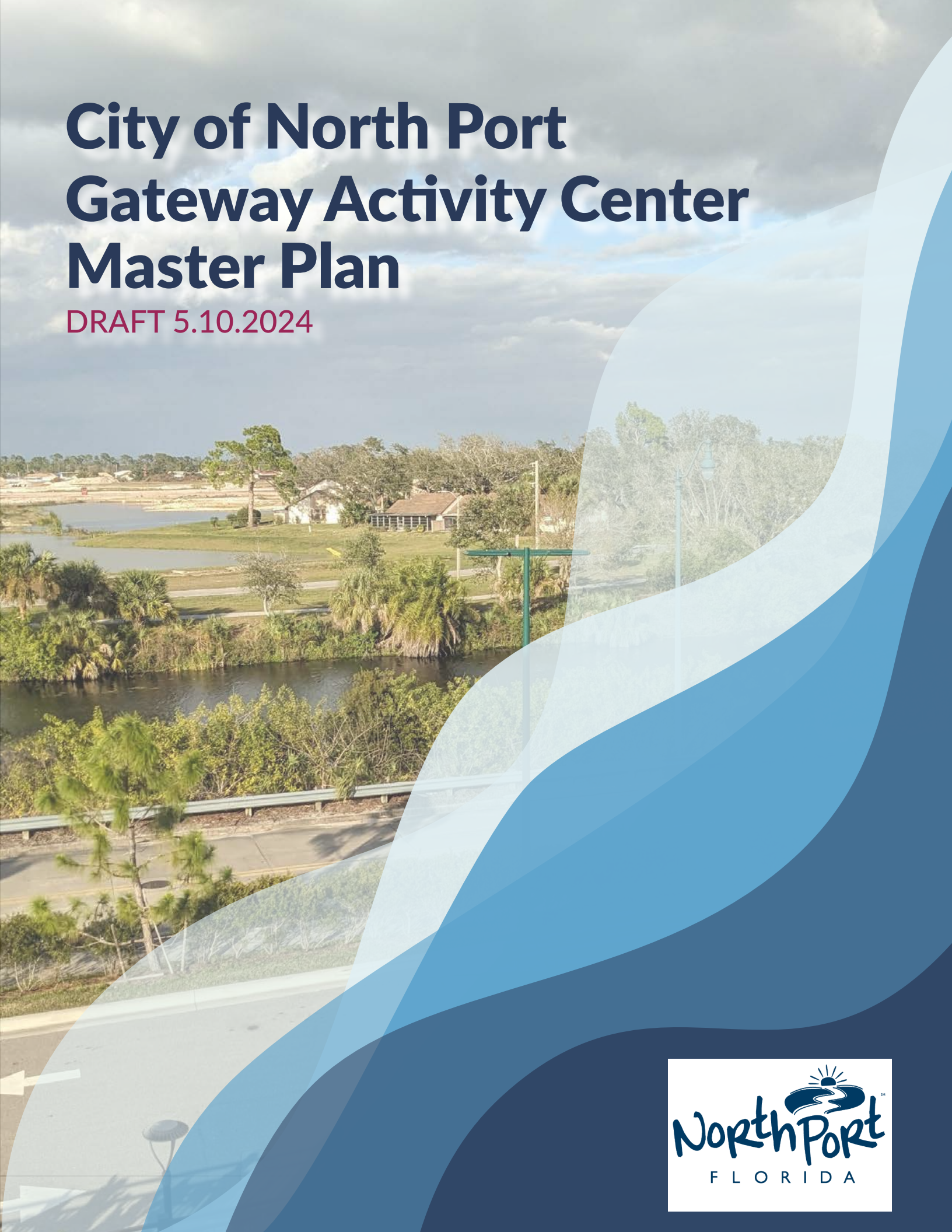
City of North Port Gateway Activity Center Master Plan

DRAFT 5.10.2024



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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of North Port's Activity Center 3, also known as the Gateway Activity Center, is a 177.8-acre area identified as one of nine Activity Centers in the North Port Comprehensive Plan. Activity Centers are defined as lands "designated to provide an area for coordinated development of industrial, commercial, professional office, residential, public, and recreational uses."

The Gateway Activity Center has the potential to develop quickly due to its prime location at the Sumter Boulevard and Interstate 75 interchange. A 100-bed hospital is in early development stages on the southeast quadrant. The purpose of the Gateway Master Plan is to encourage development that addresses the area's needs and fosters its opportunities.

The City of North Port was successful in their grant request to help fund a Master Plan for their Gateway Activity Center, which will integrate strategic land use scenarios with effective stormwater solutions to allow the area to become both a commercial and environmental asset for the City. In addition, recent infrastructure investments, such as the installation of water and sewer service to the Activity Center parcels south of I-75, have spurred interest in the development potential of the Gateway Activity Center, exacerbating the need for a localized master planning approach.

BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

The process of creating the Gateway Master Plan began with an in-depth desktop and field assessment of the study area to explore the unique conditions of the site and document the issues and opportunities relating to land use, transportation, environmental conditions, stormwater, and economic development. The Gateway Activity Center assessment (see Appendix A) identified opportunities that can create benefits for North Port and challenges that will need to be addressed in order to deliver those benefits.

The opportunities include:

- The Activity Center's location at the interchange and the imminent development of the hospital provide an opportunity to serve local goods and services needs through hospital-oriented and highway-oriented development.
- Locations are available on site and in the surrounding neighborhoods to create shared-use stormwater management infrastructure, such as ponds, that can double as neighborhood amenities.
- The topography of the study area presents an opportunity to create a network of trails along waterways that can connect neighborhoods, parks, existing trails, and the Activity Center.
- The hospital creates a strong opportunity to develop a hotel and other visitation uses, supported by the interstate and the existing market in North Port.
- Land that is conserved in the study area can be established as a natural environment that helps to manage stormwater and provides natural habitat for wildlife. These areas can also be leveraged for economic development through outdoor recreation.

