Estero, Florida
Planning Workshop
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Seth Harry & Associates, Inc.

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The Consultant Team would like to thank all of the participants for their time and interest in this process, and in particular, both ECCL and the Lutgert Companies for their support.

Also, the Team would like to express its appreciation to Bill Spikowski of Spikowski Planning Associates and Jeff Mudgett of Parker Mudgett Smith Architects for contributing their thoughts and insights to this effort.

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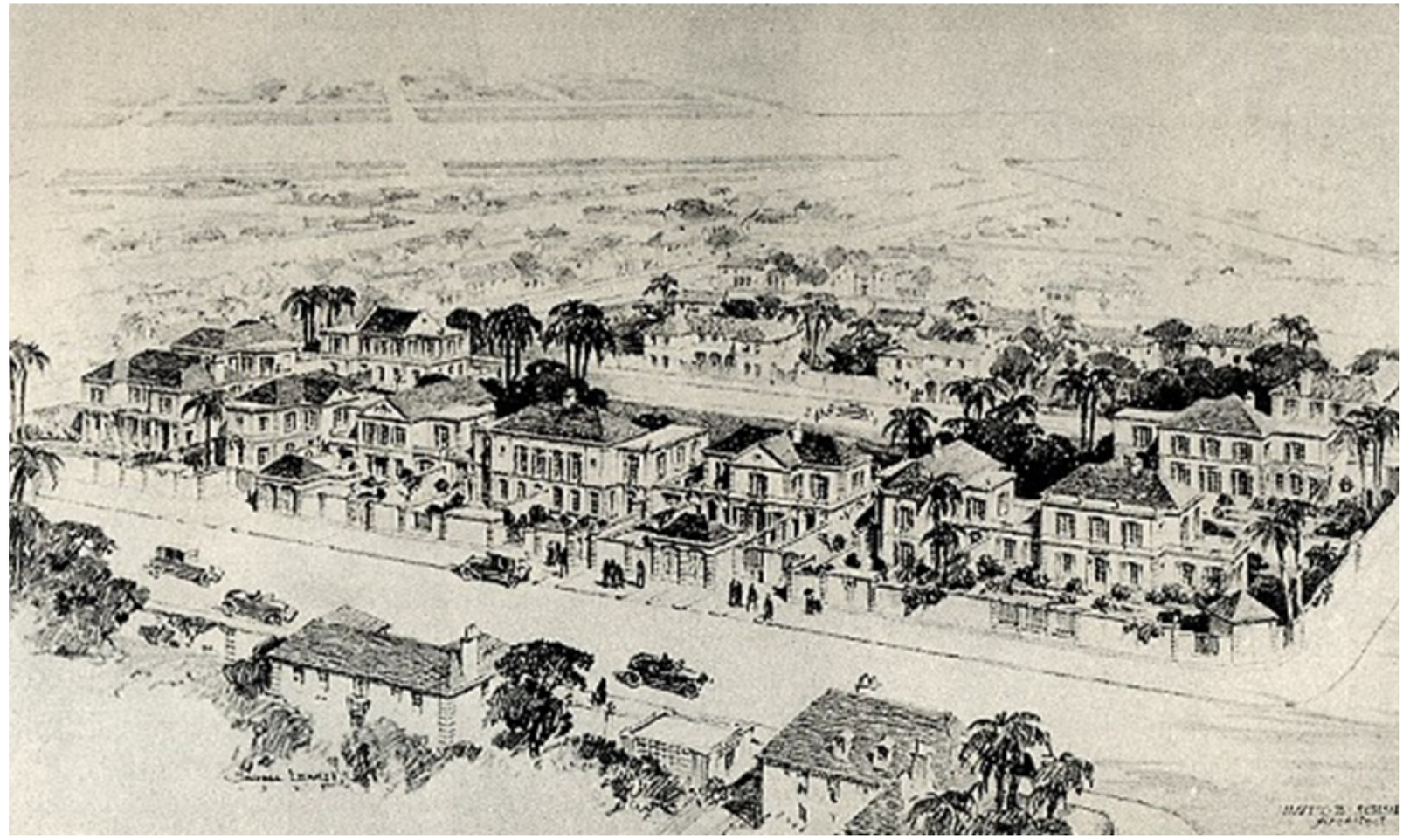


Above: One example which was used to inform the discussion which generated this report -- An artist's rending of a block of elegant single-family homes contained within a continuous perimeter wall, allows the residents to participate fully in the life of the community while still enjoying an additional degree of privacy and security. Coral Gables, circa 1924

Background and Overview:

As the third phase of a year-long effort intended to help redefine Estero's market position, post-downturn, the Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) and its consultant team, including Seth Harry and Associates, Inc., Architects and Planners, and Colliers International, with the financial assistance of the Lutgert Company, undertook a three-day strategic planning workshop during the week of February 23rd, 2014, to test many of the findings and conclusions that came out of the previous two phases of this strategic positioning exercise, which took place last year.

The purpose of this overall effort was to revisit and update general market assumptions, based on current trends, and in the process develop a conceptual strategic response to those assumptions, which also incorporates larger policy goals and objectives. Finally, the primary focus of this recent planning workshop was to undertake a scenario-based planning exercise to test the validity of those market assumptions and policy tools as a practical consideration, in part, through the use of a comparative yield analysis. The intent was to demonstrate that the general market trend toward walkable mixed-use development, employing a broad range of residential product types specifically tailored to this market, done right, could help to expedite the recovery of the local real estate market, while optimizing property valuations/return on investment by shifting the programmatic bias away from retail, without undermining or diluting the perceptual value of Estero's well-earned brand in the region.

The study area for this workshop was chosen from of one of three nodes previously identified for more intensive development. The three nodes, referred to as the Town Center node, the Coconut Point node, and the Medical District node, 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 Coconut Road on the south. The Town Center node -- the northernmost of the three -- was chosen as the subject of this workshop because it contained the largest undeveloped parcel within the corridor, and seemed well positioned for near-term development within a longer-term strategic context. However, the process as a whole could be readily applied to any of the other nodes

The approach taken for the workshop itself comprised several distinct stages -- the first being to define the larger "Town Center" context in more specific terms, relating to both the five-hundred plus acres of the overall study area, including an existing regional park, as well as the North Point development site --the previously mentioned parcel most typically associated with this area. The next stage looked at a range of analogous projects, overlaid to scale on the North Point site, to provide a basis of comparison with the pre-existing development proposal for North Point, in terms of market performance and investment criteria.

The rationale for this comparative analysis was to provide both a point of departure for the design team and a common frame of reference for framing the discussions to come. Following this initial exercise, several alternative development proposals for the North Point site and overall study area were generated for review and comment by the workshop participants at the interim pin-up, before a final preferred scheme was selected for further refinement and discussion, to be summarized for review and comment on the final day of the workshop.

This document is a compilation and summary overview of the work that took place during the workshop, leading to that final product.

These slide images describe some of the backgraund and guiding principles relating to the workshop. The slide image at the lower right describes the workshop approach itself.

Background and Purpose of Workshop:

- Revisit and update market assumptions post-downturn
- Develop conceptual strategic response which incorporates larger policy goals and objectives
- Undertake scenario-based planning exercise to test validity of market assumptions and comparative yields

Suggested Strategic Principles:

- Build Places, and not just Projects (build the collective brand/exponential returns)
- "Heads I win, tails you lose" (move beyond the zero sum game model)
- Eclectic in Type and Style (but consistent in Quality and Execution)
- Build Cumulatively toward Value (the benefits of incremental development)
- General compliance with County's Compact Communities planning guidelines

Workshop Approach:

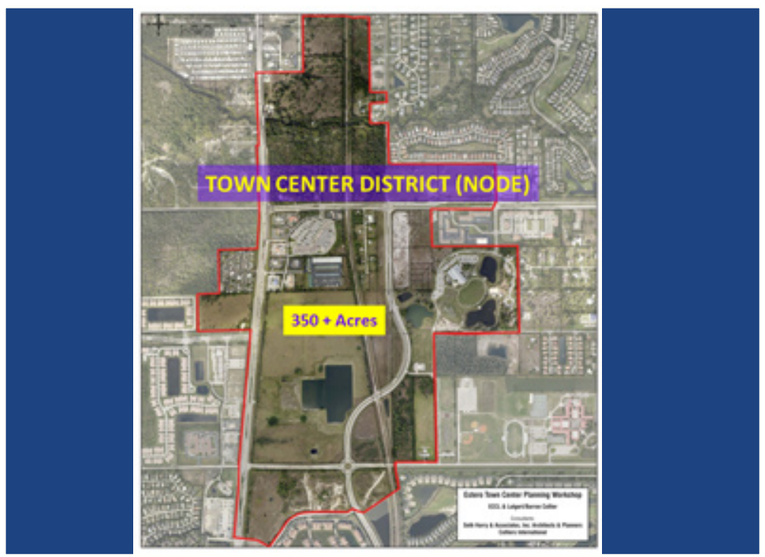
- Look at larger "Town Center" context in informing site-specific responses
- Compare with other examples which reflect a range of marketpreferences and investment criteria
- Measure and compare relative yields against other market factors and considerations
- Generate useful end-products that canbe used to facilitate further discussion

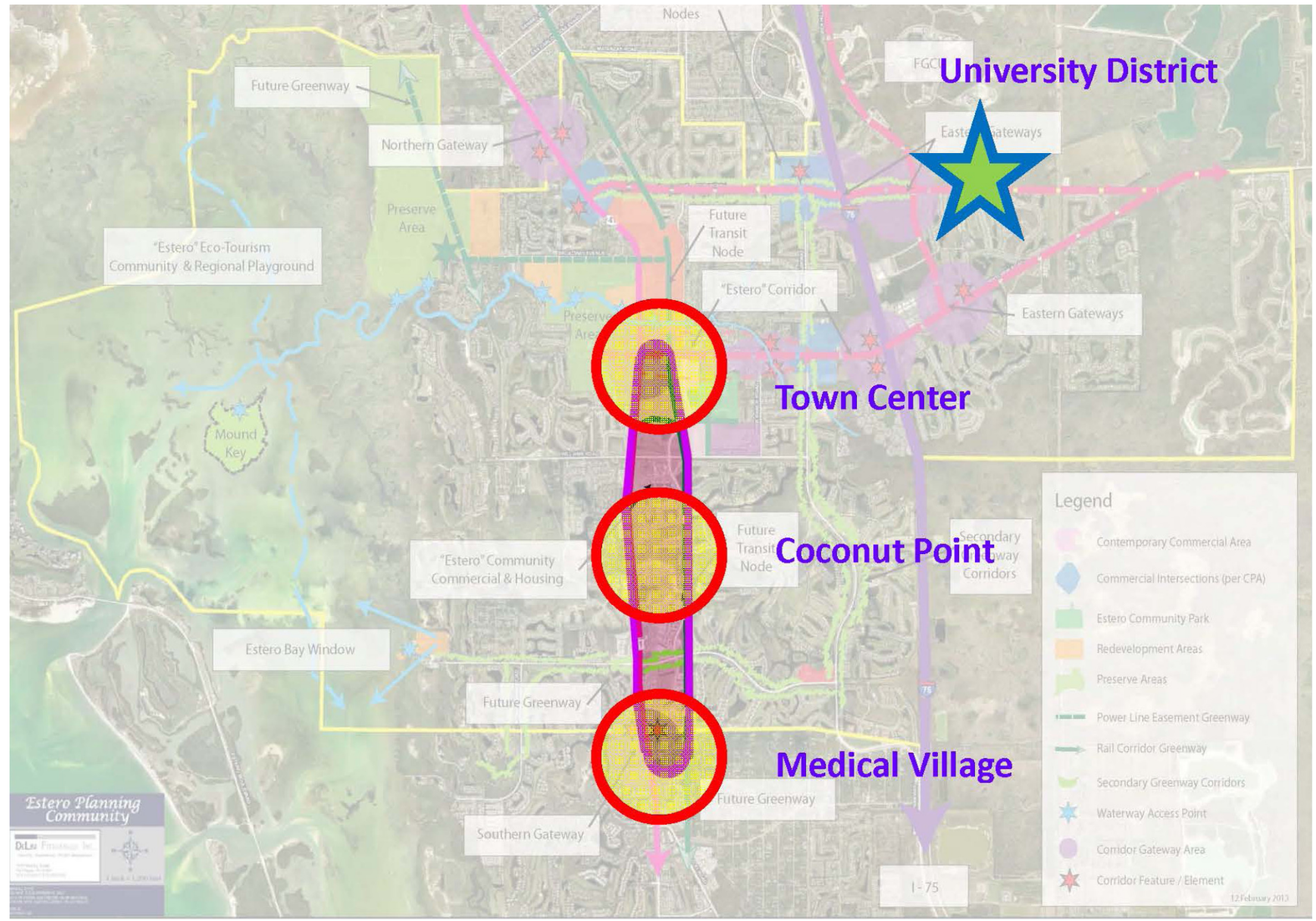
Site Context and Study Area Definition:

