



MERCY DRIVE VISION PLAN

December 2017



City of Orlando District 5 Commissioner Regina I. Hill, the City of Orlando Economic Development Department-Planning Division, and the Canin Associates consultant team would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals and organizations for their support and involvement in developing the Mercy Drive Vision Plan:

Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer

City of Orlando District 1 Commissioner Jim Gray

City of Orlando District 2 Commissioner Tony Ortiz

City of Orlando District 3 Commissioner Robert F. Stuart

City of Orlando District 4 Commissioner Patty Sheehan

City of Orlando District 6 Commissioner Samuel B. Ings

Orange County District 6 Commissioner Victoria Siplin

Florida House of Representatives District 46 Rep. Bruce Antone

U.S. House of Representatives FL District 10 Rep. Val Demings

City of Orlando Police Department

City of Orlando Parks and Recreation

City of Orlando Code Enforcement

City of Orlando Transportation Department

Orange County Government

Orange County Public Schools

Orange County Sheriff's Office

Orange County Head Start

Word of God Church

Church of Christ of West Orlando

Heart of Mercy Church

Tabernacle M.B. Church

FOUR12

Ability Housing

Star Meats & Produce

Mercy Market

Lucious & Emma Nixon Academy

Kidz at Work

Florida Department of Health

Orlando Union Rescue Mission

**Orlando Neighborhood
Improvement Corporation**

We would also like to thank all of the Mercy Drive residents and stakeholders for their insightful and enthusiastic participation throughout the visioning process!

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Children enjoying one of many activities at the Northwest Community Center.

MERCY DRIVE VISION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late March 2017, after several months of preparation, the City of Orlando embarked on the development of a vision plan for the Mercy Drive neighborhood. An interactive Vision Plan process was selected as the best course of action to engage the community and secure broad-based neighborhood input and guidance. An older, established community with significant community revitalization potential, preliminary feedback from area stakeholders indicated the pressing need for strategic infrastructure improvements, community policing, and new employment opportunities.

The approximately 400-acre study area, which is bisected by Mercy Drive, is generally bounded by Silver Star Rd. to the north, W. Colonial Drive and the Central Florida Fairgrounds to the south, N. John Young Parkway to the east, and Lake Lawne to the west. Mostly comprised of single and multifamily residential subdivisions, there are pockets of commercial, industrial, and institutional development (Aspire Health Partners) as well as recreational uses (Northwest Community Center and Lake Lawne Park). The multi-lane Mercy Drive is the major north-south thoroughfare for the Mercy Drive community. While the larger area includes unincorporated Orange County, for the purposes of the study the City jurisdiction was the primary focus.

Canin Associates was selected as the project lead to work with the community to develop a vision plan and facilitate the visioning process, which included several community meetings (workshops) as well as comprehensive planning research and repeated field visits to assess the area's overall conditions, pedestrian systems, and housing stock. The challenge was to develop a vision which would address the community's concerns, optimize its assets, and establish a common pathway to an economically vibrant and sustainable quality of life.

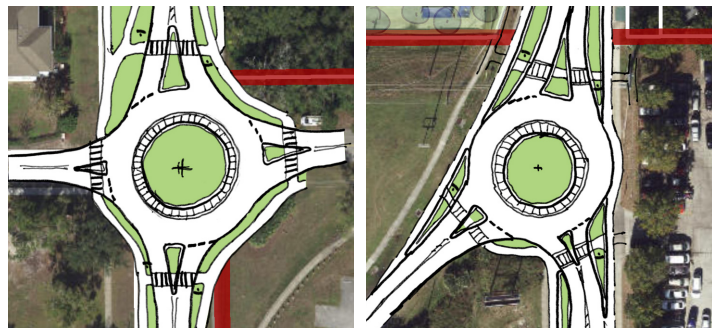
Community feedback identified a large number of community assets including recreation areas, faith-based institutions (churches), local businesses, and development opportunities for new housing and commercial employment. Areas of concern included excessive traffic speeds, large truck traffic volumes, and related negative impacts to personal safety. More recently, there had been a substantial loss of affordable, but substandard, multi-family housing and many area residents had to move away, causing breaks in important family and friendship ties. In addition, the general lack of single family home maintenance had contributed to a growing number of code enforcement violations and housing stock decline. Shopping opportunities were limited, and most residents had to go outside the community for their most basic needs.

The many community voices were distilled into a succinct but compelling vision statement, as follows:

"A safe, attractive, and connected community with quality homes and apartments that empowers neighbors of all ages to learn, build, and create together."



Community Garden; Image: Mercy Drive Ministries



Roundabouts calm traffic speeds and improve safety

VISION PLAN DESIGN CONCEPTS & COMMUNITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

The following recommendations summarize the community's vision for the future and the various implementation projects and programs needed to make this a reality:

- **Street & Streetscape Enhancements:** Roundabouts, traffic buttons, and narrower driving lanes can reduce excessive traffic speeds and noise while allowing the bike lanes to be improved. Increased street trees can enhance the public realm and increased signage can help mitigate freight truck traffic.
- **New Housing Opportunities:** City-owned parcels present opportunities for innovative single-family housing concepts such as high density, small lot single-family detached housing.
- **Connections to Nature:** A dock at Lake Lawne Park and a trail connecting to Barnett Park can activate and greatly enhance the existing waterfront.
- **A New Activity Center:** Vacant and under-utilized land at the geographic center of the community could be developed into a gathering place where residents can meet, shop, establish businesses, hold events, and host celebrations.
- **Home Repair Classes & Construction Job Training:** Utilizing expertise within the community, residents can learn to perform simple home repairs or start a home repair business.
- **Tool Lending Library:** Tool libraries help community members improve their properties while saving storage space and money by lending residents occasionally-used tools for home and yard maintenance at low or no cost.
- **Community Events:** Public events can enhance social cohesion among residents and create connections to institutions such as the Orlando Police Department.
- **The Arts:** Identifying talented residents within the community can be the starting point for launching community-wide public art initiatives.

To address these proposed design concepts and community building programs, a community implementation schedule has also been developed which has organized interventions into short, mid and long-term activities.



Street trees provide shade for walkers and cyclists



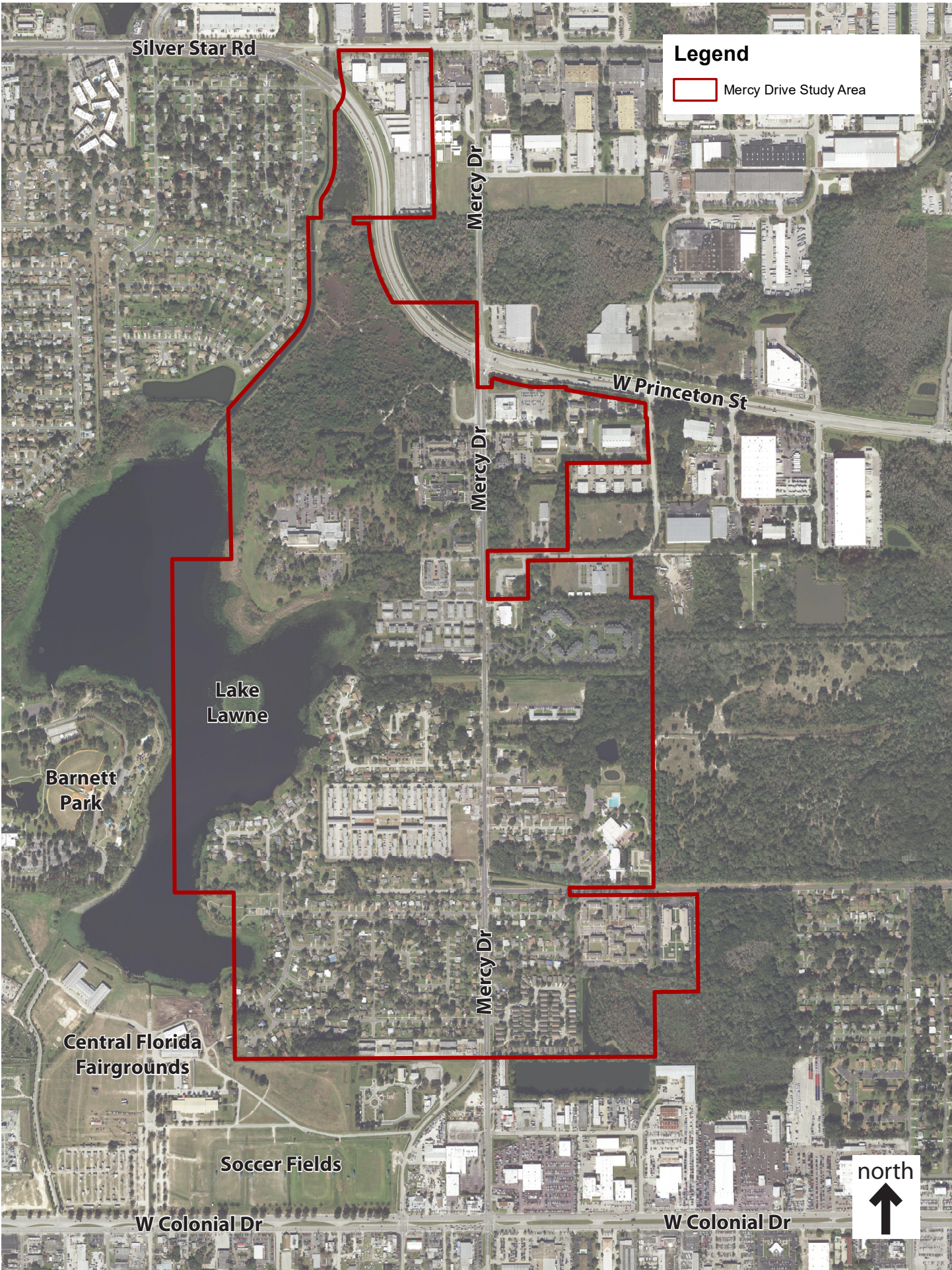
New housing opportunities on city-owned parcels



Conceptual Rendering of a New Activity Center



More Community Events; Image: OPD



Silver Star Rd

Legend

 Mercy Drive Study Area

Mercy Dr

Mercy Dr

W Princeton St

Lake Lawne

Barnett Park

Central Florida Fairgrounds

Soccer Fields

W Colonial Dr

W Colonial Dr

Mercy Dr



Chapter 1:

Community Engagement Approach

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Community visioning is an interactive process of consensus building so as to identify the desired community future and develop steps or concepts to achieve this shared vision. Based on community values, a successful vision plan incorporates concepts needed to form a strategic framework and related actions to create positive community change. The Mercy Drive Vision Plan was developed through a multi-step process including two, two-hour interactive workshops with residents and stakeholders, expert interviews, as well as planning research, an area-wide walking audit, and a housing conditions assessment. Altogether these efforts led to the development of a Community Vision Plan, which incorporates a Vision Statement, Design Concepts, Community Building Concepts (Programs), and an implementation schedule. A summary of key activities is provided below:

ACTIVITY	DATE	SUMMARY
Public Workshop 1: Introduction & Background	5/22/2017	Kicked off the planning process; introduced project team to the community; gathered resident feedback on their community's assets and concerns
Walking Audit	7/19/2017	Assessed walking and biking infrastructure with residents and City staff
Housing Assessment	8/4/2017	Assessed physical conditions of Study Area's single-family housing
Public Workshop 2: Presentation of Vision Concepts	9/28/2017	Presented design concepts and community building programs; gathered resident feedback on which concepts they preferred

Figure 1: Public Engagement Summary Table



Figure 2: Second public workshop attendees vote for their top community building programs.