The challenges include:

- Most of the land within and surrounding the activity center is in a flood hazard zone, and was recently severely impacted by flooding from Hurricane Ian.
- Land surrounding the Activity Center has been pre-platted for residential use, and parcels are owned by many different owners, many of whom are not local, making assembly of parcels for large projects difficult.
- The topography of the land, with its wetlands and waterways, as well as the current stormwater management system, creates a

challenging landscape for building.

- The transportation network between the four quadrants of the interchange and the surrounding neighborhoods lacks connectivity.

The strategic framework for the Gateway Activity Center Master Plan is informed by the North Port Comprehensive Plan, the North Port Strategic Plan, and the findings of the assessment (Appendix A). The desired outcomes of the Master Plan are summarized in four guiding principles:

1. Develop a land use strategy focusing on mixed-use development that spurs economic development to attract visitors and provide employment, services, and amenities for North Port residents.

2. Create a cohesive gateway district vision that establishes a sense of place for North Port residents and welcomes visitors.

3. Improve multi-modal transportation connectivity and access within and through the Activity Center.

4. Reduce flooding risk and mitigate the cumulative stormwater impacts from existing conditions and anticipated development projects.

LAND USE SCENARIO ANALYSIS

Three land use scenarios were developed for the Activity Center and were evaluated based on how well they support the guiding principles and the desired outcomes of environmental responsiveness, economic return, and development feasibility. The purpose of these scenarios is three-fold: present multiple ways that the undeveloped land around the I-75 interchange could be developed; evaluate the benefits and feasibility of each type of development; and form a basis for recommendations that will guide future development in the Activity Center. The three scenarios are:

- Scenario A: Hospital-Oriented High-Intensity Development - This scenario represents a high level of development for this Activity Center. The pending Sarasota Memorial Hospital development can be a significant driver of future Gateway Activity Center growth. Following the development of a new hospital, the surrounding area is commonly developed with uses that are complementary to the hospital and serve hospital patients, workers, and visitors, such as a hotel, medical offices, retail, and housing (especially senior housing). Scenario A includes development both north and south of I-75.

- Scenario B: Recreation and Conservation – This scenario is focused on limiting development in the flood zone while still creating an Activity Center that improves quality of life for North Port residents and generates economic activity. It envisions ways to activate the northern part of the Activity Center with minimal impervious surface development. In addition to the hospital, the uses considered in the Recreation and Conservation scenario include a natural park, medical offices, outdoor recreation, and an indoor activity and entertainment complex.

- Scenario C: Local Economy and Active Environmental - This scenario is a middle ground between Scenarios A and B. It still attempts to minimize impervious surface on the northern parcels, but takes a more active approach to the outdoor activities encouraged on those parcels.

In addition to the hospital, the uses considered include a mixed-use “mini-downtown”, medical offices, active outdoor recreation, retail, and an RV / glamping park.

FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS

The three land use scenarios present a set of possibilities for how development could occur in the Gateway Activity Center. Scenario A fulfills the City of North Port's vision for economic development and jobs in the Activity Center. However, a full buildout of the core Activity Center is not currently feasible due to the environmental and flooding constraints. Development north of I-75, where nearly all of the Activity Center land is in the flood zone, would require large-scale stormwater interventions that would come with significant financial and environmental costs. With enough market demand, it may become worthwhile to pay those costs; however, there is not currently evidence of that demand in this location.

Scenarios B and C represent an alternative path that focuses on this Activity Center's potential as an environmental asset. Conservation of the flood zone land north of I-75 avoids the risks that could be created by building in flood-prone areas, including worsening flooding in other parts of North Port. While the land would be conserved, there are still opportunities for economic activity in these scenarios. North Port already has strong recreational assets, such as bike trails and blueways. A well-designed park with accompanying recreational facilities that ties into North Port's existing and planned trails and blueways network, paired with an eco-tourism marketing effort, could bring visitors to the area to spend money at businesses developed in the non-flood-zone land south of I-75.

The final section of the Master Plan presents a recommended plan of action for the City of North Port to begin to activate the Gateway Activity Center. The first phase consists of immediate actions that the City can take to make the area south of I-75 attractive for development. The second phase consists of actions that require some investment and time, such as infrastructure improvements, and a plan for maximizing the potential of the non-flood-zone land in the southwestern part of the Activity Center and High-Density Corridor. At the end of the second phase, development will be underway in the southwest. At this point or soon after, the City will have evidence of the level of market demand for the northern part of the Activity Center. It may be justifiable to invest in a major stormwater facility to make that land developable. However, if the market for development in the southwest does not meet expectations, it could support a decision to conserve the land to the north and focus on future jobs development elsewhere in North Port.