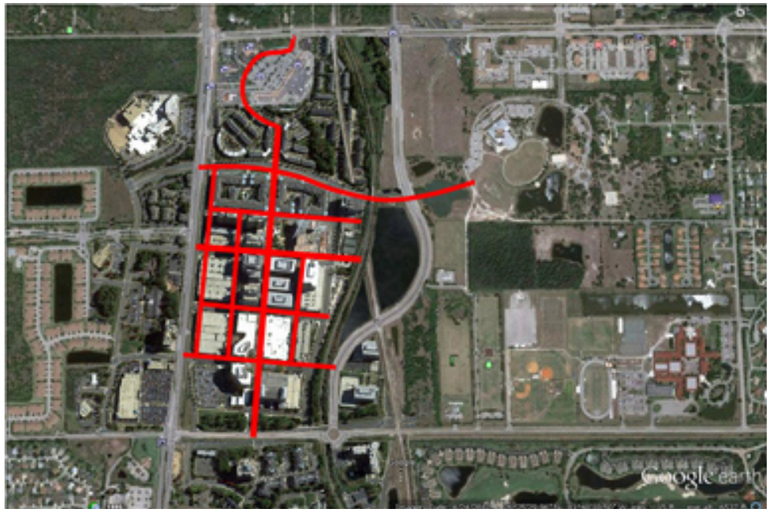
Based on the market study and positioning discussions that preceded this workshop, it was understood and agreed upon that the Estero core itself was too large to be developed based exclusively on a single, generic market approach, but instead, should be broken down into more distinct sub-areas which reflect some of the existing land-uses and maximize the development potential of each area based on their respective attributes and characteristics, allowing for more focused appeal and market capture.

A fourth development node associated with the Florida Gulf Coast University campus had also been identified, in general terms, but due to the complex mix of interests in that area, and the broader market potential that node represents, detailed conversations on that area were considered beyond the scope of this study, at this time. By the same token, because of the short duration of this strategic planning exercise, and for reasons previously described, the workshop study area was limited to just the Town Center node, with the assumption that relative lessons learned would have general application throughout the core, which could be similarly explored in subsequent workshops, and/or as part of a community-wide visioning process that could take place at a later date.

The image below shows the extent of the Study Area, while the one at right shows the Town Center node in the context of the larger Estero "Core," as well as the University District







ABOVE: EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE INCREMENTAL DEVELOPMENT

South Lake Union (Seattle, Washington)

"5 Place to live next: Where you'll want to be in 2016..."

Seattle Metropolitan

Left: Two examples of incremental infill development/densification where shown, overlaid to scale on the site. The first example on top shows how a big box retail center, with an adjoining mixed-use component, could be subdivided into future higher-density, mixed-use parcels in the form of streets and blocks. The second example, below, shows Reston Town Center, which developed from the very beginning on the basis of a street and block network, densifying with each subsequent phase, on the basis of an increase in land valuations due in part to the quality of the preceding phase.

Right: South Lake Union, north of Seattle's downtown, is an area of former low-density industrial and light commercial uses, which has been redeveloping as a higher-density, mixed-use tech office district, with multi-family residential above ground floor shops, cafes, and restaurants. The slide shows that the buildings comprising this employment area are essentially no different from what is being built alongside most suburban freeway exchanges, but the walkable, mixed-use format has made it one of Seattle's hottest new neigbhorhoods, one that is able to effectively support transit.

Opening Presentation and Discussion

Following general introductions and opening remarks by Don Eslick, and a brief summary of the larger market positioning initiative to date, the process began with a brief statement confirming that, although this was not a public process in the conventional sense, many of the key stakeholders who might be expected to participate in such a process were present, along with local community leaders who could be expected to fairly represent the interests of the broader Estero population, until such time as a more formal public process could be organized and funded. In that sense, the workshop would serve as a non-binding exploratory exercise in which the participants could vet and discuss various options and scenarios in a frank and open-minded fashion to better inform policy considerations in the future.

The opening presentation touched on critical agenda items for the workshop, including the need to identify and document emerging opportunities which could be tapped to regain lost market value in this area as represented by the land costs/investments pre-downturn, benchmarked against the current entitlement, and other relevant examples, as presented in the scale-comparative exercise. It is anticipated that the final work-products from this workshop can be used to help define the capacity and feasibility limits of the site, based on the analogues used, in relation to an informed consensus among the participants regarding what the market would support, and what the community might be willing to accept, as a model for future development within Estero.

Also, in addition to the consultant team represented by Seth Harry and Associates, Colliers International had four people in attendance who contributed to this workshop. These were: Tim Bristow, senior vice-president who also maintains a second home in Estero, and Alexandra Cozart, both in sales and marketing with the company, along with Jim Garinger, the local Colliers managing representative, and independent branding consultant, Geoff Arnoldi.

Colliers International's opening remarks focused on developing a "Go to Market" strategy, which looked at Estero within its local, regional, state, and national market context, and how to tailor a market positioning strategy and associated physical plan in response to specific market drivers and metrics including price -- total cost of occupancy, timing, and sales velocity; a time table for implementation and phasing; and risk – where is the market heading and what type of tenants should we be targeting.

Within that overarching context, other issues that may influence/impact the effectiveness of this model, including perceived hurdles, were discussed. These could include factors such as the quality of the local school system, relative level of business friendliness/entitlement and regulatory framework, etc., any of which might enhance or detract from the community's attractiveness to targeted industries. As with the scenario-based physical planning exercise, a significant aspect of creating a successful market positioning strategy for a particular place or locale involves defining the narrative one uses to describe that place to others, and staging the conversation that results.

Colliers described this in terms of a "Market Identity Model," broken down as follows:

- Phase 1 – Create the Offer
- Phase 2 – The Relationship: Who are we marketing to?
- Phase 3 – Building the value equation
- Phase 4 – Conversation/choice

In looking at how to coordinate the physical planning side with the market positioning side, particularly as it might apply to particular industry groups and/or types of end users (i.e., Fortune 500 companies), Colliers laid out an approach based on what they referred to as a "targeted marketing strategy," intended to identify potential candidates within a primary, secondary, and tertiary market context.

This was further detailed in terms of industry types and sizes, and potential motivators which might trigger a move, including various incentives, strategic location advantages, brand presence, and – most relevant to this exercise – being a part of a vibrant and growing community. A final consideration discussed was the need to develop a communications strategy which focused on a three tiered approach designed to first create awareness, and then add understanding, with the ultimate goal being to influence the decision makers in choosing Estero as the preferred location for their business.

The Hertz Factor

The introduction of Colliers to the team, with an approach designed to attract high-profile extra-regional business enterprises, grew out of the recognition that even though the market recovery was likely going to be led by housing, it would ultimately need to be sustained by growth in employment. This would help to not only replace retail as the major value driver, but also help to build a consumer market to not only help support the retail already on the ground, but any additional retail that would be added to the market as part of a conscious policy to build compact, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods within Estero's core.

Given that, the opening discussion -- as well as the planning and implementation strategy which followed, initially adhered to this assumption. While Hertz's decision to relocate to Estero may not have been entirely influenced, or influenced at all, by the kind of strategic narrative described by Colliers, the fact that they did make that decision still represented an opportunity to create an effective marketing campaign around their move as a potential catalyst to encourage other national corporations to consider Estero an attractive option in any relocation plan.

Based on that thinking, the consultant team initially looked at this possibility as one approach to kick-starting a more ambitious development program for the North Point site and – as part of their scale comparison analysis -- deliberately included examples of projects which had a significant proportion of office as an integral component of a long-term build-out scenario. However, even those projects assumed a more flexible implementation strategy which allowed them to adjust to changing market dynamics without compromising their underlying vision. This allowed projects of a scale similar to that of North Point the ability to market effectively for the short-term, even in a down market, while leaving open the possibility to create and capture future value at magnitudes greater than what the market could later sustain, and in the case of one example, actually redefine that market as a consequence of their strategic thinking.

Two examples featured in the opening presentation represented two proven models for pursuing this idea: the first being an incremental approach of densification using a sequential model of street and block development that converts existing surface parking lots into developable parcels; the second approach assumes a more suburban model, short-term, with the potential to subdivide large, existing surface lots into a smaller network of finer-grained streets and blocks, able to support a more diverse array of building types and uses.

SCALE COMPARISONS

The slide below shows five scale comparatives discussed during the opening presentation. The detailed description and relevance of each is covered on the following page

Case Studies

- Fifth Avenue
- Winter Park
- Baldwin Park
- City Place
- Reston Town Center

FIFTH AVENUE, NAPLES, FLORIDA

This scale comparison shows Fifth Avenue, Naples, running from US 41 all the way to the beach, reoriented in a north-south direction, and flipped for this comparison, stretching from Williams Road on the south, up to Corkscrew Road, on the north. A body of water that exists in Naples has been enlarged in this graphic comparison to represent the existing lake on the site.

The significance of this example for comparison is to show that relatively high densities can still be achieved in a low-rise, mixed-use neighborhood format the has both high values, and a high quality pedestrian environment, at a very human scale. It also shows how much of the surrounding residential fabric can be included along a very modest, primarily commercial thoroughfare.

RESTON TOWN CENTER, RESTON, VIRGINIA

This scale comparison shows Reston Town Center, in Reston, Virginia, superimposed to scale on the North Point site. Because North Point, unlike Fifth Av enue, doesn't enjoy the proximity to breachfront which Naples provides, Reston's higher-density reflects another way to achieve higher land valuations, assuming that the demand to support this higher density can be sustained.

This example was intended to suggest how a strategic approach built around the idea of a premier office district might be one way to successfully acheive this goal. This model also speaks directly to the idea of incremental development within the framework of an overarching master plan, which would allow for a more measured supply of product relative to demand, while still setting a clear tone for marketing and developing subsequent phases.