FIRST PUBLIC WORKSHOP - "GETTING TO KNOW THE NEIGHBORHOOD"

The first two-hour public workshop was held during the evening on May 22, 2017 at the City's Northwest Community Center. Well attended, an estimated 100 residents and stakeholders gathered together to discuss the Mercy Drive neighborhood and their experiences living and working in the area. Welcomed by Commissioner Regina Hill, the purpose of the workshop was to review vision plan development fundamentals, assess preliminary neighborhood research, and encourage attendees to share information and impressions as it concerned community assets and area concerns as well as needed improvements and key opportunities. For many attendees it was the first time they had attended a neighborhood planning session and they were eager to share their experiences and ideas. The following summarizes the feedback from this session.

INTERACTIVE MAP EXERCISES & GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Led by Canin Associates (project team facilitator), a series of planning tools were used to inspire and engage attendees. An opening exercise asked participants to place colored dots on a series of large, area-wide aerials of the study area. Each participant was given three green dots and three red dots. The green dots symbolized "favorite places" while the red dots identified "problem places" (See Appendix D). As part of this exercise attendees were asked to comment on "What You Love about Your Neighborhood", "What Geographic Area Do You Identify as Your Primary Community" and finally, "What Do You Think Would Make Your Neighborhood Better". Post-it notes were provided, which allowed individuals to draw or write responses to these questions. Animated conversations often sprang up around the various aerial stations as attendees discussed, and at times debated, key information that was incorporated into the vision plan and fall planning workshop.



Figure 3: Meeting attendees place green dots on community assets and red dots on areas of concern.

After presentations by the facilitator on "What We've Learned about Mercy Drive" and "What Planning Tools Might We Use - A Place Making Presentation", attendees self-organized into groups of 8-10 individuals for the "What Do You Want for Your Neighborhood?" interactive exercise. Broad-based discussions followed, group comments were collected, and during the latter part of the workshop, each group leader reported out to the larger audience (see Figure 4). Key findings from the three questions exercise are provided below.

"What Do You Love about Your Community?"

Community participants were quick to point out the many assets in their neighborhood. A number of attendees were part of multi-generational families who had lived in the area for decades and had seen the area decline. Community assets included the Northwest Community Center, Barnett Park, the Central Florida Fairgrounds, Word of God Church, Magnolia Pointe Apartments, Heart of Mercy Church, and Kidz at Work. Many other faith-based organizations, schools, and other area entities received positive comments.

"What Are You Concerned About?"

Identified concerns were often complex and multi-factorial, and generally included safety, neighborhood

appearance, and home maintenance as well as a lack of essential neighborhood goods and services. Shopping typically had to be done outside of the area and could only be accessed by car or bus. There was a lot of discussion about safety issues centered around roadway traffic which adversely impacted physical safety. Problems with traffic congestion, speeding, lack of sidewalks, and excessive freight trucks driving along Mercy Drive and parking overnight in bike lanes added to the lack of perceived safety when walking and biking. Lack of maintenance of roadways, trees, signage, and lighting on Mercy Drive was also mentioned. Drainage has been an issue in several areas resulting in flooding during severe rainstorms. Specific areas of concern identified by the mapping exercise include the Bordeaux Apartments, Lakeside Place Apartments, Lakeside Village Apartments, Peppertree Circle Apartments, Palm Grove Garden Apartments, Windsor Cove, some individual homes, and a vacant wooded lot north of the community center.

Where Do You See Opportunity?

Many residents expressed a strong belief and interest in Mercy Drive's potential for revitalization. A popular idea discussed at the first workshop was an education academy to develop skills ranging from basic home improvement to the process of beginning a small business. Providing commercial redevelopment, including more office and retail space for businesses, could provide more jobs for local residents and more shopping options.

Suggestions for recreation improvements included better access to Barnett Park and nearby docks to fish or launch boats. Some residents believe that the Orlando Police Department should engage more with the community to improve police relations and reduce crime. Attendees also mentioned the need for more speed bumps, an enforced noise ordinance, and improved street lighting. Several residents expressed interest in establishing a bus loop which would create a safe multi-modal environment for students and relieve vehicular traffic. Opportunities for more programs for children and seniors was also identified.

INITIAL IDEAS

As introduced in the place-making powerpoint presentation, a number of innovative concepts were presented by the facilitator which were then discussed and identified as having potential by the various participant groups. In particular, some popular community enhancement strategies identified included:

- Neighborhood Improvement: tool lending library, improving homes, tree planting programs
- Alternative Yards: food growth, rain gardens
- Supporting Small Businesses: community markets, shared commercial kitchens, live/work units
- Telling the Story: community storytelling, storytelling through art



Figure 4: A resident shares her discussion group's responses.

SECOND PUBLIC WORKSHOP - "BUILDING THE NEIGHBORHOOD VISION"



Figure 5: Attendees raised their hands to indicate their attendance at the first public workshop.

The second two-hour public workshop was held during the early evening of September 28, 2017 at the Northwest Community Center. An estimated 50 residents and stakeholders gathered to view the different vision plan concepts produced by the project team. Commissioner Hill welcomed attendees followed by brief presentations from various agency representatives to address feedback provided at the first workshop. Presentations included the status of neighborhood recreation in both the City and County including new late-night basketball programming, community safety, code enforcement, traffic calming, and the new Ability Housing project. City staff also gave a brief overview of the vision plan process to help new attendees understand the vision plan process.

Based on the first workshop findings, the preliminary vision plan concepts were then presented, leading with the plan's proposed vision statement: *"A safe, attractive, and connected community with quality homes and apartments that empowers neighbors of all ages to learn, build, and create and together"*.

This followed with a review of proposed Design Concepts and Community Building Concepts. The Design Concepts were generally organized into four areas and included street and streetscape enhancements, housing opportunities, a new neighborhood center, and connections to nature. The Community Building Concepts were broadly identified as home repair classes and construction job training, as well as a tool lending library, community events, and the arts.

After the presentation of the concepts, residents and stakeholders were invited to provide comments. Similar to first session, a series of interactive activities were introduced, including new dot exercises. One exercise allowed participants to place up to three green dots on three, of the four, vision concepts. Another exercise invited residents and stakeholders to prioritize top community building programs. General comments were also collected concerning the new vision statement, which was generally well-received.

For the vision concepts, each received close to an equal number of supporters with a new neighborhood center ranking as a top priority, closely followed by street enhancements and new housing opportunities. The community building concepts (programs) ranking showed a large number of votes for home repair and construction job training. Other activities that received support included home repair classes, more local community events, events with the Orlando Police Department, and a shared tool library.

Below is a summary of these concepts as discussed during workshop #2:

- **Street & Streetscape Enhancements:** Roundabouts, traffic buttons, and narrower driving lanes can reduce excessive traffic speeds and noise while allowing the bike lanes to be improved. Increased street trees can enhance the public realm and increased signage can help mitigate freight truck traffic.
- **New Housing Opportunities:** City-owned parcels present opportunities for innovative single-family housing concepts such as high density, small lot single-family detached housing.
- **Connections to Nature:** A dock at Lake Lawne Park and a trail connecting to Barnett Park can activate and greatly enhance the existing waterfront.
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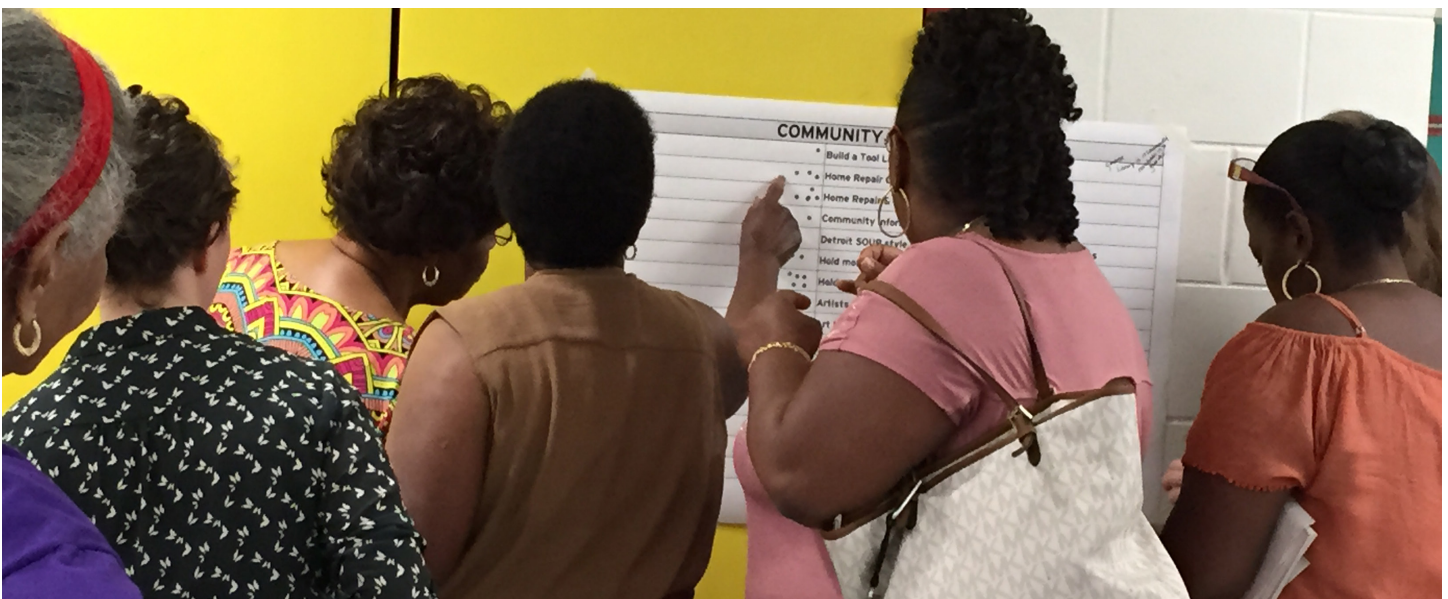


Figure 6: Workshop attendees discuss and vote for the Community Building Programs they prefer.

