

The City of Fort Walton Beach



Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) Plan



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by Resolution 2012-20

Acknowledgements

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction & The CRA Process

The purpose of any Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) is to eliminate slum and blight using strategies that promote reinvestment and revitalization in the community. Section 163.345 of the Florida Statutes states that, “Any county or municipality, to the greatest extent it determines feasible... shall afford maximum opportunity, consistent with the sound needs of the county or municipality as a whole, to the rehabilitation or redevelopment of the community redevelopment area by private enterprise.”

The original City of Fort Walton Beach Redevelopment Area was created in 1977, followed by the development of a Redevelopment Trust Fund and Community Redevelopment Agency in 1982. In 1998, the CRA area was expanded from 222 acres to 607 acres, and the boundaries remain the same today. The last Community Redevelopment Area Plan update was completed in December 2007 and included a five-year capital improvement program and implementation plan that ends in FY 2011-12. Many of the recommendations from the 2007 CRA Plan have been implemented, are outdated, or have been re-prioritized by the CRA Board since its adoption.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) revenues peaked in the CRA in FY 2007-08 and FY 2008-09 and have steadily decreased each year since. Property values have decreased more rapidly in the expanded area of the CRA since FY 2008-09, and according to the five year projections of CRA revenues, the downward trend is forecast to continue before getting better.

The downward trend in property values and an increase in the number of vacant properties and foreclosures resulted in the CRA Board of Commissioners changing philosophy towards economic development and business retention. This change in direction / philosophy resulted in the need for an update to the 2007 CRA Plan to provide encouragement and support for business and economic development as well as the physical development of the City. The 2012 CRA Plan Update also coincides with the recent adoption of a new Comprehensive Plan and the comprehensive revision to the Land Development Code. All three documents set the framework for the development of the City.

Therefore, this 2012 CRA Plan update shall serve as a guide to future redevelopment activities in the Fort Walton Beach CRA over a five- to ten-year planning horizon, focusing on initiating programs and projects to stimulate private sector participation so that the community can

eventually thrive on its own. The Plan sets forth goals, objectives, and strategies to promote redevelopment.

The 2012 CRA Plan focuses on six primary components: Land Use, Infrastructure, Transportation, Design Guidelines, Housing, and Economic Development. Each component's goal, objectives, and strategies meet all of the requirements of Chapter 163, Part III of the Florida Statutes. The Plan also identifies three special projects for completion over the planning horizon of the 2012 CRA Plan that achieves multiple objectives of multiple goals.

Goal 1 – Land Use

The goal of the Land Use component is to promote sustainable redevelopment within the CRA by implementing a true mixed-use district and implementing land value improvement programs.

The primary objective is to achieve consistency between zoning and land use to allow for more efficient and flexible use of land. This allows shops, housing, parks, and restaurants to be located in close proximity in order to foster a bustling urban core. Within this core it is essential that vacant and underutilized properties are targeted for development or redevelopment. An aggressive land use program can assist in converting these properties to desirable locations for new projects.

Strategies to achieve these objectives include: (1) amending the Land Development Code and Zoning Map to create a true mixed-use district in the CRA, (2) implementing a Façade Improvement Grant Program allowing businesses to improve their building, and (3) implementing a Land Value Investment Program to facilitate the growth in value of underutilized and vacant land.

Goal 2 – Infrastructure

The goal of the Infrastructure component is to improve the quality and availability of infrastructure throughout the CRA. Updated infrastructure is important for redevelopment in order to attract more businesses, residents, and visitors.

Strategies to achieve this goal include: (1) continuing an annual program to upgrade water and sewer lines, (2) continuing annual sidewalk and pavement improvement programs, (3) developing an underground utilities program, and (4) promoting the consolidation of trash receptacles while providing proper screening.

Goal 3 – Transportation

The goal of the Transportation component is to ensure the availability of an adequate and safe multi-modal transportation system throughout the CRA. The planned increase in density within the urban core is heavily dependent on an efficient and safe transportation system. Without an effective transportation system, strategies for housing and economic development may fail.

Due to the already built-out nature of the CRA, the most effective strategies to provide an adequate transportation system include: (1) improving safety through traffic calming devices and

congestion management techniques, (2) promoting the use of transit, (3) installing pedestrian features to encourage a walkable environment, and (4) installing bicycle improvements.

Goal 4 – Design Guidelines

The goal of the Design Guidelines component is to promote a positive image while advancing the health, safety, welfare, and appearance of the CRA. Design guidelines will allow freedom of individual preference while encourage a strong, harmonious community identity in order to attract redevelopment.

The recommended ways in which design objectives will be met include (1) encouraging the use of building massing and variations in height and depth, (2) providing a list of façade articulation techniques to assist developers, (3) implementing bonus provisions in the Land Development Code that are partially based on CRA design guidelines, (4) implementing a Façade Grant program based on CRA design guidelines, (5) ensuring adequate screening and buffers for service equipment, parking, storage uses, and dumpsters, (6) ensuring good design of public spaces, (7) considering a consistent and uniform theme for public signs, and (8) encouraging the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) techniques.

Goal 5 – Housing

The goal of the Housing component is to improve the quality and quantity of housing options in the CRA. Housing constitutes a significant share of construction and development in the CRA, for this reason it is essential to ensure a wide range of quality housing.

Specific strategies to achieve the objectives of the CRA housing goal include: (1) continuing partnerships that offer low-income housing and first-time homebuyer assistance programs, (2) amending the Land Development Code to increase density in the mixed-use zoning districts in the CRA, (3) developing a Nuisance Abatement Program to demolish dilapidated housing on a case-by-case basis, (4) allowing accessory dwelling units in specified zoning districts, (5) considering new and unique partnerships that contribute to increased quality housing stock in the Fort Walton Beach CRA.

Goal 6 – Economic Development

The goal of the Economic Development component is to achieve economic stability through new and expanded businesses and employment throughout the CRA. Economic stability is the basis for success in the CRA; this makes it vital that objectives and strategies are developed to insure economic growth and development. To create this environment of stability, the CRA must promote business retention, business expansion, and attract new businesses.

Strategies to achieve these objectives include: (1) implementing a Land Value Investment Program to return previously undesirable property back to the market and on the tax roll, (2) implementing a Commercial Revolving Loan Fund to bring in new businesses and help expanding businesses close the gap between conventional financing, (3) creating a targeted infill development list and maintain a database of information needed by prospective developers and businesses, (4) amending the Land Development Code to streamline permitting procedures and

reduce permitting turn-around time for development and redevelopment, (5) implementing a Site Development Assistance Grant Program to provide monetary support to existing businesses with major expansion plans, (6) conducting annual business surveys, and (7) implementing an annual promotional program for the CRA to attract businesses to the area.

Special Projects

Three major projects were identified during the development of the 2012 CRA Plan Update that satisfy several redevelopment objectives listed in the Plan, including Transportation, Design Guidelines, Infrastructure, and Economic Development.

The first special project includes promoting development and redevelopment along Hollywood Boulevard to create an economic hub along this important corridor that intersects with two state highways: Eglin Parkway and Beal Parkway.

The second special project accomplishes completing a pilot project for a Comprehensive Improvement District to implement capital improvement programs, economic incentive programs, etc. in an attempt to gauge the success of various programs.

The third special project creates a Brooks Street Façade Improvement Program to improve the appearance of businesses along Brooks Street in an attempt to move the “entrances” of these businesses from Miracle Strip Parkway to Brooks Street.

Ongoing Project Maintenance

Although not a specific goal, the CRA plan recognizes the importance of continuing maintenance on completed projects. As blight is removed and properties are improved it is essential that these improvements are continually maintained. The plan looks at several areas where this continued maintenance is necessary. These improvements include: (1) water and sewer lines, (2) stormwater management facilities, (3) pavement, (4) sidewalk, (5) curb and gutter, and (6) any public property, facility, or rights-of-way located in the CRA district. A continual and effective maintenance program will ensure the continued benefit of the project.

Conclusion

The integrated six-goal approach outlined above is designed to address the major factors affecting the Fort Walton Beach CRA presently and over the next five to ten years. Several of the suggested programs and strategies meet more than one objective in more than one category. In summary, all objectives and strategies are intended to provide a solid foundation for stimulating further growth and reinvestment.

Introduction

Contents:

- ◆ **History of Fort Walton Beach**
- ◆ **The Built Environment of the Fort Walton Beach CRA**
- ◆ **Economic Characterization of the Fort Walton Beach CRA**
- ◆ **The Need for a CRA Plan Update**

1.1 History of Fort Walton Beach

The City of Fort Walton Beach is a seaside community located along the Santa Rosa Sound. Founded in 1937, the City has a “small town” feel with the benefits of an urban community. Bordered by Choctawhatchee Bay and Cinco Bayou to the north and the Santa Rosa Sound to the south, Fort Walton Beach is characterized by several traditional waterfront neighborhoods and a commercial core. The City is rich with ancient Native American history dating back 14,000 years and boasts several large waterfront parks. The most significant factor in the City’s growth was the creation, and later expansion, of what is now Eglin Air Force Base in 1937. With military presence as a key to economic growth, the City enjoyed a substantial population and economic boom from the 1950s through the end of the 1970s. With the new found exposure from the military, the City’s unique beauty and destination location became another key to its success in growth. Local businesses were able to capitalize on the emerging tourism industry. This trend continued strong for several years, and elevated tourism to a level in which it competed with, but never overtook the military as the most important economic factor.



These geographic factors, the rich history of the area, and the large military presence in the area created a unique economic environment for the growth of the community; but as with most cities, the explosive growth seemed to leave certain areas vulnerable to neglect and blight.

In the late 1960s, and early 1970s, the City began to experience a decline in economic prosperity, some of which can be attributed to the utility and transportation infrastructure getting older and commercial and residential structures becoming deteriorated. New development began to take place in the surrounding communities. The City, having nearly run out of developable land, started to focus attention on finding ways to induce private enterprise investment in the City and thus capturing a greater share of the local and regional market.

With the passage of the Community Redevelopment Act of 1969, the Florida Legislature acknowledged that older areas of the state needed a means to address these deteriorating conditions and to facilitate economic development in these communities. Under Chapter 163, Part III of the Florida Statutes, local governments are able to designate areas as Community Redevelopment Areas when certain conditions exist.

The foresight of the City to establish its first redevelopment area and created the Fort Walton Beach Redevelopment Agency in 1977 that included a “slum and blighted area” located between



Beal Parkway and Eglin Parkway and the portion of Downtown, located between Beal Parkway and Brooks Bridge. In 1982, the City Council established a Redevelopment Trust Fund and developed the first Community Redevelopment Plan. This was an important step in protecting property values and removing blight. Only recently has the City experienced a decline in property values resulting in a strain on the local economy. Prior to this most recent decline, the stable economic

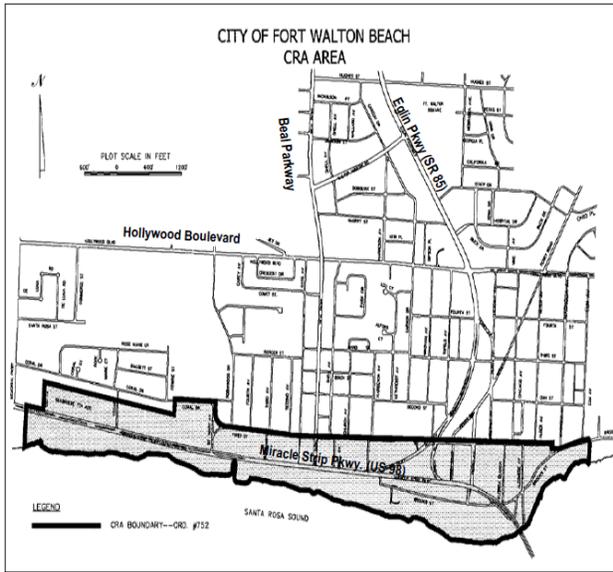
forces around the City have helped to sustain its prosperity with limited impact from vulnerable market forces and the national economic climate.