The actual Reston Town Center also demonstrates the potential to transition fairly quickly, over a relatively short distance, from this kind of higher-density central business district (CBD) to a relative low-density,residential fabric, if need be, without compromising the value and attractiveness of either.

PARK AVENUE, WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

Park Avenue, Winter Park, Florida, is another Florida scale comparative. Winter Park is similar to Fifth Avenue in scale, feel, and relative density, but is not ocean or gulf proximate, though the areas has several lakes nearby, as well as a town park, small college, and rail service.

Its relevance to Estero is in how some of the site features could be tailored to enhance the attractiveness of the adjoining residential neighborhoods, how the retail can be more community-focused (though it has added several national chain tenants in more recent times), and how potentially a branch of Florid Gulf Coast Univerity, and/or a local community college, could help to anchor North Point as both part of Estero, and a distinct place in its own right.

BALDWIN PARK, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Baldwin Park is a new, walkable, mixed-use, traditional community built on a reclaimed military airfield in the greater Orlando area. Though larger than the Town Center study area in total (only the North Point site was used for the scale comparison), it is very relevant in terms of showing how a traditional neighborhood serves as an ideal model for the planning and development of this area.

Baldwin Park is primarily driven by its residential offerings, which reflect a broad range of product types which would be very attractive to the market demographics identified by the market study as part of the repositioning strategy. However, it also has neighborhood-oriented retail, aimed primarily at serving its own internal consumer market, so it would not add to the net surplus of commercially zoned and entitled land that served as the cataylst for this process. Finally, it incorporates a number of community-scaled, community serving recreational facilities, parks, and amenities that are consistent with the attributes and characteristics normally associated with a traditional "Town Center" designation, as so comprehensively conceived and realized.

CITY PLACE, WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

This final scale comparative combines two separate places to illustrate how seemingly different kinds of environments can actually reside very comfortably in close proximately to one another, in a well designed, well executed plan. This approach could allow different parts of the Town Center to independently appeal to very different segments of the market, maximizing value and absorption, without competing with each other, while still adding up to a very attractive place to live and work at the end of the day.

The two places making up this illustration include City Place, near downtown West Palm Beach,Florida, a walkable mixed-use residential and commercial center, which include several major civic elements including a performing arts center, a civic center, and a school for the performing arts, and a close-in residential neighborhood bordering downtown Coral Gables, Florida.

This part of the plan was chosen because of the wide range of scale and density represented by the residential types, from large, estate-type homes fronting a large public green, to multi-unit courtyard apartment buildings, to small lot, single-family detached homes, all highly desirable, and all within walking distance of jobs, and local shopping, and recreational opportunities.

Discussion/Q & A

Questions and discussions following the opening presentation were fairly limited. One concern was the need for a more specific definition of the term "Town Center," a descriptor that had been widely used in relation to this area, but as yet, not well defined. Another question, following on the general discussion relating to job growth, spoke to the issue of housing types, based on the need to attract the kinds of workers needed to support and appeal to the kinds of businesses which Estero would be strategically targeting, and the physical contexts (walkable, mixed-use, amenity rich, transit-served, etc.) these kinds of workers crave.

A final question related to the types of incentives which might be offered to attract these businesses, with a preference stated for a "menu" of options, versus a specific plan. Potential responses to all of the issues raised were felt by the group to be compatible with the general approach discussed during the opening presentation, and therefore a more detailed commentary was deferred until later in the process when actual plans would be available for specific critique.

Other comments included the observation that a physical plan is helpful in terms of framing issues for the County government to react to, and a general discussion regarding the potential for transit, long-term, utilizing the existing railroad right-of-way which runs along the eastern border of the study area, as well as the core, and therefore, the critical need to respect and maintain this ROW throughout the planning exercise and as a policy goal. Potential station locations mentioned included Coconut Road, Corkscrew Road, Alico Road, the University, and the Outlet Mall.

These locations fit in well with the general framework plan for the Estero Core, and would help to further tie Estero to the region, specifically Florida Gulf Coast University, the airport, and Fort Myers.

Interim Pin-up

Keeping with the very tight schedule, the consultant team did their one and only interim pin-up of work-in-progress on the second afternoon of the event (though the studio was open for portions of the workshop for drop-in visits, as well as to sit in on internal pin-ups). This was a very short window in which to develop some of the initial concepts, even by the standards of this type of effort, however, three or four distinct plan concepts were developed for review and comment.

All of the comments presented for consideration at the opening session were incorporated in the design process on the basis of showing the entire study area at theoretical build-out. Furthermore, each concept plan was predicated on the assumption that some form of incremental intensification would be part of the implementation strategy, and at least for this first pin-up, by presuming some form of catalytic impact from Hertz. Also, because there were some attendees at the interim review and comment session who were not at the opening presentation, the decision was made to revisit some elements of the initial presentation to help clarify the implementation rationale behind the plan concepts, and to facilitate/encourage discussion on the idea of an incremental approach, in general.

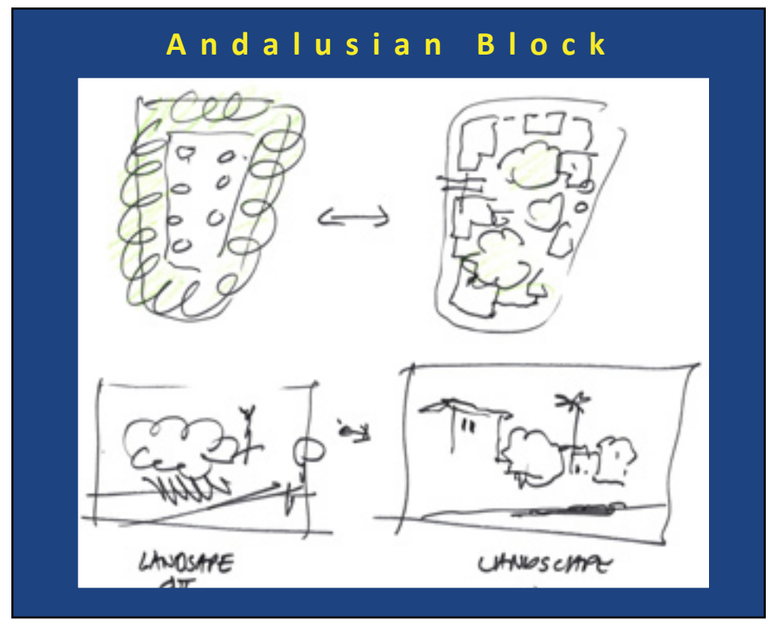
This involved revisiting the question of scale as it pertained to the North Point site, starting with a picture of the parcelization map submitted for the property's original entitlement application, and comparing it to a more flexible, fine-grained approach that breaks the site into smaller modular components (blocks) designed to accommodate a more flexible range of uses and building types. This model prioritizes complementary form over restrictive use, to create an end product whose cumulative value far exceeds the sum of its parts. A scale overlay showing all of 5th Avenue Naples, from US 41 west to the beach, easily fitting within the confines of the North Point site, was used to illustrate the point.

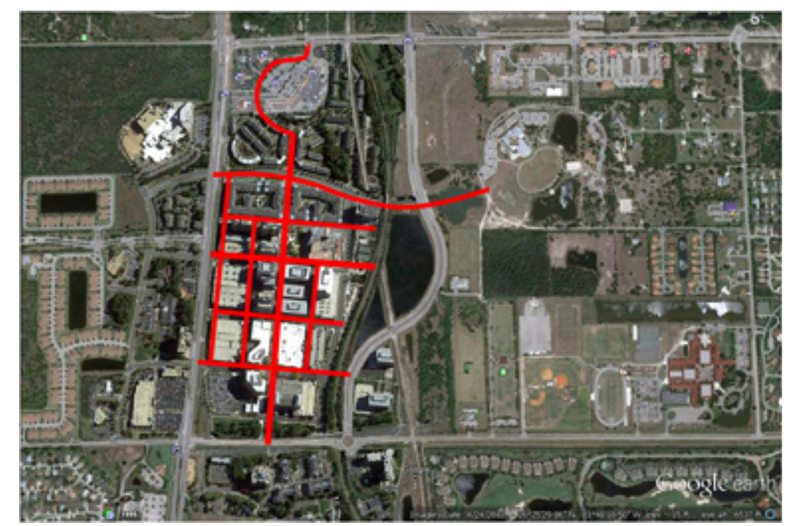
Another point to be made by this illustrative exercise was the demonstrated ability to precisely modulate both density and use in a much more sensitive way than is otherwise possible using the large-parcel model that typified much of the recent commercial development along the US 41 corridor. The scale comparatives showed that it is possible to develop a dedicated area within the Town Center node that related more to the US 41 frontage, as well as the proposed Hertz development, than the site as a whole, which could effectively function as the local equivalent of a CBD (Central Business District). This could be done while still allowing for a graduated range of density which would allow for single-family homes to abut existing single-family homes on the Town Center's northern and eastern edges.

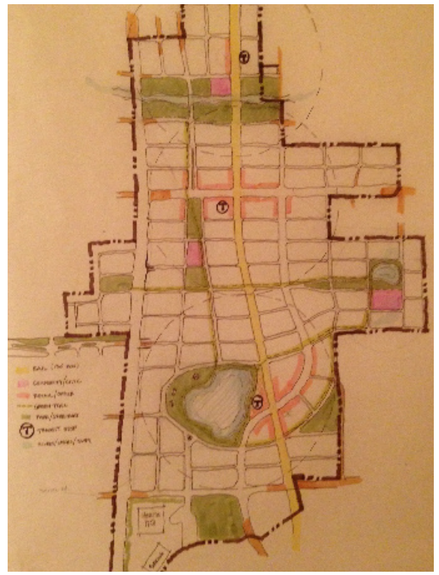
Strategies for densification and value creation/value capture were again presented and discussed; including the two outlined in the previous day's opening presentation -- an incremental development approach which endeavors to maximize market-feasible density right away, versus post-development densification which relies on infill development and future sub-parcelization to create new development opportunities within an existing suburban market context. The first model pushes the market envelope while controlling the pace of development to maintain value, while the latter assumes a more market-driven initial offering, with densification/value capture to follow. Both models are meant to maximize rate-of-return by minimizing debt carry in the short term, without compromising long-term potential.

In talking about options for densifying housing types to maximize return on underlying land costs, but also as way to provide for a greater diversity of demographically driven lifestyle preferences, the idea of introducing new building types to the market -- such as courtyard apartments -- was presented as a sort of "Rappallo two-point-0." Additionally, the idea of bringing the landscaping buffer inside the wall, while allowing the building itself to engage the wall, such that it remains a more integral part of the community that surrounds it, was presented (see illustration).

At the interim pin-up, in addition to revisiting the idea of incremental development as a model for maximizing rate of return and long-term value, concepts inspired from the scale-comparative analysis, adapted to the Estero market, were conceptually represented (below)







Discussion/Q & A

As an interim pin-up representing the first physical expression of these ideas specifically applied to the study area, this session generated a lot of discussion, including some confusion and debate over the credibility of some of the underlying assumptions. Most of these concerned the relative validity of a strategic plan presumably based on the successful likelihood of attracting a significant number of nationally-ranked companies to the area, versus a model which assumes more of a generic mixed-use program and/or simply a more mixed-bag array of uses distributed throughout the North Point site in an ad-hoc fashion, albeit one still tempered by some type of form-based, modular development approach.