Chapter 2:

Community Conditions

COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

The Mercy Drive Study Area is comprised of several residential neighborhoods, apartment complexes, businesses, and nonprofit and religious institutions centered around its namesake street, Mercy Drive (see figure 9). The street itself is a key north-south corridor near the western edge of Orlando’s city limits.

BACKGROUND

The first residential neighborhoods were platted in the mid-1950s, when Mercy Drive was still known as Fairvilla Road. During the 1960s, the Mercy Medical Center began construction on what is today the Aspire Health Property. At the time, the facility, run by the Sisters of Mercy nuns, was one of the hospitals serving this part of “West Orlando.” By the end of the 1960s most of the residential neighborhoods were in place.

Also during the 1960s, the City began annexing property within the study area. By the mid-1970s, most of the study area had been annexed except for the single-family neighborhoods, which remained under Orange County jurisdiction. About thirty years later, in the early 2000s, the City annexed the remaining single-family areas.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Mercy Drive study area is predominantly zoned residential, with a mix of single-family and multifamily designations (see figure 10). Non-residential lands consist of office, industrial, and public-use. The study area is lacking in properties zoned as activity center, thus reinforcing the lack of commercial developments. Future land use designations for the study area are mostly consistent with the current zoning (see figure 11).

Although there is a lack of commercial developments, there are over a dozen active churches in the study area as well as several daycare centers, a charter school, and a local convenience store. Aspire Health Partners, which offers behavioral healthcare services, has a large facility on the north side of the study area. Just to the south of the study area’s southern boundary is a Community Health Center and a fresh produce market.

Local recreational facilities include County-owned Lake Lawne Park and the City’s Northwest Community Center. Lake Lawne Park offers neighborhood-scale recreation amenities such as a playground and a half-court basketball court, but does not provide direct access to the lake for fishing or boating. The Community Center hosts a variety of programs for children and adults including Head Start and after-school programs. It also includes a gym, a pool, a community garden, computer lab, a playground, and outdoor courts. The Central Florida Fairgrounds is just southwest of the study area. Adjacent to the fairgrounds is the Emily Hamilton Sports Complex and the Children’s Safety Village.



Figure 7: Lake Lawne Park



Figure 8: Gym at the Northwest Community Center

The Central Florida Fair & Expo Park is a not-for-profit event venue, specializing in outdoor festivals, concerts, and fairs. Founded in 1910 by a group of community leaders who sought an outlet to celebrate the agricultural industry in Orlando and its surrounding counties, it is the largest not-for-profit fair in Central Florida and among the top five largest fairs in the state. Aside from the Annual Fair, the Fairgrounds host over 140 events each year - events ranging from outdoor concerts and festivals to trade and association shows. Bringing over 2 million visitors to the Fairgrounds each year draws an annual economic impact of \$36 million+ to Orlando.

