
FIRST STREET, NORTH CORRIDOR STUDY

VISION TO REALITY

A Joint Effort of the City of
Winter Haven and First
Street, North Stakeholders

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Stakeholders

A special thank you to the residents, business owners, and concerned citizens who participated in the meetings, survey, and discussions to help frame the future of the First Street, North Corridor.

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In association with Martin and Vargas
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Fall 2010

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1. Introduction

Study Purpose

First Street is a major gateway into the City of Winter Haven with a long and rich history. As such, this segment of First Street warrants special consideration due to its unique characteristics. The intended outcome of the study is to:

1. Promote an attractive and inviting corridor;
2. Provide safe and convenient access to shopping and other essential services;
3. Promote sustainable use of limited land and investment resources by encouraging high building densities, allowing efficient shared parking areas, and ensuring multi-modal transportation access;
4. Provide for a sufficient amount of attractive and well-maintained landscaping to complement buildings and structures within the corridor;
5. Encourage development of attractive buildings within the corridor;
6. Ensure unobtrusive and orderly signage that averts a visually cluttered appearance along the corridor;
7. Encourage creative designs and buildings of quality; and
8. Promote an increased level of economic development.



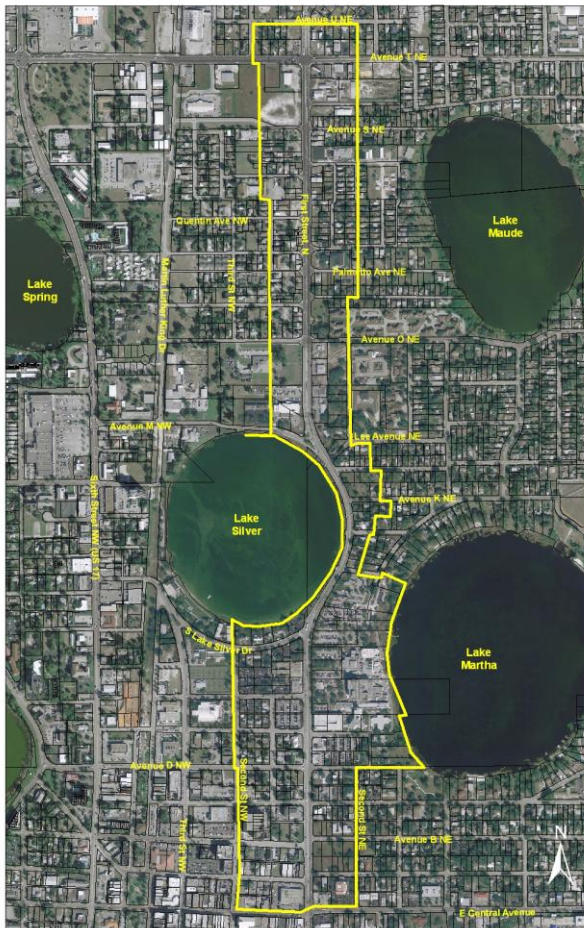
First Street and Avenue R, NE looking north



First Street /Lake Silver Drive, NE looking north

Study Boundaries

The original study boundaries of the First Street, North Corridor were from Central Avenue to the south to Avenue U to the north with the corresponding second streets providing the east and west boundaries. Through the study process it was determined that the area south of Lake Silver has different development constraints and should be separated from the northern section with a distinct study. This study will encompass the medical arts community in a planning process to address specific and unique characteristics of their employees and clients. The revised boundaries, specific to the recommended actions, are Lee Avenue, NE and Lake Silver to the south, Avenue U to the north, with second streets cordoning the east and west sides. The following maps correspond to the original and revised boundaries.



