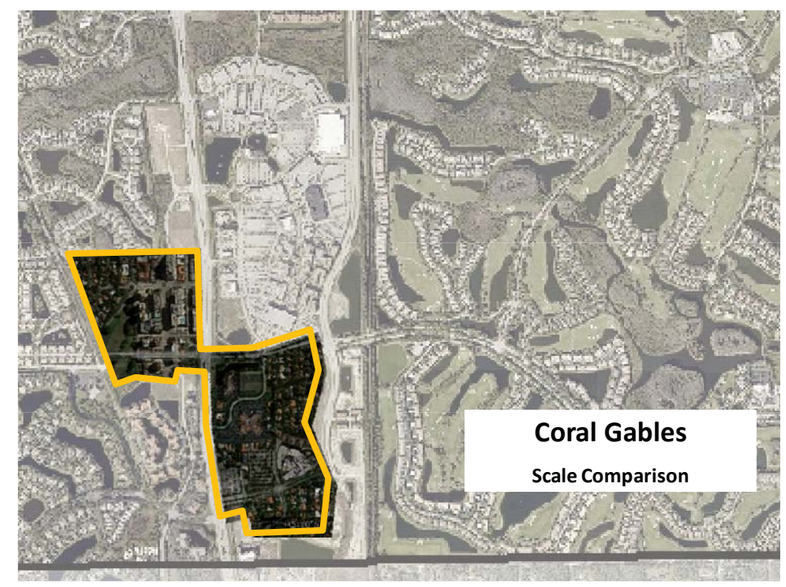
To help illustrate and better understand the theoretical potential of the remaining parcels, it is helpful to put them into a relevant context: One of the quickest and most effective tools for doing so is a "scale comparison" which superimposes an image of a place with similar attributes, to that of what is being proposed, at the same scale as the site. This provides an accurate frame of reference between a known place and the development parcel, allowing one to "experience" the site at full scale, even before a detailed plan is generated. This tool can also be used to quickly test yield, market and feasibility assumptions.

Two of the projects looked at for this comparative analysis were Baldwin Park, a new infill mixed-use neighborhood built on the site of a former Naval Air Station, in suburban Orlando. And downtown Coral Gables, Florida, an upscale 1920's vintage garden suburb, south of downtown Miami. Both markets are comparable to the Estero/Bonita Springs area.

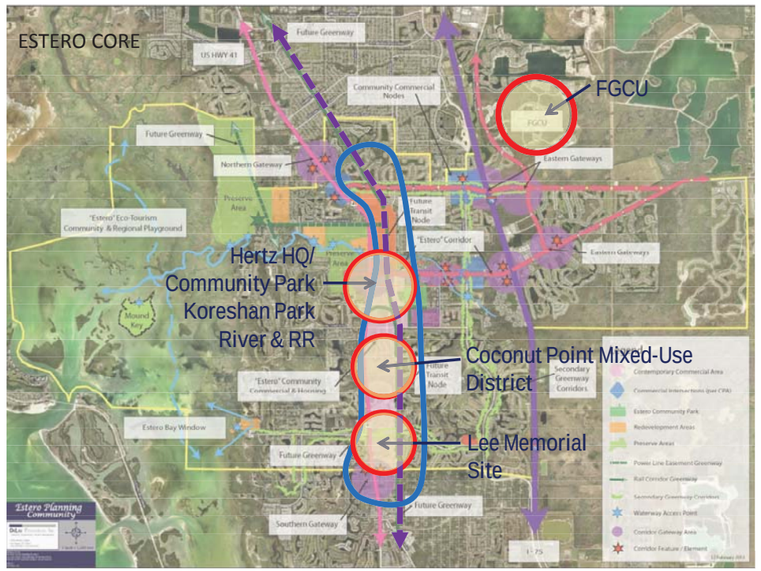
Above, right: This image shows the mixed-use commercial area of Baldwin Park, which is anchored by a grocery store and neighborhood-serving retail, and includes live-works, apartments, townhouses, and single-family detached homes, overlaid on the "Village Center" node area of Estero, ease of US 41, and north of Corkscrew road (see following page).

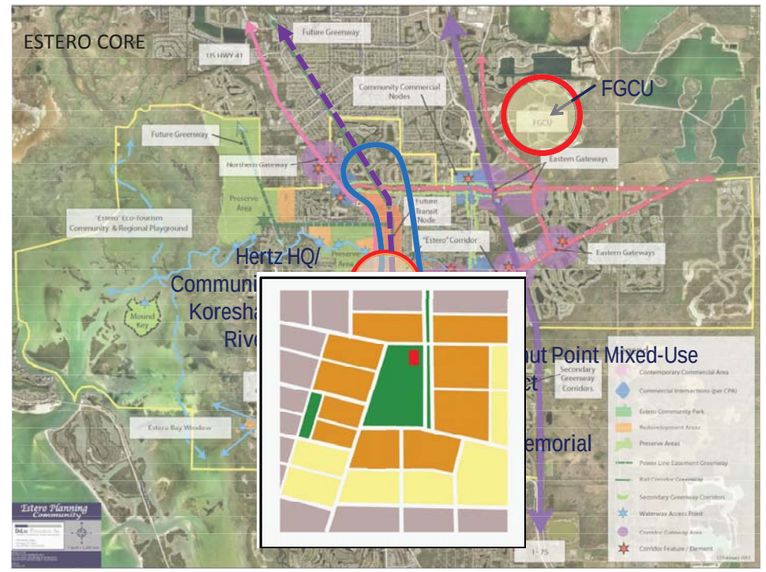
Below, left: an image of a luxury mixed-use neighborhood near downtown Coral Gables, and a top notch local-serving hospital in a very desirable residential neighborhood adjacent to the University of Miami, superimposed at the same scale with the area currently identified as a potential new Health and Wellness, mixed-use neighborhood, just south of Coconut Point Mall.





ESTERO: pieces or places?



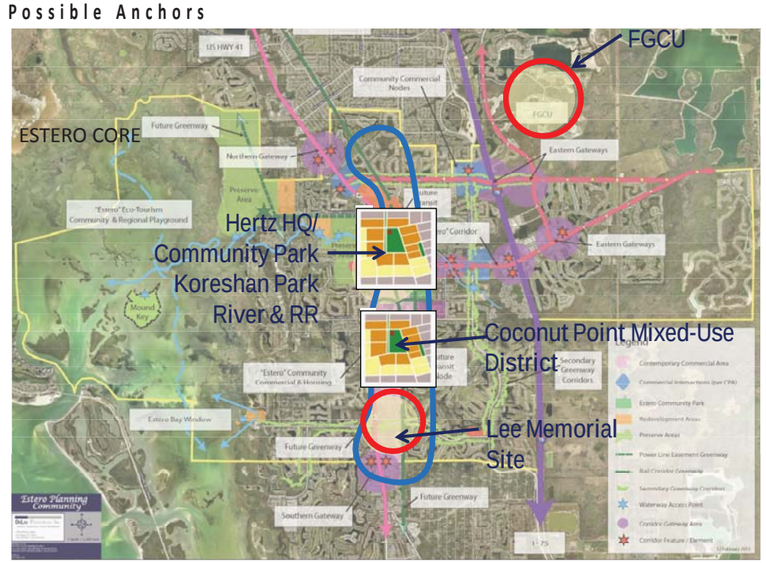


Looking at these "nodes" in more detail, it is important to understand that they should not, and will not, be developed as a single, generic commercial strip, but as a series of individual, discrete communities, each with its own internal network of interconnected local streets, parks, and civic places, of varying size, format and complexity.

One way to think of these nodes is as either individual neighborhoods, or as a collection of neighborhoods, each with a distinct form and character, based on the fundamental organizing principle of "center, general, and edge" conditions, and each with its own set of development parameters, targeting specific end-users and market preferences.