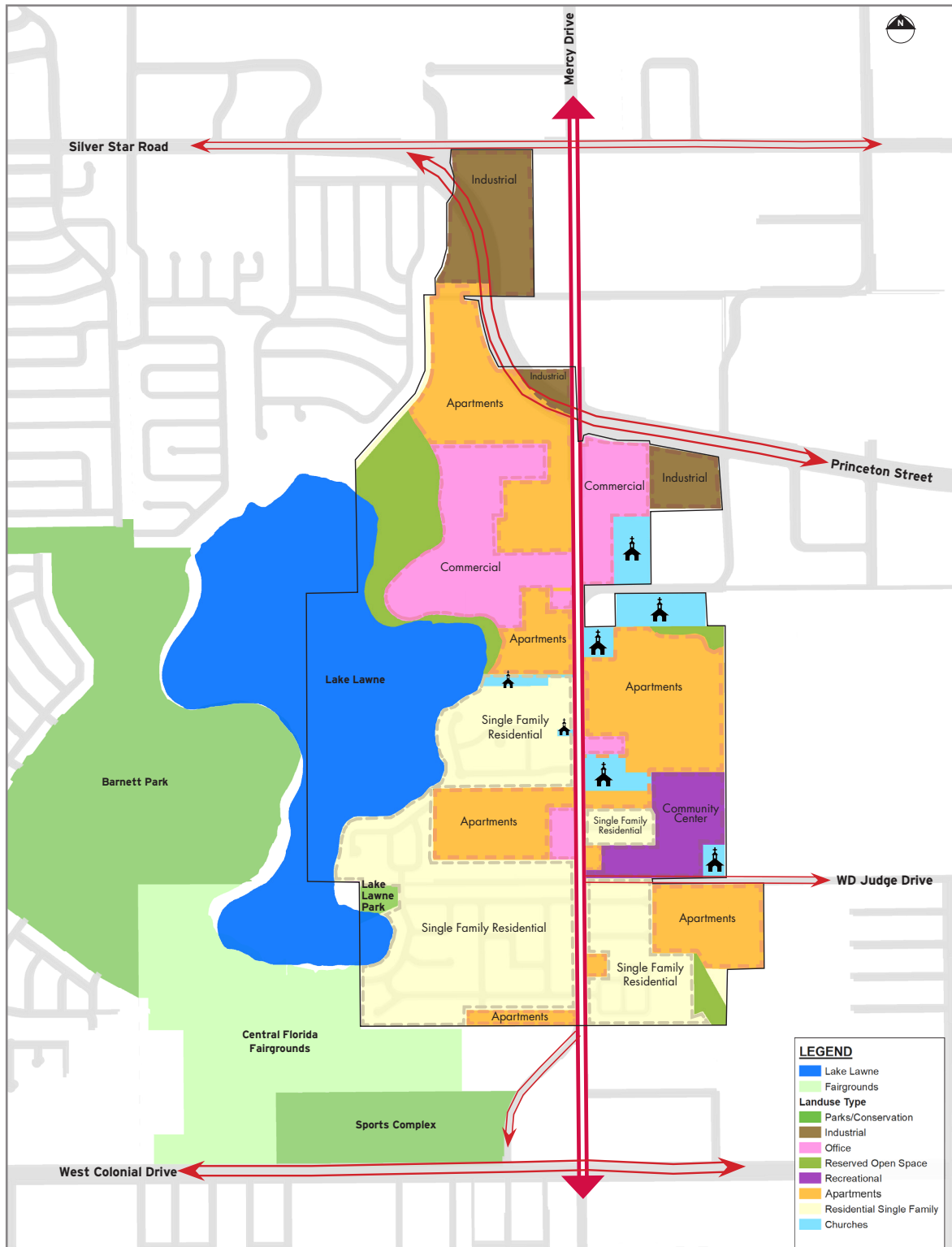


Figure 9: Map of the Mercy Drive Study Area

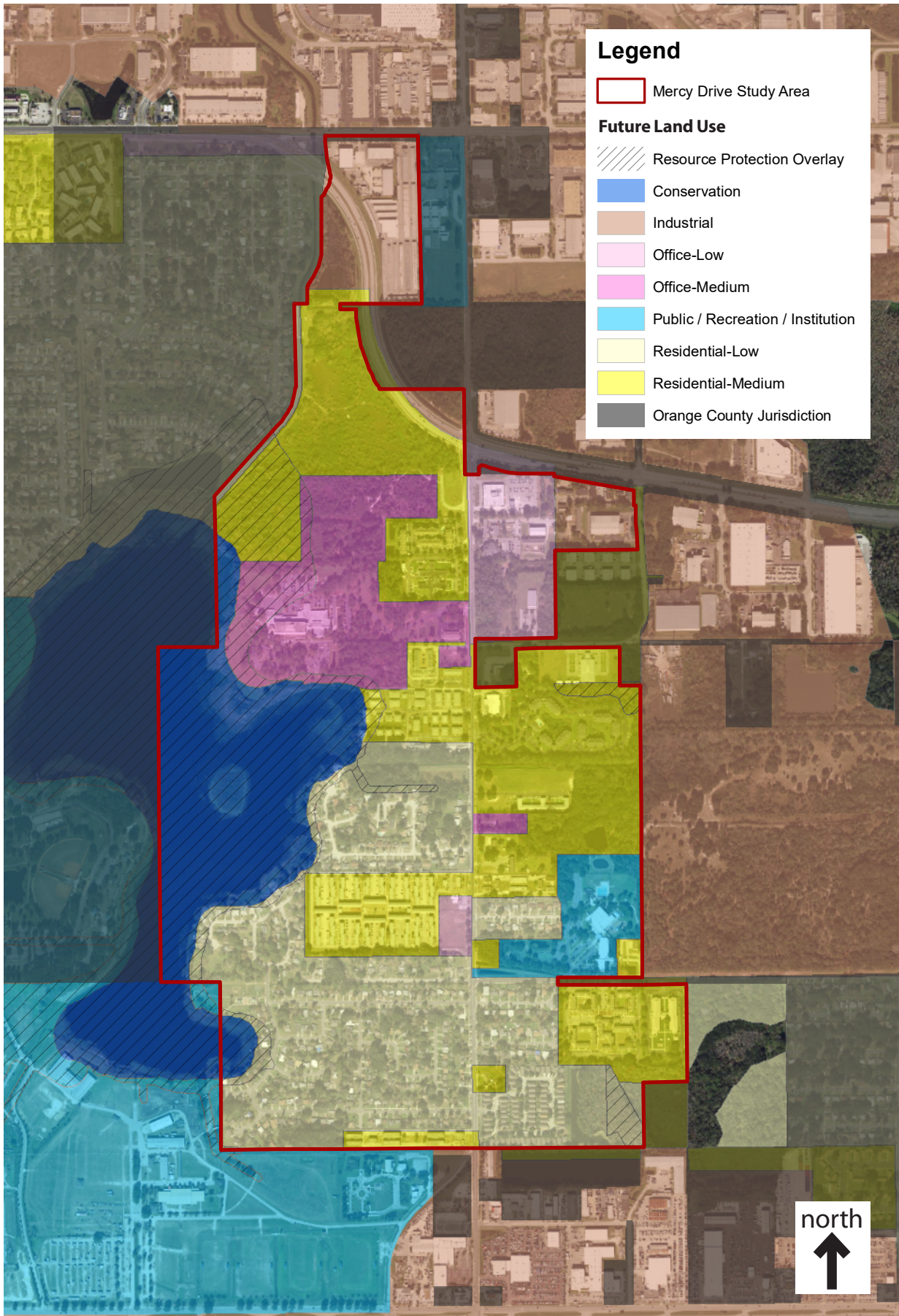


Figure 10: Study Area Future Land Use Map

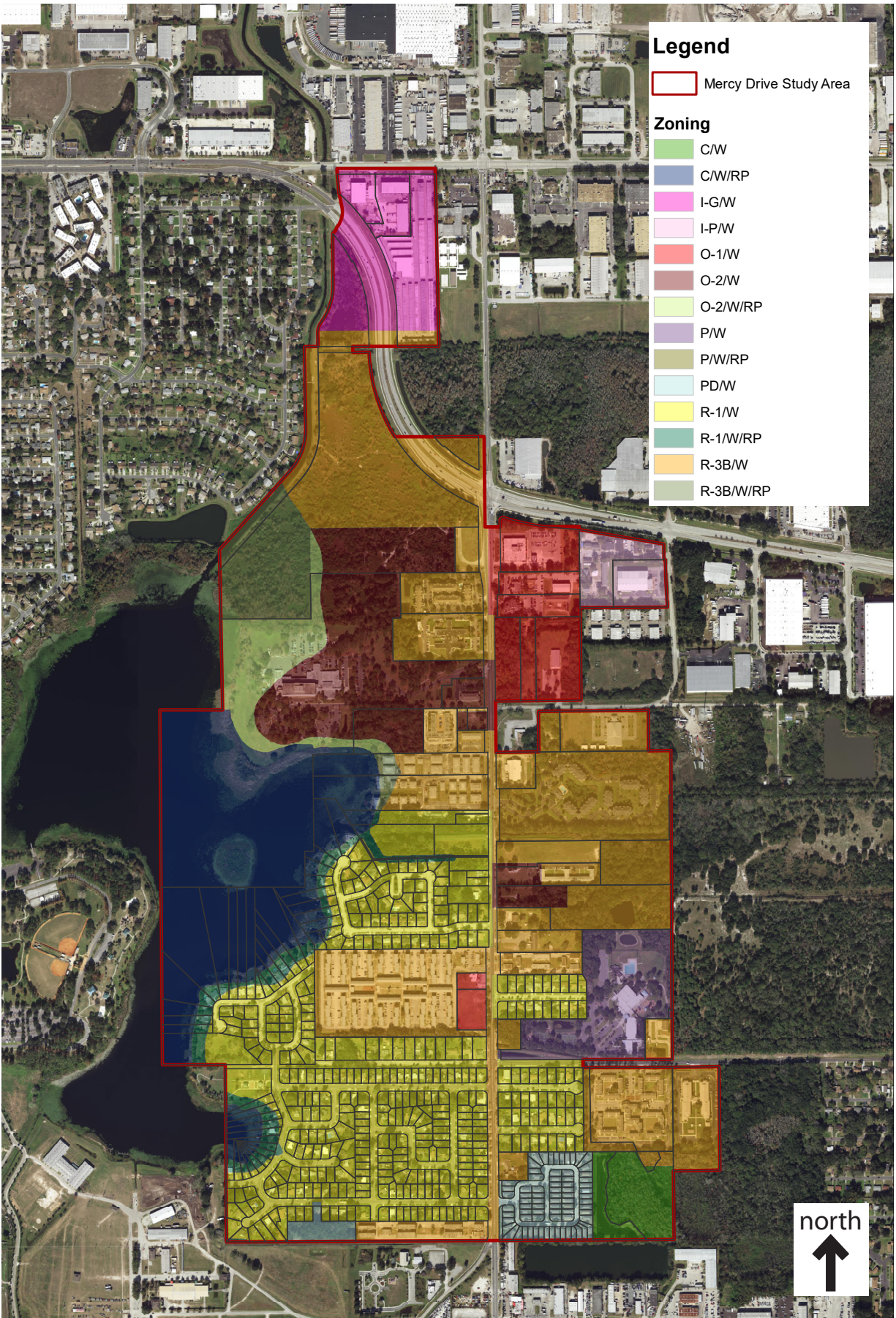


Figure 11: Study Area Zoning Map

DEMOGRAPHICS

Approximately 83% of study area residents identify as African-American according to the 2014 American Community Survey. Almost half of the study area’s households are below the poverty income threshold, with a median household income of \$17,846. This is less than half of the median household income for the City as a whole, which is \$41,901. As a result, about 55% of area households pay greater than 30% of their income on housing, and almost 50% have received SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits. Mercy Drive also has almost twice the number of households with children under 18 at about 48% when compared to the rest of the City at 27%. Additional demographic information is provided in Fig. 12 as well as in Appendix A.

About two-thirds of the study area’s adult residents are high school graduates or higher, however less than 10% hold a college degree. These numbers are considerably lower than the City overall (89% and 33% respectively).

Approximately 40% of the study area’s residents are school-aged children. They attend three different elementary schools, two middle schools, and three high schools. In addition to this fragmentation, elementary students south of W.D. Judge Drive have a challenging walking route to school (Ivey Lane Elementary) that includes crossing seven lanes of Colonial Drive, crossing under the FL-408 expressway, and walking past several industrial properties.

Schools are often a source of social gathering within neighborhoods. The lack of a common school for neighborhood children decreases opportunities for the neighborhood to gather. In addition, as a result of the distance to schools and the fact that many parents lack transportation options, some children attend one of the charter schools within the neighborhood instead of their assigned public school.

	Mercy Drive	Orlando
Socio-Economic¹		
Population	4,475	250,224
Race-Black	83.0%	28.5%
Race-White	6.7%	59.1%
Race-Other	0.0%	5.8%
Hispanic, All Races	9.5%	26.8%
Median Age	32.9 years	33.0 years
% Over 65 Years	14.1%	9.8%
% Households Living Alone	29.8%	36.8%
% Households with Children under 18	47.6%	27.0%
Education¹		
% High School Diploma or Higher	63.6%	88.9%
% College Degree	6.0%	33.4%
Work and Income¹		
% Labor Participation	38.1%	72.6%
Median Household Income	\$17,846	\$41,901
% Poverty	43.6%	19.8%
% SNAP Recipients	49.3%	15.8%

¹Source: 2014 American Community Survey

Figure 12: Study area demographics compared to City of Orlando

HOUSING

Lake Lawne Shores, platted in 1954, is the oldest of Mercy Drive's neighborhoods. Apartments homes started to be constructed in the 1970s. The largest of these, Windsor Cove, was built in 1973 and lies near the center of the community just north of WD Judge Rd. Several of the newer apartment complexes are dedicated to housing senior citizens. Additionally, several of these complexes were built as affordable housing so that some or all of their apartment units must be available at affordable rates for low-income residents. Almost 80% of all of the study area's housing was built prior to 1980, although Parkview, a single-family residential neighborhood much denser than the other Mercy Drive neighborhoods, was added in 1995. As of 2014, a little over 40% of the study area's housing was detached single-family, with only about 25% owner-occupied. The median house price was \$58,860, which is almost exactly \$100,000 less than the City's median home price of \$158,600. Since most of the neighborhoods were originally built in unincorporated Orange County, many remain on septic systems which is a concern for health and long-term maintenance.

	Mercy Drive	Orlando
Housing¹		
Occupied Units	85.6%	83.9%
Vacant Units	14.4%	16.1%
Housing Built Prior to 1980	77.2%	39.2%
Detached Housing	43.2%	34.6%
2-3 Bedrooms	69.2%	67.1%
Level of Home Ownership	24.5%	37.4%
Cost Burden	54.5%	18.5%
Median House Price	\$58,860	\$158,600
Average Housing Condition Score	3.4 out of 5	

¹Source: 2014 American Community Survey

Figure 13: Study area housing statistics compared to City of Orlando

According to the City's records, nearly two-thirds of the single-family properties in the study area have been under some form of code enforcement over the last year. A map showing these properties as well as homesteaded, foreclosed, and bank-owned properties is provided in Appendix C. Most homes date to their original construction in the 1950s or 1960s. There is a mix of ownership ages, with some owners dating to the original decade of construction, but many others having purchased between the 1990s and the present.

The City of Orlando, through receivership, had acquired five former apartment complex properties prior to the beginning of this study. All five properties were condemned and demolished, resulting in a significant loss of apartment housing in the study area. Also prior to this study, the City accepted a proposal from Ability Housing to purchase three of the properties and build affordable multifamily housing units and an amenity center. As of the conclusion of this study, the City still owns two long, narrow, vacant parcels that present an opportunity to rethink housing opportunities for the study area. These properties were previously advertised, but did not garner interest from prospective purchasers.



Figure 14: Palm Grove Gardens apartment complex.