Original Study Boundary

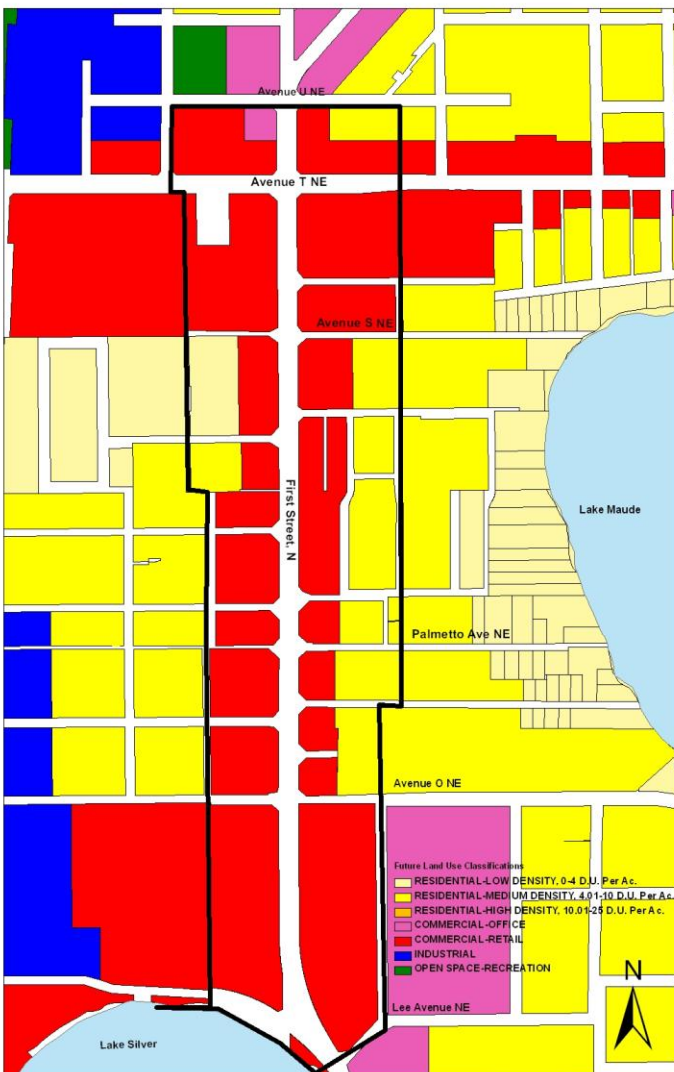


Revised Study Boundary

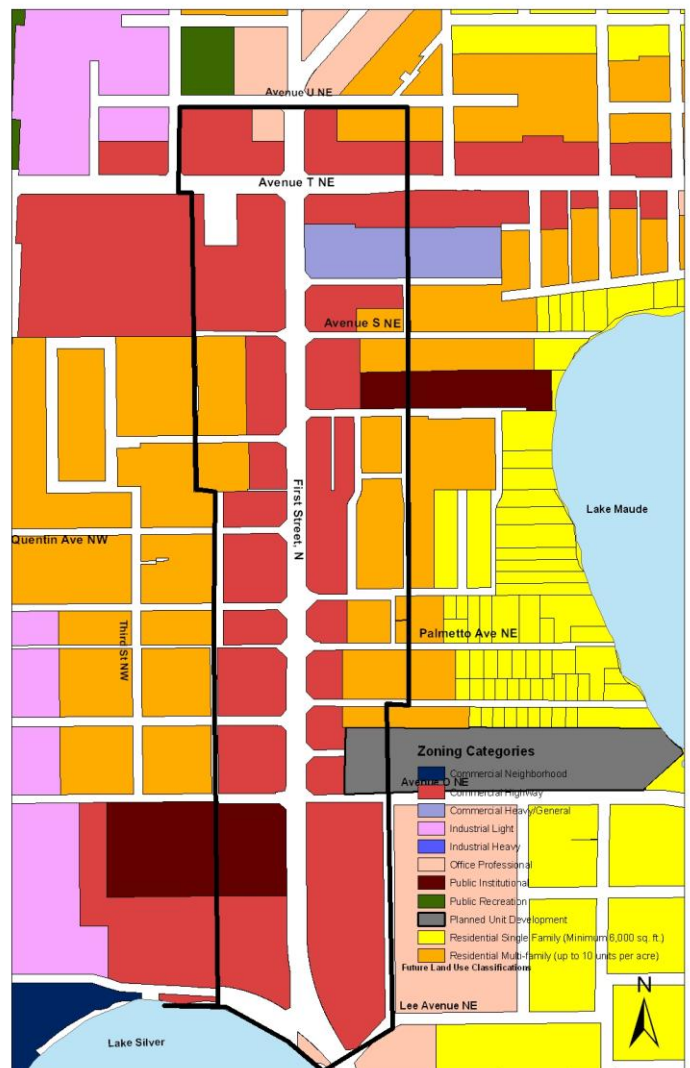
2. Existing Conditions

Future Land Use and Zoning

The First Street, North Corridor is comprised primarily of highway commercial and multi-family residential zoning districts. The remaining parcels are designated as public institutional, office professional, and heavy commercial. The current uses are primarily local businesses that serve the surrounding neighborhoods composed of single-family residences.