In addition to the variations within the different strata (center, general and edge) of each node, one can also think of – as in this case – of each node being programmatically distinct from one another, while still sharing basic compositional elements and structure. In the following illustrations, you can see how different scales or level of development might be represented in the built product, of each node. This could also apply to differences in focus, or thematic intent, again, specific to each node.

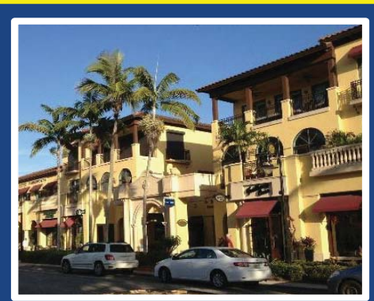
Possible Anchors



Components of Vibrant Places

Above: Each "node" is composed of individual neighborhoods, and each neighborhood is comprised of a Center, General, and Edge condition (or sub-zone), based on a 5 minute, or quarter-mile walking radius, as represent by the diagram above.

The photos show representational building types and relative scale and intensity for a single neighborhood, in this case what might be envisioned for the "Village Center" node, across those three neighborhood sub-zones. The top pictures shows low-scale (2-3 stories) mixed-use residential/office and commercial buildings in the neighborhood center area, the middle pictures, medium density multifamily and attached, to small-lot residential in the neighborhood general area, and the lower pictures show larger lot, single-family detached residential exclusive to neighborhood edge area.

	Neighborhood Center	Neighborhood General	Neighborhood Edge
Small: **(Village Center)**			
Medium: **(Health Village)**			
Large: **(Coconut Point)**			

In addition to the distinctions within the different strata of each node, one can think of, as in this case, each node being distinct from one another, while still sharing basic compositional elements and structure. In this illustration, you can see how different scales, or intensities, might be represented in the built product. This could also apply to differences in focus, or thematic intent, relating to each specific node.

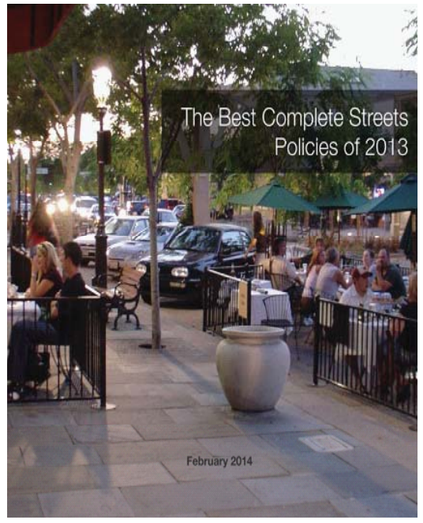
Small-scale, inter-connected local streets allow for neighborhood amenities within easy walking distance, including neighborhood parks and playgrounds, elementary schools, neighborhood pools, local coffee shops and gathering places, all to be accessible without crossing major roads or highways

This form of neighborhood structure can support a broad spectrum of housing types, price points, and lifestyle preferences, from large lot, single-family detached homes, to urban townhouses and apartments. Work-housing can be accommodated in a number of ways, from small, detached cottages, to carriage houses (accessory dwelling units, which also enhance affordability for the property owner) -- both good options for working families -- to urban lofts and micro-units, very popular with young tech workers.

Variety of residential and lifestyle options…

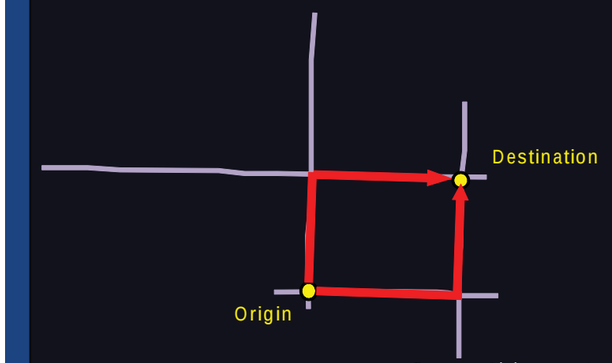
Workplaces…

In addition to Hertz's new headquarters, this form of incremental infill development can support a range of architectural styles and mixed-use building types, attracting and catering to a much wider range of end-users, while the compact, pedestrian-friendly (complete streets) environment readily lends itself to the inclusion of transit, including light rail, BRT (bus rapid transit), or even simple. rubber-tired circulators.



Complete Streets:
The key to complete streets is matching street types to walkable context, using a coordinated balance of land-uses and urban form. The connective power of networks is illustrated below

HOW DO WE GET THERE FROM HERE…?



$$\frac{(x+y)!}{(x!)(y!)} = \text{\# of possible routes}$$

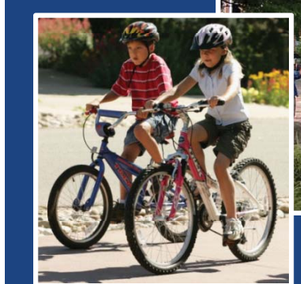
2 possible routes without doubling Back….

Courtesy of Hall Planning & Engineering, Tallahassee FL

Power of Connected Streets

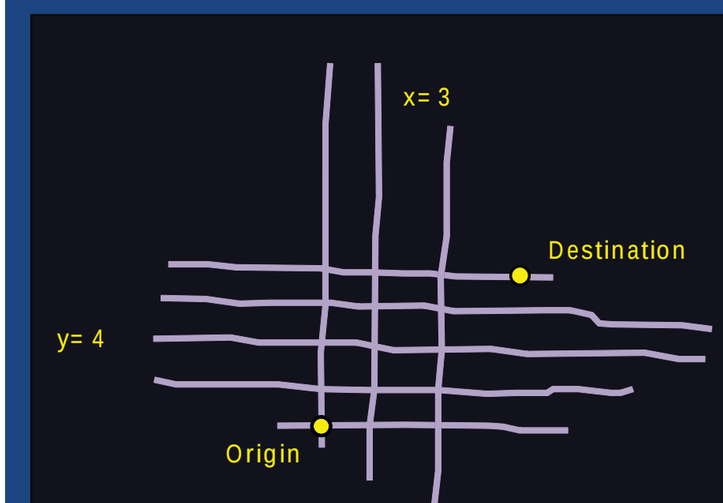
Complete Streets:

- Streets are designed to match the surrounding character
- Streets make up a diffuse network, with many choices
- Streets serve motorists AND walkers, bicyclists,and transit users



These diagrams (right, above and below) show a simple network, typical of many suburban arterial networks with limited internal connectivity, or connecting street networks, at the local level.

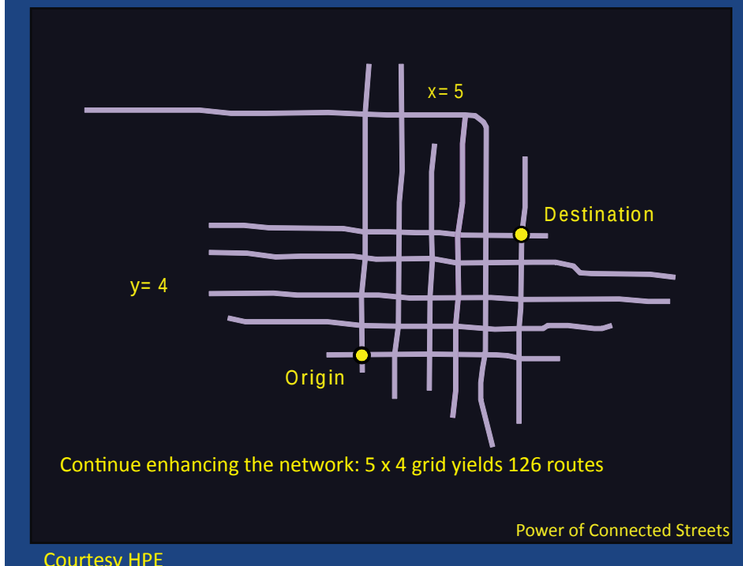
Each addition or enhancement to the network results in an exponential increase in the number of possible routes. This dramatically reduces congestion -- meaning you can use much smaller streets to carry the same amount of traffic, through the use of a diffuse network. This not only allows for shorter trips, it greatly improves the environment for other uses, such as walking or bicycling, sidewalk, cafes, etc.