HOUSING ASSESSMENT

In an effort to identify where City and/or third-party home rehabilitation programs could be most effective, Canin Associates visited each residential street in the study area and reviewed every fifth house on a range of conditions from roof to foundation, even including yards and driveways. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “deteriorated” and 5 meaning “excellent”, the average home score was 3.4. While there were some notable exceptions, the data indicate that most homeowners are interested in maintaining their homes. The code enforcement map in Appendix C shows a correlation between houses without a homestead exemption and houses that have code enforcement violations, indicating that most maintenance issues are associated with rental properties. Interest in home maintenance was later reinforced during the second public meeting when the attendees voted to prioritize specific community programs for encouraging and increasing home repair and maintenance skills, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

STREETSCAPE & PUBLIC REALM

Mercy Drive, the study area’s namesake street, runs north-south and spans almost 3 miles between the Seaboard Industrial area and FL-408. The 1.5 mile stretch of Mercy Drive between Colonial Drive and Silver Star Road serves as the study area’s main street. Today, it is a two-lane roadway with 7,600 average daily trips (ADT) and a speed limit of 35 mph. Both sides of the street have bike lanes, sidewalks, overhead power lines, and intermittent flowering and canopy trees. There are multiple school and city bus stops along the corridor.

Because Mercy Drive connects an industrial area to state road 50 and a highway, a large amount of freight truck traffic travels through this primarily residential community. This creates a safety hazard for the approximately 20% of residents that walk, bike, and take transit to get to work and for the many adults and children that need to cross the street while running errands and for getting to and from school. High traffic speeds along the corridor create discomfort for pedestrians and may increase the risk of injury in the event of a crash. Physical design concepts for addressing these truck and traffic issues are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Canin Associates, along with residents and City staff, performed a walking audit that verified these conditions as well as provided additional insight into how the existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities could be improved. These concepts are also detailed further in Chapter 3. Additional walking audit data is provided in Appendix B.



Figure 15: Example of a “poor-average” house that scored 2.5.



Figure 16: Example of an “average-good” house that scored 3.5.



Figure 17: Example of a “good” house that scored 4.2.

According to Walk Score, a national company that rates the quality of mobility networks in cities across the United States, the Mercy Drive study area has a walk score of 32. On their scale, which ranges from 1-100, this falls into the “car-dependent: most errands require a car” category. Walk Score also gives the study area a transit score of 35 “some transit: a few nearby public transportation options” and a bike score of 47 “somewhat bikeable: minimal bike infrastructure”. These scores are slightly lower than or on par with the overall City’s walk score of 42, its transit score of 33, and its bike score of 53.



Figure 18: Typical street view of Mercy Drive.

During the course of this Visioning Study, the City’s Planning Division performed a tree canopy study that identified existing city trees and their species as well as vacant street tree sites. The tree canopy study also created an inventory of overhead power lines and analyzed the existing sidewalk network and its condition. It concludes with recommendations to add street trees, both understory and canopy trees, in as many places as possible throughout the study area.



Figure 19: Sidewalk in need of maintenance.

PUBLIC SAFETY

In addition to traffic issues and the loss of housing, personal safety is also a main concern for residents of this study area. The Orlando Police Department’s crime data, shown in figure 20, shows large numbers of theft, assault, burglary, and narcotic infractions. The participation of Orlando Police Department representatives in the public workshops exhibits the commitment of the department to the vision of improving the study area.

	Mercy Drive	Orlando
Crime Data²		
Theft	77	11,200
Assault	59	2,553
Burglary	53	2,946
Narcotics	34	2,135
Vehicle Theft	16	1,067
Fraud	7	1,551
Robbery	6	577

²Source: 2015 OPD Crime Data

Figure 20: Study area crime statistics compared to City of Orlando

Chapter 3:

Vision Plan

PLANNING ANALYSIS & ONGOING REVITALIZATION ACTIVITIES

BRIEF CITY PLANNING ANALYSIS

Through a series of large scale annexations starting in the early 1950's, the 400-acre Mercy Drive neighborhood has been gradually incorporated into City limits (see area map on page 15). Much of the development in the neighborhood occurred while in Orange County which, with different zoning regulations and development requirements than the City, has led to a dominant suburban development pattern. The irregular jurisdictional boundaries shared by the County and the City have also historically contributed to development challenges, particularly as it concerns the construction of public facilities and the delivery of social services. Better communications and joint efforts between the two jurisdictions, as evidenced during the Vision Plan process, have established a much-needed framework for successful area-wide redevelopment.

Bisected by the multi-lane Mercy Drive, the larger community is divided into two broad areas. The west-side is characterized by large institutional tracts as well as single and multi-family residential with pockets of commercial, while the east-side is generally comprised of single and multifamily residential and neighborhood churches as well as commercial and industrial developments. Industrial uses continue along the east side of W. Princeton St. to Silver Star Road, which is the northern point of the study area. Affordable, multifamily projects have historically been found on both sides of Mercy Drive and, with few exceptions, have declined from a lack of maintenance.



Figure 21: Charter school within the study area.

On the west side, the 156-acre spring-fed Lake Lawne with its natural beauty and abundant wildlife is mostly hidden from the larger community. Single story, single-family concrete block/stucco homes predominate along the lake, which serves as a watery "extension of the backyard", with no lake-side public trail and few points of access. Many of these older residential neighborhoods have poor lighting, an incomplete sidewalk network, and little tree canopy. Some subdivisions are still on septic tanks. While many homes show "pride of ownership", vacant land is starting to emerge in a piece-meal fashion as substandard and/or abandoned housing necessitates demolition and further contributes to the growing destabilization of these important traditional neighborhoods.



Figure 22: Aspire Health Partners entrance signage.

On the east-side, sited in and around older single and multifamily residential properties, are sprawling and outdated commercial and industrial uses, which have little relationship to the pedestrian realm and are characterized by blank walls, deep building setbacks, and inadequate buffering. Due to code enforcement

violations and an antiquated physical plant, these properties are on the decline and potentially subject to demolition which will contribute to an increase in vacant land. The multiple churches in this area enhance and strengthen the neighborhood framework and invigorate community involvement.

Although technically a “walkable” and “bikeable” community, the larger area has few destinations, no defined main street or neighborhood shopping areas, and the largest area landholders and non-profit institutions, which include Aspire Health, Inc. (former Mercy Hospital site) and the Central Florida Fair & Expo Park (established in 1910), have no tangible social or physical connection to the Mercy Drive Community.

The 2-acre Lake Lawne Neighborhood Park, owned by the County, and operated by the City, has limited amenities and only allows for a visual connection to Lake Lawne. There is also no easy access to Orange County’s 187-acre Barnett Community Park, directly across the lake, where the recently improved 25-acre Emory Hamilton Sports Complex, sited along the southern tip of the neighborhood by W. Colonial Drive, almost wholly serves as a regional recreational destination.

REVITALIZATION ACTIVITIES

While not in the Traditional City, the City zoning in this area allows for “urban” development standards, supporting a mixture of uses as well as higher development densities and intensities. Shallower building setbacks and greater building heights as well as varying impervious surface ratios and lot sizes, not typical in the existing development pattern, are allowed. These standards permit more diversity in design and density, which further supports a multi-modal transportation system and a significant neighborhood commercial market area.

In the early 2000’s, extensive infrastructure improvements were made to the Mercy Drive corridor through the addition of vehicular and bike lanes, a connected sidewalk system, lighting, crosswalks, and bus shelters. The anticipated commercial revitalization along the corridor did not follow and today certain areas need to be upgraded.

Area recreational elements were also introduced to support community redevelopment. Northwest Community Center was built in 1994 and Lake Lawne Park was developed in 2002. More recent improvements include a popular community garden at the Northwest Community Center (shared with the County’s Hal Marsten Center) and an anticipated future expansion of the Northwest Community Center further west, to have a presence along Mercy Drive. The community also has several City supported neighborhood associations which are active in the area.

In early 2015, the City of Orlando acquired multiple foreclosed multi-family properties from FannieMae in the Mercy Drive neighborhood. The City’s intent was to sell the redevelopment sites to developers interested in establishing mixed-income, affordable housing communities that would complement the surrounding neighborhoods. At time of purchase, these unoccupied substandard properties included the 3.28-acre Peppertree Shores multifamily site, the 2.29-acre Peppertree Circle multi-family site, and the combined 12.83-acre Bordeaux I-II/Lakeside Village multifamily site. All of these properties are on the west side, excluding Peppertree Circle.



Figure 23: Former Bordeaux I-II building.

Since then, all properties have been cleared and prepared for development. Sold in 2017, to Ability Housing, a non-profit housing developer, the 12.83-acre former Bordeaux-I/Lakeside property, through the support of a \$5 million state apartment incentive loan and a \$21 million state tax credit allocation, was targeted for redevelopment. Ability Housing will be breaking ground in Spring 2018 to develop a new \$27.4 million master planned, three-story, mixed-income, 166-unit residential community. It is anticipated that this project will spur additional development.

Other development activities include the Princeton Oaks project first approved in 2015, which addresses 1.03 million square feet of industrial uses. This project has broken ground and two buildings are under construction. While situated due west of the study area, its development will directly impact the corridor. A neighborhood tree canopy study was also completed by City staff in 2017 addressing the entire study area and providing information on needed area-wide tree planting.

RECOMMENDATION

An analysis of neighborhood future land use and zoning during the Vision Plan process indicates that higher density and intensity zoning, which would allow for a greater mixture and concentration of uses along Mercy Drive, is needed to support key redevelopment activities. A transition zone from the Mercy Drive commercial corridor, of office and medium intensity residential, should also be considered on both sides of Mercy Drive to protect neighborhood residential from encroachment by incompatible uses. It is anticipated that as an outcome of the visioning process, a new Future Land Use Subarea Policy could effectively incorporate vision plan concept projects and programs, similar to the Parramore Comprehensive Neighborhood Plan approach, and further support greater community-driven revitalization.

DESIGN CONCEPTS

The following design concepts were developed based on review of the study area's existing conditions as well as on information gathered during the first public meeting, the walking audit, and the housing assessment. They are intended to enhance the area's assets, address residents' concerns, and ultimately realize the principles laid out in the vision statement.