In anticipating a question of "how do we get there from here?" the consultant team stated that the apparent focus on attracting nationally-ranked companies to the site was, in fact, just one of several potential marketing strategies which could be used to help catalyze and stimulate higher-value development along the corridor (building on the success of Hertz), but certainly not the only one. Nor was it necessarily an either/or issue, as the scale comparison examples clearly demonstrated that the site could easily accommodate a more intensively developed office driven sub-area (the aforementioned CBD), without precluding the ability to actively market the remainder of the site to (and attract) a wide variety of other uses, including both residential and locally-serving commercial uses.

Other topics discussed during this session related to issues touched on repeatedly over the past 12 months, including the need to reconsider the amount of currently entitled retail space in the market, previously documented in the market report, and whether or not proven regulatory tools exist to facilitate such change (short answer – yes) and how this need to dramatically reduce the amount of retail space in Estero also provides a viable opportunity to reconsider how Estero positions itself, moving forward, in anticipation of changing demographics.

Final questions/comments concerned other potential uses besides the office mix initially presented, and these would include most of the types of uses already allowed for and accommodated by the existing Estero zoning code, although these would probably need to be accommodated in a different form to better fit the strategic vision for the Town Center, and to help minimize incidental impacts to surrounding communities.

One question, in particular, strongly informed the direction the team pursued for the final design and presentation related to another subject that had surfaced repeatedly over the preceding months, and that was, how does one define the term "town center," recognizing that it has different meanings for different people? That was a question that would clearly need to be addressed, and hopefully answered by this workshop.

Right/Left: On the afternoon of the second day of the workshop, four conceptual master plans and one detail plan of the commercial area were presented for review and comment by the participants.

Many of the ideas and concepts discussed from the day one comparative analysis were incorporated into the proposed designs, which generated a good deal of useful feedback.

Final Presentation

The final presentation was presented in a PowerPoint slide show, which started out by briefly restating the overall goals and objectives for the entire 12 month process, culminating in this workshop, the purpose of which was to explore these strategic concepts in a physical form that could be rationally discussed and validated, through a shared frame of reference.

The workshop itself was designed as a scenario-based planning exercise, using a range of comparable projects based on similar principles to define a set of credible benchmarks against which any proposed design could be reasonably measured in terms of development program, effective yield, and economic performance. This, in turn, would ideally serve as the basis for an effective regulatory framework in support of a flexible, incremental approach to long-term development specifically designed to add value to the existing community, and the property owner's bottom line.

In summarizing the key points which emerged from the workshop, several stand out. These are as follows:

- The primary North-South corridor comprising the Estero "core" covers too large an area to develop generically, strategically as well as geographically, even given the flexible parameters ("compact, walkable, transit-supportive, mixed-use") which provide a preferred development model. Therefore, some notion of differentiation is both warranted and recommended. Within that context, one facet of the northernmost node that might justify a Town Center designation is a conscious decision to include community-serving civic uses as an overt component in the planning and development of this district, and to allow those uses to help set the tone for the area.

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

- There was a lot of discussion regarding the "mix" of uses in the Town Center area. Recognizing that some aspect of "live, work, play…" should be, 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 also contain a major office district, and/or a wide variety of housing and live/work combinations, and still meet that definition.

- This approach is not about reducing choice, but about expanding it, in a format that can be more readily accommodated and valued by a still recovering market. Individual parcels can still be tailored for more specific uses, including a combination of niche products that have greater collective appeal in the overall marketplace, while still reflecting a singular narrative vision. In other words -- selling both an idea and a place. Properly planned and executed, this approach can build value both cumulatively and exponentially, building momentum as it goes, while still leaving ample opportunity for additional value capture throughout the build-out process.

- By acting as a master developer within a well-articulated master plan and implementation model, a property owner could make "bite size" parcels available to the market right away, while reserving the bulk of the property to sell later, as the market continues to recover. This approach can help to enhance long-term rates of return by managing debt service in the short term, without compromising the potential for long-term gains. This model could even be applied to larger sub-parcels more typical of how sites of this scale are often subdivided.

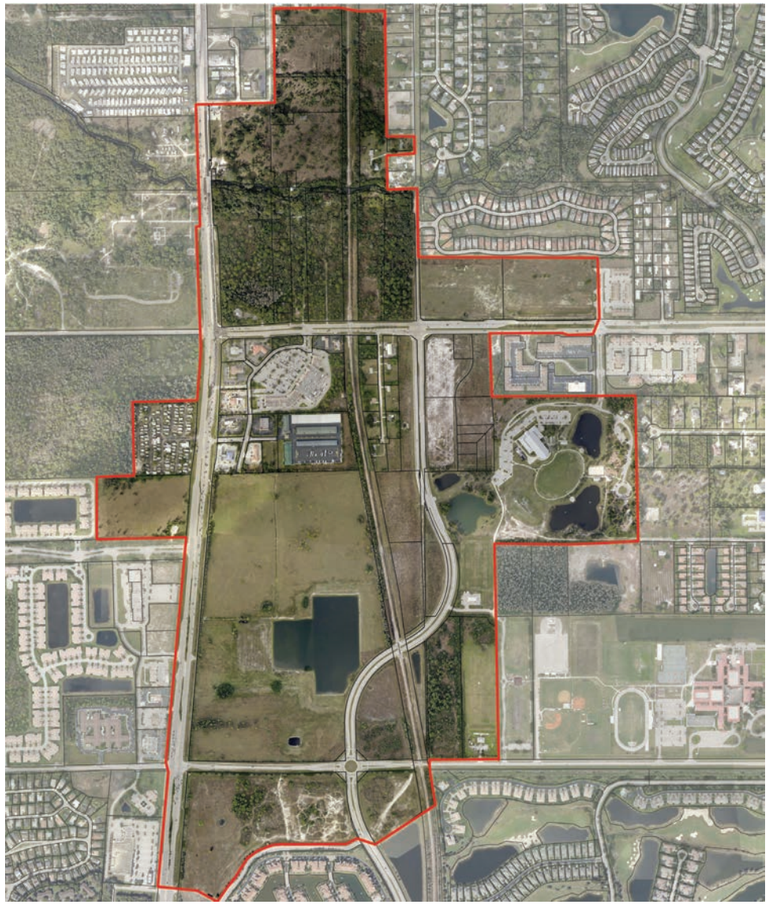
- In master planning the overall Study Area, significant value can be gained by building on, or leveraging, existing assets to maximize the benefit per investment. This includes incorporating the existing regional park, currently an isolated and underutilized amenity, into the civic area and linking it to a larger green network, and by anticipating the potential of a future transit station. The more these disparate elements can be incorporated into a single, comprehensive vision, the greater the impact of each individual piece added to the mix (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 dramatically increased by harnessing it to serve multiple 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 choice – and by balancing price, size and convenience without compromising quality -- leaving the existing home inventory as 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 town 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.

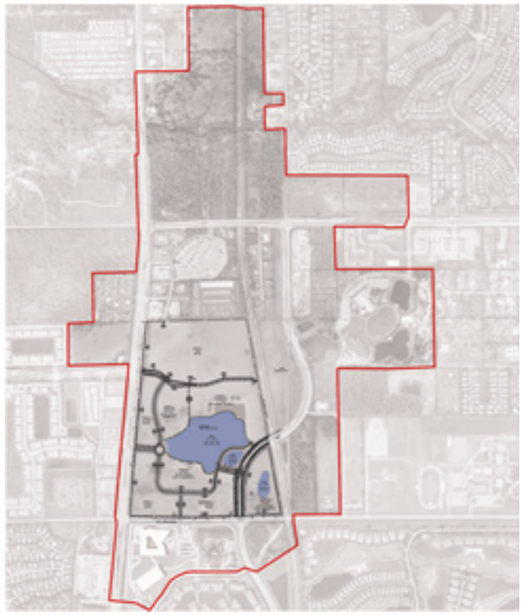
Study Area for the Town Center Master Plan



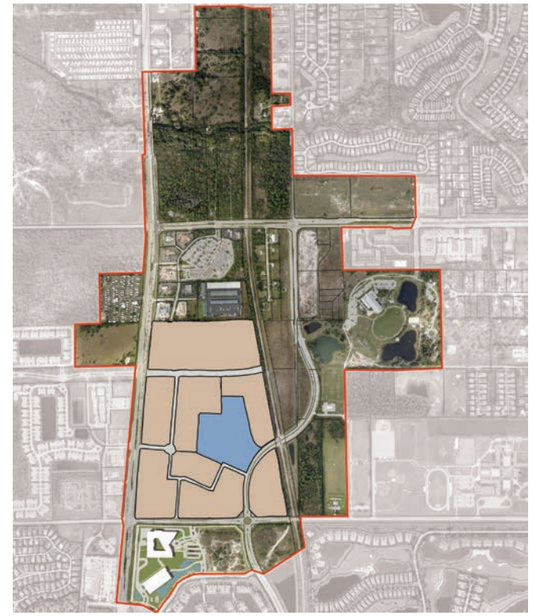
TOWN CENTER DISTRICT MASTER PLAN

The following six images are intended to illustrate the conceptual basis for the final master plan, as presented.

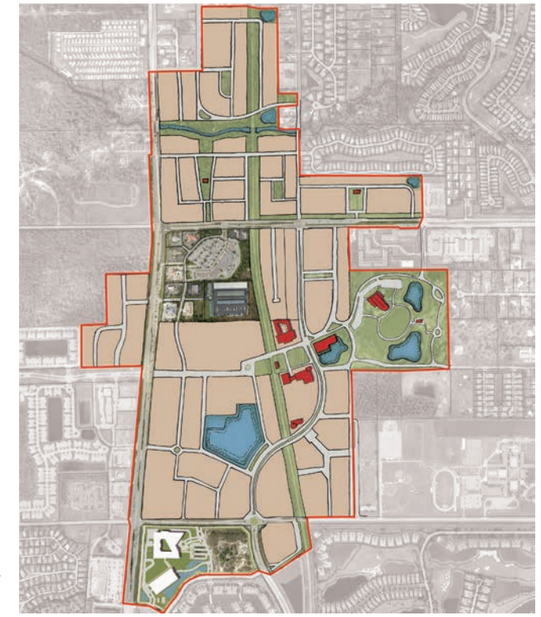
The first illustration shows the current entitled development schematic, showing a half-dozen large development parcels connected by a single internal roadway.



This second image shows how the original schematic 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 planning format supportive of walkable mixed-use.