Enhancing the network: 4 x 3 grid yields 35 routes

Courtesy HPE

Power of Connected Streets



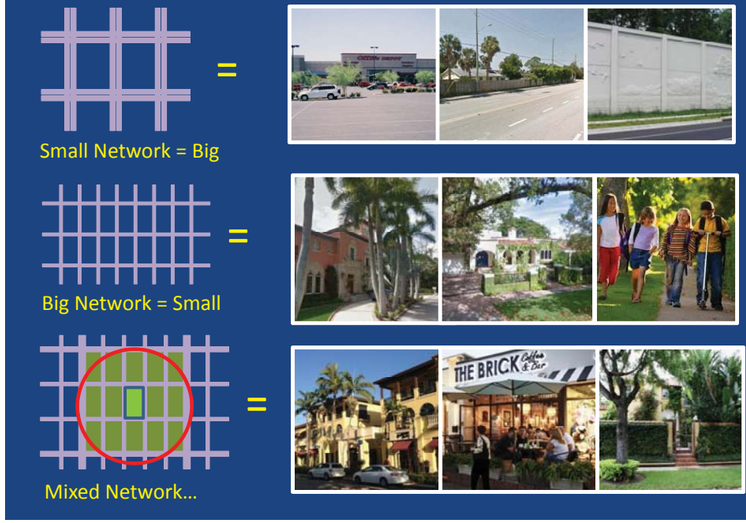
Courtesy HPE

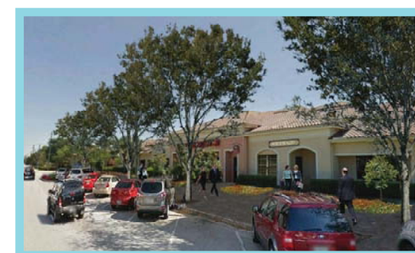
Left above and below: A relatively modest network comprised of an 8 X 8 grid, affords an astonishing number of routes. Ironically, there is probably more pavement than this in many of Estero's existing gated communities, but the lack of connectivity, both internally, and to the larger arterial network, negates most of the benefits this type of network offers.

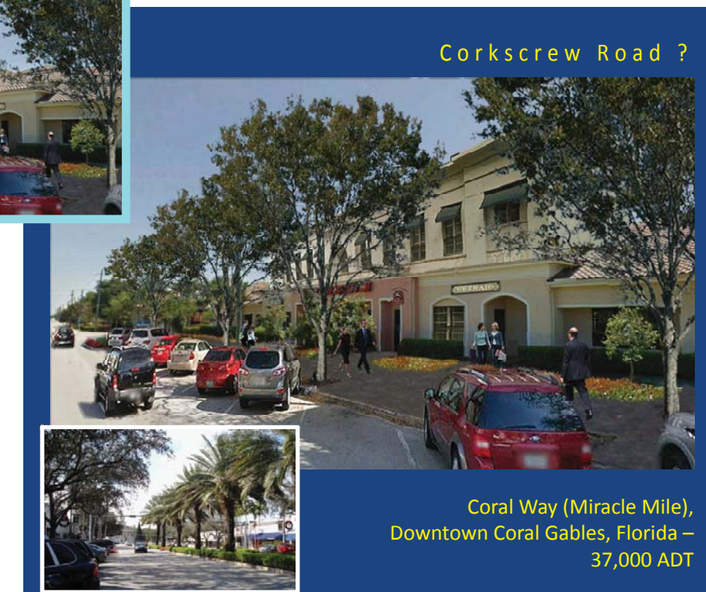
Right, above: A few big roads are great from traveling long distances, but not ideal for local trips. A lot of small roads are great for capturing local trips, but problematic for regional traffic. A combination of small roads, in the form of a neighborhood, keeps local trips off of the large arterial network, freeing up capacity for regional, and/or "journey to work" trips.

This also helps to keep local roads at a perfect scale for walking and bicycling, and provides an ideal pedestrian shed for local amenities already mentioned, such as neighborhood schools and parks, as well as transit.

Why is this important?

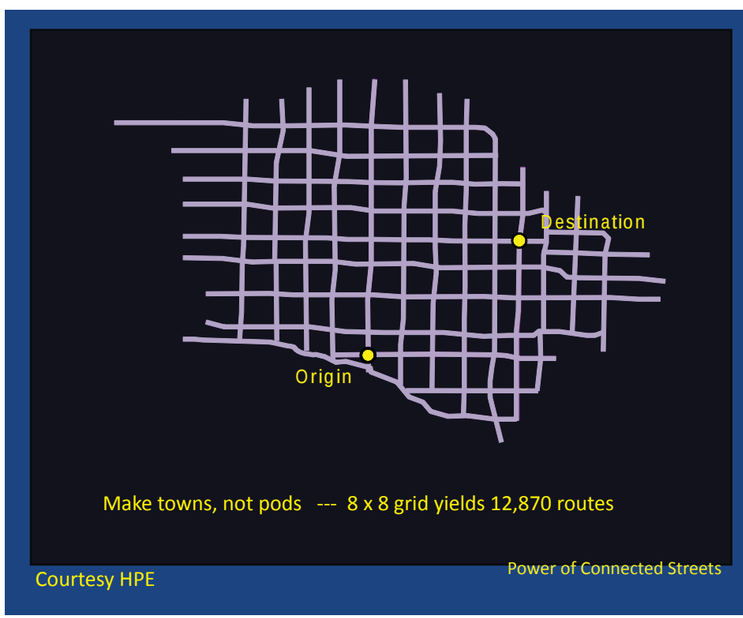






Corkscrew Road ?

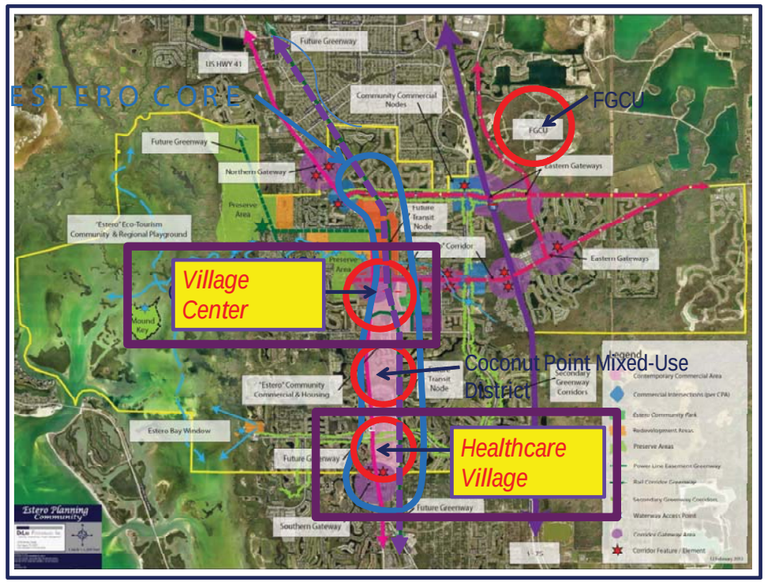
Coral Way (Miracle Mile), Downtown Coral Gables, Florida – 37,000 ADT



Courtesy HPE

Right, Below: By capturing most local trips within the neighborhood's local street network (approx. 80% of household generated trips are local), it may even be possible to fully realize the long-term intentions of existing policies, implicit in many existing properties, such as this Corkscrew Road example, showing an "after" once the additional capacity design into the roadway is recaptured for on-street parking to serve true streetfront retail, as exemplified by Coral Gables premier shopping street, Miracle Mile (Coral Way).