As the rest of the nation has faced an economic crisis, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) initiative allowed Eglin AFB to grow even more in prominence. BRAC assigned the F-35 fighter program to Eglin AFB and relocated the 7th Special Forces group from Fort Bragg, North Carolina to the local area, which resulted in an influx of thousands of new residents to the area. The Base continues to represent a significant economic impact to Fort Walton Beach and the region. The Air Armament Center at Eglin AFB and Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field continue to make the military the top employer in the region.

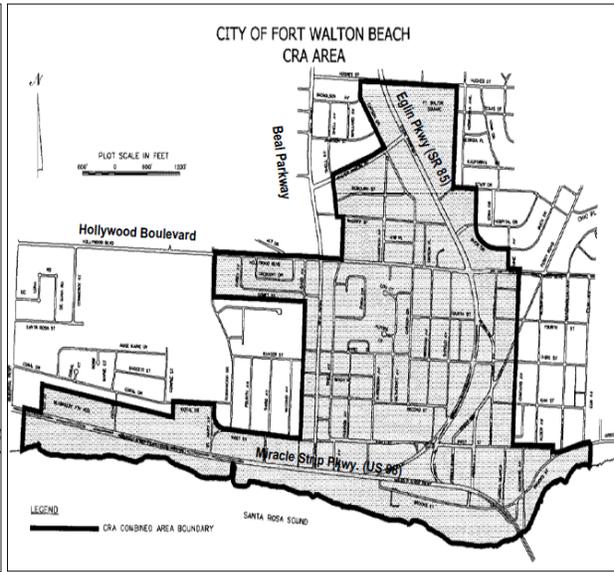
1.2 The Built Environment of the Fort Walton Beach CRA



The Community Redevelopment Area is located within the most historic section of the City and includes portions of two of the City’s waterfronts – Santa Rosa Sound and Choctawhatchee Bay. The initial size of the CRA was 222 acres in 1982, and was expanded to 607 acres in 1998. In 2007, the CRA Plan designated eight (8) community subzones, with each subzone having unique characteristics and issues. Two of these subzones, the Historic Downtown and the Uptown District, have created Merchant Associations to assist with the redevelopment efforts in the CRA.



Original CRA Boundaries (1982)



Expanded CRA Boundaries (1998)

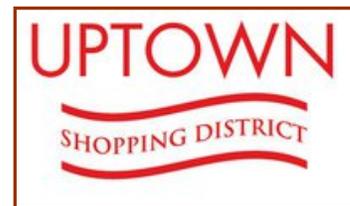
The other subzones, include the Comet / Crescent Circle area, Beal Parkway Corridor, Central City, Midtown, West Miracle Strip, and East Brooks Street and all consist of a mixture of residential and commercial developments.



The Downtown Arts & Entertainment District is located along Miracle Strip Parkway SE (U.S. Highway 98) and Brooks Street SE. The Downtown area hosts the Indian Temple Mound Museum, the Public Library, several waterfront condominiums, and a variety of unique shops and restaurants.

The Uptown Shopping District is located along the Eglon Parkway corridor north of Fourth Street SE, and is made up of primarily commercial uses.

This area was a large portion of the area added to the original CRA boundaries in 1998. The Uptown Shopping District includes several national retail tenants and restaurants and hosts several major events throughout the year attracting thousands of people.



The Comet Street / Crescent Circle District is bounded by Hollywood Boulevard to the north, Robinwood Drive to the west, the property line of the Fort Walton Beach Housing Authority to the south, and Bass Avenue to the east. This area consists of both single-family homes and high-intensity commercial uses, such as auto repair shops, used car sales, etc.

The Beal Parkway Corridor is bounded by Hollywood Boulevard to the north, Bass Avenue to the west, First Street to the south, and Shell Avenue to the east. The properties abutting Beal Parkway are developed primarily as commercial uses, ranging from office complexes to high

intensity uses, such as auto repair shops, used car sales, etc. Along the perimeter roads to the east and west, there are residential developments and small office complexes or businesses.

The Central City District is bounded by Walter Martin Road to the north, Shell Avenue to the west, First Street to the south, and Tupelo Avenue to the east. The properties along Walter Martin Road and Hollywood Boulevard are primarily commercial uses. Properties along First Street are developed as public or quasi-public uses, such as religious institutions, the Okaloosa County School District administrative offices. The remainder of the areas is almost exclusively residential.

The Midtown District bisects the Historic Downtown and Uptown Districts and is bounded by Fourth Street to the north, Tupelo Avenue to the west, First Street to the south, and Chicago Avenue to the east. All of the properties along Eglin Parkway are commercial. Throughout the remainder of the district is a mix of medium- to high-density residential and small commercial uses.

The West Miracle Strip Parkway District is bounded by Coral Drive to the north, Memorial Parkway to the west, Santa Rosa Sound to the south, and Harbeson Avenue to the east. Miracle Strip Parkway is a State highway that is a regional transportation corridor and the major east to west highway in the City. The properties along Miracle Strip Parkway are a mixture of mostly commercial uses north of the road, ranging from office complexes to high-intensity uses, such as car dealerships, hotels, etc., and a mixture of smaller businesses, marinas, restaurants, and condominiums on the south side of the road.

The East Brooks Street District is bounded by First Street to the north, Florida Blanca / Alconese Avenue to the west, Santa Rosa Sound to the south, and Elm Avenue to the east. This area is primarily residential with large-lot low-density single family homes to higher intensity medium-density townhome and condominium developments.

Fort Walton Beach is the only City located along the Gulf Coast between Pensacola and Panama City that includes an authentic “downtown”. Additionally, the downtown area is located within the boundaries of the CRA Area. Ensuring the continued vitality and success of the CRA Area is necessary to the economic health of the City and the surrounding region.

Current CRA Boundaries



1.3 Economic Characterization of the Fort Walton Beach CRA

The Fort Walton Beach CRA serves as the City’s social and economic core. The area thrives today through a CRA characterized by:

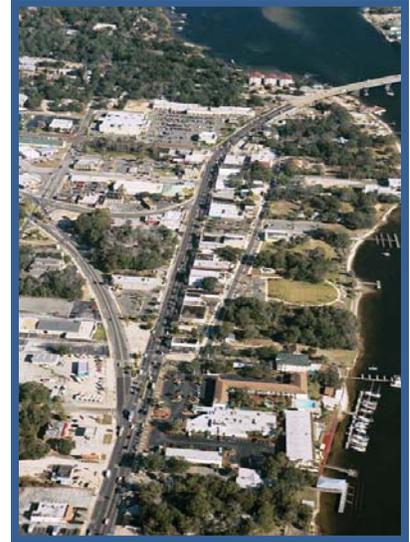
- A vibrant waterfront offering entertainment, dining and recreation to seasonal visitors and permanent residents;
- Residences ranging from single-family detached to duplexes, townhouses, condominiums and apartments, available for all ages, incomes and lifestyles;
- Retail and service businesses;
- Unique cultural opportunities, including theater, dance, art galleries and museums highlighting the City's rich historical background; and
- Public parks, plazas and open spaces.

Major public improvements within the Fort Walton Beach CRA have proven important to the redevelopment effort. Sound Park was constructed across from City Hall in 2007, Chester Pruitt Park received a major upgrade in 2009, Phases I-V of the Downtown Streetscape project were completed in 2009, and many commercial property owners have taken advantage of the matching streetscape grant program to improve the rights-of-way along major corridors. Significant private

redevelopment efforts have included transforming an outdated strip shopping center (Fort Walton Square) into Uptown Station, filled with national commercial tenants and bustling with customer activity as well as the construction of several new large-scale waterfront condominiums downtown. Continued attention to façade improvements, business retention and expansion, and infrastructure improvements are essential to build on the redevelopment efforts.

A 2007 update to the CRA Plan began to change the focus of planning and development to a more mixed-use district with greater residential density - recognizing that successful urban centers require both residential and business development. With little vacant land throughout the CRA and the City, growth is possible primarily through increased density and infill development. This 2012 update to the CRA Plan continues to focus on more streamlined approaches to the development of mixed-use areas and smart growth through a comprehensive improvement program.

Growth and redevelopment slowed significantly in the CRA with the economic decline beginning in 2008 and into 2010, but the lag gave the CRA an opportunity to re-evaluate priorities and position itself to focus more on specific strategies to truly achieve widespread economic revitalization in the CRA. The focus has shifted from trying to “force” a desired development pattern to instead, realizing and forecasting the natural development pattern and providing the tools necessary to accommodate and compliment redevelopment. In the remaining years of the CRA, much is left to be accomplished.



1.4 The Need for a CRA Plan Update

To bring forth the new priorities and strategies, the CRA Board of Commissioners directed staff to begin updating the existing CRA Plan, which was last updated in 2007, in part because much of the information in that plan was outdated, but also because many of the recommendations from the 2007 CRA Plan have either been implemented or are no longer applicable as the economic climate of the area has changed. The 2012 CRA Plan includes all elements required by Chapter 163 of the Florida Statutes for a community redevelopment plan.

Short-term (up to five years) and long-term (up to 10 years) capital improvement projects are identified in this plan as a means to address current issues, as well as continue to address issues identified in the prior CRA Plans. The Finding of Necessity documentation prepared for the 1982, 1998, and 2007 CRA Plans is hereby adopted by reference into the 2012 CRA Plan. Concepts for creative funding options, including private or joint public / private developments that further the goals and objectives of this Plan, are also identified. Other recommendations identify programs and strategies to assist in the overall revitalization of the Fort Walton Beach CRA.

This CRA Plan does not recommend any changes to the current CRA boundaries or to the duration of the CRA. The provisions of this Plan shall remain in effect, and serve as a guide for

2012 Community Redevelopment Plan

the future redevelopment activities in the entire designated Fort Walton Beach CRA Area through December 31, 2026.

Since the enactment of the Community Redevelopment Act of 1969, local governments have utilized the designation of redevelopment areas as an effective method to address blighted conditions within their communities. To understand the purpose and effectiveness of Community Redevelopment Areas, one must understand the process local governments complete to designate Community Redevelopment Areas.

The CRA Process

Contents:

- ◆ **Keys to Success for a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA)?**
- ◆ **What is Tax Increment Financing (TIF)?**
- ◆ **The Fort Walton Beach CRA TIF Fund**
- ◆ **The CRA Budget Process**

2.1 Keys to Success for a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA)?

The language of the Community Redevelopment Act provides three crucial “keys” to inspire the local government’s success in addressing blighted conditions within their community:

- Local self-determination;
- An emphatic directive to maximize private enterprise participation in the redevelopment efforts; and
- A method for funding without raising additional taxes.

Local self-determination lays out the framework for the local government to create a separate legal entity call a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) via Ordinance and following the requirements of Chapter 163, Part III of the Florida Statutes.

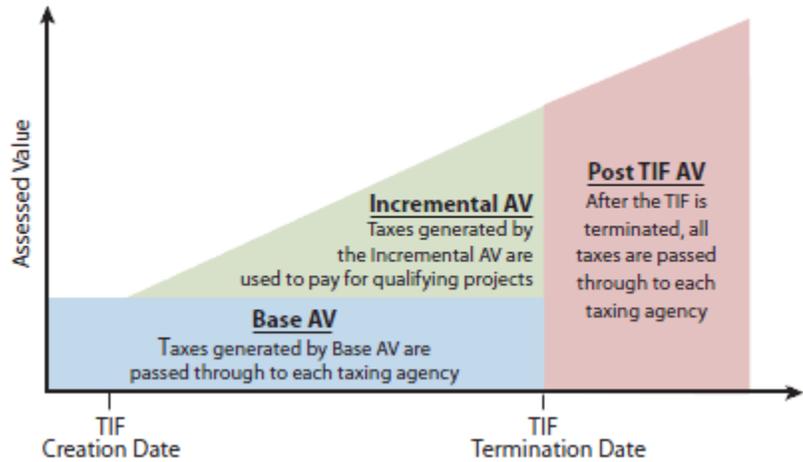
The directive to maximize private enterprise participation in redevelopment results in initiating programs and projects to stimulate private sector participation. The CRA should attempt to identify the impediments to private enterprise fulfilling its roles so that private enterprise can apply its resources to assist in ameliorating the area’s economic shortcomings as well as to operate a profitable venture for itself.