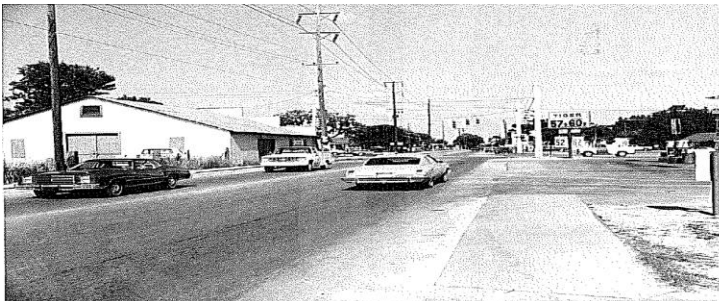
Future Land Use Categories



Zoning Categories

History

Since its inception, the First Street, North Corridor has been an essential gateway connecting Winter Haven to the US 27 corridor and beyond. It is also the backbone of the Florence Villa community. As a small local road, First Street, North connected citrus groves, their workers, and the market to sell the fruit. As Florence Villa grew, First Street, North grew into a business corridor for the surrounding community. Over time, as the Winter Haven population grew and used First Street as a major transportation corridor, connecting Florence Villa to the US 27 corridor as well as to downtown Winter Haven, the burgeoning medical community on First Street, South, and recreational and educational opportunities to the east, west, and south. By the mid- to late-1970s, the capacity of the roadway needed expansion. A study was completed in 1977 calling for the expansion of First Street from a two-lane minor collector roadway to a four-lane arterial road. When this widening occurred, in the early 1980s, the impact was significant. Approximately 35 structures were demolished, displacing residents and businesses alike, leaving no discernable business center along this section of the First Street corridor. In addition, the widening had the desired effect of increasing both traffic speeds and volumes. On street parking disappeared and created a dividing presence in the community.



First Street looking north to Avenue T - 1977



First Street and Avenue R, NE looking north -1977



First Street and Palmetto Avenue, NE looking north - 1977



First Street and Avenue R, NW looking south - 1977

The study anticipated a variety of improvements to soften the effects of the widening project and reconnect the community through private and public investments. Envisioned improvements in the study included landscaped medians, public gathering places, interconnected parking lots to reduce pedestrian conflicts, directing access to side streets, higher architectural standards, new housing and business developments, and enhanced lighting and crosswalks. Since the widening, the improvements have been slow to develop. In late 2009, the City began to investigate options to spur redevelopment along the First Street Corridor.

3. Public Participation

When the idea of a corridor study was developed, it became imperative to involve the community in the process. The following represents the guiding principles of the process:

- **Generate a broad understanding of the current First Street Corridor issues, including strengths and opportunities for its future enhancement;**
- **Develop a strategy to address the community's most critical corridor issues;**
- **Identify a community visioning process aimed at soliciting public input on issues and needs;**
- **Generate a community consensus about the creation of guiding principles for a vision for the future of the corridor;**
- **Encourage the contribution of ideas/strategies to be considered for the corridor; and**
- **Involve local leaders and community residents in the First Street Corridor revitalization planning process.**

The planning process started with a community meeting in November 2009 and included a two additional meetings held in January and March 2010. Over 80 people attended and participated in the three meetings. In addition to the meetings, a survey was developed and distributed to gain more input from the general public and interested stakeholders. Over 30 surveys were returned.



4. Planning Process

November 10, 2009

The first community meeting was held to establish a baseline of the existing conditions, general perceptions of the First Street, North Corridor, introduce the overlay district concept, and start the visioning process for the future. All meetings were advertised by mailing and posting flyers, as well as announcing the meetings in the News Chief newspaper and the City's website.