Possible Anchors



All of these concepts and ideas relating to walkable mixed-use can also be applied to health care, by combining wellness, senior housing, and long-term care in a pleasant walkable environment, close to services. Though the Healthcare Village is intended to have a health-care focus, it can also support uses that will allow seniors to participate more fully in community life. Southside Village, in Sarasota is a good example of how a hospital/critical care facility can be integrated into neighborhood fabric, supporting local shops and restaurants, providing local jobs, and neighborhood amenities.

Diversity of residential types, serving different housing and care needs.... Aging in Place --

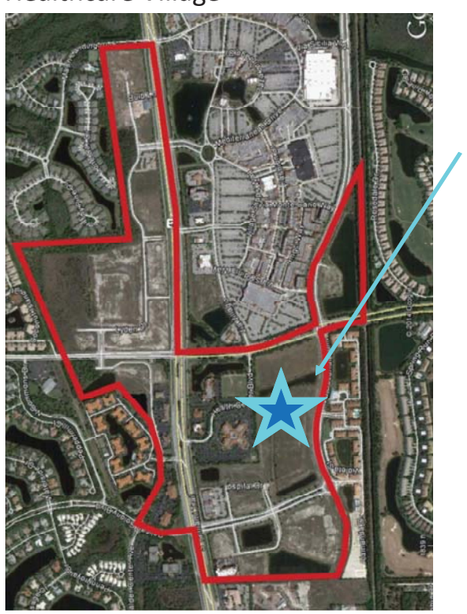
Planning Estero's Future Development

PART 3:

- **Healthcare in a New Era**
- **Creating the Missing Hub**

Here are two examples of higher density, multifamily housing products that can comfortably accommodate seniors in the type of walkable mixed-use environment this document envisions, without compromise in terms of quality-of-life, security or convenience. These can be proximate to, but not directly part of, a more active mixed-use commercial area, providing convenience and mobility choice, and very high quality, shared amenities and outdoor communal space. When combined with in-home health care services, this type of development can function as a purpose built NORC (naturally occurring retirement community), or even be part of a CCRC (continuing care retirement community), built in the form of a neighborhood, and seamlessly integrated into its local community context.

Healthcare Village



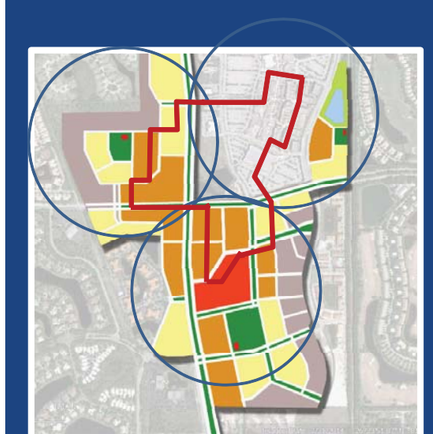
Hospital Anchor:

Providing community-wide Acute Medical Care, combined with local at-home services

Aging at home
- In-home care
- Facilitated care (in-home monitoring, etc.)
- Easy, direct access to daily needs, recreational and cultural amenities
- Home delivery – food/medication/etc.

Easy access to transit, or personalized transportation services at low cost

Purpose-Built Health-Care Village, based on 'NORC' precedent (Naturally-Occurring Retirement Community)



- Compact
- Walkable
- Mixed-Use
- Transit supportive

- Acute care and clinical services
- Wellness & prevention
- Senior & assisted living facilities
- Retail, dining, and hospitality
- Urban parks, gardens, bike paths
- Civic & entertainment venues

Diversity of residential types, serving different housing and care needs…

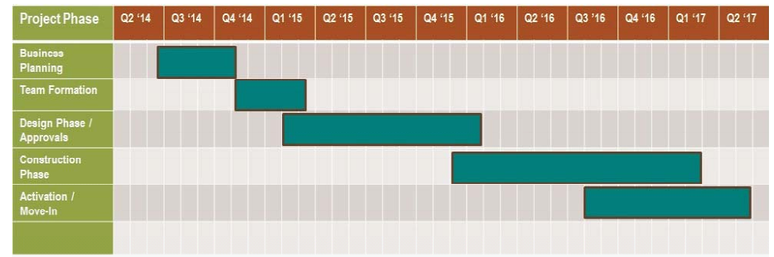
From cottages & apartments, to courtyard and single-family homes…

Another version of this same idea, elevator courtyard apartment buildings, offer parking directly below each unit, along with unique charm and a range of unit configurations and sizes, in low-maintenance convenient package, both part of, and distinct from, the neighborhood within which it resides. Bungalow courts, mixed-use courtyards, and small-lot, single family attached, are all options in this kind of walkable, neighborhood context.

A full range of daily needs and activities

- within easy walking distance
- or a short shuttle ride or a phone call away…

Master Project Schedule – Phase I

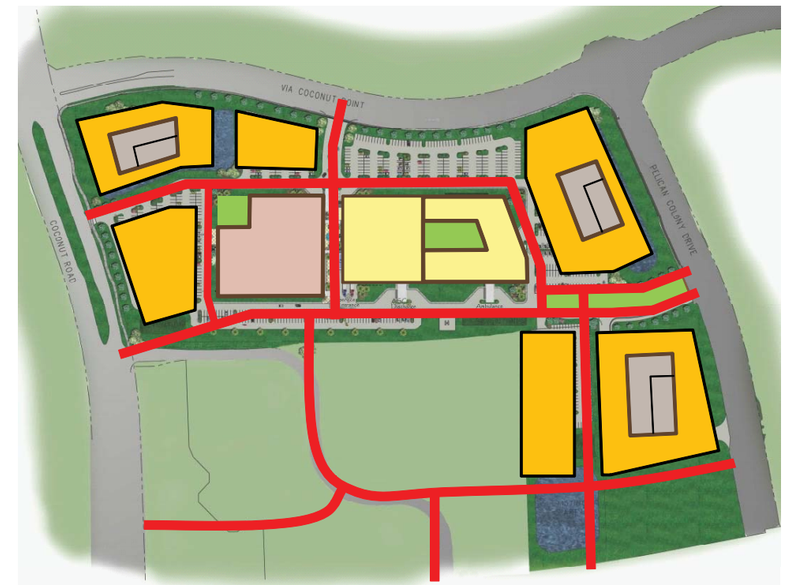


Phase I scope includes ASC, Freestanding ED, Clinical Decision Unit, Imaging, lab, Wellness, Retail, and Integrative Medicine / Wellness and Physician Offices.

Concept Plan – Phase 1

Phase 1 includes 3 development zones – Integrative Medicine / Wellness / ASC / Emergency, Physician Office Suites and Sports Medicine and Performance Center with retail components augmenting clinical areas.

Alternative Concept Plan – Phase 1



The proposed critical care facility, shown at left in a conventional suburban format, can be better integrated into a more traditional walkable, mixed-use neighborhood context (above), providing a more convenient way to take care of multiple health-related needs in a single visit, or to support nearby assisted living/continuing care-type facilities.

Planning Estero's Future Development

PART 3:

- ***Village/Town Center***
- ***Civic Heart of Estero***

ANCHORS:

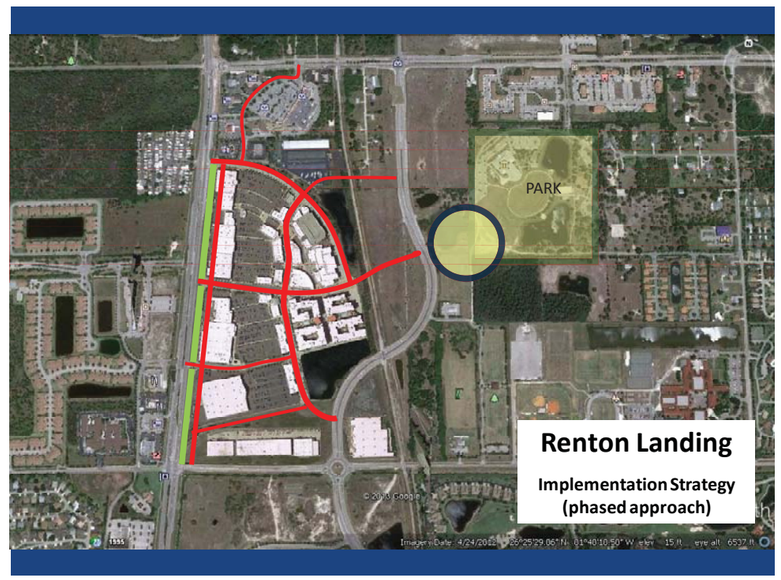
- ✓ Civic Center
- ✓ Transportation Hub
- ✓ Entertainment

- New Main Entrance to Estero Community Park
- Potential Site for Village Hall
- Possible Commuter Rail or Bus Rapid Transit Station
- Performing Arts Theater?