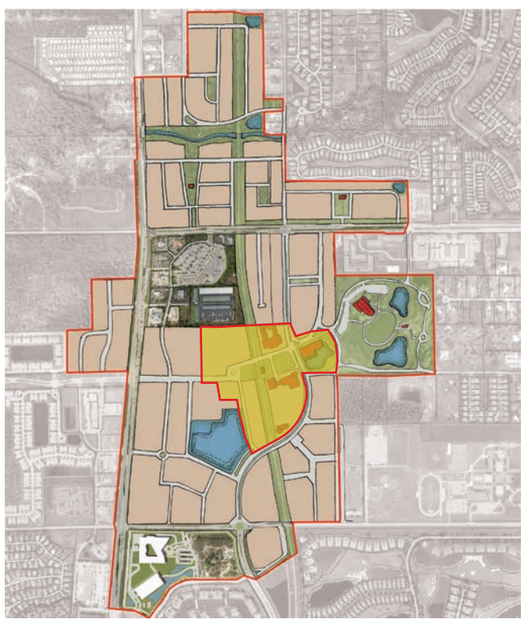


This image shows the overall framework plan for the entire Study Area, illustrating how larger development parcels can still be broken down into a finer grain network of streets and blocks. This plan also shows the introduction of a "civic" center that better intregates the existing park into the North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

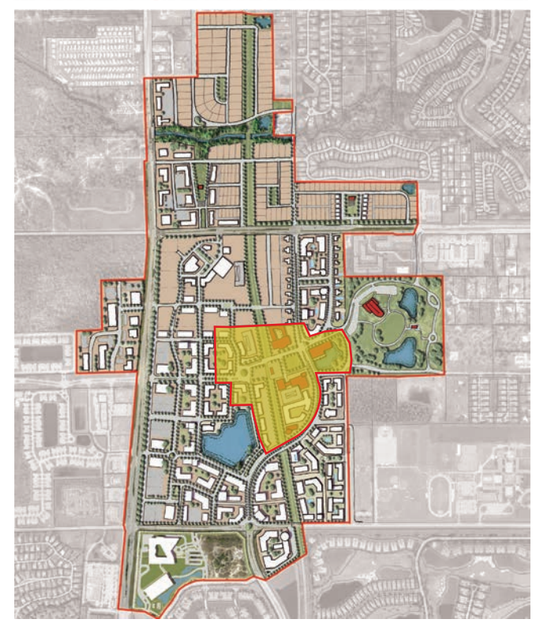


This fourth image introduces the idea of a special "Town Center" sub-area,which could take the form of an overlay distict.

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

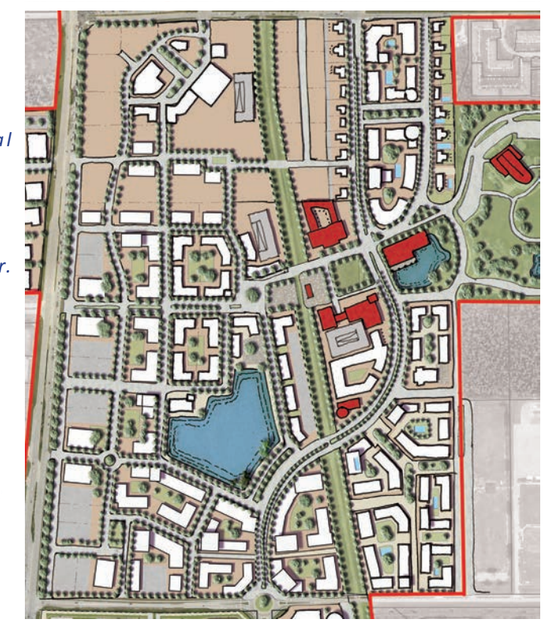


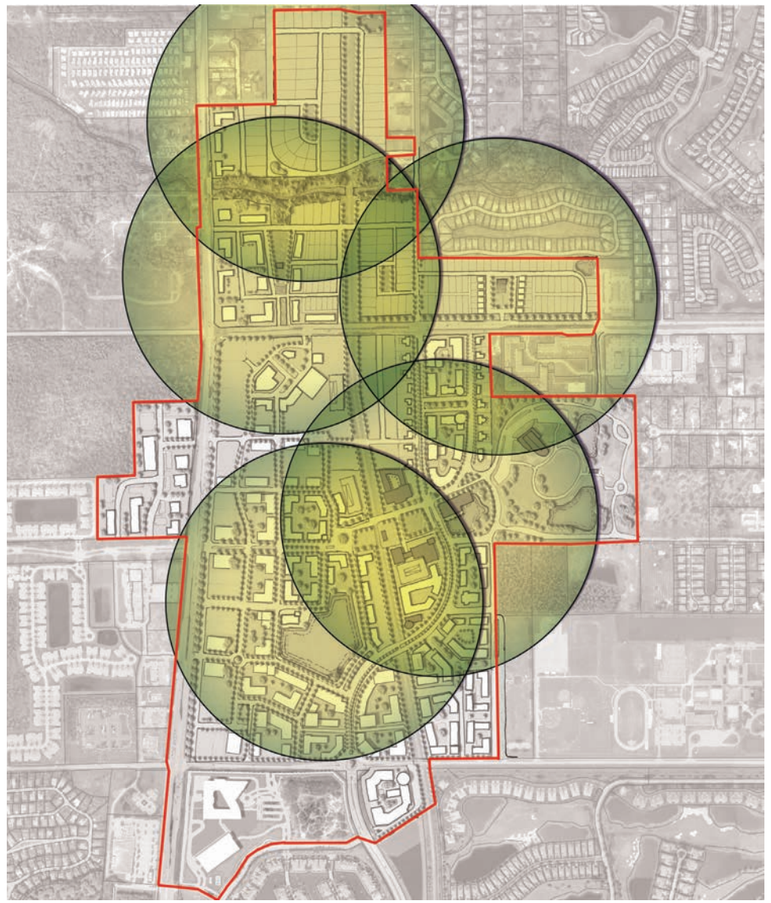
This image shows a more detailed representation of how the larger parcels can be efficiently sub-divided into even smaller development parcels for smaller-scale investors and development interests, dramatically increasing the market potential for these smaller lots, without compromising the value of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



This detailed plan illustrates a potential build-out footprint 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, while still preserving the possibility for future intensification, even at this stage of the build-out.





PEDESTRIAN SHEDS

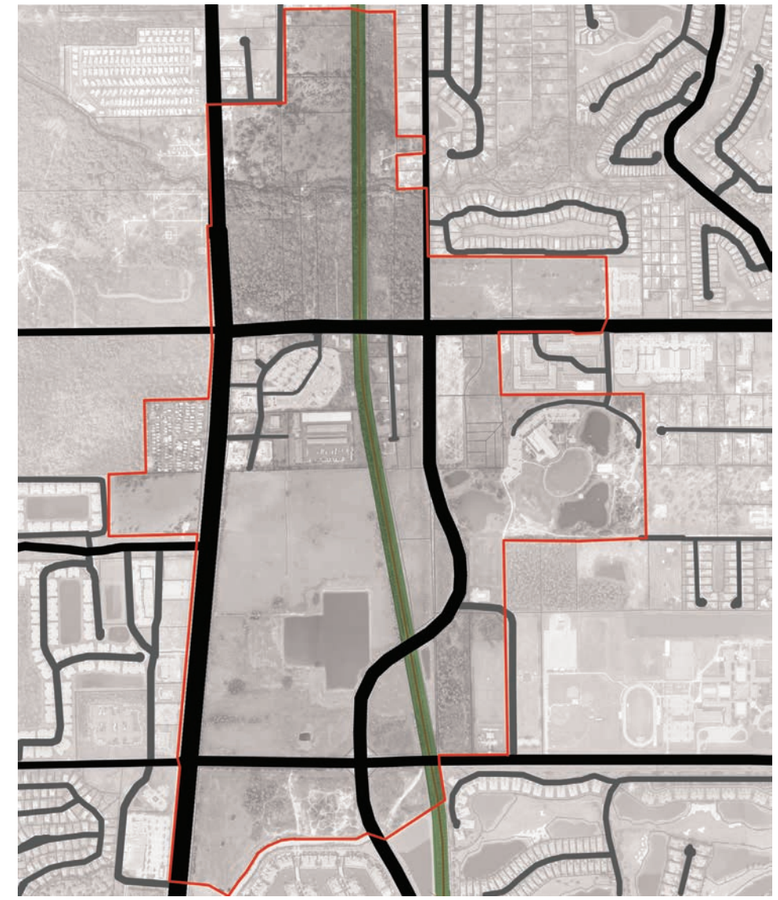
A "pedestrian shed" is defined as the distance an average person can easily walk in five minutes, or about a 1/4 mile radius. Most traditional neighborhoods are defined by this spatial standard, which can include a range of housing types, and easy access to local parks and basic services within this compact area.

This diagram shows that the Town 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 Town Center in relation to Estero's other core nodes.

TOD PEDESTRIAN SHEDS

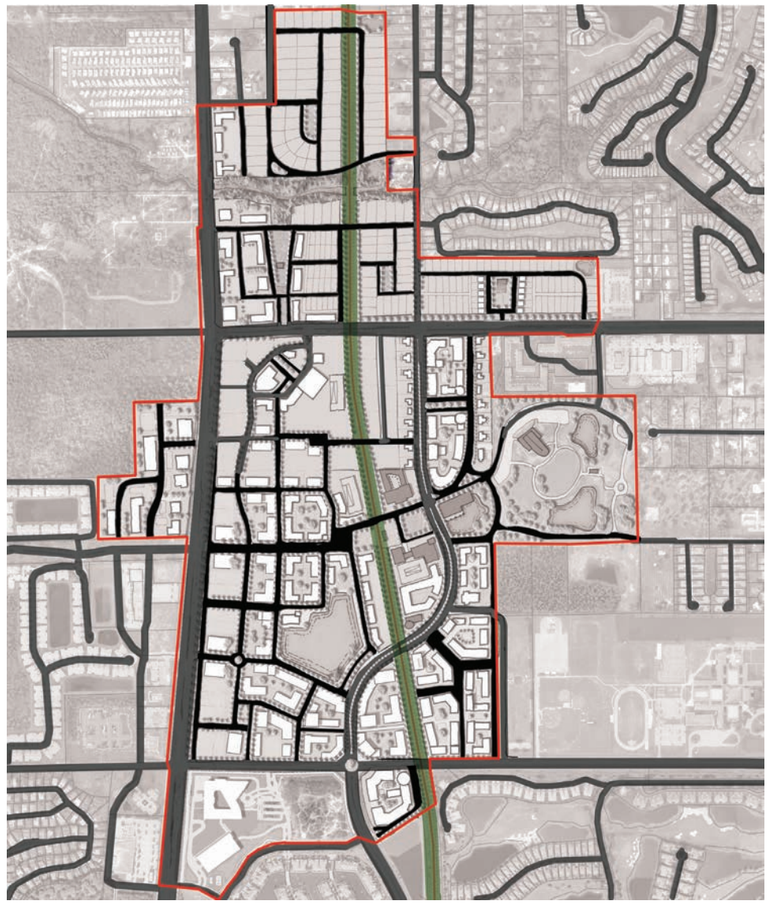
TOD, or Transit-Oriented Development, pedestrian sheds are similar to conventional pedestrian sheds, except that -- because they typically represent a more "purpose-driven trip" than the more frequent and casual neighborhood walking trip -- they are assumed to have a larger ped shed, in this case a 10 minute walking radius, or half-mile, which would normally encompass four neighborhoods.