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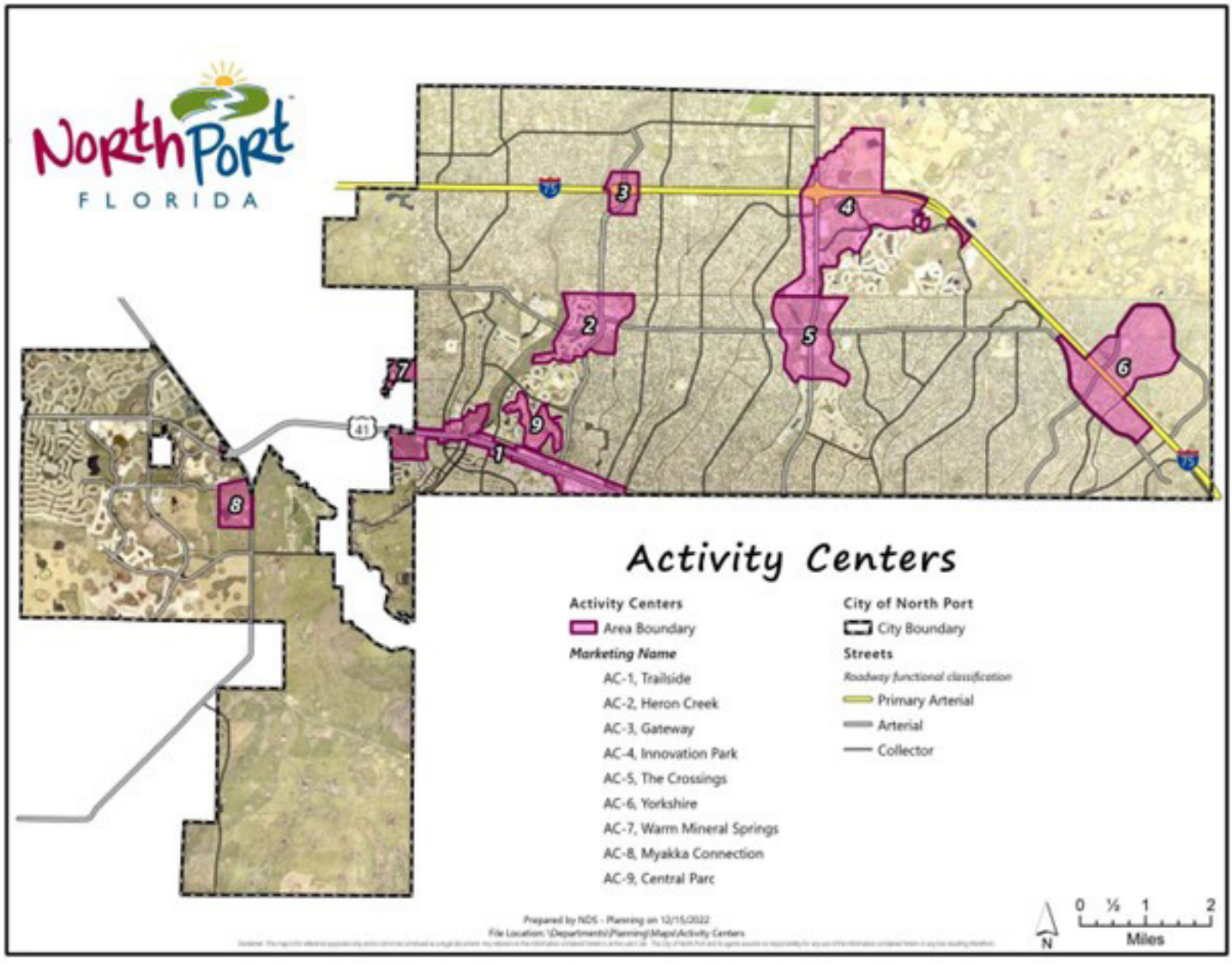
INTRODUCTION

Activity Center Overview

The City of North Port's designated Activity Center 3, also known as the Gateway Activity Center, is a 177.8-acre area identified as an activity center in the North Port Comprehensive Plan. The Gateway Activity Center is one of nine Activity Centers in the Comprehensive Plan, pictured below. Activity Centers are defined as lands "designated to provide an area for coordinated development of industrial, commercial, professional office, residential, public, and recreational uses."

The Gateway Activity Center comprises five undeveloped parcels of land surrounding the I-75 interchange at Sumter Boulevard. North Port's proposed Comprehensive Plan updates extend the Activity Center to include the neighborhood to the north.

In addition to the Activity Center, the Gateway Master Plan also addresses a wider study area that includes the Activity Center itself, as well as the neighborhood to the southwest, which is proposed



North Port Activity Centers. Source: City of North Port

Aerial Imagery of Gateway Activity Center and Study Area.

to be reclassified as High-Density Corridor in the proposed Comprehensive Plan updates, and the neighborhoods to the east. The western boundary of the study area is Myakkahatchee Creek (also called the Big Slough Canal), a tributary of the Myakka River. This wider study area shares some of the same issues as the Activity Center itself, and will be affected by development that occurs in the Activity Center.

Purpose of the Gateway Master Plan

The Gateway Activity Center has the potential to develop quickly due to its prime location at the Sumter Boulevard and Interstate 75 interchange. To that end, a 100-bed hospital is in early design stages on the southeast quadrant. The purpose of the Gateway Master Plan is to encourage development that addresses the area's needs and fosters its opportunities.

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

Grant Award

The City of North Port made a request to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity's Community Planning Technical Assistance grant program in 2023. As detailed in that request, the City's population growth over the past 10 years has accounted for over a fifth of Sarasota County's growth, but only two and half percent of the county's job growth. This mismatch between population and jobs is a trend North Port's elected officials, staff, and community members are determined to address.