Flexible, Incremental Development

As part of an illustrative case-study exercise, the area identified as a potential Village Center node was used to demonstrate how a compact, walkable, mixed-use, transit supportive neighborhood could be incrementally built out to support a flexible array of residential, commercial and civic uses, that the market can support, in a way that optimizes the value and productivity of the underlying real estate, while providing community wide amenities and benefits, including enhanced access and utilization of an existing regional park, and the potential for a future light-rail station/transit-oriented development (TOD).

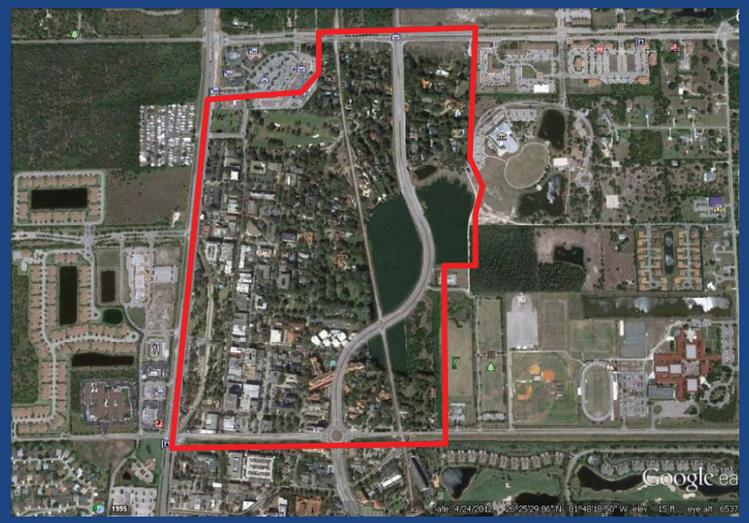
Two national examples were used to illustrate how a system of streets and blocks can be adapted to allow for either incremental build out, or incremental intensification, over time, in a rational, flexible way, which continuously builds toward value. The benefits of this approach are significant: It allows a property owner to extract value in increments that the current market can support, without undermining or foreclosing the potential for long-term gain, as the market continues to improve, across the broadest possible spectrum of uses, to maximize market potential and absorption, in a neighborhood format that builds value exponentially, and provides opportunities for returning some of that value in the form of neighborhood parks and amenities, that only serve to reinforce and strengthen the market viability and attraction of the location to future end-users and the community as a whole.



This example, overlaid on the Village Center area for demonstration purposes, shows how a more suburban development pattern, properly planned, can actually "evolve" over time, adding density and diversity by anticipating the location and size of future development sites, based on an implied street and block configuration, designed into the existing surface parking lots. The yellow circle shows a possible future "civic center," connecting residential and commercial uses to the amenity of a nearby existing regional park.

This diagram shows another approach, building incrementally across the site, block by block, in increasing layers of intensity, as the market responds favorably to the investment represented by each preceding phase, until the entire site realizes its full potential.... An added bonus -- having created a large ridership population within the ½ mile pedestrian shed necessary to support transit, transit becomes a practical and viable economic possibility, as was the case with this example.

Fifth Avenue South, Naples, FL



Park Ave, Winter Park, FL

Baldwin Park, Orlando, FL

City Place, West Palm Beach, FL

To illustrate that there are many existing examples of other places in similar markets across Florida which share these attributes the images at left show various new and historic mixed-use neighborhood centers, overlaid to scale, across several of the parcels representing what could be a future Village Center for Estero.

The places selected have been oriented and placed to represent a hypothetical development scenario that best relates to the Village Center node area, and it's immediate context, and may have been slightly modified to allow existing site features to remain visible for reference. The comparative sites were also selected because they represent a range of scales and programmatic focus that could be considered feasible for the US 41/Corkscrew location, depending on what the community's preferences were for this area. A brief description of each graphic representation and its implications for this site are as follows:

Fifth Avenue South, Naples
This example was chosen for obvious reasons -- it is close to Estero, and probably familiar to many of Estero's citizens. It is also a good example of smaller-scale, mixed-use development in the form of a small town neighborhood representing a classic network of small streets and blocks. Downtown Naples nonetheless supports a wide range of business and retail establishments, as well as fairly diverse array of housing options within walking distance of its primary commercial areas.

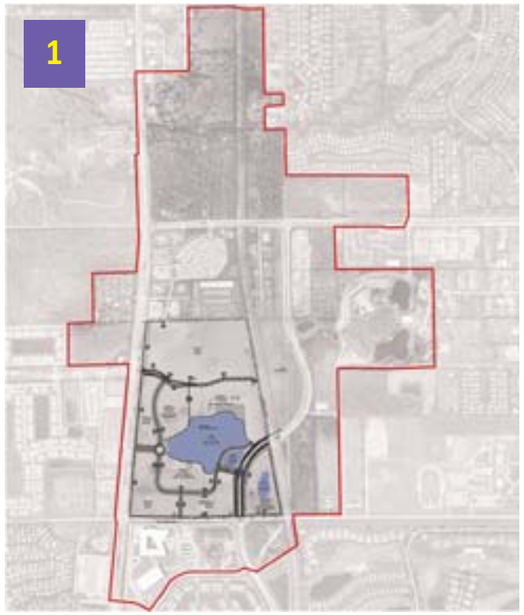
Park Avenue, Winter Park
Winter Park is similar in scale and character to downtown Naples, but has the additional distinction of a large downtown green, through which daily Amtrak service passes, and a small college. Though located within greater suburban Orlando, Winter Park retains its small town character of small, walkable streets, local parks, and charming homes. It is also a local destination for unique dining, and small scale shops and independent businesses.

Baldwin Park, Orlando
A suburban infill redevelopment of a former Naval Air Station, Baldwin Park has a mixed-use commercial main street serving the residents and workplaces within Baldwin Park, and the surrounding neighborhoods. It has a higher concentration of multifamily and single family attached housing immediately around its commercial district, as well as a large number of neighborhood parks, schools and other amenities.

City Place, West Palm Beach
The densest and most urban of the four comparables, City Place is really an extension of West Palm Beach's downtown fabric, and contains, in addition to residential and retail uses, several major civic amenities, including a large performing arts center and nearby civic center. It is also proximate to major employment centers, numerous schools, and a regional rail TOD. Though more intensely developed than anything currently envisioned for Estero's Village Center, it shows the inherent flexibility of the street and block approach to incremental development.

The following six images are intended to document the conceptual basis for a theoretical master plan, produced as an illustrative exercise to demonstrate how the principles described earlier in this report, could be applied to a specific, representative site.

The first image shows the current entitled development schematic, which assumes a half-dozen large development parcels connected by a single internal roadway.