The third “key”, Tax Increment Financing (TIF), is the primary method of funding for projects and programs setup by the CRA though a Redevelopment Trust Fund.

2.1 What is Tax Increment Financing (TIF)?

Authorized under the Community Redevelopment Act of 1969, (Section 163.330, F.S.), the Community Redevelopment Area functions as a Tax Increment Financing District. Often referred to as “TIF,” it is a method to pay for redevelopment through the annual increase in ad valorem tax revenue. The process for calculating TIF revenue requires first establishing a base assessed value (Base AV). This is the total assessed value of the property within the district at the date the Redevelopment Trust Fund is established. At that point, the incremental increase in assessed value over the life of the TIF will continue to generate ad valorem revenue, while the excess (Incremental AV) will be distributed to the TIF agency (CRA) and the Base AV amount

will continue to be distributed to the original taxing agencies. The revenue collected is used to pay for qualifying programs and projects within the TIF district (CRA). At the sunset of the TIF, the total revenue collected through the assessed value (Post TIF AV) will once again be distributed to each of the taxing agencies according to their right.



TIF revenues may be expended by a CRA as described in the CRA Plan for the following purposes, including, but not limited to:

- Administrative and overhead expenses necessary or incidental to the implementation of a community redevelopment plan adopted by the CRA;
- Expenses of redevelopment planning, surveys, and financial analyses, including the reimbursement of the governing body or the CRA for such expenses incurred before the CRA Plan was approved and adopted;
- The acquisition of real property in the redevelopment area;
- The clearance and preparation of any redevelopment area for redevelopment and relocation of site occupants within or outside the CRA;
- The repayment of principal and interest or any redemption premium for loans, advances, bonds, bond anticipation notes, and any other form of indebtedness;
- All expenses incidental to or connected with the issuance, sale, redemption, retirement, or purchase of all bonds, bond anticipation notes, or other form of indebtedness, including funding of any reserve, redemption, or other fund or account provided for in the ordinance or resolution authorizing such bonds, notes, or other form of indebtedness;
- The development of affordable housing within the CRA;
- The development of community policing innovations;

At the end of each fiscal year of the CRA, any funds that remain in the Redevelopment Trust Fund after the payment of expenses for the fiscal year, shall be:

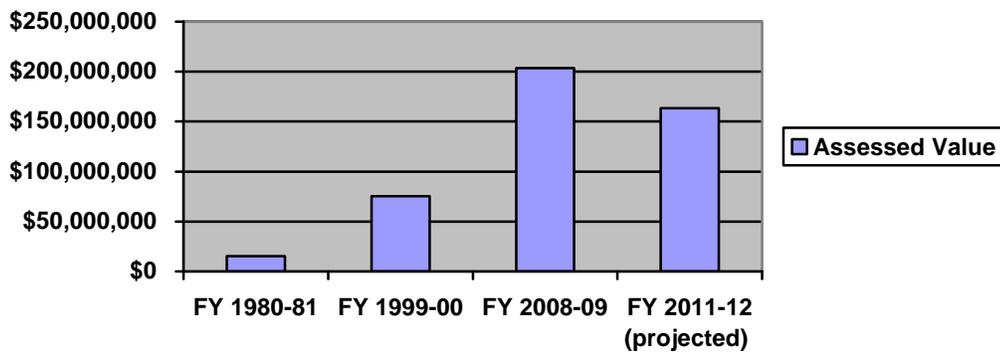
- Returned to each taxing authority which paid the increment in the proportion that the amount of the payment of such taxing authority bears to the total amount paid into the Trust Fund by all taxing authorities for that year;
- Used to reduce the amount of any indebtedness to which TIF revenues are pledged;

- Deposited into an escrow account for the purposes of later reducing any indebtedness to which TIF revenues are pledged; or
- Appropriated to a specific redevelopment project pursuant to an approved CRA Plan that will be completed within three (3) years from the date of such appropriation.

2.2 The Fort Walton Beach CRA TIF Fund

The original Fort Walton Beach Redevelopment Trust Fund began with a base year assessed value of \$15,309,825 in FY 1980-81. At the time of the CRA expansion in FY 1999-2000, the assessed value of the original CRA area had increased to \$75,326,886, an increase of \$60,017,061. The projected assessed value of the original CRA area in FY 2011-12 is \$163,380,136, and increase of \$148,070,311. The highest assessed value of the original CRA area occurred in FY 2008-09, when the assessed value reached \$203,719,445. The economic downturn began in the original CRA area in FY 2009-10 and has decreased in assessed value each year since.

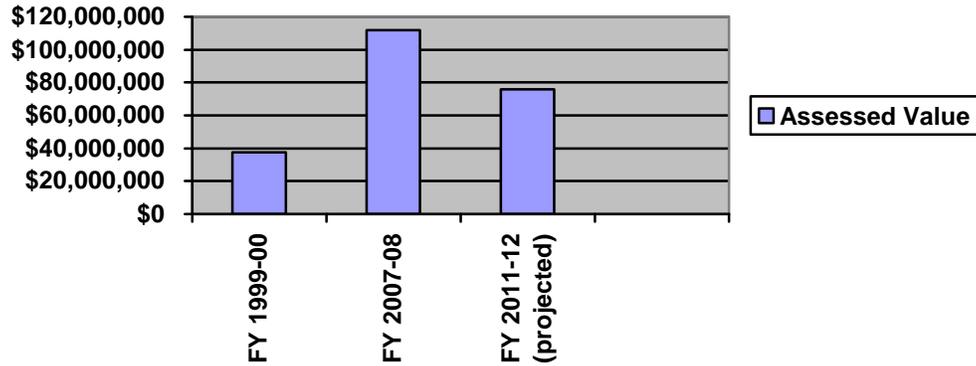
Assessed Value Within Original CRA Boundaries



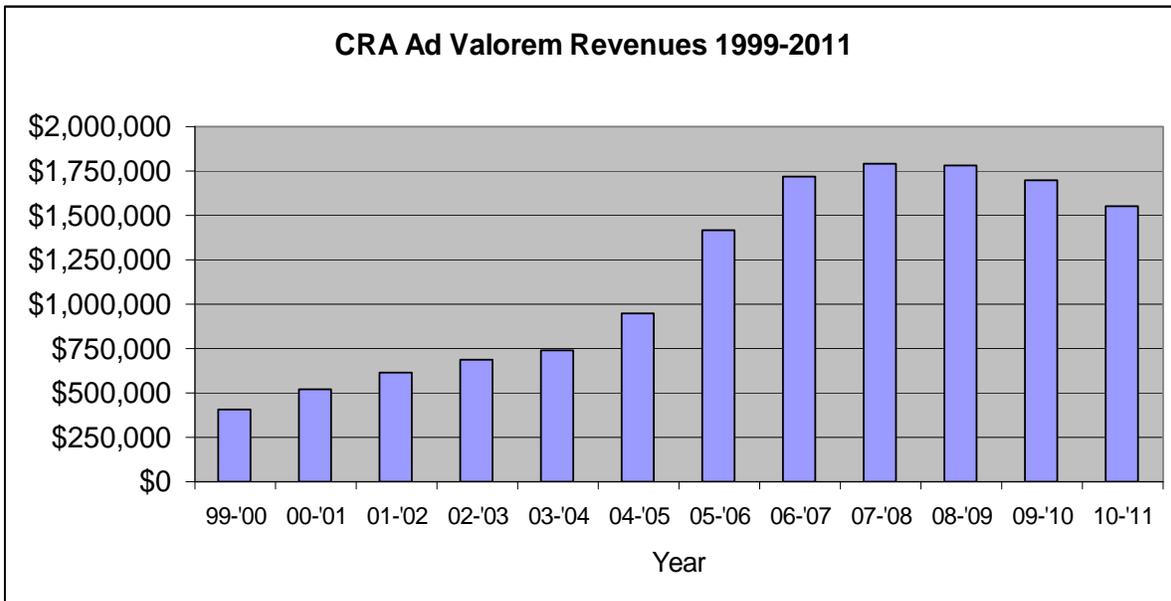
The base year assessed value of the expanded area of the Fort Walton Beach CRA is \$37,439,782 in FY 1999-00. The projected assessed value of the expanded portion of the CRA in FY 2011-12 is \$75,810,333, an increase of \$38,370,551. The highest assessed value of the expanded portion of the CRA area occurred in FY 2007-08, when the assessed value reached \$111,800,011. The economic downturn began in the expanded CRA area in FY 2008-09 and has decreased in assessed value each year since at a higher rate than the original CRA area.

The TIF revenues of the CRA after the expansion in 1998 steadily increased until capping out in FY 2007-08 and FY 2008-09. Since FY 2008-09, there has been a steady decrease in the TIF revenues due to the economic downturn.

Assessed Value with Expanded CRA Boundaries



CRA Ad Valorem Revenues 1999-2011



The revenue collected in the Redevelopment Trust Fund is reinvested into the CRA within the guidelines established by the Community Redevelopment Act and in accordance with the goals and objectives set forth in the CRA Plan. The increment is determined annually and is equal to 95 percent of the difference between:

- (a) The amount of ad valorem taxes levied each year by each taxing authority, exclusive of any amount from any debt service millage, on taxable real property contained within the geographic boundaries of a community redevelopment area; and
- (b) The amount of ad valorem taxes which would have been produced by the rate upon which the tax is levied each year by or for each taxing authority, exclusive of any debt service millage, upon the total of the assessed value of the taxable real property in the community redevelopment area as shown upon the most recent assessment roll used in

connection with the taxation of such property by each taxing authority prior to the effective date of the ordinance providing for the funding of the trust fund.

2.3 The CRA Budget Process

Budget development begins early each year, usually in February or March. Each year, CRA staff begins to develop and compile an annual plan of programs and projects that meet the goals of the Community Redevelopment Area Plan. During this time, the City will solicit participation from residents and businesses located within the boundaries of the CRA. This is the opportunity each year for the public to contribute to the development of the CRA budget and provide valuable input on CRA programs and projects. Budget items must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the CRA Plan and be consistent with the overall mission of the Community Redevelopment Area. For this reason, all submission, requests, and staff generated budget items must be evaluated against the primary purpose of the CRA, which is to eliminate blight and slum. More specifically, programs and projects focus on three general areas as identified in the Florida Statutes:

1. Encouraging private enterprise. This shall include the consideration of certain development and job creation incentives as well as the acquisition and transfer of real property in the CRA in order to promote revitalization and redevelopment (Sections 163.345, 163.370, and 163.380, F.S.).
2. Installation of necessary public improvements. This shall include installation, construction, or reconstruction of streets, utilities, parks, playgrounds, and other public areas as well as furnishing and repair of these facilities (Section 163.370(c)(3), F.S.)
3. Provision of affordable housing. This shall include the acquisition of property, demolition/removal of buildings and improvements, transfer of property, and other activities for purposes of meeting the housing goals and objectives of the CRA Plan (Section 163.370, F.S.).

Once developed, the draft annual budget will be submitted to the Community Redevelopment Agency Board of Commissioners in April or May and finalized in June or July. The CRA Board and City Council will then adopt the final budget in September for the fiscal year of October 1st through September 30th. CRA expenditures must be balanced with CRA revenues each year.