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



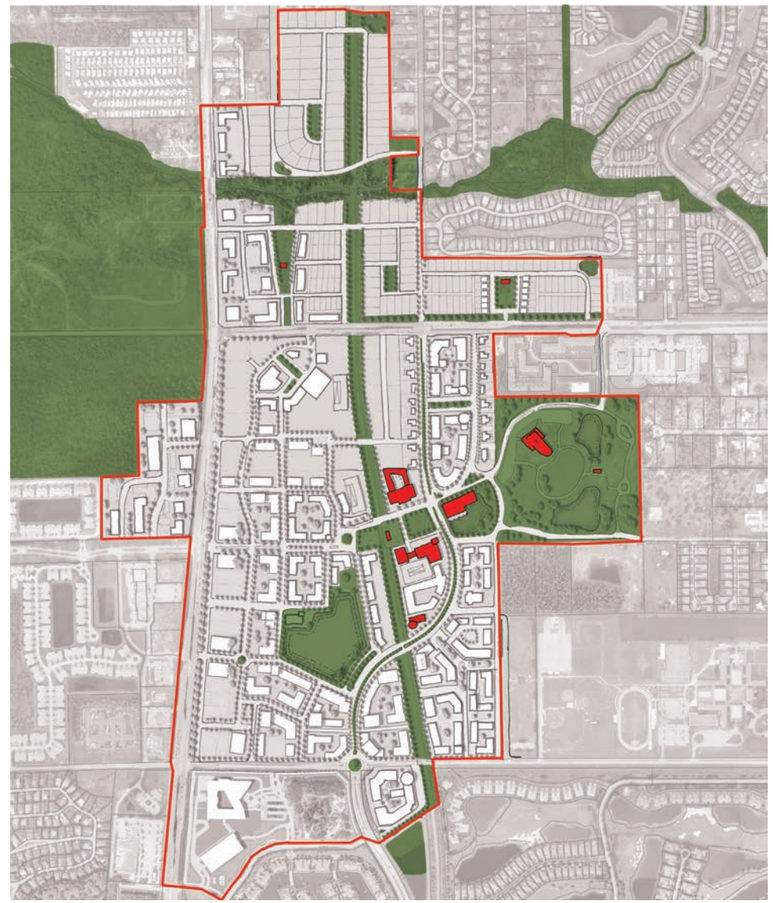
EXISTING STREET NETWORK

This digram shows the existing street network, which shows a disparate, disconnected network of local streets juxtaposed against a very large-scale network of multilane arterials. This model is usually associated with a high-level of traffic congestion per relative density, since most local trips are required to traverse the same large-scale network more typically used for intra-regional trips.



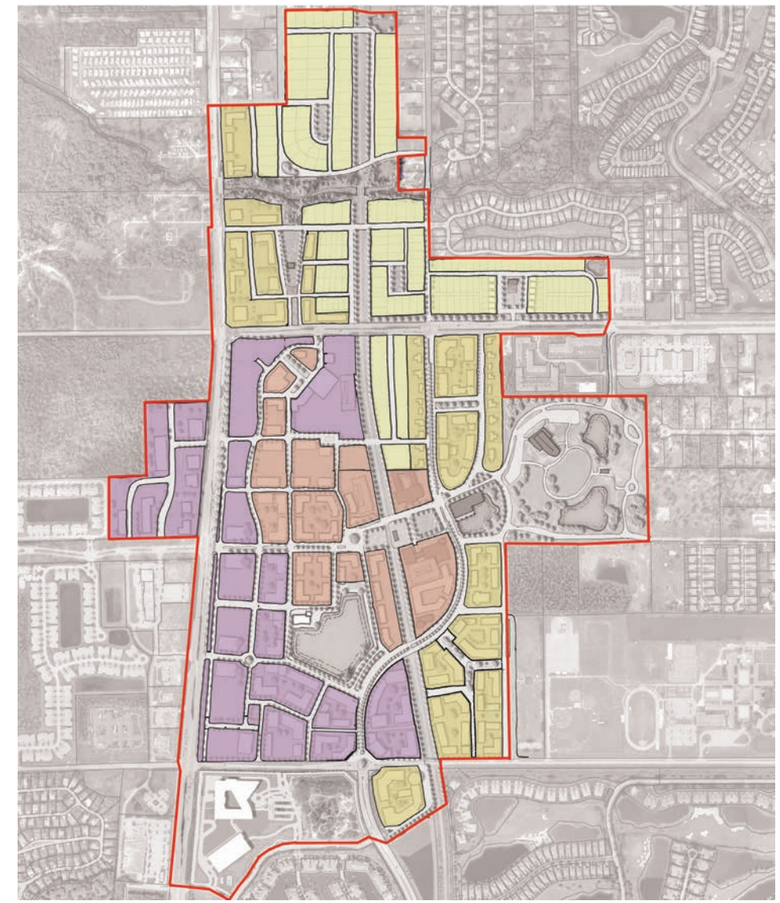
PROPOSED STREET NETWORK

The illustrative Town Center street network, on the other hand, disperses traffic through an efficient network of smaller-scaled streets, capturing most local trips, and reducing congestion on the primary arterials. Furthermore, this network allows for the efficient and cost-effective distribution of basic utilities, typically generates no more asphalt than conventional suburban development, but creates significantly higher value through better access and visibility, and most importantly -- more linear feet of discrete frontage on attractive, walkable, amenity rich, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.



GREEN NETWORK

This plan diagram shows the potential of this node to link meaningful green space into a network of natural, recreational, and civic features and amentities including wildlife corridors, pristine natural waterways. Easy pedestrian and bicycle access to this green network from each neighborhood in the Town Center will provide greater mobility for all ages, and add value to every use within the node.



ZONING

Though a range of regulatory tools are available to help ensure the efficent and attractive entitlement and implemenation of both individual and large-scale lots and parels within the Study Area, this illustrative plan approach can be graphically represented in terms that would be completely familar to anyone comfortable with a conventional land-use and zoning map.

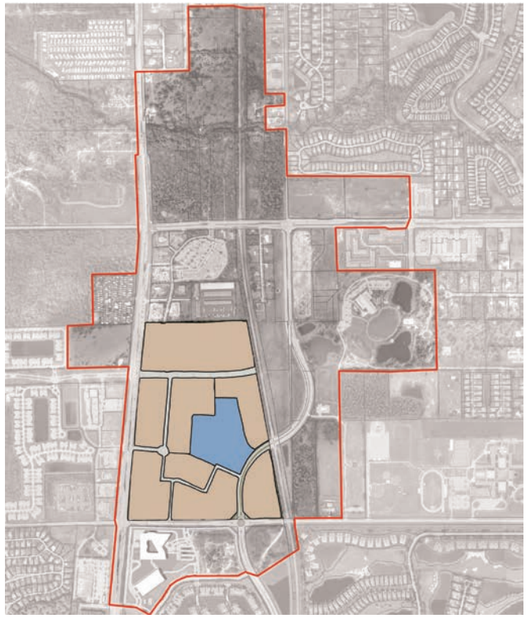
Additional tools could be included to provide additional clarity and a more flexible, integrated approach to implementation, resulting in greater market appeal and significantly higher net value than is often achieved though use-based zoning alone.

MODEL OF TOWN CENTER DISTRICT MASTER PLAN

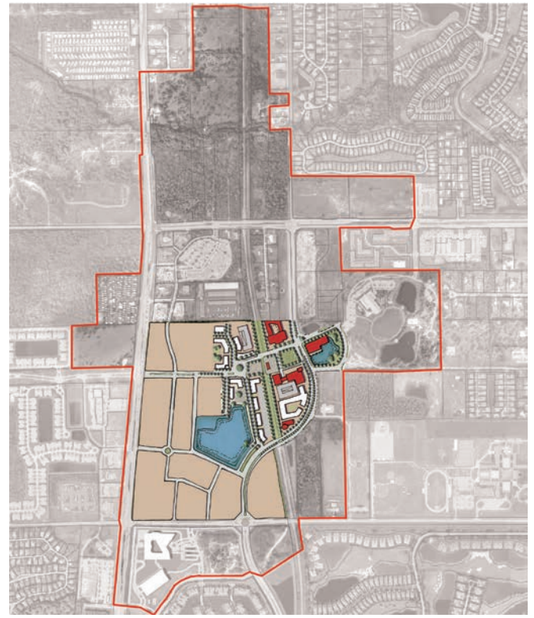
These three views of the Town Center sub-area show the "green" connection with the regional park in the form of a series of public spaces, both green and hardscaped, framed by various proposed civic uses including a new Town Hall, performing arts center, civic center/potential town library and future light rail station. In the above two images, a small-scale commerial area fronts a more urban lake edge, around which special events -- farmers markets, art shows, wine festivals, etc.-- can be held among local boutiques, cafes and restaurants. To the immediate north of this area, a courtyard block, similar to the one illustated on the table of contents page, allows local residents to enjoy easy access to all of these amenities, within a short walk of home.

Left: One example of Town Hall that is well integrated into a traditional walkable community fabric, is Coral Gables' town hall, which sits between residential and commercial areas in a formal civic setting that helps to anchor the downtown by providing an important symbol of the community. It serves as a gathering place for local events and is the site of various seasonal parades and those marking national holidays and events, like Christmas and the Fourth of July.

PHASING SEQUENCE

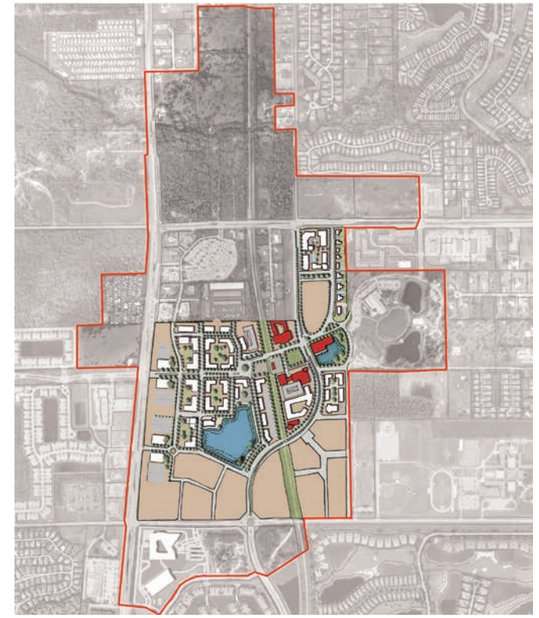


The following series of digrams depicts one potential implementation and phasing sequence, though the flexibility of this approach could actually permit several distinct phasing sequences, based on different elements of the overall plan, to move forward simultaneaously:



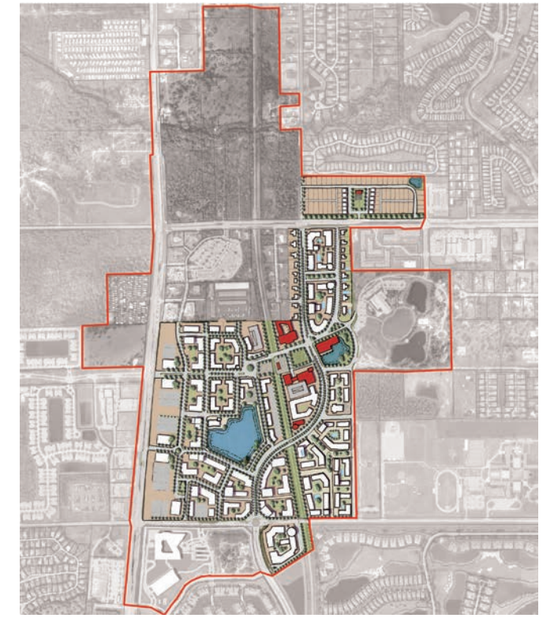
In this digram, the Town Center sub-area, inspired and motivated by the incorporation of Estero, is formally adopted by the new City, leading the way for the planning and implementation of the new Civic area.