STREET & STREETScape ENHANCEMENTS

During the first workshop, unsafe traffic speeds, excessive truck traffic, and excessive traffic noise were among the participants' most identified concerns. Participants also mentioned that they felt unsafe using the bike lane (its width is substandard) and that it is difficult to safely cross the street, most notably at the Mercy Drive/Fairvilla Road intersection. The safety of bus riders from both Lynx and Orange County School buses is also a concern. Bus riders, especially children, will need a safe way to cross the street for either the inbound or outbound trip.

One way to address the community's traffic management concerns is with **roundabouts**. This design tool causes traffic to slow down (more in keeping with the neighborhood setting), which makes traveling on the sidewalk or bike lane more comfortable and facilitates safer street crossings.

Two recommended roundabout locations on Mercy Drive are at the New Hampshire Street intersection and at the Fairvilla Road intersection (see figure 22). These locations have notable pedestrian traffic. At the Mercy Drive/Fairvilla Road intersection, residents travel between home and churches, the health center, and the local fresh produce market. In addition, these locations near the northern and southern boundaries of the study area are ideal locations to create community gateways. Roundabouts provide opportunities for special landscape treatments which can act as neighborhood gateways to welcome residents and visitors to the community.

Another effective tool for calming traffic speeds is the **traffic button**, which is essentially a smaller version of a roundabout. It has similar traffic calming effects, but can be accomplished within a smaller footprint (see figure 23). The center of the traffic button is a raised, mountable surface that diverts traffic into a circular pattern. Speed humps are required in the approach lanes to ensure drivers enter the intersection at manageable speeds. Figure 24 shows a typical vehicle interaction with a traffic button. Because of their smaller footprint, the center of the traffic button cannot be landscaped, but it could present the opportunity for a decorative mural. Suggested traffic button locations on Mercy Drive are at Magnolia Pointe Apartments and at Arch Street.

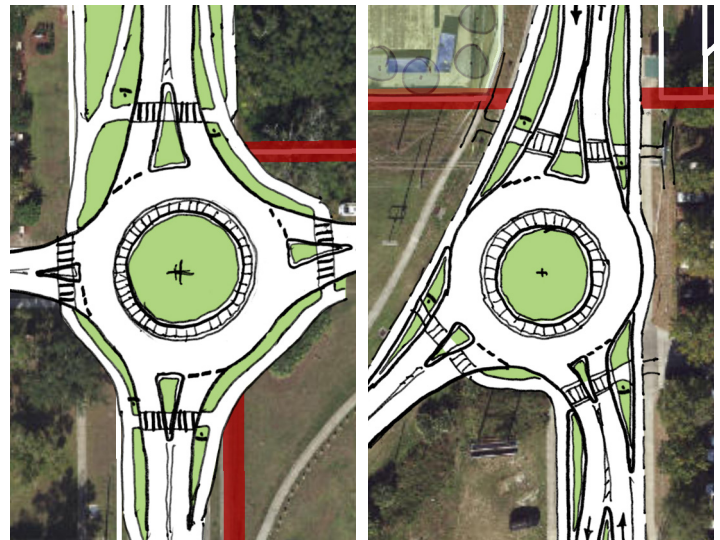


Figure 24: New Hampshire St. and Fairvilla Rd. Roundabouts.

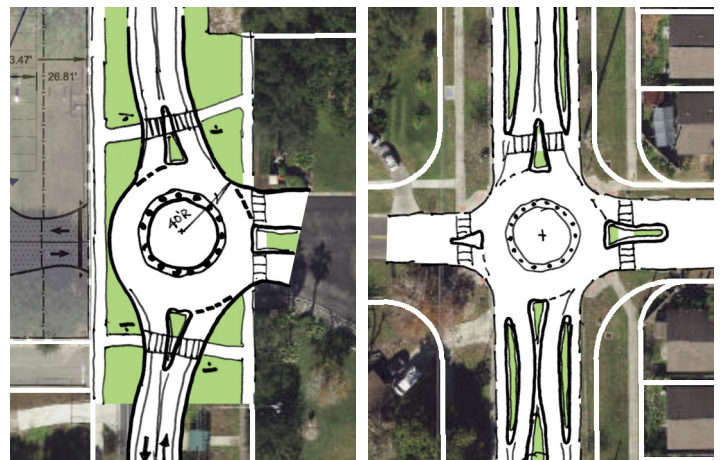


Figure 25: Magnolia Pointe and Arch St. Traffic Buttons.

Modifications to the existing **lane widths** are also an effective traffic calming measure. Currently, Mercy Drive has 11' wide travel lanes and 4' wide bike lanes separated by a single white paint stripe. This is more accommodating for cars and large trucks than it is for other transportation modes such as bicycles and pedestrians. Narrowing the drive lanes to 10' would help to reduce travel speeds and noise as well as create the opportunity for a second paint stripe to be added to the bike lane. This additional 1' of space would improve the bike lane's visual separation from vehicles. Figure 25 shows a cross-section of this new configuration. Additionally, reflectors can be added within the new gap at 20-foot intervals in order to reduce the likelihood of drivers crossing into the bike lane due to inattentiveness.

Signage can provide another visual opportunity to welcome residents and visitors to the study area. In addition to serving as gateways and community identification, wayfinding signage can increase awareness of local businesses and institutions. Potential sign locations are all along Mercy Drive and in roundabout centers.

Another way to enhance the overall streetscape is with **street trees**, as seen in figure 26. In addition to providing shade, which is important for walking and biking in the Florida heat, trees are also recognized as a traffic calming element. They have been shown to reduce vehicle travel speeds in urban conditions and even decrease the probability of crashes.

During the course of this Vision Plan, the City conducted an inventory of the study area's existing tree canopy and provided recommendations on potential new tree locations and configurations. The inventory also reviewed existing sidewalks, street lights, and overhead power lines along with suggestions for improvements.

Mercy Drive has consistent sidewalks, however there are some missing sidewalks on side streets. An important missing sidewalk connection is at the end of Kalwit Lane where many residents, including children, walk on a dirt path to access the Northwest Community Center.



Figure 26: Vehicles interacting with a traffic button.

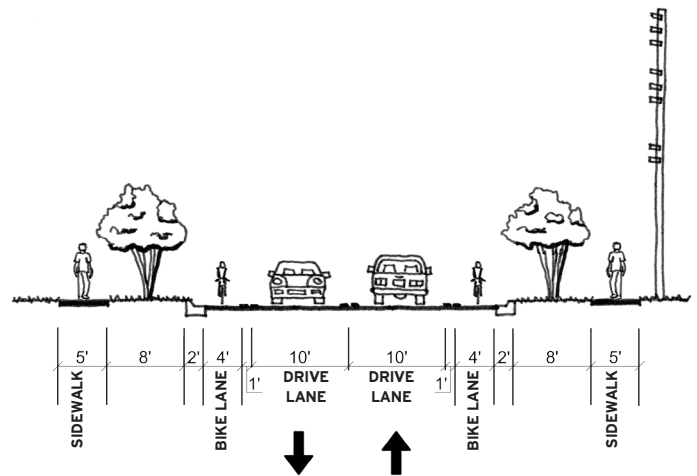


Figure 27: Conceptual street section with narrower drive lanes.



Figure 28: Street beautification with more trees.

NEW HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES ON CITY-OWNED PROPERTIES

As previously mentioned, the Ability Housing project is anticipated to create 166 new affordable apartment homes on land formerly owned by the City. The City's two remaining vacant properties that, at the time of this study, are available for development are the former sites of Peppertree Shores and Peppertree Circle. Due to their relatively small size and unconventional shape, these sites are not well suited to new multifamily development. In order to replace as much of the housing that was lost as possible, innovative medium density housing concepts are needed. This type of housing, also known as "Missing Middle" housing, consists of typologies such as small lot single-family, duplexes, bungalow courts, and townhomes. It serves to bridge the gap between traditional single-family housing and mid-rise apartment complexes.

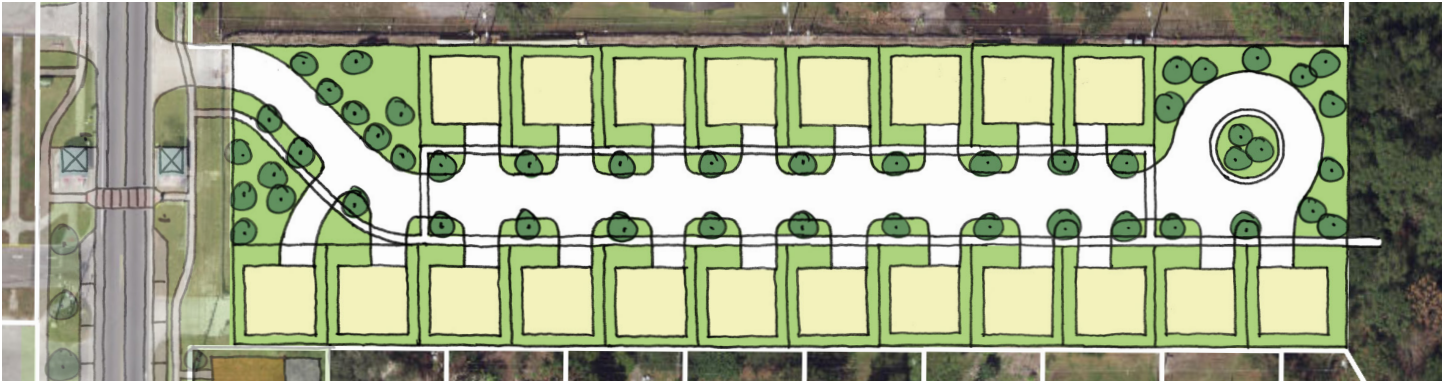


Figure 29: Conceptual site plan illustrating small lot single-family detached housing on former Peppertree Circle site.



Figure 30: Conceptual site plan for former Peppertree Shores site. The faded part of the plan denotes privately owned property.

For example, both sites can accommodate small lot single-family detached homes on 50'x50' lots with a tree-lined street in the middle, as seen in figures 27 and 28. This effectively doubles the site's yield when compared to traditional single-family lot sizes. Duplexes and townhomes could also prove to be viable "Missing Middle" housing opportunities on these sites should greater densities be desired.