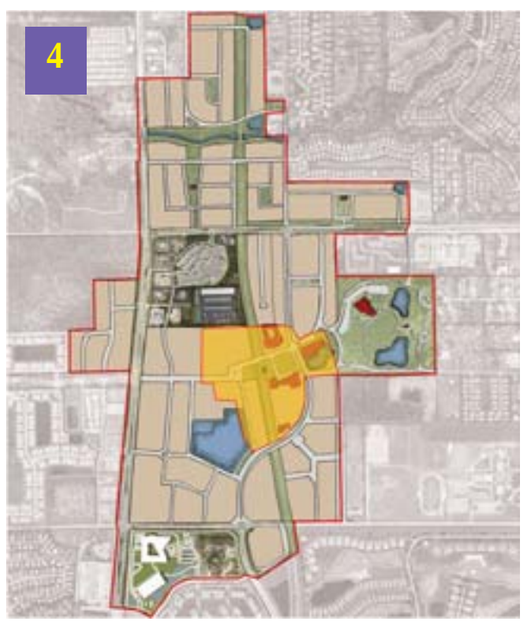


This second image shows how the original schematic plan diagram, with minimal changes, could be used as the basis for a much more flexible development plan, readily able to accommodate a wide-range of uses and building types in a flexible planning format supportive of walkable, mixed-use.

This image shows the overall framework plan for the entire Study Area, illustrating how large development parcels can be broken down into a finer grain network of streets and blocks. This plan also shows the introduction of a potential "civic" center that better leverages the value of the existing park, by connecting it with the North Point site, through the introduction of a new green corridor.

This fourth image introduces the idea of a special "Town Center" sub-area, which could take the form of a more explicitly defined overlay zoning district.

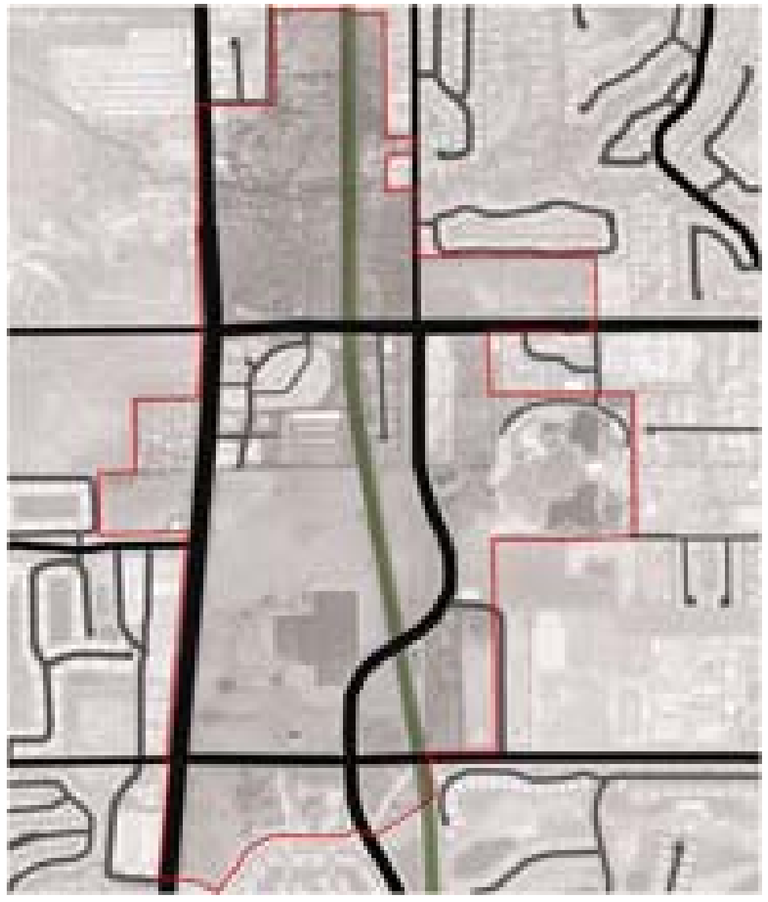
This sub-area would include the aforementioned civic center and green corridor, as well as a mixed-use village center area featuring more local businesses, and smaller scale retailers and local events of the type more typically associated with the idea of a traditional village center.



This image shows a more detailed representation of how the larger block-scale parcels can be efficiently sub-divided into even smaller development parcels, well suited for small-scale investors and development interests, dramatically increasing the market potential for these smaller lots, without compromising the value of the larger vision for the entire Village Center area.

This detailed plan illustrates a potential build-out scenario for the higher-density core of this node, including the proposed civic center.

This drawing shows the possibility of surface parking signature office buildings along US 41, anticipating the potential future intensification, even at this level of build out.

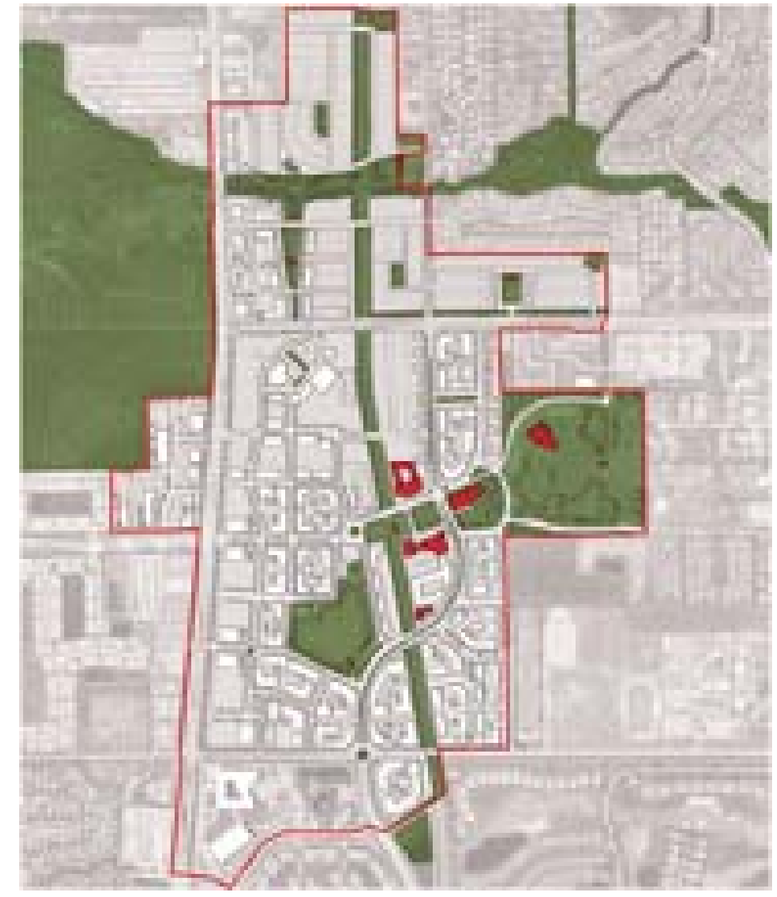


EXISTING STREET NETWORK

This diagram shows the existing street network, a disconnected network of isolated local streets juxtaposed against a large-scale network of very big, multilane arterials. This model is usually associated with a high-level of traffic congestion per relative density, particularly during peak periods (rush hour), since most local trips are required to use the same large-scale network more typically reserved for intra-regional trips.