Meeting Outcomes

A presentation by the City's consultant, Martin and Vargas Design, on the current conditions of First Street, North, was provided. The presentation also included a discussion on the difference urban design considerations can make, and what an overlay district is and is not. The audience was then tasked with defining the strengths and opportunities of the First Street, North Corridor. The following summarizes the responses from the meeting.

- *First Street is the backbone of Winter Haven*
- *Work together to encourage new businesses to locate in the corridor while supporting existing businesses*
- *Make the area safer for people to access, regardless of mode of transportation*
- *Beautification improvements are an important component of this plan, but there is a need to go beyond just beautification projects and make real changes that will extend into the community beyond the corridor*
- *Develop Lake Silver into a destination park with amenities and greater access along First Street*
- *Create a main street development pattern while crafting regulations that reflect the uniqueness of this community within Winter Haven*
- *Locate a branch library on the north end of First Street to provide greater access to area residents and spur development of ancillary businesses*
- *The plan needs to address concerns regarding redevelopment issues such as small lot sizes, consolidation of lots, and eminent domain*
- *Private developers will follow the lead of the City's investment in the corridor and adjacent areas*
- *Implement the plan we create*

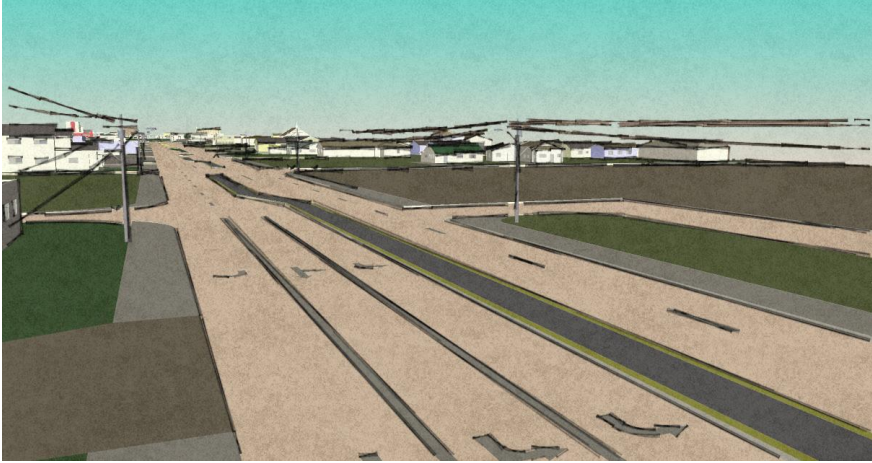
As a result of the first visioning meeting, survey responses, and additional discussions, the following were developed as guiding principles for the First Street, North Corridor Vision:

1. **Target housing and job growth in strategic areas along the corridor.**
2. **Encourage compact mixed-use development and high-quality urban design and construction.**
3. **Create safe and civil vehicular flow and a pedestrian-oriented environment, improve streetscapes, ensuring full access to and between commercial areas, public areas and private developments.**
4. **Develop a balanced multi-modal corridor to maintain and improve mobility of pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and vehicles along the corridor.**
5. **Manage parking assets.**
6. **Provide vibrant public spaces and gathering places.**
7. **Celebrate the unique and desirable community character and enhance the existing quality of life in adjacent neighborhoods.**
8. **Improve safety and public health.**
9. **Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections with the corridor.**
10. **Pursue environmentally sustainable and economically viable development patterns.**

January 12, 2010

A second meeting was held in January, 2010 to continue to discuss the revitalization potential of the First Street, North Corridor, to present the findings from the November 10th work session as well as to discuss possible recommendations, and to review the next steps in the process. Whereas the first meeting was a work session to start the visioning process; the second meeting was an open forum to discuss potential challenges and opportunities in the First Street, North Corridor revitalization.

Potential design solutions were presented to raise the level of community understanding and expectation for quality in the built environment. The presentation highlighted possible public and private improvements.