CONNECTING TO NATURE

Adjacent to Lake Lawne on the western edge of the study area, Lake Lawne Park is one of the community's most valuable assets. However, residents and stakeholders indicated that its use is limited by the lack of access to the lake. Adding a dock to the park would allow easy access to the water for park patrons and fisherman, and could also be a launching point for canoes or kayaks. The park operated by Orange County, so any improvements would need to be coordinated with the County.



Figure 31: A dock at Lake Lawne Park; Image: Runner1928

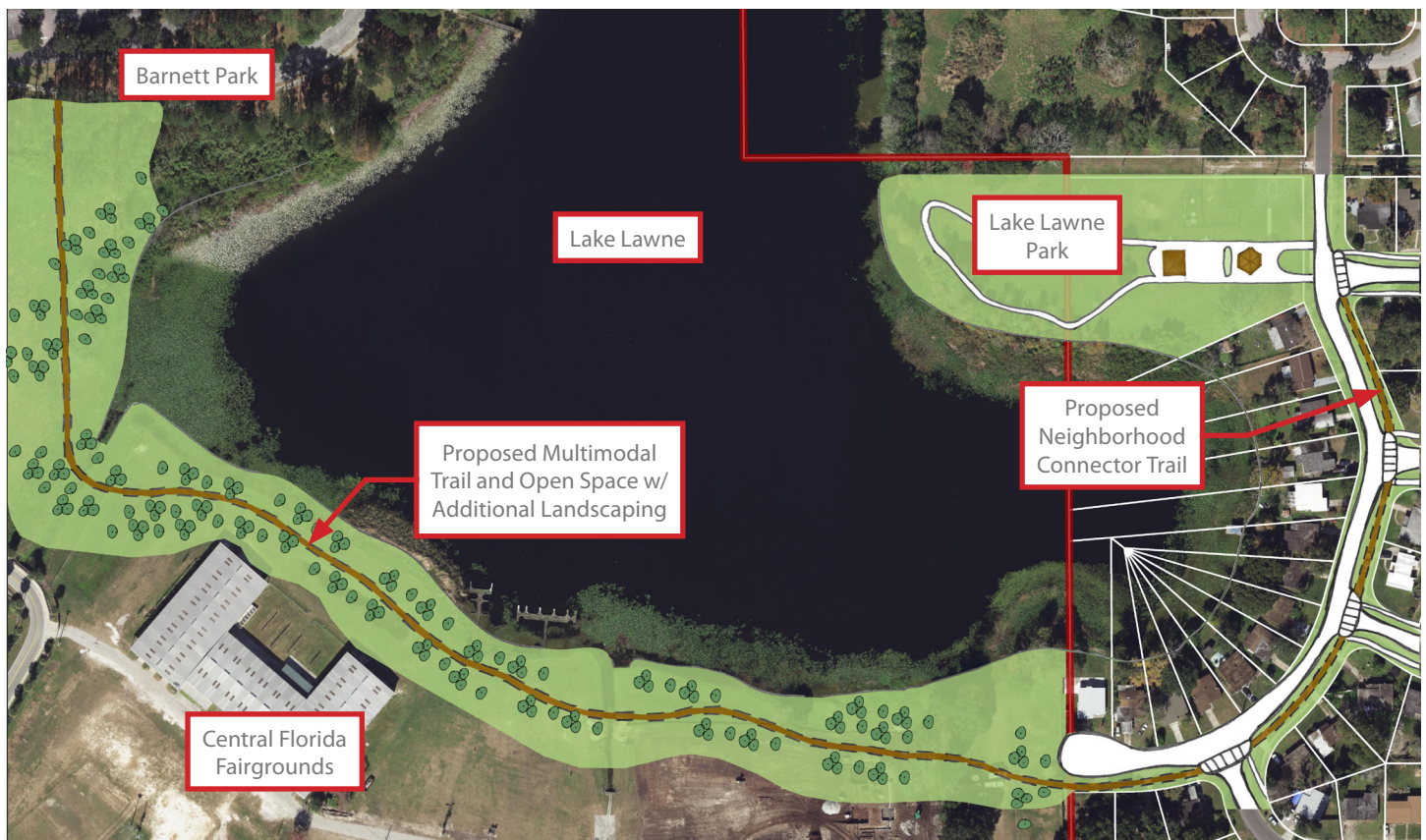


Figure 32: Conceptual site plan illustrating a trail connecting the study area to Barnett Park.

Barnett Park, also owned and operated by Orange County, lies in close proximity to the west, but is separated from the study area by Lake Lawne. Many Mercy Drive residents utilize the park's amenities, especially the gym and sports fields, however their options for traveling to the park are severely limited. Providing a multi-modal trail would greatly enhance the connections between the area's neighborhoods and Barnett Park. Such a trail could potentially start at Lake Lawne Park, continue south along Lawne Blvd utilizing the existing sidewalks, and then turn west and north, running between the Fairgrounds and Lake Lawne. This trail, which would require coordination between the City, Orange County, and the Central Florida Fairgrounds, would provide a quiet and pleasant environment for physical activity away from vehicular traffic as well as improved access to Barnett Park for pedestrians and cyclists. An additional multi-modal trail connection could also be made via W.D. Judge Drive to the Packing District that is currently developing just outside the eastern edge of the study area.

A NEW ACTIVITY CENTER

An important part of any community is an identifiable center; a place where residents can meet, gather, hold events, shop, and even work. The Northwest Community Center serves this purpose to some extent, but historic communities typically have less formal activity centers that incorporate non-governmental uses and a greater range of activities that allow for residents to cross paths during commonplace errands. An ideal location for a new activity center would be on Mercy Drive between W.D. Judge Drive and Colony Way. There are several privately-owned vacant parcels and one City-owned vacant parcel directly adjacent to Mercy Drive in this area. The location of these parcels is advantageous because they are all within a 5-10 minute walk from the majority of houses and apartments in the study area.

A conceptual site plan and rendering for a potential activity center in this area is shown in figures 31 and 32. This plan features several design and programming concepts that residents identified as desirable during the first public meeting such as: live/work townhomes (orange color), spaces for small businesses (orange and pink

colors), and an event space (purple color). Parallel parking, which is vital for effective businesses and contributes to traffic calming, could also be added to both sides of the street within the right-of-way on this section of Mercy Drive.

Street trees should also be added where possible to enhance the streetscape and to provide shade for pedestrians, parked cars, and bicyclists. Additional crosswalks with rectangular rapid-flashing beacons are recommended for the Kalwit Lane intersection and at the bus stops to make both sides of the street fully accessible. With these or similar improvements, a bustling activity center and source of community value and pride could develop.

This activity center would provide important opportunities for supporting entrepreneurship in the neighborhood through the availability of small office and retail spaces. Additionally, live/work units can be an important building type for small businesses because they provide legal, lower cost business spaces while also providing living accommodations. The business space within live/work units is usually lower cost than a conventional retail or office space because it can be financed with a residential mortgage and is typically less square footage. These units could also be limited to lower impact businesses uses compatible within a residential context.

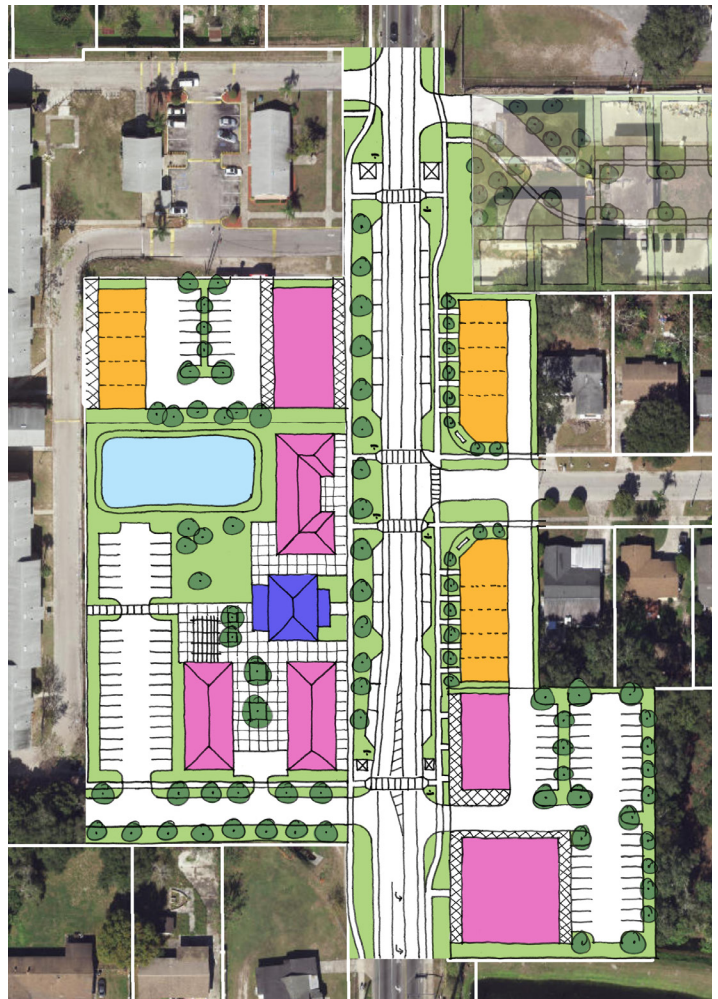


Figure 33: Activity Center concept plan.



Figure 34: Conceptual rendering of the event space in the new activity center.

COMMUNITY BUILDING CONCEPTS

While the design concepts focus on technical solutions to challenges in the physical environment, the Community Building concepts are programs that empower residents to improve the quality of life in their own community by bringing people together to strengthen social bonds and, in some cases, collaborate on physical projects in the community. Many of the following recommendations focus on how to build on the talents, know-how, and energy of residents already in the community. Focusing on human resources the community already has helps to create programs that are sustainable and build community pride. These concepts are generally presented from highest ranked to lowest ranked based on participant feedback from the second community workshop. Some topics have been combined.