Fort Walton Beach CRA Budget Development Timeline		
January	Budget Development Begins	
February		Public Input Sought
March		
April	Draft Programs and Project presented to CRA Board	
May		
June	Annual Budget presented to CRA Board	
July		
August	Annual Budget Finalized	
September	Annual Budget Adopted	Fiscal Year Ends September 30 th
October	Fiscal Year Begins October 1 st	
November		
December		

The Fort Walton Beach CRA is an incredible tool, which if used properly will benefit not only those in the blighted area, but the community as a whole. Throughout the budget process it is essential to remain focused on the primary function of the CRA, and to ensure that CRA goals and objectives are being met, at least in part, in every project or program. The remainder of this document will describe the goals, objectives, and strategies of the Fort Walton Beach CRA in more detail.

Goals, Objectives, & Strategies

Land use, infrastructure, transportation, design, housing, and economic development compromise the primary sustenance of the Fort Walton Beach CRA. Each category presents unique redevelopment challenges, yet each category also represents great opportunity. In formulating specific goals, objectives, and strategies for each category, the overriding focus was to provide all of the tools possible for successful redevelopment. This section of the Plan is organized into six primary goals, each with accompanying objectives as well as specific strategies to achieve the objectives.

COMPONENT 1 – LAND USE

LAND USE GOAL:

PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE REDEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CRA BY IMPLEMENTING A TRUE MIXED-USE DISTRICT AND BY CREATING LAND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

Objectives:

- ◆ **Achieve Consistency between Zoning and Land Use**
- ◆ **Help Landowners Increase their Property Values**
- ◆ **Appropriately Preserve and Accentuate Historic Buildings and Sites**
- ◆ **Protect Natural Resources and Promote Sustainability**

Introduction



Land use is the foundation for development and redevelopment. It is the means of describing the range of possible uses and development standards for those uses. Land use determinations are the first step in development by identifying what is possible on a parcel of land. This chapter identifies the future land uses within the CRA and objectives to ensure that redevelopment results in mixed uses and sustainability. The graphic to the left depicts the adopted Future Land Use Map for the CRA.

Objective 1.1 – Achieve Consistency between Zoning and Land Use

The predominant land use category in the CRA, defined in the Comprehensive Plan, is the MU (Mixed Use) category. The mixed-use (MU) land use category is generally intended to allow single-family residential, multi-family residential, a wide range of commercial activities, limited industrial (such as artisan studios or cottage industries), educational, public, civic, cultural, and specific tourist-related activities all in the same area. The mixed-use district provides for more efficient use of land and infrastructure and promotes a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The table below outlines the “mix of uses” goal for the CRA. In order to ensure a mix of uses for land within the mixed-use land use category, the percentages set in the table below will be implemented on a district-wide basis and evaluated periodically.

Type of Use	Minimum %	Maximum %
Residential	20	40
Commercial retail	20	45
Personal service and office	5	10
Entertainment, hospitality, tourist-oriented establishments	20	45
Civic, institutional, educational, cultural, or public	10	25
Limited industrial (artisan studios or similar)	0	20

Strategy 1.1.1

1. Increase opportunities for development and redevelopment by implementing the new mixed-use land use category. Mixed-use developments range from a single building with two or more uses to a large-scale development with an assortment of office, retail, service, residential, recreational, and occasionally industrial uses. These developments are a response to market demand for places that provide everyday shopping and lifestyle needs in a location accessible by foot, bicycle, public transit, or automobile

Objective 1.2 – Help Landowners Increase their Property Values

Over the years, certain blocks and lots in the CRA have experienced depreciation in the value of land and buildings, contributing to blight. When a neighborhood becomes blighted, it is often accompanied by crime rates and other undesirable circumstances which can cause a social breakdown and devaluation of the area as a whole. Housing improvement programs discussed in Chapter 6 may be combined with programs such as façade improvement grants for businesses, land value investment programs, and site development grants to improve current conditions of buildings that contribute to the “blight” of an area. Dilapidated buildings may be removed allowing for more constructive land uses for that property and taking advantage of every infill opportunity.

Strategy 1.2.1 & 1.2.2

1. Implement a CRA Façade Improvement matching grant. Businesses in the CRA may receive up to a designated dollar amount, matched 1:1 by the business owner, for purposes of

improving the building or structure with new paint, windows, doors, awnings, signs, or other enhancements to attract new customers.

2. Explore the cost-benefit of creating a Land Value Investment program and/or a Site Development grant program in the CRA. A site development assistance grant may offer partial (up to 25%) reimbursement for the cost of exterior improvements to a building or site in the CRA. In a Land Value Investment program, the CRA may purchase underutilized land and lease it short-term (up to 10 years) for discounted rates to attract new businesses to the area and in exchange for site development improvements between the CRA and lessee.

Objective 1.3 – Appropriately Preserve and Accentuate Historic Buildings and Sites

Historic structures can be both a dilemma and an asset depending on the desired use of the site. Currently in the Fort Walton Beach CRA, any building that is older than 50 years is considered to be historic. Based on this definition, 29.2% of the structures in the CRA (built before 1960) are historic. Many times, these buildings are deteriorated and should be removed. The buildings are not historically significant simply due to age; buildings should have significance because of architectural importance or a historically significant event. The older buildings in the CRA are not on the Florida Master Site File or the National Register.

On the other hand, culturally and historically rich areas can help define the character of an area and attract tourists. Therefore, it is important to identify important historic buildings and places. Further, private properties may also be eligible for tax incentives.

Strategy 1.3.1 – 1.3.3

1. Refine methods to designate historic sites and structures to ensure valuable historic property is protected and dilapidated structures are not unduly protected.
2. Establish a process to promote historic sites and buildings that are listed on the Florida Master Site File or the National Register.
3. Provide support in the form of information from City records or appropriate provisions in the Comprehensive Plan.

Objective 1.4 – Protect Natural Resources and Promote Sustainability

“Green” development techniques are gaining more acceptance while developers are quickly realizing the market demand for more sustainable products, including housing and commercial buildings. Buyers want the benefits of these new “greener” buildings and sites, some of which include: significantly lower utility bills, lower employee absenteeism, and higher building resale value. Promoting “green development” within the CRA helps ensure the Fort Walton Beach CRA will be able to accommodate the market demand for greener products. Promoting lower impact development now also lays the foundation for a self-sustaining CRA, which is an ultimate goal of any CRA.

Strategy 1.4.1 – 1.4.4

1. Consider offering CRA incentives to developers, within grants, for example, to developers and businesses who implement green development techniques as part of their project.
2. Apply appropriate green development principles “in-house” when renovating, reconstructing, or repairing City buildings and facilities. For example, install energy-efficient lighting fixtures during replacement or install a “cool” roof.



3. Ensure the permitting process is adequate to accommodate “green” development and that the LDC sets forth measures to streamline green development.
4. Highlight important natural resources in the CRA, such as the waterfront and estuarine environment, and promote those resources to attract new tenants, visitors, and customers to the CRA.

Continued emphasis on growth and higher density places a higher demand on infrastructure needs. The following section will outline the goal, objectives, and strategies for infrastructure within the CRA, ensuring that water & sewer lines, streets, and sidewalks are upgraded consistently and keep up with demand.

COMPONENT 2 – INFRASTRUCTURE

INFRASTRUCTURE GOAL:

IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGHOUT THE CRA

Objectives:

- ◆ **Continue Sidewalk and Pavement Improvement Programs**
- ◆ **Continue to Upgrade Water and Sewer Lines Throughout the CRA**
- ◆ **Consider Narrowing Excess Right-of-way and Creating or Extending Alleyways in the CRA**
- ◆ **Increase the Use and Screening of Joint Use Dumpsters**
- ◆ **Consider an Underground Utilities Program in the CRA**
- ◆ **Consider Narrowing Excess Rights-of-way and Creating or Extending Alleyways in the CRA**

Introduction

Aging infrastructure can be a significant impediment to successful redevelopment. While Fort Walton Beach is a leading center for technology and job growth, deficiencies still exist such as utility lines, water & sewer, streets, and sidewalks. A continual program for updating infrastructure can make the area more attractive for redevelopment, in turn, attracting more residents, businesses, and visitors.

Objective 2.1 – Continue Sidewalk and Pavement Improvement Programs

The CRA maintains annual sidewalk and pavement improvement Capital Improvement Programs (CIP). The purpose of the pavement improvement program is to perform preventative maintenance on roads to prevent them from deteriorating to a point requiring a complete rehabilitation. The CRA could also consider utilizing funding to match needed road improvement projects including capacity projects, congestion management, and other transportation projects, including bike lanes.

The annual sidewalk improvement program is designed to increase pedestrian safety and provide a pedestrian-friendly urban environment in the CRA. The sidewalk program should consider the classification of each road, as some roads require wider sidewalks further away from the main street.

Strategy 2.1.1 & 2.1.2

1. Continue the annual pavement improvement program and possibly expand the program to include other road improvement projects, such as capacity building, bicycle lanes, congestion management, and enhanced pedestrian features.
2. Continue adding sidewalks and improving existing sidewalks where needed. If possible, construct wider sidewalks, allowing for multiple modes of non-motorized transit to occur simultaneously. Develop a prioritized list of sidewalk improvement projects.

Objective 2.2 – Continue to Upgrade Water and Sewer Lines Throughout the CRA

Aging and failing water and sewer lines make the Fort Walton Beach CRA less attractive for redevelopment compared to newly built areas. Upgrading these lines to accommodate higher density may attract more developers to the CRA.

Strategy 2.2.1 & 2.2.2

1. Consider implementing a yearly program to utilize CRA funds to complete needed underground infrastructure in the CRA. Though infrastructure can be costly to update, this program can attract developers into the CRA and make the area more competitive compared to other newly built areas.
2. Offer incentives to incoming developers, such as a Development Infrastructure grant program, that may provide up to 75% of qualifying expenses necessary to upgrade infrastructure for incoming commercial and residential projects in the CRA.

Objective 2.3 – Increase the Use and Screening of Joint Use Dumpsters

In many locations, multifamily residents and businesses rely on individual garbage cans, primarily due to space limitations for dumpsters. For small businesses, even the smallest dumpster may be too large for the business needs. However, in areas with small lots, narrow sidewalks, or narrow streets, the proliferation of garbage cans, seen in the photograph below, is unsightly and potentially unsanitary. The City could coordinate with users to establish a location for dumpsters to serve multiple users, reducing the need for individual garbage cans.



the photograph below, is unsightly and potentially unsanitary. The City could coordinate with users to establish a location for dumpsters to serve multiple users, reducing the need for individual garbage cans.

In addition, dumpsters, whether currently in use or provided to meet this objective, should be screened from view to the maximum extent possible.

Strategy 2.3.1 & 2.3.2

1. Develop a program for establishing joint use dumpsters in areas now cluttered with individual garbage cans.
2. Provide financial incentives for installing screening or landscaping to buffer existing dumpsters to improve the appearance of these facilities throughout the CRA.

Objective 2.4 – Consider an Underground Utilities Program in the CRA

Traditional overhead utility lines connected by utility poles can create visual clutter and inhibit urban center development patterns. Placing utilities lines underground contributes to an overall pedestrian-friendly environment and may prove to be safer and more reliable during hurricanes and other natural disasters. Converting overhead utilities to underground utilities is not without its drawbacks. Therefore, the CRA should consider all aspects of an underground utilities program and should evaluate the cost benefit for each individual project.

The City has completed several steps towards beginning an underground utilities program, including a Feasibility Study in 2007 and obtaining estimates from Gulf Power for the Eglin Parkway corridor. If the CRA wishes to pursue underground utilities, several more steps must be taken.

Strategy 2.4.1 -2.4.4

1. Coordinate with Gulf Power to produce binding estimates for converting overhead utilities to underground along major corridors, such as Eglin Parkway, Brooks Street, and Miracle Strip Parkway.
2. Consider different funding scenarios to complete the entire project in one or more phases. Several problems exist with phasing an underground utilities project including: the substantial cost of a temporary to overhead construction pole, additional mobilization costs, matching fixtures due to different manufacturers during different bids, and additional set-up costs.
3. Coordinate with Gulf Power for placement of utility lines in alleys, especially during implementation of programs to create or extend alleys and when underground placement is not feasible.
4. Continue the CRA Streetscape grant program, which provides matching funds to private businesses for underground utilities.