Avenue T, NE looking south - before



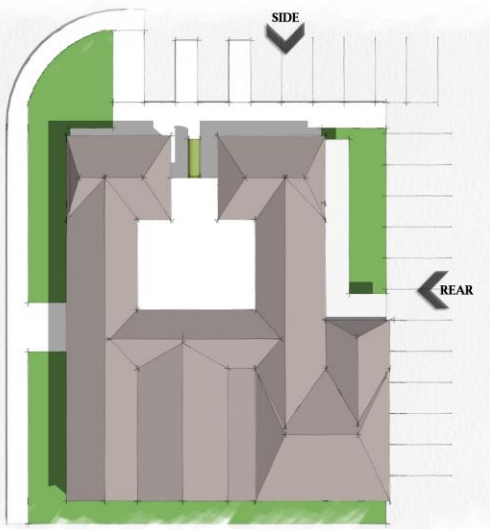
Avenue T, NE looking south - after streetscaping and infill development

One important point of discussion was the unbuildable lots along the corridor in the study area. Many of these lots were rendered unbuildable through the road widening project. The expectation during the road widening project was that over time, these lots would be purchased, consolidated, developed; spurring economic development through additional investments. While this has not occurred to the extent envisioned, there are opportunities to create buildable lots in order to attract additional development. However, eminent domain is not an option the City will pursue and this consolidation of lots will need to occur through the private property redevelopment process. At the conclusion of the meeting, a discussion regarding implementation touched on potential incentives, partnerships, and funding sources. This is an important consideration, given the many plans and reports on this area over the years.

March 16, 2010

After the January meeting and discussion, a draft overlay district document was developed and then presented for review and discussion at the March 16, 2010 meeting. The draft overlay district recommendations include both textual and graphic explanations for parking, building height and orientation, pedestrian-friendly treatments, and lighting considerations.

Entrances. All buildings should include well-defined entrances facing the street at regular intervals. An operable entrance on each primary façade should be provided to encourage access by pedestrians. Buildings on corner lots may place the entrance at the corner eliminating the need for side entrances.



Parking. Parking shall be placed on the sides and rear of buildings, in order to shield and minimize the appearance of the entire parking area, and in some instances, separate the parking required for mixed use projects and give credit for their shared parking with other uses of the building with coordinated hours of operation.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the timeline for implementation was presented, which included presentation of the overlay district document for review to the Planning Commission in the late summer/fall of 2010, with the presentation for review, discussion, and adoption by the City Commission in the late fall, 2010.

Survey Results

In addition to the three community meetings, a survey was developed and distributed at the meetings and on the website to gain additional feedback from interested citizens. The aim of the survey was to provide an objective assessment of the perception of the First Street, North Corridor's existing conditions as well as to identify potential opportunities for improvements along the corridor. The responses to the survey assisted in the development of the guiding principles as well as to refine some of the components of what citizens would like to see in the enhanced First Street, North Corridor. The survey consisted of a total of eleven questions. The first two questions relate to background information on the respondents and the final three questions asked how the City can communicate with the respondents. The remaining six questions relate to the visioning process. Of those six questions, two questions asked respondents about what they see as strengths and possibilities in the current corridor as well as what they envision for future uses in the corridor.

The top three positive characteristics of the First Street, North Corridor are:

1. **The condition of the roads**
2. **Drainage/flooding**
3. **Street lighting**

The top three opportunities for the First Street, North Corridor are:

1. **Economic development**
2. **Development of vacant lots**
3. **Redevelopment potential**

In addition, small cafés, mid-level family restaurants, pharmacies, medical clinics, and retail are the preferred uses to consider attracting to the corridor. Whereas; big-box retail, parking garages, and convenience stores were not uses the respondents to the survey preferred to locate in the corridor.

Appendix A contains the complete survey results.

5. Recommendations

Given all of the input from stakeholders, the general public, the planning consultant, and City staff, the following guiding principles and potential implementation strategies were developed.

1. Target housing and job growth in strategic areas along the corridor.

Potential Strategies:

- Create an Overlay District and implement zoning that facilitate increases in density, particularly around key intersections and northern portions of First Street Corridor.
- In accordance with City and citizens goals, encourage more housing and business opportunities, with a greater range of affordability and choices, exemplifying high-quality architecture and urban design.
- Identify opportunities to enhance the residential and future mixed-use quality of significant buildings.
- Provide a system of local and corridor-wide incentives to attract private development and economic investment along the corridor.

2. Encourage compact mixed-use development and high-quality urban design and construction.

Potential Strategies:

- Accommodate restaurants, commercial and office infill in a mixed-use environment as urban nodes where possible.
- Implement design-specific elements that address street orientation, facade treatment, parking, pedestrian and bicycle access, and setbacks
- Provide planning aides, such as the First Street Corridor Study and the overlay district regulations as well as design guidelines document to future developers to follow.