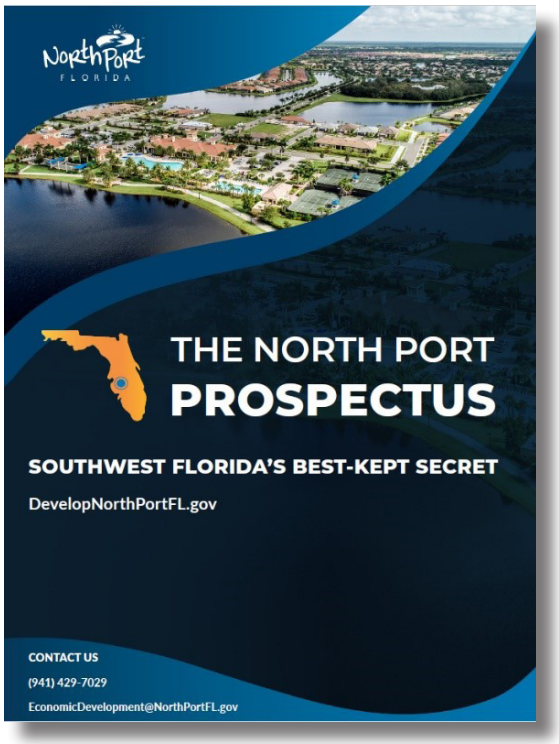
The City of North Port was successful in their grant request to help fund a Master Plan for their Gateway Activity Center, a targeted major employment center, and will integrate strategic land use scenarios with effective stormwater solutions to allow the area to become both a commercial and environmental asset for the City. In addition, recent infrastructure investments, such as the installation of water and sewer service to the Activity Center parcels south of I-75, have spurred interest in the development potential of the Gateway Activity Center, exacerbating the need for a localized master planning approach.

Study Area Assessment

The process of creating the Gateway Master Plan began with an in-depth desktop and field assessment of the study area to explore the unique conditions of the site and document the issues and opportunities relating to land use, transportation, environmental conditions, stormwater, and economic development. The project team conducted three site visits to understand the Activity Center's existing context. The first focused on land use and transportation connectivity; the second on environmental and ecological features, such as species and wetlands; and the third on the risk of flooding and potential mitigation strategies.

Pillars of the City of North Port 2022 - 2025 Strategic Plan

The project team conducted three site visits to assess the Activity Center



The North Port Prospectus, North Port's economic development plan

Master Planning Process

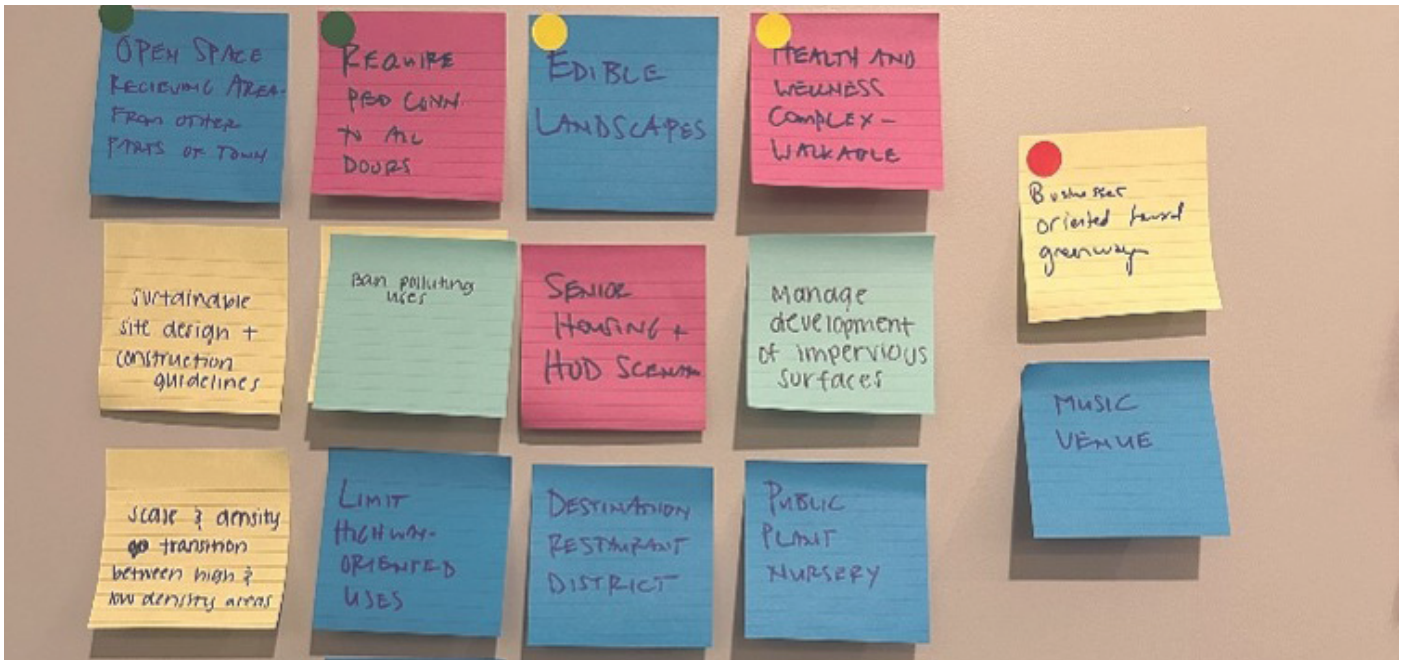
The assessment led to the development of a framework and guiding principles for moving forward with scenario planning and recommendations. The framework was based on North Port's existing plans, such as the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan and The North Port Prospectus economic development plan, and discussions with City staff about what they wanted to achieve in the Activity Center.

The findings of the assessment report are summarized in the next section, and the full report can be found in Appendix A.

The next step was to develop the scenarios and recommendations. The project team engaged with the owners of undeveloped land in the Activity Center, and held a work session to develop recommendations .

The team presented the draft Master Plan to the public and the North Port City Commission in April 2024. Feedback from the commission was used to evaluate the land use scenarios and develop a final set of recommendations.