At the same time, the smaller-scale nature of the town center mixed-use commercial area allows for introduction of new housing product types, catering to new demographic preferences in housing and lifestyle choice, capturing pent-up demand for new housing close to small-scale shops, convenience shops and other local services in a walkable, transit served, lakeside setting.



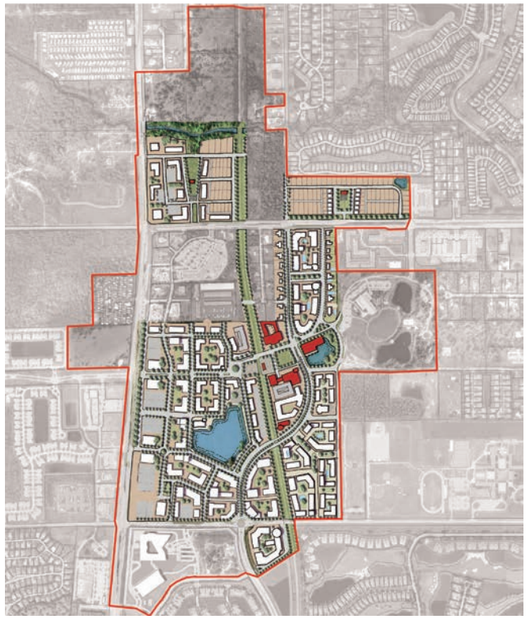
At the same time, ongoing efforts to market the larger Town Center area begin to take root, as several national-level office users, attracted by a variety of factors, including the well-articulated strategic vision proposed for the area, and Estero as whole, commit to moving to Estero, encouraging other local and regional businesses to locate here also.

The jobs, convenience, and amenity promised by the walkable, mixed-use format, and the straightforward entitlement process encourage more working-age people to move to the Town Center, and local developers and their investment partners to respond to the need, as the demand for housing and related services for year-round residents builds.

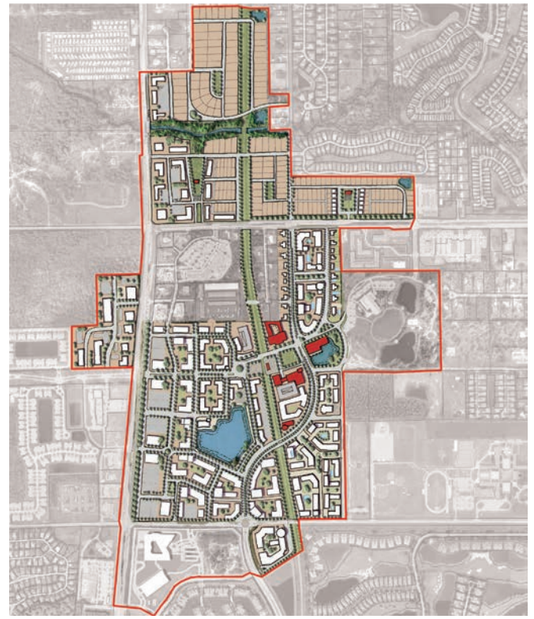


As the housing market continues to recover, and new product types begin to emerge, the overall market for housing broadens and strengthens. Other parts of the overall Town Center master plan, focusing more on housing and neighborhood services build momentum, taking full advantage of natural amenities, and easing the transition to existing neighborhoods and nearby developments.

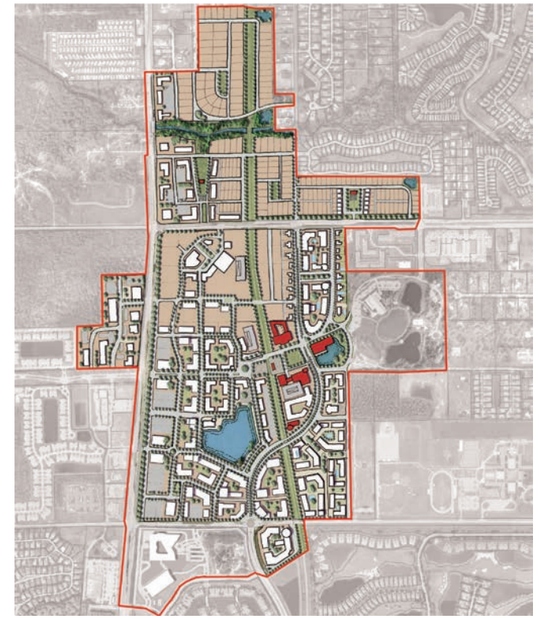
PHASING SEQUENCE



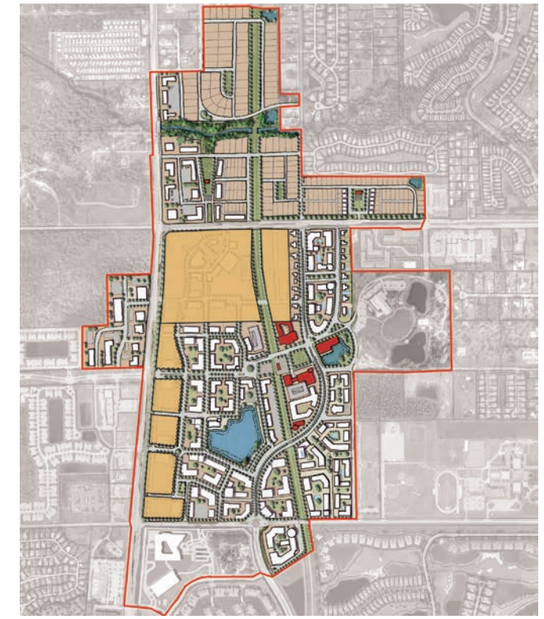
North of Corkscrew Road, smaller lot single family neighborhoods, with integral parks, and walkable, small scale streets connecting to community greenways and natural amenities are very popular, and both protect natural community assets like the Estero River, while facility access to the larger Estero community.



Thoughtful development based on the principles of compact, walkable mixed-use along the existing rail corridor encourages implementation of an integrated regional transit system, linking coherent centers in a rational and efficient way, strengthening Southwest Florida's regional competiveness, while accentuating the value and distinctiveness of each individual center.



The final stages of the initial build out are almost complete, building toward value and filling more and more discrete market niches, at the same time, maximizing the collective value and utilization of the area, with minimal impacts to surround communities and natural areas.



In the last phase, the next stage of value creation/harvesting begins as the earliest stages of the Town Center build out, along with many of the existing uses along the corridor, optimized around highway frontage alone, realize the long-term benefit of increased land valuations the strategic repositioning and planning efforts have generated, and begin redeveoping as the final and most valuable redevelopment parcels of all. With the benefit of ongoing cash flow throughout this process, these parcels realized the greatest return on investment for the original investors and property owners who initiated and encouraged this approach.

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

This character sketch, which evolved shortly after the second-day pinup session, finally captures the essence of "Town Center." A proposed town hall, foreground, flanks a new performance center and parking deck, across the town green, with lakeside housing and mixed-use in the background

Discussion/Q & A

Following the final presentation, which marked the formal end of the creative process related to this workshop, most of the questions and discussion focused on practical considerations.

For instance, with the discussion on workability and transit, one participant asked whether, when and if this goes to a more formal public process, the community might interpret this emphasis as a foregone conclusion, versus the outcome to a consensus building, community-participatory planning event. The answer is that this emphasis was based, in large part, on the market study which preceded this workshop, and the relevant demographic trends that study identified. However, how the community ultimately chooses to respond to these trends will still be at the discretion of the citizens of Estero, their representatives, and other key stakeholders.

Regardless, this workshop was about expanding choice, and the car is still very much a fact of life in Estero and will be for some time to come. Therefore, the car was consciously considered in everything discussed and proposed. Nonetheless, it was also pointed out that the core represents one of the best real opportunities for expanded mobility and transportation choice left in Estero, one that should not be needlessly squandered. At the same time, acknowledging the still soft office market, structured parking was only shown adjacent to the proposed performing arts center (and next to the future light-rail station), recognizing that surface parking may be the only viable option in the near term, though other financing tools may be available for this type of infrastructure when associated with a public use.

Other questions concerned the regulatory framework for such an approach, including how one defines "mixed-use" (vertically, horizontally, or both?). The answer was that there are a variety of proven regulatory tools well suited to this type of development, including overlay zoning, form-based codes, etc. (even existing codes can often be modified through their bulk-zoning regulations to effectively administer this type of development) so there is no need to invent anything new to allow this to happen. As for vertical versus horizontal mixed-use, both are potentially relevant, assuming that the horizontal mixed-use is legitimate mixed-use, meaning that it would be possible for an average person to easily navigate between the two uses on foot, without resorting to extreme measures, or the use of a car.

One big question that everyone agreed upon should be answered sooner, rather than later, is how much oversight of the resulting entitlement process should the community retain? The consultant team replied that there are already a number of recognized tools, such as special-use permits, available for managing more complex land use applications, that otherwise meet the intent of the ordinance. But ideally, one should try to craft a well-defined (as in non-ambiguous) regulatory framework that is by nature, flexible enough to accommodate most applications in an efficient and straightforward manner.

Ultimately, the purpose behind all of this discussion is to avoid being forced to simply accept whatever walks in the door, whether it conforms to the vision or not. The intention is not to arbitrarily dictate what is or isn't allowed, but rather, to have the ability to shape the market within the context of a well-defined set of policy goals and initiatives in which both the community and its key stakeholders have had a credible say.

