

INTRODUCTION

The Southwest Area Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan was initiated as part of an on-going effort by community leaders and the City of Delray Beach to revitalize the City's neighborhoods and commercial districts. The plan seeks to identify core strengths and assets that will move the Southwest neighborhoods towards stability and stimulate private sector investment in the area. . The plan links housing development and economic development efforts to create positive synergy and take advantage of current development opportunities centered around the West Atlantic Avenue business district.

Community leaders and stakeholders identified several tangible outcomes that provide good benchmarks for measuring the plans' ultimate effectiveness. Improving the housing stock in the area was identified as a priority objective. Replacing, upgrading and enhancing substandard structures is expected to increase the value of residential and commercial property and as a result, increase the property tax base. The increased tax revenues and community wealth provide resources to fund public service improvements and leverage other public and private reinvestment in the area.

Increasing residential density and providing affordable housing for a variety of incomes appeared to be a goal shared by the management team and most neighborhood stakeholders. Community stakeholders also recognized that the redevelopment of the West Atlantic Avenue downtown business district is critical to the areas' revitalization. In addition to providing quality goods and services to meet the daily needs of residents, redeveloping the Southwest commercial district could potentially provide new investment vehicles, and entrepreneurial opportunities for community stakeholders. A bustling commercial district would also create additional job opportunities for residents. Increased civic capacity and enhanced community empowerment was clearly a top priority for community stakeholders.

Before the current planning study was initiated, community stakeholders were greatly concerned about the potential for the displacement of current residents and the gentrification of the neighborhoods surrounding the downtown business district. West-side residents and other key community stakeholders formed a collaborative alliance to ensure that community stakeholders played a major role in the planning and implementation of any redevelopment projects in West Delray. The West Delray Beach Community Management Team was organized to serve as a vehicle for the active engagement of community stakeholders from all segments of the community. The Management Team is comprised of residents, representatives from area neighborhood associations, local faith leaders, City and CRA officials, public housing officials, the business community, local CDC's, education officials, local service providers, and other community organizations.

The organization is structured to ensure that local residents have an opportunity to "drive" the planning and decision making process regarding any major redevelopment activity in and around core West Delray neighborhoods. The Management Team initiated this study to begin a community-driven effort to solve current problems and begin planning for the future of neighborhoods and commercial districts in Southwest Delray. The Management Team played a major role throughout the planning process. The Management Team coordinated outreach efforts, community meetings and workshops, worked closely with the consultant team to craft and edit the plan document. Members of the Management Team provided valuable insight and clarity regarding community issues and priorities. The principles from which the conceptual design schemes and strategic recommendations included in this plan were derived were based upon the collective input of the Management Team and from input received from community stakeholders that attended the community meetings and workshops.

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In reality, appropriately planned and executed redevelopment programs can provide an opportunity to increase the number and types of housing choices for current residents, while also allowing for reasonable growth, commercial development and increased social and economic diversity. The Management Team provides a unique opportunity to build and sustain the community's trust and active engagement in community revitalization efforts.

Implementation of the plan is expected to have profound short-term and long-term impacts on the community. This plan could potentially determine the quality, quantity, and costs of housing and the types of businesses and services located in the area in the future. Automobile & pedestrian circulation patterns would also be altered based upon recommendations included in this plan. The plan also includes detailed strategies to improve landscaping, parks, and other public spaces. The plan focuses on primarily physical improvements, but addresses other elements of community livability such as public safety, economic development and service delivery strategies.

The concepts and strategies included in this plan are intended to reflect the voices, vision and hopes of the community. Continued collaborative action and diligence will be required by all of the community stakeholders if this vision is to become a reality. The high level of determination and commitment exhibited by the community stakeholders that participated in this process left this writer with little doubt that the community's collective dream of a beautiful, healthy community with a quality housing stock; vibrant commercial centers; and practical and well maintained public spaces can, and will be a reality some day.