3. Create safe and civil vehicular flows and a pedestrian-oriented environment, improve streetscapes, ensuring full access to and between commercial areas, public areas and private developments.

Potential Strategies:

- Provide an integrated pedestrian environment with continuous sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, benches and appropriate signage, all with human-scale details, with a commitment to maintain those amenities. Such amenities should conform to FDOT Standards.
- Continuously clean and maintain the 1st Street streetscape and public spaces.

- Create incentives for the creation of landmarks and signature buildings to shape the street environment to a pedestrian orientation.
- Repair barriers between activity areas such as discontinuous sidewalks.
- Reduce street crossing distances where appropriate.

4. Develop a balanced multi-modal corridor to maintain and improve mobility of pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and vehicles along the corridor.

Potential Strategies:

- Orient buildings towards the street.
- Design bus stops for easy, safe, and ADA compliant passenger loading, unloading, and fare payment.
- Improve signal timing.
- Reduce auto dependency and roadway congestion by locating multiple destinations and trip purposes within walking distance of one another.

5. Manage parking assets.

Potential Strategies:

- Consider trip reduction due to transit when designing parking requirements.
- Pursue the development of public/public and public/private partnerships to develop multi-use parking facilities in strategic locations.
- Consider shared parking facilities (e.g. for business during the day and for restaurants at night).
- Preserve street frontage for active uses by placing parking behind buildings.
- Develop and use a network of alleys to access parking and limit vehicular crossings of sidewalks.
- Where appropriate, install time-limited parking to encourage turnover
- Review parking requirements when considering new developments, possibly reducing parking requirements and incorporating provisions for Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies.

6. Provide vibrant public spaces and gathering places.

Potential Strategies:

- Create vibrant public spaces of all sizes for all ages and abilities that will stand the test of time and provide lasting value for future generations
- Design public areas to attract usage, especially along Lake Silver.
- Design public realm and spaces to be functional as well as decorative through the careful use of space and amenities.
- Encourage the development of small public spaces and pocket parks.

7. Celebrate the unique and desirable Winter Haven community character and enhance the existing quality of life in adjacent neighborhoods.

Potential Strategies:

- Encourage infill design that is compatible with or shares design elements with adjacent developments and neighborhoods.
- Understand the unique character of non-conforming lots and unique lot configuration of First Street, North in order to allow incentives for their development.
- Identify local characteristics and express them through landscape, architecture, and urban design guidelines.
- Preserve diverse local small businesses and create economic opportunities for their continued presence in the revitalized corridor.

8. Improve safety and public health.

Potential Strategies:

- Design intersections for a balance between the needs of autos and pedestrians.
- Design parallel access routes where needed to separate pedestrian and bike movements.
- Provide high-quality pedestrian amenities such as distinct crosswalks, countdown signals, and curb ramps.
- Ensure adequate facilities for people with disabilities.

9. Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections with the corridor.

Potential Strategies:

- Reduce the distance between corridor crossings to improve connectivity with adjacent neighborhoods where appropriate.
- For projects near the corridor, encourage design that provides easy access to the corridor or to cross streets.
- Provide pedestrian cut-through linkages to access parking lots, alleys and neighborhood routes between blocks.

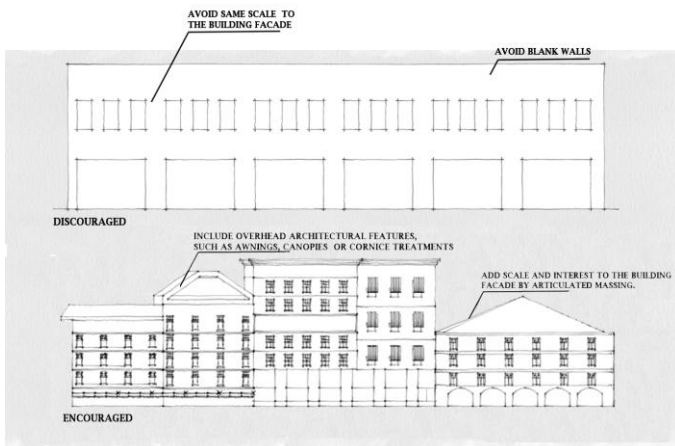
10. Pursue environmentally sustainable and economically viable development patterns.