Objective 2.5 – Consider Narrowing Excess Right-of-way and Creating or Extending Alleyways in the CRA

Several streets in the CRA have excess right-of-way that is currently underutilized. In some areas, the right-of-way can be “transferred” to alleyways. Extending and creating alleyways

allows pedestrians a place to walk far away from traffic and noise and also allows businesses adequate space for storage and loading/unloading.

Strategy 2.5.1 & 2.5.2

1. Implement a pilot study that will decrease the right-of-way (ROW) on Chicago Avenue and extend the alley that currently exists parallel to Chestnut Avenue and Chicago Avenue and to the south of Oak Street. Extend that alley north to Ferry Road and south to First Street.
2. Based on the success of the alley extension pilot study, more alleys may be created and/or extended.

Just as infrastructure improvements are vitally important to support growth and redevelopment in the CRA, transportation improvements are equally important. The transportation system should provide for safe and efficient mobility allowing residents and visitors to travel from residential areas to shops and restaurants. A good transportation system is also a key component of an effective mixed-use district, supporting a compact mix of land uses. The following section will outline the goal for the transportation system in the Fort Walton Beach CRA, as well as the objectives and strategies formulated to achieve the goal.

COMPONENT 3 – TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATION GOAL:

ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF AN ADEQUATE AND SAFE MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM THROUGHOUT THE CRA

Objectives:

- ◆ Improve Safety Through Installing Traffic Calming and Congestion Management Design Features
- ◆ Promote the Use of and Enhance the Availability of Transit Facilities
- ◆ Continue to Promote Walkable Areas Throughout the CRA Through the Installation of Pedestrian-Friendly Features
- ◆ Ensure Adequate Bicycle Facilities Throughout the CRA
- ◆ Ensure Adequate and Accessible Parking Throughout the CRA

Introduction

The transportation system within the Fort Walton Beach CRA is functional, but can be congested and unsafe at times. Major arterial roads such as Miracle Strip Parkway (U.S. Highway 98), Eglin Parkway (State Road 85), and Beal Parkway (State Road 89) carry a capacity of up to 33,500 AADT (average annual daily traffic), 38,000 AADT, and 15,000 AADT, respectively. Due to the already built-out nature of the City, and the CRA specifically, most road widening projects to increase capacity through additional lanes on major roadways are not feasible. Therefore, it is important to focus on transportation improvements that can improve mobility in the CRA, such as enhanced pedestrian facilities, bikeways, and other congestion management and traffic calming techniques. Providing multimodal transportation options in the CRA is increasingly important in order to support the denser, mixed-use development pattern planned for the CRA.

Objective 3.1 – Improve Safety Through Installing Traffic Calming and Congestion Management Design Features

When traffic volumes approach or exceed capacity during peak hours or seasons, the resulting congestion reduces mobility. Congestion management can include roadway design practices such as limiting the number of driveways on arterials, installing needed turning lanes, intersection improvements, rerouting through-traffic, and traffic signal synchronization. Other congestion management strategies include ways to actually reduce capacity by encouraging other modes of

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transportation including transit service, walking, and bicycling. Traffic calming principally involves managing vehicle speed, modifying drivers’ behaviors, and reducing traffic volume in order to increase the safety level for all modes of travel. The most common practices for traffic calming include installing speed tables, medians, street trees, pavement treatments, signage, and diverters.

Existing Roadway Analysis:

ROADWAY	EXISTING CONDITIONS	POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS
SR 85 (Eglin Parkway)	Undivided 6-lane major arterial surrounded by primarily commercial land uses, including Uptown Station	Median improvements, continuous streetscape/ improved sidewalks, wider sidewalks, underground utilities, improved pedestrian crossings, limit continuous curb cuts, improved internal circulation
US 98 (Miracle Strip Parkway)	4-lane divided major arterial carrying through traffic from Pensacola to Panama City; low speed limit, new streetscape downtown; tree-lined medians	Improved pedestrian crossings; enforced speed limit; Brooks Bridge improvements; wider and improved sidewalks west of Brooks Street; streetscaping west of Brooks Street
SR 189 (Beal Parkway)	Undivided 4-lane minor arterial	Improved sidewalks, additional pedestrian crossings
Brooks Street	2-lane “local” road with low volume traffic; streetscape north side only; low speeds, existing raised pedestrian crossings	Streetscaping and/or underground utilities south side; additional raised pedestrian crossings; well-marked parking, additional lighting
Hollywood Boulevard	“Undivided” 2-lane minor collector with suicide lane and excess paved ROW principally located in the light industrial/mixed use retail district	Improved sidewalks (wider sidewalks, continuous sidewalks), streetscape/ landscape, street reconfiguration for marked bike lanes and possibly 4-lanes or landscaped medians with turn lanes, marked pedestrian crossings
First Street, Second Street, Third Street, Fourth Street, Bass Avenue, Shell Avenue, Harbeson Avenue, Carson Drive, Alder Avenue, Chicago Avenue, McGriff Street, Walter Martin Road, Windham Avenue, Tupelo Avenue Lowery Place, Buck Drive, and Hughes Street	Many “local” roads in the CRA are set up fairly grid-like, providing alternate routes through the main part of the CRA.	Some of the local streets could be improved through streetscaping, landscaping, sidewalks, wider sidewalks, continuous sidewalks, and pedestrian friendly crossings and intersections

Strategy 3.1.1 – 3.1.4

1. Install speed tables on local roads to reduce vehicle speeds. According to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), speed tables promote smooth flow of traffic at slow speeds, less than 25 miles per hour, and are reasonable on local residential streets. Speed humps have the potential for traffic calming and can be applied for roads with two lanes. Speed humps are recommended on Brooks Street to reduce speeds. Additional signage and striping to identify speed humps and high levels of pedestrian activity are also recommended.



2. Install “buffers” along the ROW, such as landscaping, lighting, trees, or hedges to create a visual and physical separation of traffic and pedestrian activity. Buffers should be incorporated with on-street parking and bicycle lanes. Streets recommended for buffers include Miracle Strip Parkway and Eglin Parkway where no streetscaping currently exists. Low hedges may be incorporated into Hollywood Boulevard improvements. Require sidewalks to be set back from the street, when possible, instead of at the curb.
3. Educate the public. Successful congestion management is based, in part, on making people aware of the available choices for transportation. When people choose travel options other than the car, especially a car with one person, the number of trips on the road will be reduced. Therefore, it is important to provide information and, where possible, support to neighborhoods and businesses regarding new multimodal projects in the CRA and the benefits of multimodal transportation
4. Continue to actively participate in the Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) process to prioritize needed projects in the CRA.

Objective 3.2 – Promote the Use of and Enhance the Availability of Transit Facilities

Public transportation helps to alleviate traffic congestion, improve air quality, and is much more economical for residents and visitors than single-occupancy motor vehicle travel. Okaloosa County Transit Service currently provides three bus routes within the Fort Walton Beach CRA. There are approximately 30 bus stops in the CRA, each with a pickup frequency of approximately every 1½ hours.

Ideally, a transit stop should be located every ¼ mile so that every person is within walking distance to a bus stop. Bus stops should be located close to major trip generators and should be safe, convenient, comfortable, high quality facilities in order to promote the highest possible ridership.

Strategy 3.2.1 – 3.2.4

1. Consider working with Okaloosa County to add additional transit stops in the CRA. Increasing the number of transit stops will provide riders better connectivity so they can access more destinations. Accommodating different modes of transportation such as buses, vehicles, and bikes will foster interactive multi-modal uses.
2. Consider adding local trolley or shuttle bus services. Trolley service can attract visitors from the beach to the CRA area. Ideally, a trolley should continuously circulate in the area, providing frequent pick-up service. Partnerships with the local hotels and condominiums could be researched to provide shuttle services to guests.
3. Work with Okaloosa County to provide additional transit signage and marketing activities within the CRA. Signage should notify users of the transit pick-up schedule and routes. Increasing information about transit availability can help increase the effectiveness of the system.
4. Consider improvements to existing transit stops by adding bus shelters, benches, and signage, where appropriate. Sidewalk connectivity is also an important component of an effective transit system.



Objective 3.3 – Continue to Promote Walkable Areas Throughout the CRA Through the Installation of Pedestrian-Friendly Features

Sidewalks alone cannot necessarily provide adequate pedestrian access. Many features, such as street furniture, vegetated buffers, wider sidewalks, and pedestrian scaled buildings and signage contribute to the “walkable” environment. Walkable areas provide greater connectivity and access for both vehicles and pedestrians. Providing accessible pedestrian paths via a complete network of sidewalks that link residential areas with recreational and commercial areas is the foundation of a walkable community. This will also reduce the need for automobiles for those traveling within the CRA area, while promoting healthier lifestyles for the residents of this area.

Strategy 3.3.1 – 3.3.5

1. Continue to budget for and construct sidewalks throughout the CRA. Targeted program areas and arterial roads should receive priority. A prioritized list of areas needing sidewalks will be developed.
2. Improve pedestrian signage and signals in the CRA. Additional signage and crosswalk systems are needed on Brooks Street, Eglin Parkway, and Miracle Strip Parkway, among others, to improve visibility and safety.
3. Improve pedestrian crossings in the CRA. Consider retrofitting certain intersections to include “pedestrian crossing islands” and consider pedestrian overpasses and medians. Without adequate crosswalks, walking may be unsafe in certain areas.

4. Provide for wider sidewalks in the CRA. According to FDOT, in central business districts (CBD) the minimum recommended width of sidewalks is eight feet; industrial and commercial areas outside the CBD should be seven feet wide. In residential areas, sidewalks should be at least five feet wide with two feet of a landscape strip from the curb.
5. Continue a streetscape program to enhance walkability. Pedestrian-scaled lighting, street furniture, and pavers all enhance the walkable environment.

Objective 3.4 – Ensure Adequate Bicycle Facilities Throughout the CRA

Bicycle paths should be well-signed and complete, and bicycle parking facilities should be provided to support travel by bicycle. Bicycle lanes enhance the safety of pedestrians on sidewalks.

Strategy 3.4.1 – 3.4.3

1. Install bicycle lanes and shared use paths in the CRA. Installing bicycle lanes can be as simple as adding paint to the road in some areas. The CRA should consider a transportation improvement “program” or “fund” to implement bike lanes in addition to the sidewalk improvement program.
2. Provide additional bicycle parking facilities in both public and private areas throughout the CRA. Continue to utilize CRA funds to install bicycle racks in public parking lots and public spaces. Continue to enforce provisions in the Land Development Code that require bicycle parking spaces.
3. Continue to coordinate with the Okaloosa-Walton TPO for a bicycle plan and bicycle improvements in the CRA.



Objective 3.5 – Ensure the Availability of Adequate and Accessible Parking in the CRA



While the 2007 Parking Facilities Study concluded that there is not a deficit of parking spaces in the CRA overall, it did validate the perception of poor parking choices. Parking, specifically downtown, is neither well-placed nor well-known. Directing patrons to available parking spaces may be what is needed most in the CRA.

Strategy 3.5.1 – 3.5.3

1. Consider acquiring new property or entering into public-private partnerships to add additional parking spaces where needed most.

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2. Consider adding parking lot improvements, where needed most, to existing public property.
3. Improve visibility of public parking through highly visible signage on Miracle Strip Parkway, Brooks Street, and Perry Avenue directing motorists towards public parking areas.

Implementing the strategies outlined above will improve mobility and safety for residents and visitors in the CRA, especially when integrated with infrastructure upgrades and efficient land use choices. To continue a positive image of the CRA, the following section outlines design guidelines, which are intended to promote visual consistency and harmony throughout the area.