HOME REPAIR CLASSES & CONSTRUCTION JOB TRAINING

Simple home repairs can have a significant impact on the character and sense of pride within a community. However, hiring someone to make these repairs can sometimes be difficult for residents with limited means. One way to mitigate these costs is to use expertise within the community. A great way to start would be to find members of the community that have experience in the home repair or construction field and organize classes that allow these community members to share their knowledge and expertise so that residents can learn to make repairs themselves. Classes could include on-site training in which students learn through the supervised repair of homes owned by elderly residents or others who cannot do their own repairs. As community members build their skills some may want to help friends and neighbors or even start a small home repair business. One example of a successful program is the Home Repair Resource Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Locally, Rebuilding Together Orlando is a nonprofit that leads community based home repair programs.



Figure 35: Home Repair Classes; Image: Home Repair Resource



Figure 36: Tool Lending Library; Image: Toronto Tool Library.

TOOL LENDING LIBRARY

After homeowners learn how to make repairs, they will need access to the tools necessary to get the jobs done. Tools needed for infrequent or specialized repairs can become a costly investment for individual homeowners. However, the creation of a tool lending library is one way to address this issue. There could be a central repository where individuals could rent the tools they need to get repairs done without expensive personal investments. It could start in the Community Center or in a local church using existing staff and then expand to the activity center in the future. Tool

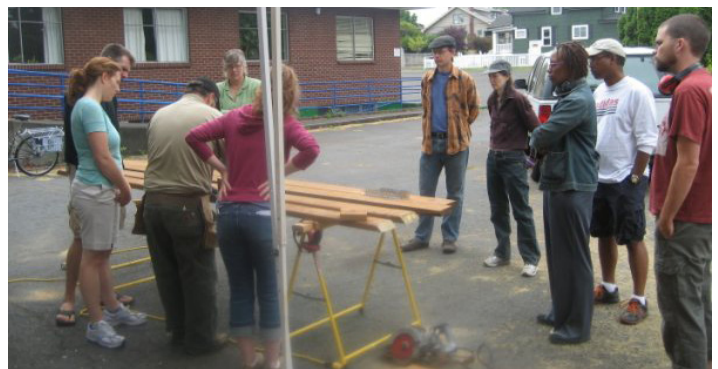


Figure 37: Deck and Woodworking Workshop; Image: North-east Portland Tool Library

lending libraries are becoming increasingly popular in the United States with examples ranging from Portland, Oregon to Safety Harbor, Florida.

COMMUNITY EVENTS & INFORMATION

Hosting community events is an effective strategy for bringing neighbors together and for fostering community pride and identity. Events such as community markets, wellness expos, and fall festivals give residents a chance to meet up and support each other's small businesses, learn about community resources, and get to know each other better. The Orlando Police Department has outreach programs in which they come out to a community event, meet up with residents, and sometimes even barbecue, all in a relaxed and informal setting. These community events can be great opportunities for increasing police presence in a more comfortable setting.

Another popular event is the community market which could be a Farmer's Market or more oriented towards crafts. Many residents may be unaware that Florida's "Cottage Food Law" allows residents to prepare certain products in a home kitchen and sell them at a community market.

Some residents indicated that they were unaware of programs or existing assets, such as the community garden, that already exist in the study area. Increasing awareness of what is already available in the study area could be part of community events or a community information kiosk.

Events could also serve as a launching pad for other projects. The Detroit SOUP project uses a dinner gathering to create micro-grants for community-serving projects. Each attendee pays a small fee to have dinner and watch a series of speakers pitch an idea for community improvement. Diners vote on the proposals and the winning idea is funded with the proceeds from the dinner.

THE ARTS

Engaging with the arts can be a great way to build community in a highly visible way. To kick off this type of engagement, a neighborhood artists inventory is recommended to identify residents with artistic talent. While visual artists are important, this could also extend to musicians, writers, craftspeople (e.g. weaving or woodworking), and even cooks. Once these talented people are identified, the community can identify the best ways to showcase their work such as creating a neighborhood art gallery, a craft market, or featuring musicians at community events.



Figure 38: Public Bulletin Board; Image: Liberty Village Toronto



Figure 39: Detroit's SOUP community event



Figure 40: Neighborhood Art Gallery; Image: King Arts Complex

Chapter 3

These artists can also be engaged in a variety of neighborhood improvement efforts. These could be programmatic such as art classes for children or they could result in making art visible within the study area. One program already set up to feature the arts in Orlando is the “Artbox” program in which traffic control boxes are painted with fanciful images. They are also coated with an anti-graffiti clear-coat making them more graffiti resistant than before the art was installed. Local artists can be commissioned to create these works. An extension of this program might be a mural program where blank walls or even fences could be painted to create a more inviting feel to what are typically barriers.



Figure 41: Intersection Painting; Image: Arati Michaud

Art can even be applied to the study area’s streets through artistic crosswalks or intersection painting. Both of these additionally improve traffic calming by letting drivers know they are in a neighborhood setting. The design is created by an artist based on input from the community about what values or ideas should be featured. In the case of a cross-walk the artists may also complete the piece. In the case of intersections, the artist typically draws the outline of the piece in chalk and then neighborhood residents come together for a community painting party which is in itself a community building event. The mural then becomes a lasting reminder of the residents coming together. Visit www.cityrepair.org for more information. These intersection paintings are more appropriate for low-speed intersections in residential subdivisions rather than for Mercy Drive itself.



Figure 42: Community Wall Mural; Image: @theArtAroundUs

STORY TELLING

Many communities have found power in telling and preserving the history of their neighborhood and its residents. For instance, Winter Park’s Hannibal Square Heritage Center features historic family photos from residents. The collection of many ordinary histories merges to create a collective narrative of place. Other efforts have focused on preserving oral or written histories such as New Orleans’ Neighborhood Story project. In this model, older children and teens could be engaged to document the stories of older citizens and gather them together into a short book.

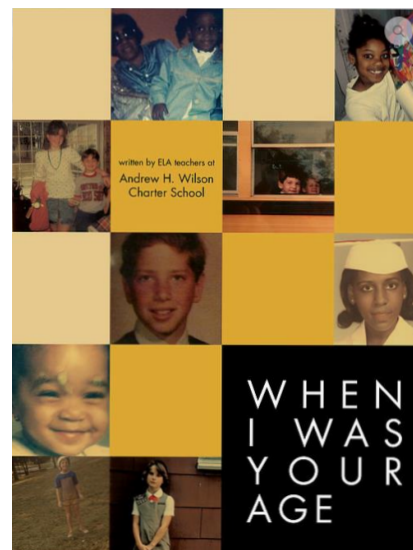


Figure 43: Story Telling Collection Book

BEST OF MERCY DRIVE AWARDS

Recognition shows what a community values. An annual “Best of Mercy Drive” awards dinner could help highlight neighbors who are contributing to things the community values in categories such as “best yard”, “most creative”, or “most dedicated volunteer”. A panel of neighborhood residents would identify what should be recognized and take nominations in each category. Winners could receive a plaque, an award sign, or perhaps a sponsor could provide a gift certificate to a local restaurant or business.



Figure 44: Award-winning home landscaping

CRIME REDUCTION & PERSONAL SAFETY

Crime was a major concern expressed at the community meetings. This study incorporates this concern as an overarching goal considered in all projects. The primary planning approaches to crime reduction in the vision are displacing negative activities, increasing social cohesion, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

The conceptual design of the activity center considers the need to establish clear boundaries between public and private space. In addition, any new development projects being reviewed in the study area should be evaluated from a CPTED standpoint with an emphasis on clear boundaries between private, shared, and public spaces, and designs that improve passive surveillance. For instance, while it is important to protect pedestrians from vehicular traffic, locating public or shared spaces in apartment complexes within sight of a roadway or vehicular access area can increase passive surveillance. OPD also performs CPTED reviews for individual homeowners by request. The study’s landscaping recommendations also consider CPTED principles with a focus on the addition of trees rather than shrubbery in public spaces. The maintenance of landscape on undeveloped properties, including government-owned properties and infrastructure sites, should also be monitored.



Figure 45: Police department community picnic; Image: OPD

The remaining two approaches to crime and safety, displacement of negative activities and increasing social cohesion, are strongly connected. Strategies to improve property appearance, increase employment opportunities, and promote community involvement can have positive benefits from a public safety standpoint. Negative activities are drawn to underutilized places lacking in passive surveillance. Community events fill otherwise neglected spaces with a diverse group of community members. Among the recommended community events, participants expressed interest in engaging in community barbecues and other events with Orlando Police Department to build positive relationships between the department and residents, which is consistent with activities the department has done in the past. The proposed activity center is intended to decrease vacant land, increase local ownership, and increase passive surveillance in the community’s geographic center. Public art created by and for the community stakes a claim to shared spaces. The extension of the Northwest Community Center’s hours already being implemented provides young people with positive activities for more hours of the day. Participants also indicated lack of transportation as a barrier to education and employment. Improved biking and walking conditions, job training for construction-related activities, and increased opportunities for local business can also contribute to education and employment opportunities.

POTENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION TIMING

Based on input from the study area’s residents and stakeholders, the following potential implementation timing table was developed:

		Near Term (<2 yrs)	Medium Term (2-5 yrs)	Long Term (> 5 yrs)
Community Building Programs (in order of votes received)	Build and Learn Apprenticeship		•	
	Home Repair Classes		•	
	Community Events	•		
	Hold Community Events with Police Department	•		
	Tool Lending Library		•	
	Story Telling Project	•		
	Community Kitchen		•	
	Neighborhood Artist Inventory	•		
	Artistic Neighborhood	•		
	Artbox Program	•		
	Intersection/Crosswalk/Fence Painting	•		
	Neighborhood Art Gallery	•		
	More Community Gardens and Fleet Farming	•		
	Community Information Bulletin Board	•		
	Seniors volunteering with kids and youth	•		
	Community Ambassadors	•		
	Community Market	•		
	Best of Mercy Drive Awards	•		
Detroit SOUP Program	•			
Design Concepts (in order of timing)	Community Signage	•		
	Better Bike Lanes	•		
	More Street Trees	•		
	Traffic Roundabouts		•	
	Traffic Buttons		•	
	Lake Lawne Park Fishing Dock		•	
	Barnett Park Trail			•
	Redevelopment of City-Owned Parcels			•
	New Activity Center			•

Figure 46: Chart of the potential implementation timing for the design concepts and community building programs.

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