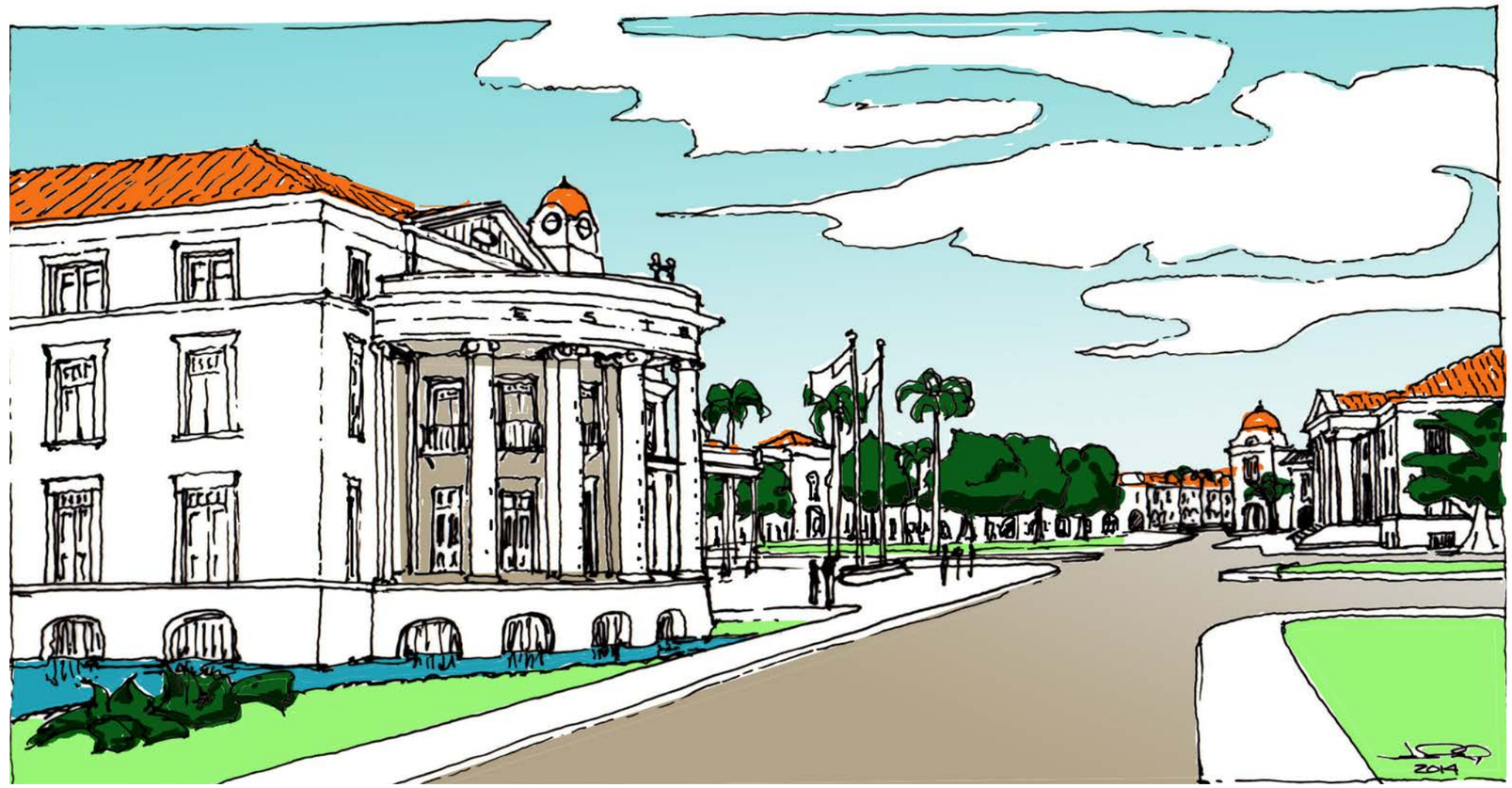
Conclusion

The purpose of this workshop was to explore the potential benefits of taking a different approach to the development of the North Point site, and its surrounding areas, in light of the recent market down turn and changing demographic preferences. The bigger question however, was whether it made sense from an economic and market perspective to pursue a model based on a more flexible, incremental development strategy which focused not on a specific set of market imperatives, so much as a set of larger principles which --taken together -- might help restore lost valuations by capturing a broader spectrum of market potential in a form that not only supports the well-earned Estero Brand, but broadens its meaning and appeal.

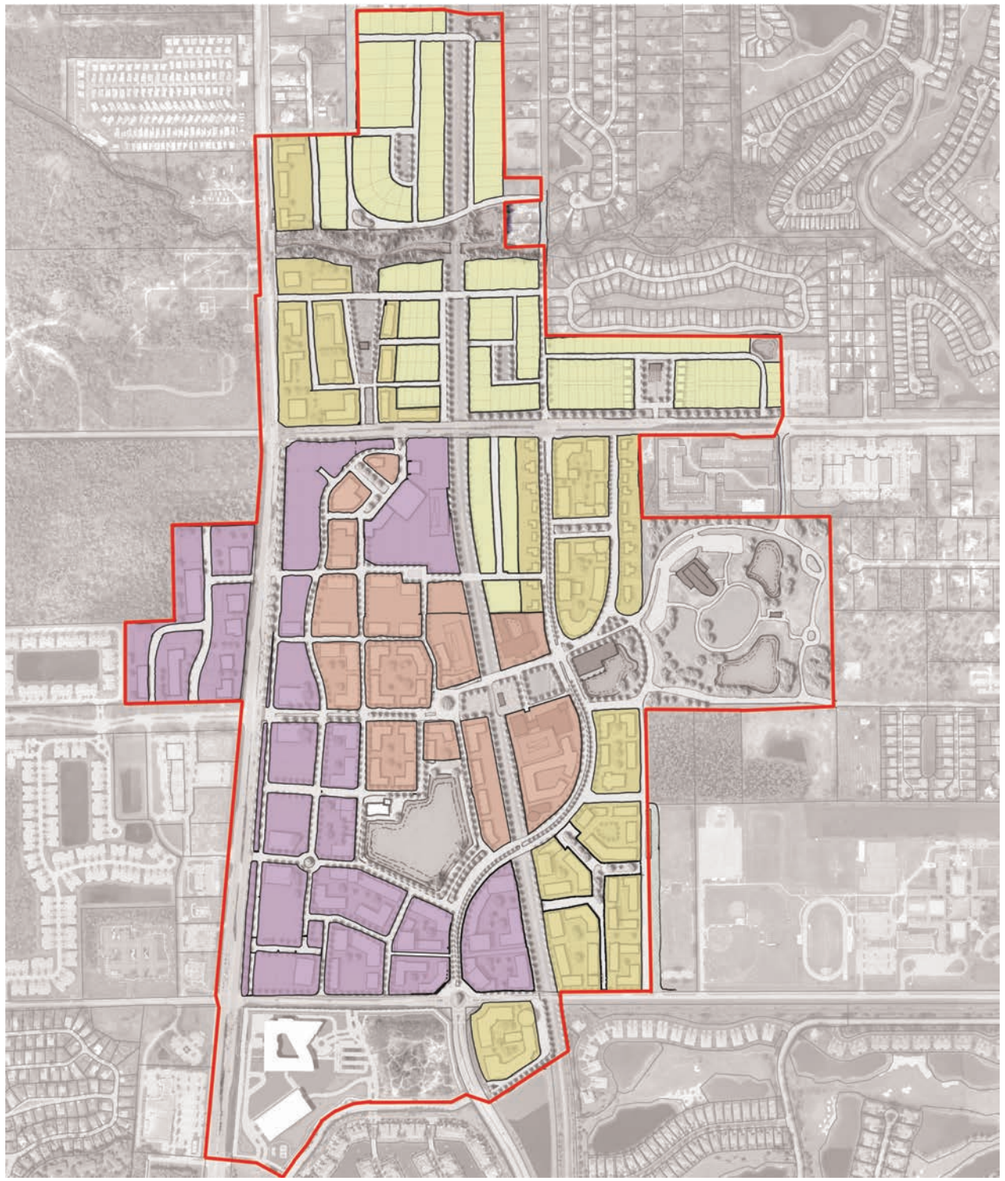
The work products of this exercise are not intended as a strict blueprint, per se, but rather as illustrative representations of what might be possible, given the skillful and patient application of the ideas represented in this document. What the case-studies have shown is that there are clear examples of how this approach has yielded significant results which far surpassed the performance of their more conventional competition during the economic crisis, while still generating acceptable returns on risk in both the short and long-term.

It is recognized that this approach, by nature, requires a more sustained level of attention to detail than the model more recently in use. However, with a well thought-through regulatory framework, that process can be greatly simplified. And, unlike the current model which puts so much emphasis on a single thoroughfare frontage, this approach creates the much more intrinsic and integrated value of place, and the means by which to harvest that value in a sustained and cumulative way that helps to manage risk throughout the build-out, as well as the inevitable cycles of the market.

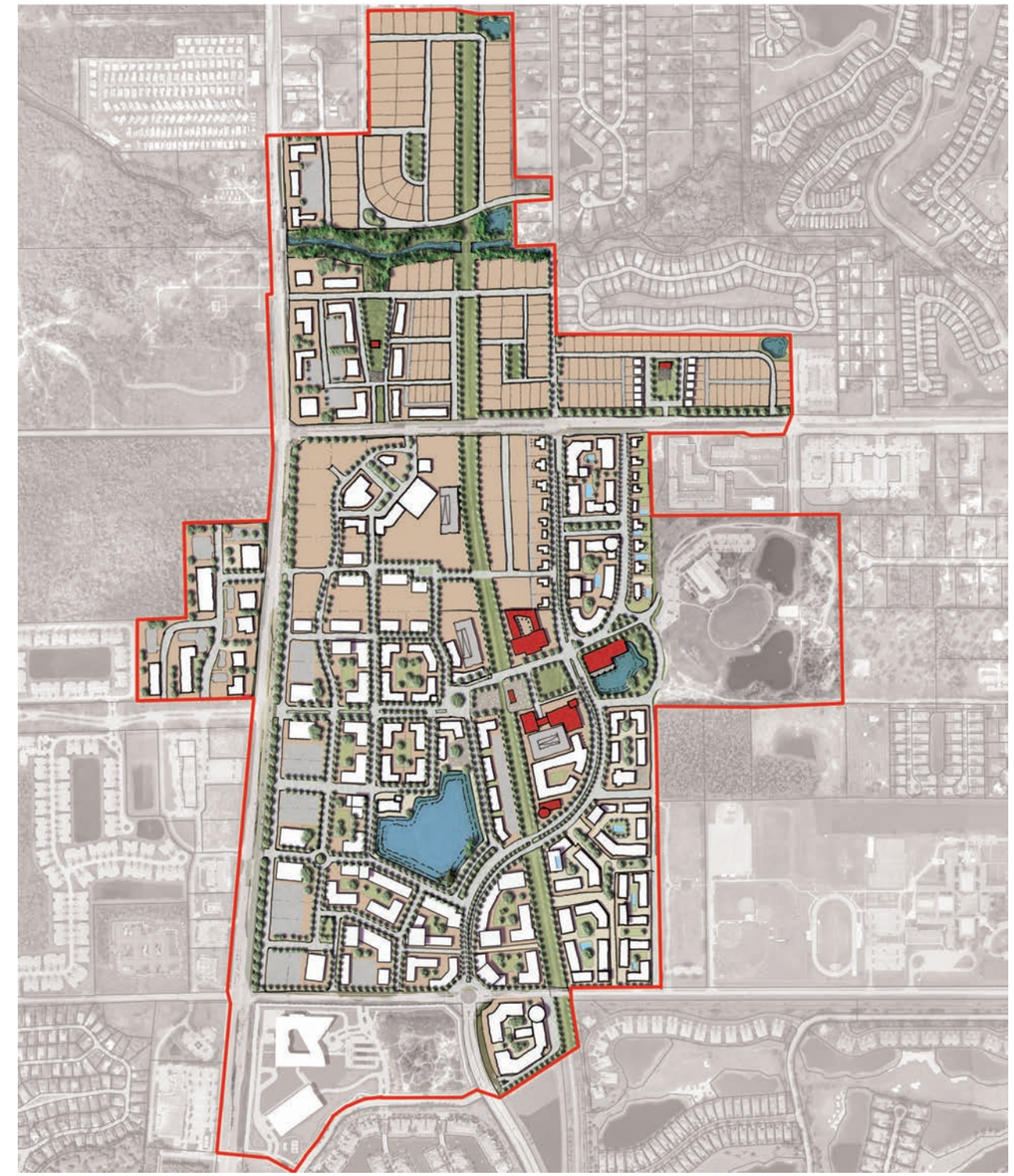
It is hoped that this workshop, and the larger process which preceded it, will continue to inform an ongoing discussion regarding Estero's future in a way the reflects the input and participation of not only the key stakeholders who contributed to this process, but of the larger Estero community as well.



Above: A rendering of what the new Town Center civic green and Town Hall might look like in the future -- a vision which speaks directly to the ongoing and long-term aspirations of the community



ILLUSTRATIVE ZONING MAP



ILLUSTRATIVE MASTER PLAN