COMPONENT 4 – DESIGN GUIDELINES

DESIGN GUIDELINES GOAL:

PROMOTE A POSITIVE COMMUNITY IMAGE WHILE ADVANCING THE HEALTH, SAFETY, WELFARE, AND APPEARANCE OF THE CRA THROUGH THE PROMOTION OF VISUAL CONSISTENCY AND HARMONY

Objectives:

- ◆ **Reduce and Avoid the Use of Over-Simplified Rectangular Volumes and Limit the Amount of Blank Walls**
- ◆ **Achieve Façade Articulation Treatments**
- ◆ **Achieve a Cityscape with Well-Articulated Walls**
- ◆ **Achieve Compatibility Through Type, Size, and Location of Windows and Doors**
- ◆ **Achieve Compatibility of Rooflines and Roofing Materials**
- ◆ **Achieve Compatibility of Design for Entryways and Storefronts**
- ◆ **Achieve Transitions Between Adjacent Uses**
- ◆ **Ensure Compatibility of Accessory Structures**
- ◆ **Provide Screening for Equipment and Specified Uses**
- ◆ **Ensure Compatibility of Site Features, such as Landscaping, Fences, Outdoor Seating, and Recreation Areas**
- ◆ **Achieve Consistency and Compatibility in Signage**
- ◆ **Provide for Community Policing and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design**

Introduction

Fort Walton Beach is characterized by an eclectic mix of styles ranging from the Florida Cracker Style to Florida Contemporary, and while there is currently no dominant style, the intent of this plan is to ensure harmony, consistency, and compatibility between structures and to create appropriate transitions and complements between these styles throughout the CRA. This will be achieved through the establishment and implementation of common architectural design principles including façade articulation and orientation, through the proportional use of materials, colors and architectural features based upon approximate façade area ratios and

through consistency and compatibility of styles through roof pitch and materials, consistency of scale and style with appropriate transitions.

Design guidelines are based on certain design elements and principles, which allow the freedom to choose material, color and design with the use of façade ratios to project consistency and compatibility compiled into a streamlined set of guidelines. Building materials including windows, doors and design elements are used to ensure proportionality and transitions to create a visually interesting appearance through approximate façade area calculations which contributes towards uniformity between an eclectic mixture of styles throughout the CRA (Community Redevelopment Area). The emphasis within the design guidelines is on the freedom of individual preference while providing guidance in working towards strengthening the community identity to further encourage development and redevelopment. These contribute towards the overall goal for increasing property values while further incentivizing and promoting business activity within the CRA. Furthermore, it is at the discretion of each individual neighborhood and district within the CRA, to choose to organize and adopt their own Covenants and Restrictions, to be privately administered to further promote consistency and compatibility per each area.

The intent of this chapter is to provide guidelines that may be incorporated into the LDC for density and intensity bonuses and considered when reviewing applications for CRA grant programs. These guidelines will help to strengthen the image and identity of the CRA . This in turn increases property values and promotes the compatibility of uses and appearance through a flexible approach to design that promotes quality and durability and based on the pedestrian scale. Applicants should provide renderings and elevations, including information regarding the use and type of material and colors to demonstrate achievement in regards to façade articulation. In addition, these plans will include dimensions, location of screening devices and mechanical equipment locations and storage areas to ensure consistency within the CRA with final approval of roof type, material and pitch; construction style and materials; and landscaping and structural orientation.

Objective 4.1 – Reduce and Avoid the Use of Over-Simplified Rectangular Volumes and Limit the Amount of Blank Walls

Massing and interior voids, plazas, etc. can encourage advanced design, and provide additional vistas, improved ventilation, and walkability throughout a development. A well-designed façade includes façade articulation techniques. This is achieved through an approximate calculation of the amount of structural and façade square footage in order to determine the amount of façade articulation necessary. For many buildings, there is more than one street frontage. Therefore, well-designed facades will include all visible sides receiving “front” treatment. The following graphics illustrate designs that meet this objective.



Recommendation 4.1.1 – 4.1.4

1. Utilize a minimum depth for three-dimensional features, such as projections and recesses and other design features to ensure consistency in treatment.
2. Provide landscaping as an alternative that can be incorporated to create visual breaks along blank wall areas.
3. Use building massing, or structural volumes, to create proportional, well-designed structures which integrate larger volumes into a scale oriented to the pedestrian.
4. Use variations in height and depth within façade articulation strategies to create further interest in addition to the use of porches, verandas, decks, balconies, arcades or colonnades, towers, and/or porticos.

Objective 4.2 – Achieve Façade Articulation Treatments

The primary methods to achieve façade articulation are the use of windows, shutters, doors, banding, moldings, arches, balconies, porches and verandas to vary the façade. Combining façade articulation techniques with strategies to avoid blank walls and simple rectangles provides for interest and variety in design. The goal for the provision and implementation of detail within façade articulation is to achieve an orientation to the scale of the pedestrian while creating a visually interesting façade through the use of architectural features. Awnings and canopies can provide a design feature which contributes toward façade articulation in addition to the use of arcades (series of columns), overhangs, parapets, arches, building details, such as columns, pilasters, banding and bays, towers, cupolas, etc. Furthermore, through the use of repetition, the façade is further enhanced through the repeated use of material, patterns, textures, colors, banding, projections and massing of forms.

The variety in materials, color, window placement, and projections and recesses shown in the following illustrations helps in understanding the concepts of façade articulation.

Recommendation 4.2.1

1. Utilize City-provided façade articulation techniques to enhance the area and create harmony among individual developments.

Objective 4.3 – Achieve a Cityscape with Well-Articulated Walls

The use of varying materials and colors along with design elements are methods to achieve well-articulated walls. Building designers can use a wide range of techniques, choosing colors and materials to meet the design needs and choices of the building owner and occupant. Where buildings have street “frontage” on two or more sides, these techniques should be used to achieve the appearance of a front entrance on all street frontages.

The use of banding (shown in the photographs below) differentiates uses, such as residential on upper floors and commercial on the street level. The incorporation of different materials can create further visual interest, while promoting the “small town character”.



Recommendation 4.3.1 & 4.3.2

1. Establish CRA-funded grant or loan programs to support improvements to façade design and to encourage treatment of all street frontages with “front” entrance designs.
2. Consider establishing bonus provisions in the LDC to grant additional floor area or additional density based on the degree of compliance with the design guidelines in this CRA Plan.

Objective 4.4 – Achieve Compatibility Through Type, Size, and Location of Windows and Doors

The placement and style of windows and doors is important in achieving compatibility and consistency in design and scale. Where multiple “front” entrances are provided, the design and placement of windows and doors can improve visibility to businesses, enhance safety for pedestrians and shoppers, and also respect privacy. Where a building has both residential and business uses, separate entrances for residents are important to respect privacy. Further, windows and doors should be proportional to the façade and enhance design choices described in the objectives above. The placement and design of doors, in particular, is crucial to achieve a clear delineation of entrances.

Recommendation 4.4.1

1. Review grant applications for consistency with window and awning design guidelines.

Objective 4.5 – Achieve Compatibility of Rooflines and Roofing Materials

Compatibility and consistency between rooflines and roofing materials of new or redeveloped buildings with buildings in the surrounding neighborhood can be achieved through attention to roof pitch, varying heights, the use of eaves and parapets, and complementary materials. Design interest can be accomplished through the use of design elements and dormers. Pitched roofs are particularly important in areas where heights are three stories or less in order to promote design consistent with the small town character desired in Fort Walton Beach. Examples of various roof treatments are shown in the following illustrations.

Recommendation 4.5.1 & 4.5.2

1. Utilize minimum standards for pitched roofs in residential areas.
2. Create incentives to achieve consistency in roof design within a neighborhood.

Objective 4.6 – Achieve Compatibility of Design for Entryways and Storefronts

Entryways and storefronts should serve as a focal point and an integral component of the overall design scheme. These features should provide further identification and maximize visibility while providing features that can provide relief from inclement weather designed for the visibility and comfort of the pedestrian. This is accomplished through the use of color, transitions between varying materials; and the incorporation of awnings, decorative pavers, landscaping, and/or water features to provide interesting entryways and storefronts to further attract business within the CRA. The objective further encourages the provision of shade and cover, in addition to outdoor seating areas and benches, near entryways and storefronts.

Recommendation 4.6.1 & 4.6.2

1. Provide examples of entryway and storefront designs a guidelines for new development and redevelopment.
2. Consider providing incentives for incorporating recommended entryway and storefront designs. Review grant applications for consistency.

Objective 4.7 – Achieve Transitions Between Adjacent Uses

While it is the goal for all new development within the CRA to complement surrounding structures, the use of transitions between building heights, the differentiation of style, and the use of materials and scale will further promote compatibility and consistency of development.

Recommendation 4.7.1 & 4.7.2

1. Encourage development that achieves compatibility through transitions in height, scale, and style of new development or redevelopment when compared to the surrounding neighborhood.
2. Consider compatibility standards for transitioning from low-rise development to taller buildings and consistency of scale of adjacent buildings.

Objective 4.8 – Ensure Compatibility of Accessory Structures

Accessory uses and structures should complement the primary structure through the use of consistent materials, colors, and style. This can be accomplished through repetition of materials, colors, and design features among related structures.

Recommendation 4.8.1 & 4.8.2

1. Provide guidelines and examples of methods to achieve compatibility of accessory structures with primary structures.
2. Consider standards or incentives to achieve compatibility for accessory structures.

Objective 4.9 – Provide Screening for Equipment and Specified Uses

Screening and landscaped buffers help ensure aesthetic appeal by providing visual barriers for equipment such as electrical facilities or heating and air conditioning equipment. In addition, screening and buffers block public view of dumpsters, recycling areas, parking areas which allow lights from vehicles to shine onto adjacent properties, or even outdoor gathering places with potential for noise.

Recommendation 4.9.1

1. Utilize adequate and appropriate screening and buffers of service equipment, parking areas, dumpsters, and gathering places. Review grant applications for consistency.

Objective 4.10 – Ensure Compatibility of Site Features, such as Landscaping, Fences, Outdoor Seating, and Recreation Areas

Site features include such things as buffers and accessory structures, addressed above. However, many additional site features are appropriate, including landscaping, fencing, shade devices, outdoor furniture, and recreation areas. These features should be integrated into the overall site design to ensure consistency and compatibility of color, style, scale, materials, and location. In residential areas, outdoor recreation facilities can be an important amenity to single-family as well as multifamily development. Location is important as outdoor areas can have a negative impact due to lights and noise. In business areas, plazas and other outdoor gathering or resting places can provide points of interest along the streetscape as well as opportunities for respite to the pedestrian or bicyclist.

Intense commercial or business development areas will allow the most impervious surface coverage. In such instances, planters and containers can nevertheless provide landscaping for both screening and aesthetic appeal. In less intense residential areas, landscaping can support drainage designs and help improve recharge of stormwater runoff.

Recommendation 4.10.1 – 4.10.6

1. Provide guidelines and examples to demonstrate integration of site features into the overall design of a site.
2. Ensure landscaping is consistent with the Land Development Code and harmoniously compliments the development.
3. Ensure the land development code contains provisions to provide bonus incentives for number, placement, and design of site features.
4. Ensure that public spaces serve as models of good design and integration of site features into the overall design of an area, including compatibility with any principle buildings on a site.
5. Consider establishing a bench sponsorship program to encourage the placement of benches which encourage pedestrians to frequent businesses and as part of supporting transit in the area.
6. Utilize awnings, canopies, or other shading devices to further support pedestrian activity.

Objective 4.11 – Achieve Consistency and Compatibility in Signage

Signs are needed to provide directions, identify locations, and advertise businesses. Throughout the CRA, signs should be pedestrian scaled and externally lighted. A variety of sign types is appropriate: monument signs, wall signs, window signs, awning signs, banners, and sandwich signs. Signs placed on walls, windows, and awnings are easily integrated into the overall design of buildings and sites. It is important that window signs be limited in size in order to maintain visibility. Signs should complement the colors, materials, and design elements of the principle buildings served by the signs. Public signs for wayfinding and identification of public buildings and spaces should have uniformity in design, style, size, and color to enhance recognition of public places.