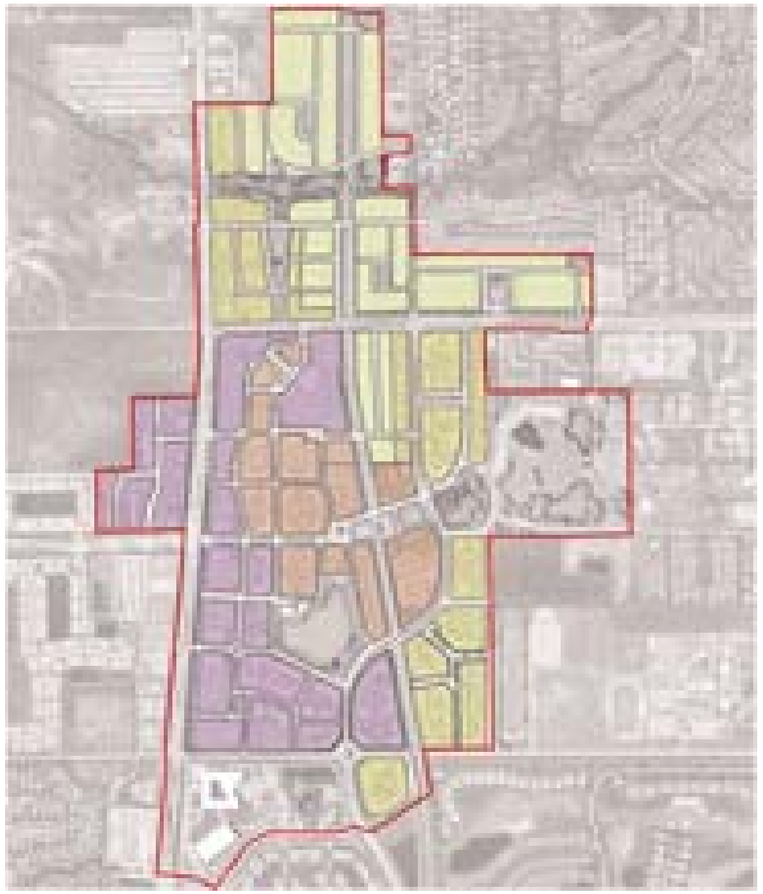
PROPOSED STREET NETWORK

The illustrative Village Center street network, on the other hand, disperses traffic through an efficient network of smaller-scaled streets, capturing most local trips within the neighborhood, thus reducing congestion on the primary arterials. Furthermore, this network facilitates the efficient and cost-effective distribution of basic utilities, typically requires no more asphalt than conventional suburban development, while creating significantly higher value through better access and visibility, and most importantly from a value point of view -- significantly more linear feet of property frontage, on attractive, walkable, amenity rich, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.



GREEN NETWORK

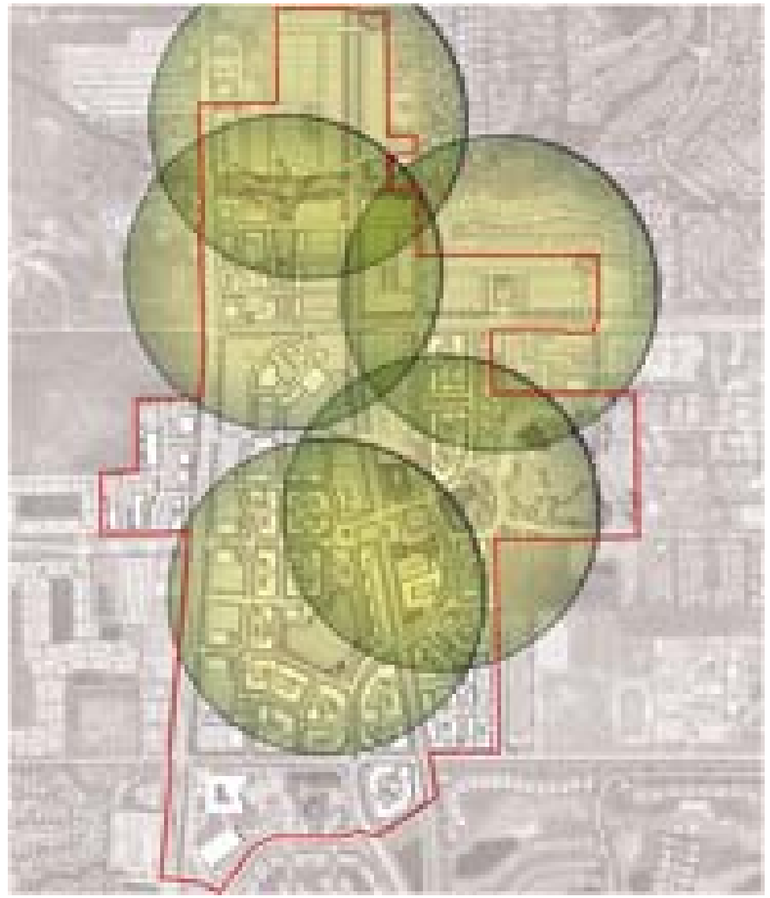
This plan diagram shows the potential of this node to link to meaningful green space through a network of natural, recreational and civic features and amenities including wildlife corridors, pristine natural waterways. Easy pedestrian and bicycle access to this green network from each neighborhood within the Village Center, will provide greater mobility for all ages, and add value to every use within the node, and a future light rail, and regional trail system would connect these amenities directly to the other nodes along the US 41 corridor.



ZONING

Though a range of regulatory tools are available to help ensure the efficient and accurate entitlement and implementation of both individual lots and large-scale parcels within the Study Area, this more form-based coding approach can be graphically represented in terms that would be immediately recognizable to anyone comfortable and familiar with a conventional land-use and zoning map.

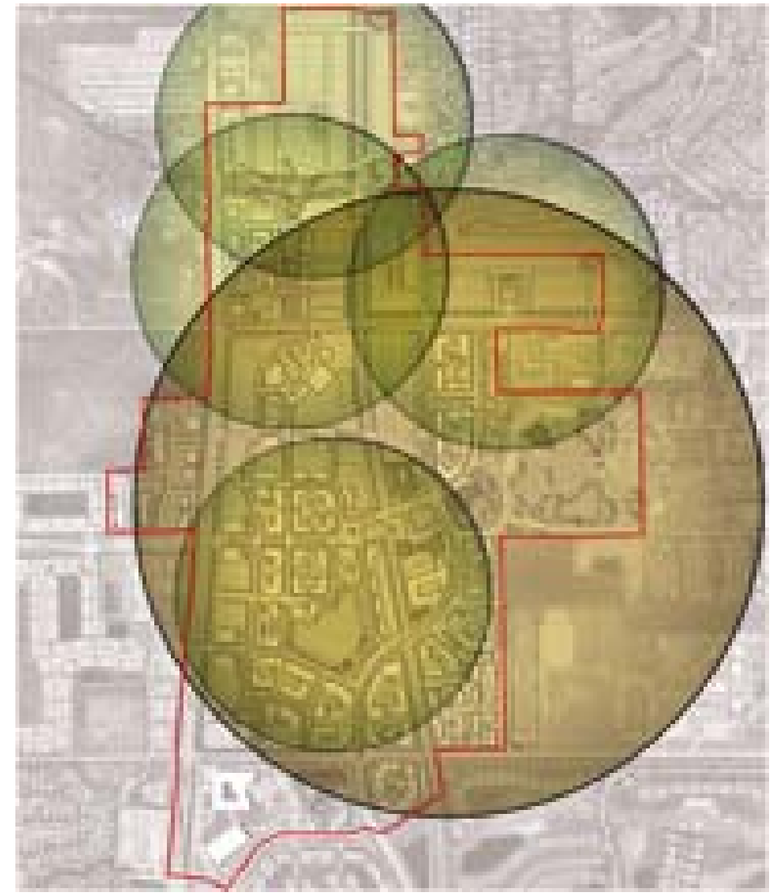
Additional tools could be used to provide even greater clarity and predictability, within a more flexible, integrated approach to zoning approval, resulting in greater market appeal and significantly higher net value than is often achieved though use-based zoning alone.



PEDESTRIAN SHEDS

A “pedestrian shed” is defined as the distance an average person can easily walk in 5 minutes, or about a 1/4 mile radius. Most traditional neighborhoods are based on this dimensional standard, a compact size which can easily accommodate a broad range of housing types, while providing easy access to local parks and daily needs.

This diagram shows that the Village Center node can accommodate between four and five “neighborhoods” within the Study Area, each of which can have its own unique character and flavor, which in turn, will help to define the Village Center in relation to Estero’s other core nodes.