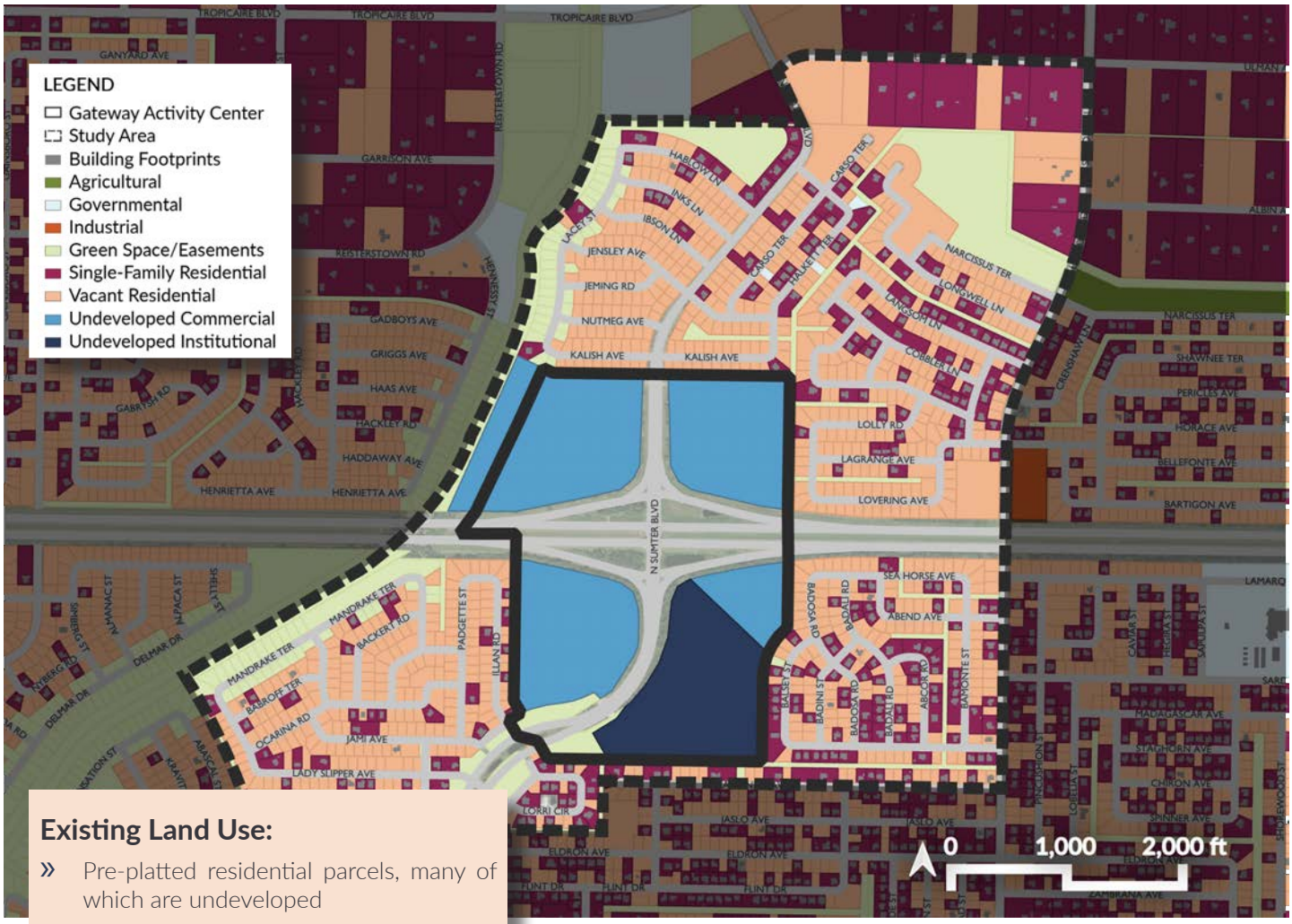
The next section summarizes the findings of the assessment. These findings highlight the unique environmental, economic, and infrastructure conditions in the study area.



The project team held a brainstorming session to develop recommendations.

ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Sarasota County Property Appraiser's Existing Land Use Classification



Existing Land Use:

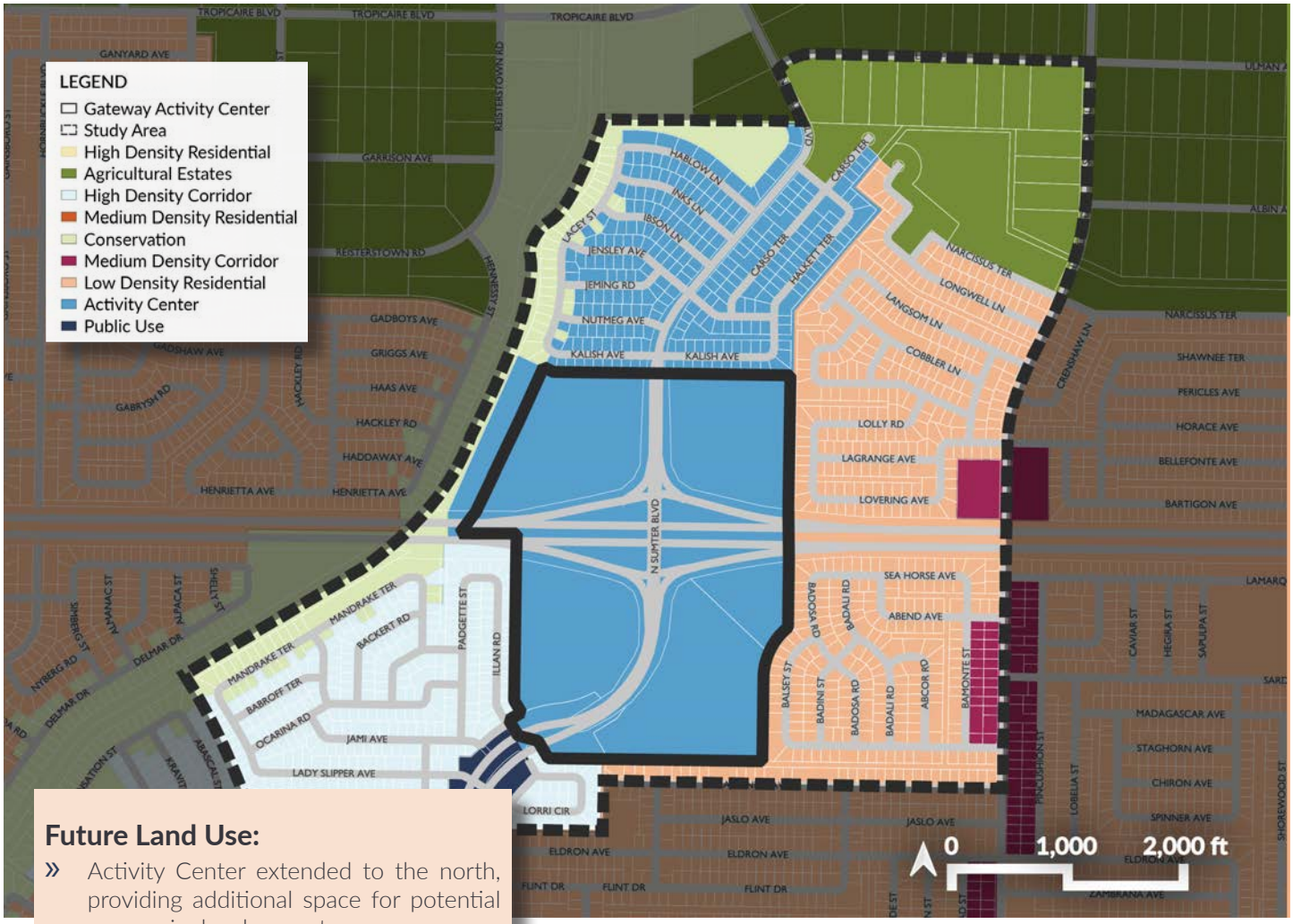
- Pre-platted residential parcels, many of which are undeveloped
- Undeveloped land in the Activity Center
- Green space and easements that may provide opportunities for recreation and trails

Land Use

The core of the Activity Center is made up of five large undeveloped parcels, one of which will soon be developed as a hospital. Most of the study area outside the Activity Center is currently low-density residential land. The parcels are pre-platted, and a majority of them are vacant. A recent utility expansion occurred along Sumter Boulevard south of I-75 that extended water and sewer service to the southern parcels in the Activity Center. However, the utility expansion does not continue north of I-75, which means the northern parcels will not have water and sewer in the near term.

North Port's Unified Land Development Code (ULDC) and Comprehensive Plan are both undergoing extensive updates. The proposed update