Recommendation 4.11.1 – 4.11.4

1. Implement signage standards that include requirements for size, number, and location based on the need for identification as well as consistency design.
2. Ensure consistency and compatibility of design, with particular attention to maximum coverage for wall and window signs.

3. Establish a theme for public signs, including design, materials, and color, for consistency with the standards recommended for the CRA and for uniformity of public signs throughout the CRA.
4. Encourage joint signage to reduce clutter while still ensuring business identification and location information.

Objective 4.12 – Provide for Community Policing and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Redevelopment in the CRA Area can be limited by the relatively high incidence of personal and property crimes and the concentration of transients and others at the social and legal margins. The Community Redevelopment Area and the Fort Walton Beach Police Department share common interests and goals toward identifying long term solutions for crime suppression and community revitalization in the CRA.

The City's Police Department developed an innovative comprehensive program to improve the actual and perceived security of the redevelopment district residents, customers, visitors and business people through the implementation of its Community Policing Unit (CPU). The CPU initiative offers proactive law enforcement services via traditional and non-traditional methods to maintain a safe community. The philosophy of the CPU is to address crime through problem-solving tactics and police/community partnerships. These cooperative efforts, which involve the Community Policing Officers, staff from various City departments, property owners, and business owners, have proven to be very effective in maintaining safe neighborhoods and should be expanded as necessary.

In addition to a variety of policing programs, design of buildings and spaces should include Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies. The four principles of CPTED are:

- Natural Surveillance: A design concept directed primarily at keeping potential criminals and their targets under observation. Applying natural surveillance concepts during planning often reduces the need for more expensive security measures.
- Natural Access Control: A design strategy directed at decreasing crime by denying access to targets and creating a perception of risk to offenders. It is also used to prevent public access to private areas. CPTED discourages a "fortress mentality" but recognizes that high-value targets require the application of more traditional security measures.
- Territorial Reinforcement: The belief that physical design can contribute to a sense of ownership and responsibility for a space. This results in higher actual and perceived levels of risk to potential offenders
- Maintenance: Improper maintenance is the enemy of territorial reinforcement and implies "no one cares what happens in this place." Thus, proper design supports maintenance by including graffiti resistant surfaces, vandal-proof lighting and landscaping selected for easy maintenance.

Recommendation 4.12.1 – 4.12.4

1. Continue current programs for coordination with neighborhood residents and business owners, such as the CPU, the Great Neighborhoods Partnership Program, and Neighborhood Watch Programs.
2. Include CPTED techniques in design guidelines, considering the design of individual sites, streetscapes, and public buildings and spaces.
3. Ensure that public buildings and spaces include CPTED design techniques as a model for private development and to increase safety for visitors and residents of the CRA and the City.
4. Ensure CPTED training for public safety staff to enhance understanding and implementation of the techniques.

Encouraging specific design guidelines will help increase property values and promote further business activity in the CRA. To this end, good community and building design must incorporate a variety of housing choices, including a mix of income ranges. In particular, targeting vacant and underutilized parcels can help meet objectives in housing and community appearance/design. The following section outlines the goal, objectives, and strategies for housing in the CRA.

COMPONENT 5 – HOUSING

HOUSING GOAL:

IMPROVE QUALITY, QUANTITY, AND OPTIONS FOR HOUSING IN THE CRA

Objectives:

- ◆ Improve the Quality of Housing through the Use of CRA Funds and Available State and Federal Housing Programs and Funds
- ◆ Prepare the CRA for Anticipated Increase in Median Age by Ensuring an Adequate Range of Housing Types to Meet the Needs of Elderly and Special Needs
- ◆ Achieve the Desired Level of Mixed Income Housing within the CRA by Providing a Wide Range of Quality Housing Opportunities and Choices for All Income Levels
- ◆ Achieve Public Participation Regarding Neighborhood Planning and Housing Development Throughout the CRA
- ◆ Provide for Infill Opportunities by Making Productive Use of Scattered Vacant and Underutilized Parcels
- ◆ Incorporate Recommendations for Housing into the Land Development Code

Introduction

Housing constitutes a significant share of new construction and development in the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA). Successful implementation of the CRA Plan requires an increased residential population, primarily through increased density. Development should be integrated with, and interconnected to, a wide range of commercial uses and allow residents better vehicular and pedestrian access to employment, services, education, recreation and entertainment. The addition of new housing units – attached housing, accessory units, or multi-family dwellings – within existing neighborhoods creates opportunities for communities to slowly increase density without radically changing the character. Most importantly, a range of housing choices allows households in all incomes to find their niche in the community and creates the synergy for an energetic, pedestrian-friendly city. Housing improvements can be achieved through the leveraging of CRA funds through public-private partnerships, utilizing other grant opportunities, preparing for shifts in median age within the CRA, and promoting mixed-income housing through zoning incentives.

Objective 5.1 – Improve the Quality of Housing through the Use of CRA Funds and Available State and Federal Housing Programs and Funds

Housing options are essential to the CRA to accommodate the needs of a wide range of population demographics such as income level, family size, and age. One way to raise the quality of housing as a whole is to develop and participate in programs that preserve and improve current housing stock. Several programs currently exist City-wide, identified below, that achieve that objective. CRA-specific programs could also be developed that leverage existing available funding.

Strategy 5.1.1 & 5.1.2

1. Continue current programs that improve the quality of life and consider new public-private partnerships that contribute to housing goals. The City has a number of programs designed to assist existing residents in maintaining and improving their homes. The City is an entitlement community for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, which supports several programs to improve housing. The World Changers program helps income-eligible residents to reroof and paint their homes. The Okaloosa Community Development Corporation (OCDC) administers the City's share of the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) funds. The SHIP funds are used to rehabilitate homes, provide down payment, and provide closing cost assistance for new homebuyers. New partnerships are also an opportunity to leverage funding from different sources to achieve a common goal.
2. Consider developing a Nuisance Abatement Program utilizing CRA funds to demolish dilapidated housing on a case-by-case basis. A CRA-specific program to consider demolishing dilapidated housing and other buildings contributes to the positive growth of the CRA and directly achieves the objective to improve the quality of housing in the CRA. This program would be especially effective when combined with Code Enforcement activities.

Objective 5.2 – Prepare the CRA for Anticipated Increase in Median Age by Ensuring an Adequate Range of Housing Types to Meet the Needs of Elderly and Special Needs

Increasing median age within the CRA is due to the population as a whole getting older. Some existing residents will continue to live in their homes and age in place. Fort Walton Beach and the CRA area is expected to continue to attract retirees, many of whom will continue to live in their new homes and age in place. As the average age continues to rise, the CRA must include adequate and desirable housing for this population.

Appropriate housing will include a range of housing types to meet the needs of elderly and special needs residents. The area should include shopping to meet daily and weekly needs and a range of services, such as medical clinics, doctors, dentists, and other medical services. Housing areas must have appropriate infrastructure, such as safe and well-lighted sidewalks for pedestrian access to nearby shopping and services.

Strategy 5.2.1 – 5.2.4

1. Continue to work with various CDBG and housing programs throughout the area that help meet the needs of elderly and special needs populations.
2. Continue to ensure adequate housing availability through the Medium Density Residential and Low Density Residential land use categories in the comprehensive plan, as well as ensuring a mix of these uses within the Mixed Use land use category.
3. Implement a true mixed-use CRA district that allows nearby services to meet the daily and weekly needs of the elderly, such as medical clinics, doctors, dentists, grocery, and personal services. Mixed-use districts should support aging and low-income housing.
4. Ensure multi-modal (sidewalk) projects and new developments are compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Housing Act.

Objective 5.3 – Achieve the Desired Level of Mixed Income Housing within the CRA by Providing a Wide Range of Quality Housing Opportunities and Choices for All Income Levels

Mixed income housing helps meet the needs of people of all income levels. The area becomes marketable to a wider range of buyers and meets the housing goal to improve the quality, quantity, and options for housing in the CRA. Incentives to reach this goal may include density bonuses, financial subsidies, development fee waivers / subsidies / reductions, options to produce inclusionary units off-site, and donations of land or fees in-lieu of providing affordable units.

The objective can also be met through the construction of accessory dwelling units. Such units, smaller than the principle dwelling unit, are excellent means of providing affordable housing within specified neighborhoods. As rentals, these units can also provide an important source of income to existing households. Although the addition of accessory units in specified zoning districts will result in a modest increase in density, the units are small and ancillary to the principle structure and have only a modest impact on the neighborhood while providing an important benefit.

Strategy 5.3.1 – 5.3.5

1. Develop incentives, such as density bonuses, financial subsidies, development fee waivers / subsidies / reductions, etc. in selected zoning districts to voluntarily create workforce housing.
2. Encourage developers to designate a portion of development as workforce units meeting requirements of an inclusionary housing program.
3. Consider revisions to the Land Development Code to allow accessory dwelling units in specified zoning districts.

4. Provide the development framework to allow assimilation of new attainable and workforce housing into the community.
5. Consider public-private partnerships that meet the CRA housing goals and objectives.

Objective 5.4 – Provide for Infill Opportunities by Making Productive Use of Scattered Vacant and Underutilized Parcels

Scattered vacant lots are already served with streets, public safety services, water, sewer, and a range of other government services. Development of these vacant lots improves the neighborhood through adding housing, shopping, or services; adding to the tax base through development; and, in many cases, reducing an eyesore when lots are not well maintained. These scattered lots could be improved utilizing a number of different programs, including the land value investment program described in Chapter 8. Targeted infill strategies should be implemented to improve the likelihood that such lots will be developed. Infill of scattered vacant lots may require adjustments to development standards where vacant lots were platted under previous standards that require varying lot sizes and site design features. Also, infill objectives should target underutilized buildings, such as buildings with significant vacant areas or buildings designed for a more intense purpose than the current use.

Strategy 5.4.1 – 5.4.4

1. Create an inventory of vacant lots for use in providing information to prospective developers. The inventory should identify all vacant lots whether or not the lots are currently offered for sale. The inventory should include information on lot size, land use category, and zoning requirements.
2. Develop a methodology for identifying underutilized and vacant residential buildings. Create an inventory of such underutilized and vacant buildings.
3. Consider providing financial incentives through the CRA to target prime infill locations and redevelopment of underutilized or vacant buildings. The City should determine what types of incentives can be offered and develop a marketing program to make information available to potential developers. For example, properties that have been vacant or on the market for more than one year could qualify for a matching development grant up to \$10,000, \$25,000 or \$50,000 to cover capital costs such as utility or demolition/groundbreaking work.
4. Consider less stringent setback and lot dimension standards in the Land Development Code to promote infill and redevelopment on what otherwise may be undevelopable lots due to size.

Objective 5.6 – Incorporate Recommendations for Housing into the Land Development Code

Both the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code should promote increased densities and compact building design that allow for development of a wide range of housing styles,

including small-lot single-family detached homes, duplexes, townhouses, accessory dwelling units, and apartments.

Recent updates to the Comprehensive Plan include land use categories that accomplish this purpose. Revisions to the Land Development Code must implement the Comprehensive Plan and the redevelopment objectives of this CRA plan.

At a minimum, the following provisions should be considered:

1. Reduce required street frontage standards for infill situations.
2. Reduce the required lot area per unit to allow for diversity in housing types.
3. Reduce setbacks consistent with smaller lot sizes and reduced street frontage
4. Adopt standards in the LDC to permit accessory dwelling units in specified zoning districts.
5. Revise the LDC to ensure that densities in specified zoning districts are consistent with the goal to increase overall density within the CRA.
6. Revise the LDC to provide for compact building design that allows for the development of a wide range of housing styles.
7. Revise the LDC to provide incentives for developments that provide workforce and quality low-income housing consistent with the CRA housing goals and objectives.