TOD PEDESTRIAN SHEDS

TOD, or Transit-oriented development Pedestrian sheds, are similar to conventional pedestrian sheds, except that -- because they typically represent a less frequent, more “purpose-driven trip” than the more frequent and casual neighborhood walking trip -- they are assumed to have a larger ped shed. In this case, a 10 minute walking radius, or half-mile would normally encompass four neighborhoods.

The TOD ped shed illustrated is based on the possibility of a future rail stop at the Village/Civic Center, which would include the existing community park, and shows the potential of capturing additional community-scale recreational uses to the south and east of the potential station.

This model image, left, reflects an earlier conceptual sketch, showing much of the landscaping moving inside the block, while the buildings engage the surrounding community, and provides both convenience and security in an attractive package that reflects the latest market preferences

This character sketch, produced shortly after the second-day pinup session, captures the essence of "Village Center," A proposed village hall, foreground, flanks a new performing arts center, while across the town green, there is lakeside housing and a mixed-use commercial center.

This view of the Village Center sub-area, below, shows the "green" connection with the regional park in the form of a series of public spaces, both green and hardscaped, framed by various proposed civic uses including a new Village Hall, performing arts center, civic center/potential town library and future light rail station. Beyond that, a small-scale commercial area fronts a more urban lake edge, around which special events can be staged (i.e., farmers markets, art shows, wine festivals, etc.) among local boutiques, cafes and restaurants. To the immediate north of this area, a courtyard block, allows local residents to enjoy easy access to all of these amenities, within a short walk of home.

This scenario-based planning exercise, used a range of comparable projects, based on similar planning principles, to define a set of credible benchmarks against which a proposed design could be reasonably measured in terms of development program, effective yield, and economic performance. This was intended to inform an effective regulatory framework to support the kind of a flexible, incremental approach to long-term development described above.

In summarizing the key points which emerged from this exercise, several warrant specific mention:

- The primary N-S corridor comprising the Estero "core," covers too large an area to develop generically, either strategically or geographically. However, given the flexible parameters of compact, walkable, transit-supportive, mixed-use, it is possible to programmatically differentiate the three nodes, while maintaining the shared benefits of this approach. Given that, the northernmost node could most readily justify a Village Center designation, by consciously including community-serving civic uses as a significant component in the planning and development of this district, thereby setting the tone for the area.

- Though the Village Center will contain some types of retail uses, this is not intended to be just another large regional retail destination, or to have such a use as its primary focus. The difference here from the other mixed-use centers in the market will be in terms of emphasis – which in this case will be primarily on employment and housing – with the retail component intended to serve mostly locally-generated demand, and/or otherwise uses which support the notion of "village center" as a community gathering place.

- There was a lot of consideration given to the "mix" of uses in the Village Center area. Recognizing that some aspect of "live, work, play…" should, and likely will, be common throughout the Estero core, the additional emphasis here will be on "civic," which shall remain the defining feature of this area from the community's point of view, regardless of other uses. Having said that, with a total land area of 500+ acres to work with (over 350 developable), there is nothing to say that it couldn't, or shouldn't, also contain a major employment district, and/or variety of housing and live/work combinations, and still meet that definition.

- This approach is about expanding choice, in a format that can more readily accommodate a recovering market, without diluting the value of the Estero "brand." Individual parcels can be tailored for specific uses, including a combination of niche products that have greater collective appeal in the overall marketplace, while still reflecting a singular narrative vision. Properly planned and executed, this approach can add value both cumulatively and exponentially, building momentum as it goes, while still leaving ample opportunity for additional value

capture throughout the build out process.

- With the support of a robust regulating plan, an individual property owner could make smaller parcels available to the market right away, reserving the bulk of the property to sell later, as the market continues to recover, in the context of the larger vision. This approach maximizes the rate of return by managing debt service in the near term, without compromising the potential for long-term gains.

- In master planning each individual node, significant value can be gained by building on, and leveraging existing assets to maximize the value of the investment. This includes incorporating the existing regional park – currently an isolated and underutilized amenity -- into the civic area, and linking it to a larger green network, which anticipates the potential of a future transit station. By incorporating these disparate elements into a single, cohesive vision, the impact of each individual piece added to the mix is greatly enhanced (the whole outpaces the sum of the parts).

  Along the same lines, the value of marginal features, such as the existing lake on the North Point site, can be increased by harnessing it to serve multiple uses and interests. To illustrate the point, it was suggested that a lake that size could have both an urban edge for outdoor cafes, etc., including a waterfront plaza for events such as farmer's markets, art shows, wine festivals, etc., in addition to the more typical naturalistic treatments.

- Issues of density and security can be addressed through the use of building types and residential products specifically designed to work within this kind of flexible, modular system. These, in turn, can be marketed on the basis of life-style preference – balancing price, size and convenience, with similar quality, leaving the existing inventory of large-lot homes an attractive and viable alternative for the segment of the market which prefers a gated golf-course community lifestyle option.

- Examples shown of these types of products included multifamily courtyard buildings, which can provide a high level of privacy and security, in a premium courtyard garden environment, a few short steps from a mixed-use village center, at densities ranging from 8 to over 40 units per acre, depending on style and price point. For other building types and uses, options include smaller boutique hotels and inns, instead of more generic suburban hotel formats, and/or smaller, multi-tenanted office buildings with ground floor retail, in lieu of, or in addition to, more conventional suburban-style single-tenant, signature office buildings.

Important steps to move Estero forward:

- **Land-use changes to allow better growth**
- **A vital and growing local economy**
- **More housing & transportation choices**
- **Accessible & comprehensive health care**
- **A real "Village Center" for Estero**

Left, Estero needs to adopt a regulatory approach which will align land-uses to current market realities; diversify the economy, by pursuing jobs that will attract and retain skilled, younger workers; provide more housing and transportation choices which reflect changing demographic preferences; and provide adequate healthcare for its growing senior population, in the form of compact walkable communities; and create a "real" center for Estero, that everyone can identify with.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This document outlines a broad agenda intended to sustain Estero's enviable quality of life and market competitiveness far into the future. In order for this goal to be fully realized, a clear and robust regulatory framework needs to be established which will ensure that whatever future the citizens of Estero chooses for itself, that vision will be fully supported, through a flexible, principle-based model that reflects the increasing market preferences for compact, walkable, transit-ready mixed-use development.

Therefore, it is recommended that the following steps be taken following Estero's incorporation:

1. Build on the recent amendments to the Estero Community Plan by making these additional comprehensive plan amendments by late Spring 2015:

   a) Adopt a new overlay map that identifies the areas where new mixed-use planning standards would apply (and potentially a larger area where they might be optional). This map would include the village center (east of US 41 between the Estero River and Williams Road) and the healthcare village (surrounding the intersection of US 41 and Coconut Road).
   b) Adopt policies that describe generally how these new standards will be applied. Higher densities would be allowed in traditional mixed-use patterns (city blocks and a network of walkable streets). Conceptual regulating plans would be adopted into the land development code to provide more predictability to developers. The new review process would consider these mixed-use areas as future interconnected neighborhoods instead of isolated development projects.

2. The Village Council should simultaneously commission the preparation of regulating plans and supporting standards such as block sizes, street connectivity, and building types that could be used in the new mixed-use code. The regulating plans would be created with input from affected landowners and the public.

3. Within one year, the Village Council should adopt detailed comprehensive plan amendments that implement these concepts. At that time, the Village Council should also adopt a set of coordinated code amendments. New density allowances for the mixed-use areas would be tied to a streamlined review process, which would be based on Lee County's compact community's code:

   a) An initial framework would be adopted by the Village that shows city blocks, interconnected local streets, and transect zones. Amendments to the adopted framework could be proposed by master developers using the LDC amendment process.
   b) A secondary framework would be approved for blocks or groups of blocks, specifying building types and ranges of uses. This secondary framework would be proposed by individual developers through the development order process (just prior to subdividing lots).

4. The Village Council should create a village design office to coordinate and administer the new mixed-use processes and provide design review services to the Village Council and its advisory boards.