Proposed Future Land Use Map

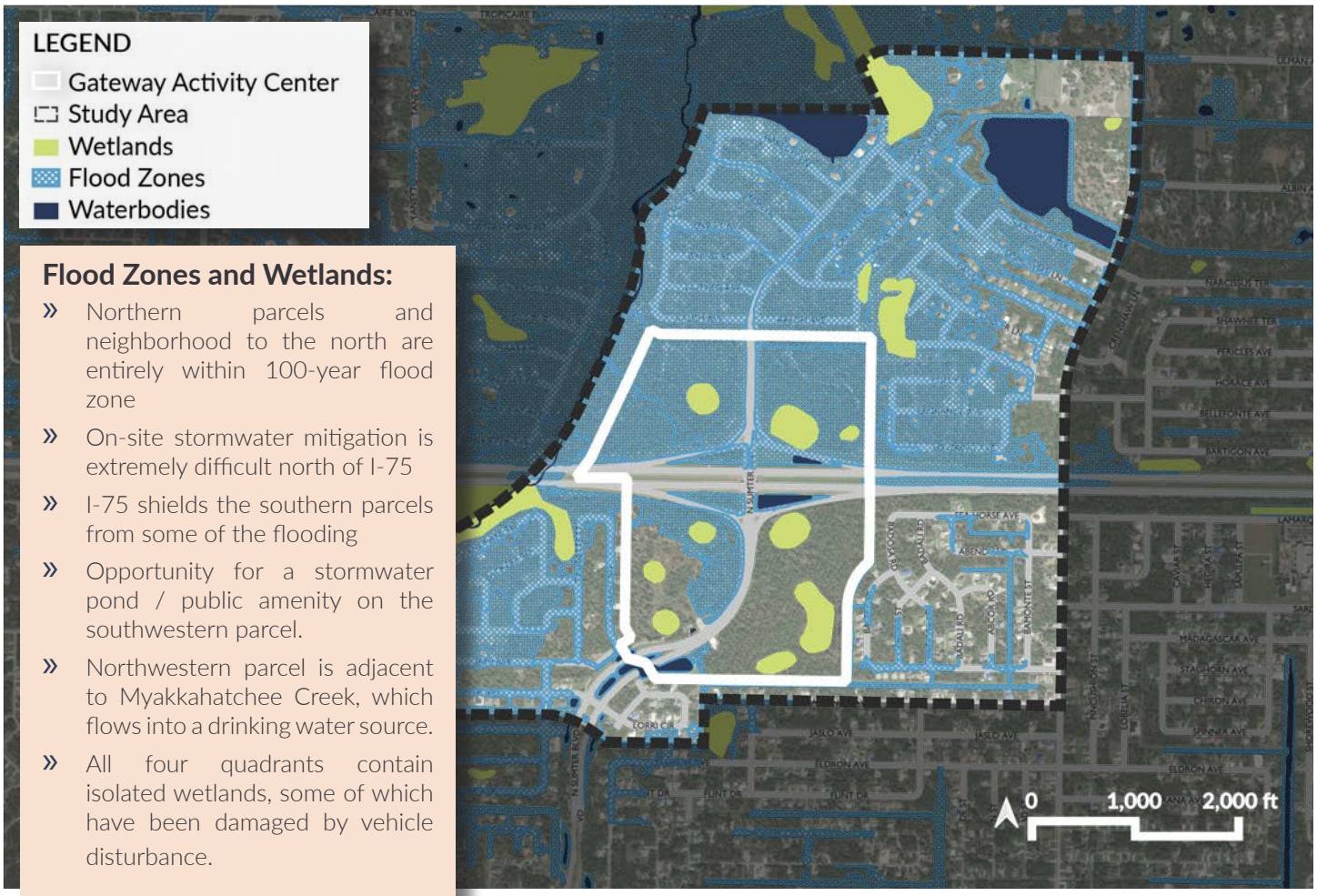


Future Land Use:

- Activity Center extended to the north, providing additional space for potential economic development
- Mixed-use area to the southwest could supplement the Activity Center with housing and retail.

establishes Activity Center 3 as an area supportive of commercial, medical, and recreational uses. The map shows the existing boundary of the Activity Center (black line), the proposed expansion to the north, and the residential area to the southwest that would be recategorized as High Density Corridor (in light blue).

Wetlands, Flood Zones, and Waterbodies



Flood Zones and Wetlands:

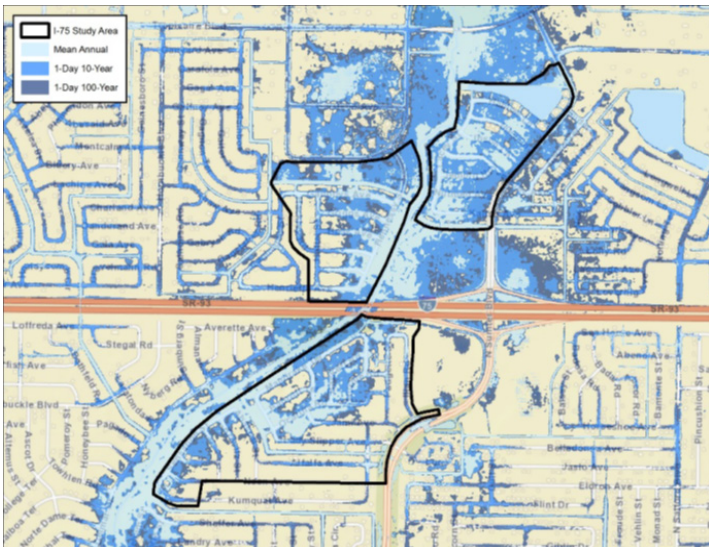
- Northern parcels and neighborhood to the north are entirely within 100-year flood zone
- On-site stormwater mitigation is extremely difficult north of I-75
- I-75 shields the southern parcels from some of the flooding
- Opportunity for a stormwater pond / public amenity on the southwestern parcel.
- Northwestern parcel is adjacent to Myakkahatchee Creek, which flows into a drinking water source.
- All four quadrants contain isolated wetlands, some of which have been damaged by vehicle disturbance.

Environment and Stormwater

The most prominent water feature in the Study Area is the Myakkahatchee Creek. A series of canals drain toward this creek, which feeds into ground water wells, which are sources of drinking water. The creek then discharges to the Myakka River, a Florida-designated Wild and Scenic River. The unique hydrology creates some challenges for connectivity and development in this area. The on-site environmental assessment found that all four quadrants of the Activity Center contain isolated wetlands of varying qualities. Some wetlands are relatively undisturbed, and others have been highly damaged by vehicles.

Much of the study area lies in the 100-year flood zone, and was significantly impacted by Hurricane Ian in 2022. North Port commissioned two stormwater studies of Myakkahatchee Creek (also called Big Slough): the Big Slough Watershed Best Management Practices Analysis in 2014 and the Big Slough Flood Reduction Study in 2019. The studies found that to effectively combat the impacts of flooding on the Gateway study area and beyond, a regional stormwater management approach is needed. Additional stormwater investigation was done in the Activity Center as part of the assessment, and is detailed in Appendix B.

A combination of regional and local strategies can be employed to mitigate the impacts of potential flooding. This can take the form of promoting green infrastructure within new developments, retrofitting existing stormwater infrastructure, building new stormwater infrastructure, preserving wetlands that naturally store water, and raising evacuation and emergency routes.



Historic Flooding Near the I-75 / Sumter Blvd Interchange. Source: City of North Port Big Slough Flood Reduction Study, 2019

Transportation

There is overall a lack of connectivity between the four quadrants of the interchange, and between the neighborhoods and Sumter Boulevard. There are very few access points between neighborhood streets and major thoroughfares. Currently, residents in the neighborhoods must travel circuitous routes to access Sumter Boulevard and I-75. This lack of connectivity created an additional hazard for residents during Hurricane Ian.