Promoting successful housing programs and ensuring the availability of quality housing stock is critical in the CRA. The CRA cannot attract new businesses and expanding businesses to the area without additional housing to support the new growth. The following section outlines the goal, objectives, and strategies for economic development within the Fort Walton Beach CRA.

COMPONENT 6 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOAL:

ACHIEVE ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH NEW AND EXPANDED BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYMENT THROUGHOUT THE CRA

Objectives:

- ◆ **Attract New Businesses to the CRA, both Anchor Tenants and Small Businesses**
- ◆ **Promote Business Expansion in the CRA**
- ◆ **Promote Business Retention in the CRA**

Introduction

The overall goal of any CRA is to foster sustainable redevelopment. To do this, the CRA must implement programs and projects that leverage private investment. Economic development is the cornerstone of success in the CRA. Businesses provide services and jobs, both necessary to a vibrant community. Residents need shopping and other services close to their homes, as well as jobs for sustainability. Through programs to attract business and industry, jobs are created, the economy grows and is maintained, and Fort Walton Beach continues to be a healthy, vibrant, and desirable community.

The City of Fort Walton Beach has natural strengths that are important to economic success. These include its accessibility, weather, lifestyle, proximity to the water, existing infrastructure, and business support. Fort Walton Beach is near a regional airport, is near the interstate system, and is served by major State highways. The region, the City, and the CRA are all supportive of existing business, expanding business, and new business. The next step is to implement aspects of redevelopment planning through increased information sharing and by creating new incentives to attract and retain businesses.

This chapter is organized into three main objectives: promoting new businesses to locate in the CRA, retaining existing businesses in the CRA, and promoting business expansion within the CRA. By focusing in on these three main objectives, other important objectives are achieved, such as job creation and infill development, through strategies that support the overall goal of the CRA.

Objective 6.1 – Attract New Businesses to the CRA, both Anchor Tenants and Small Businesses

A sustainable economy is diverse, not only in terms of types of businesses, but also in terms of the size of businesses. Small business can fill important niche industry needs, providing support to larger employers through materials, assembly, distribution, and support services, such as accounting or marketing. Small businesses can also provide important support to area residents who need shopping, personal services, and medical services. While one important focus of economic development is the attraction and retention of large, often high-tech businesses, the focus must actually be two-fold to include a balanced approach that includes support businesses as well.

The CRA can help facilitate and provide businesses with needed support, whether employee training, assistance with business plans, or financial assistance to grow and maintain the business. Grant and loan programs can be especially effective. Combining local programs with state and federal programs may give start-up businesses the incentive they need. A detailed list of Federal, State, and non-governmental incentives, grants, and loans programs with links to websites is provided in the appendix. In order to best provide these services, a recommended special project is to locate a storefront office in the CRA, staffed by a CRA professional who can provide information and assistance to businesses seeking funding for physical improvements, job creation, or business expansion. The storefront may also contain enough office space to serve as a business start-up center for qualified small businesses that need a storefront to get started.

Additionally, the CRA has available land and buildings that are vacant and underutilized, but are well-served by water, sewer, transportation, and other infrastructure. The proximity to Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field means there is need for continued and increased focus on high-tech jobs and businesses. Fort Walton Beach is a good location to focus business recruitment and expansion efforts to cluster high technology businesses, continuing job growth in this industry sector. Combining a commercial property inventory with a land value investment program and other economic incentives can create a synergy leading to economic success.

Strategy 6.1.1 – 6.1.5

1. Implement a Land Value Investment Program. A Land Value Investment Program coordinated by the CRA allows vacant, underutilized, or contaminated parcel(s) to be purchased by the CRA, possibly below market rates, and prepared for development. The parcels may then be sold at a reasonable market rate, or below, through an RFP (request for proposal) process. The program may be combined with other grant or incentive programs, and may include specific development criteria, such as number of jobs created, specific industry, and/or certain additional design standards. Lots may be combined or split to meet the needs of the developer. Ultimately, a Land Value Investment Program returns previously undesirable property to the market and places it back on the tax roll.
2. Implement a commercial revolving loan fund program. Revolving Loan Funds are used by many local, state, and regional government agencies to offer incentives for businesses to locate in their area. A CRA Revolving Loan Fund may offer new or expanding businesses in the CRA funding for qualifying expenses to close the gap between conventional financing.

The loans are typically offered at an interest rate below or well below the prime rate with a short-term (two to five years) flexible payback period. Eligible businesses may include general commercial, retail, light manufacturing/industrial, and service industries. Non-profit organizations would not be eligible for the loan. Businesses would be required to submit an application along with a business plan, and invest a minimum of 15% developer equity into the business, as well as create new jobs for the area. The CRA would typically partner with a financial institution to implement such a program.

3. Maintain a database of information needed by existing and prospective businesses. The database should include an inventory of vacant and available properties for sale or lease, an inventory of labor force characteristics for the area, demographic and other statistical information, a record of utility capacity, and a targeted infill list.
4. Implement a more streamlined permitting process for development in the CRA.
5. Implement a flexible mixed use land use category. A mixed use category provides for a wide variety of uses which is an important means of allowing for diversity in physical development that is supportive of the economy

Objective 6.2 – Promote Business Expansion in the CRA

Successful economic development is dependent on the growth of existing businesses. Therefore, the CRA should promote business expansion through various mechanisms such as grant and incentive programs.

Strategy 6.2.1 – 6.2.3

1. Create a site development assistance / business expansion grant. Existing businesses, especially small businesses, can benefit from assistance with remodeling, inventory, or other aspects of expansion. A grant program can provide funds to support and assist businesses with expansion and expansion plans.
2. Implement a mixed use category to allow a mix of uses in one building. The mixed use land use category should allow not only mixed uses on one parcel or lot but also within one building. Specific requirements must address building and site design, access, and amenities to support mixing uses with a building.
3. Promote the HUBZone area surrounding Hollywood Boulevard.

Objective 6.3 – Promote Business Retention in the CRA

Small businesses may lack information or financial resources needed to grow. The CRA can promote small business growth and expansion by providing information on incentive programs, grants, loans, and property availability. The CRA may also coordinate with merchant associations and the Chamber of Commerce to ensure that small businesses have knowledge of

and access to support services, including such programs as SCORE or training through local higher education institutions.

Existing businesses may also be failing due to a number of reasons. It is important to listen to those reasons and be able to tailor programs to help retain existing businesses in the CRA. Some of the businesses that have recently left the CRA noted lack of visibility/awareness of the general location as a primary reason sales may have been down. Aesthetic improvements to buildings and specific marketing strategies can go a long way to promote an area and the businesses operating in that area.

Strategy 6.3.1 – 6.3.7

1. Conduct annual business surveys to determine the primary factors that contribute to the success of businesses and failure of businesses in the CRA.
2. Create a paint-up program and/or façade improvement grant to offer businesses a 1:1 matching grant to improve the appearance of their building.
3. Consider creation of a business assistance grant that may offer assistance with rental fees for businesses that demonstrate a temporary financial hardship.
4. Implement a Downtown Design Overlay District to allow for flexible uses in Downtown such as street parties, art festivals, and outdoor dining and vending that can attract crowds and new customers to Downtown.
5. Implement an annual promotional program and funding for the CRA, geared towards bringing visitors to the area and area businesses.
6. Implement a program to provide weekend rentals at the Fort Walton Landing for farmer's markets, festivals, etc. to bring new crowds of customers to the area.
7. Continue public improvements in the CRA.

The foregoing sections of this plan have outlined objectives and strategies for items such economic development, quality housing, and transportation safety. In order to put these strategies into action, the following section outlines special projects for consideration. The following projects integrate categorical ideas to achieve common objectives.

Special Projects

Contents:

- ◆ **Promote Development and Redevelopment Along Hollywood Boulevard**
- ◆ **Comprehensive Improvement District – Pilot Project**
- ◆ **Brooks Street Façade Improvement**

Introduction

The preceding sections identified objectives for redevelopment throughout the CRA in terms of land use, infrastructure improvements, transportation, appearance, housing, and economic development. In order to implement these objectives, specific strategies are identified to guide decision-making, capital improvements, and program development. In addition to these strategies, three projects that involve several redevelopment objectives – transportation, design, economic development, and infrastructure - are proposed to be fully developed and implemented to help achieve the goal of redevelopment.

Special Project 1 – Promote Development and Redevelopment Along Hollywood Boulevard

Hollywood Boulevard has the potential to become a hub of economic activity. Hollywood Boulevard intersects with Eglin Parkway and Beal Parkway, which are both state highways, and is bounded by a residential neighborhood and a commercial corridor. The current properties are underutilized and lack aesthetic appeal for pedestrians and potential business proprietors. The south side of this area is located within the HUBZone designation. Given that the east side of Eglin Parkway has been the focus of new development, the west side of Eglin Parkway should receive focused redevelopment attention to complete the development node. The Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund (QTI) can be used as a potential incentive from the State of Florida. In addition, specific properties in this location could be included on the CRA's Target Infill Development list and prioritized to receive grant funding for redevelopment and job creation. This project should be coordinated with the commercial property inventory, land value investment, public improvements (specifically sidewalks and landscaping), and façade improvement programs for maximum benefit.

Special Project 2 – Comprehensive Improvement District – Pilot Project

In combination with the pilot project to establish an alley extension between Chestnut Avenue SE and Chicago Avenue SE near Oak Street SE and extended north to Ferry Street SE and south to First Street SE, the entire two-block area should be targeted for a comprehensive range of improvements.

In addition to vacating excess right-of-way on Chicago Avenue SE, all sidewalk deficiencies within the area should be programmed for correction at the time of the alley extension. The area should also be targeted for appearance improvements to ensure that existing and new businesses are attractive and enhance the area. To complete the comprehensive approach, this area should be prioritized for business expansion, new business recruitment, and other economic development grants and loans. Through coordination with the commercial property inventory and façade improvement grants, the entire area can be upgraded in one focused project for maximum benefit in a short period of time.

Special Project 3 – Brooks Street Façade Improvement

Many properties on Brooks Street have frontage on Miracle Strip Parkway as well as Brooks Street and often treat the Miracle Strip Parkway frontage as the front entrance, leaving the Brooks Street frontage with a “back door” appearance. This often means that trash cans are scattered about, service and mechanical equipment is highly visible, and pavement is not well maintained. The appearance is not inviting and often does not give the appearance of being a major entrance to stores or other establishments, even though many visitors approach from this side due to the proximity to nearby amenities.

The overall goal of this program is to leverage funding utilizing a public-private partnership to encourage future façade improvements along Brooks Street. Screening and façade treatments can include:

- Screening of utility/electrical equipment both on the rooftop and on the Brooks St. façade
- Undergrounding of utility power lines;
- Use of a parapet wall or pitched roof to shield rooftop electrical equipment;
- Parking lot repaving with integrated landscaped features, including landscaped medians, islands, and landscaping surrounding the façade of the Brooks Street entrance with outdoor seating areas, benches, etc.;
- Use of architectural elements to create visually interesting features on the Brooks Street façade where windows are not applicable (i.e. through banding, differentiation of materials, colors, use of arcades, etc.) while creating a “front porch” area;
- Improved monument, wall, canopy or parapet signage with adequate lighting;
- Implementation of a projected entryway or gateway to encourage pedestrian traffic through this commercial property.

Ongoing CRA Project Maintenance

Finally, in order to ensure continued maintenance of completed CRA projects, this plan establishes ongoing installation and maintenance of public infrastructure and projects is in the best interest of the CRA district. The CRA funds numerous capital projects that extend beyond the definition of typical public infrastructure projects. Specifically, ongoing maintenance includes sewer lines, water lines, stormwater management facilities, pavement, sidewalk, curb and gutter, and any public property, facility, or rights-of-way located in the CRA district. Provision of ongoing maintenance helps further the ultimate goal of eliminating slum and blight through upkeep of public projects and properties.