Potential Strategies:

- Provide incentives for LEED (leadership in energy and environmental design) and Florida Green Building Coalition certified projects.
- Pursue design, engineering, landscaping, and construction techniques that assist with the management of storm water runoff, preserve (and possibly increase) soil permeability, and reduce heat island and other negative effects of urban development.
- Pursue cross-jurisdictional shared revenue projects, such as parking structures and parks, that provide mutual benefit to the partners.
- Provide a system of local and corridor-wide incentives to attract private development and economic investment along the corridor.

Overlay District

Many of the guiding principles and potential strategies involve building design, flexibility on typical zoning regulations, and aesthetic improvements. With these goals in mind, the development of an overlay district to address these issues was an early consideration, which was refined through the planning process. The intent of the First Street, North Overlay Zoning District is to guide future development by enhancing community character through the built urban form. Through implementation of the overlay zoning district guidelines, the anticipated outcome is to foster civic pride, highlight the area as a Winter Haven gateway, protect and enhance the local aesthetic, support safe access to, in, and through the corridor for all modes of transportation, and to stimulate businesses.



The creation of an overlay district will allow more flexibility in applying design standards without changing the existing land use and zoning. This flexibility will allow higher design standards and remove some of the barriers to creative development while taking the corridor's unique characteristics into consideration. An overlay district does not change current zoning, condemn or take private property, or result in immediate funds for action on land or infrastructure development.

The main components of the overlay zoning district address building orientation, height, and setbacks; pedestrian and bicycle facilities; parking; windows and entrances; lighting; and access management. If the overlay zoning district is approved, it will apply to all new development within the boundaries of the corridor. This includes changes in use that require a site plan review, major additions or changes to a property, major façade renovations, and new development on vacant land. The changes along the corridor will be noticeable with the first new property to be developed under the new guidelines. However, in order to truly implement the vision created, the effort needs to go beyond physical development guidelines on private property. In addition to the overlay district guidelines, the City will pursue policies, partnerships, and consider incentives to turn the vision created by stakeholders and the City into reality.

Policies

In addition to the regulatory parameters set forth in the overlay district guidelines, certain policy objectives are described below for the City to pursue. Some of the policies require funding to implement. All policies that require funding are subject to cost and feasibility constraints. As with the overlay district guidelines, the policies will take time to implement and will only occur through enhanced partnerships and funding directives.

- Investigate incentives such as reduced site plan review fees;
- Within annual budget constraints, include City projects along the First Street, North Corridor in the CIP;
- Work with the Florence Villa CRA District Advisory Committee to develop additional business and housing incentives for property owners in the corridor;
- Continue to work with FDOT to assist in the development of safer crossings along First Street, North and to implement landscaping and streetscaping improvements along the corridor;
- Work with the transit agency to ensure safe and convenient access for transit services in the corridor;
- Seek grant funding for infrastructure improvements;
- Where feasible, utilize CDBG funding for infrastructure improvements;
- With resident support and participation, develop a vision for the residential neighborhoods surrounding the First Street, North Corridor; and

Summary

After taking the history of the corridor into account and soliciting input from the community, City staff recommends a two-pronged approach to implementation. First and foremost is to adopt the First Street, North Overlay Zoning District to encourage quality development to infuse the area with economic development opportunities. By promoting quality design principles, development will be attracted to the corridor. And by changing the design patterns from those prescribed in the underlying zoning, the corridor will begin to better reflect the character of the surrounding community.

The second, ongoing approach, is to:

- **Seek out new and innovative funding opportunities for infrastructure improvements;**
- **Develop new programs which can be financially supported for business attraction, creation, and retention; and**
- **Create and sustain partnerships to accomplish the goals of the study.**

By combining these two approaches into one initiative, this area will thrive and become a showcase corridor for the City and its citizens well into the future.

5. Appendices

Appendix A – Full Survey and Complete Survey Results

Appendix B – Proposed First Street, North Overlay Zoning District Code Language

Appendix C – Proposed First Street, North Overlay Zoning District Illustrated Design Guidelines