In the heart of the Gateway Activity Center, the City of North Port is working with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to signalize the intersection of I-75 at Sumter Boulevard at both the northbound and southbound ramp intersections.

Shared-use path along Sumter Blvd

The signalization will include pedestrian call buttons for the crosswalks across the interchange ramps, but no pedestrian crossings are planned to be added across Sumter Boulevard.

The existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure within the study area consists of the sidewalks on both sides of Sumter Boulevard within the I-75 interchange and a sidewalk/shared-use path on both sides of Sumter Boulevard south of the I-75 interchange, near the unofficial North Port Park and Ride parking lot. However, there is a gap of about ¼ mile between the interchange sidewalks and the shared-use path. There is also an unprotected bike lane along Sumter Boulevard. There are currently no sidewalk facilities within the northern portion of the study area.

Additionally, there is no public transportation in the Gateway Activity Center. The closest transit stop is located at City Hall Boulevard, over a mile and half south of the I-75 and Sumter Boulevard interchange. However, Sarasota County's transit agency, Breeze, operates an east/west route along US 41/Tamiami Trail (known as Route 09 Venice/ North Port) which connects North Port City Hall and the unofficial Park & Ride, located off Sumter Boulevard, to Downtown Venice.

Economic Development

According to the 2022 US Census, North Port is the 5th fastest growing city in the U.S. (among cities 50,000 people or larger), and the single fastest in all of Florida. However, jobs in North Port lag far behind population. Only about 10% of employed North Port residents work in North Port.

The pending Sarasota Memorial Hospital development has the potential to be a significant driver of future Gateway Activity Center growth. Case studies identified as part of the assessment (see Appendix A) demonstrate immense growth fueled by the construction of a hospital in an underdeveloped part of a city. This growth includes activities that are complementary to a hospital, including retail and restaurants, medical offices, a hotel, and pharmacies. It is reasonable to assume that tax revenues for the City of North Port from this area will increase substantially with the development of the Gateway Activity Center.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Gateway Activity Center assessment (see Appendix A) identified a variety of Gateway Activity Center development opportunities that can create benefits for North Port. The assessment also identified challenges that will need to be addressed in order to deliver those benefits. The recommendations in this Master Plan focus on alleviating the issues while taking advantage of the opportunities.

Opportunities

The following opportunities have been identified:

- The Activity Center's location at the interchange and the imminent development of the hospital provide an opportunity to serve local goods and services needs through hospital-oriented and highway-oriented development.
- The utilities expansion taking place in the southern quadrants increases the parcels' development potential.
- Locations are available on site and in the surrounding neighborhoods to create shared-use stormwater management infrastructure, such as ponds, that can double as neighborhood amenities.
- The topography of the study area presents an opportunity to create a network of trails along waterways that can connect neighborhoods, parks, existing trails, and the Activity Center. This trail network can be implemented as part of new development and would allow for better public access to parks and other recreation opportunities on public land.
- The FDOT safety work at the I-75 interchange, which includes signalization of the highway ramps, may create an opportunity to connect trails across Sumter Boulevard.
- The signalization project also creates an opportunity for a gateway treatment across Sumter Boulevard, which could improve safety and create a sense of place for North Port and the Activity Center.
- The expected level of development in the Activity Center could facilitate a Tax Increment Financing district (or similar tax benefit structure) to finance infrastructure improvements.
- The future mixed-use area in the southern

quadrant would support affordable housing for seniors or workers with proximity to the hospital.

- The hospital creates a strong opportunity to develop a hotel and other visitation uses, supported by the interstate and the existing market in North Port.
- The Activity Center land could support light industrial and employment-intensive uses to create jobs.
- Land that is conserved in the study area can be established as a natural environment that helps to manage stormwater and provides natural habitat for wildlife. These areas can also be leveraged for economic development through outdoor recreation.

Issues / Challenges

The following challenges, or issues, have been identified:

- Most of the land within and surrounding the activity center is in a flood hazard zone, and was recently severely impacted by flooding in Hurricane Ian.
- Existing single-family homes exist in areas where mixed-use or Activity Center development is desired, and will need to be considered in any redevelopment plans.
- Land surrounding the Activity Center has been pre-platted for residential use, and parcels are owned by many different owners, many of whom are not local, making assembly of parcels for large projects difficult.
- With the exception of the hospital, there is uncertainty surrounding the interest and feasibility of current development prospects.
- The topography of the land, with its wetlands and waterways, as well as the current stormwater management system, creates a challenging landscape for building.
- While water and sewer utilities are currently being installed in the parcels south of I-75, there are no plans to extend utilities to the parcels north of I-75.
- The transportation network between the four quadrants of the interchange and the surrounding neighborhoods is lacking in connectivity.
- The presence of an archaeological site on the northern Activity Center parcels creates additional development impediments.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Strategic Framework

The strategic framework for developing Gateway Activity Center land use scenarios is informed by the North Port Comprehensive Plan, the North Port Strategic Plan, and the findings of the assessment (Appendix A).

The Gateway Master Plan considers three land use scenarios for the Activity Center, along with five recommendations for stormwater management. The scenarios and recommendations are guided by the existing plans and strategic vision for North Port.

Four Guiding Principles

The desired outcomes of the land use models are summarized in the four Guiding Principles on the following page.

Guiding Principles Icons

Throughout the document, we will use the Guiding Principles icons to represent which of the land use scenarios and recommendations support one or multiple of the Guiding Principles. We will use the abbreviation "GP", short for Guiding Principle throughout.

GP 1: Economic Development

GP 2: Placemaking

GP 3: Transportation

GP 4: Flood Mitigation

Guiding Principle 1: Economic Development

Develop a land use strategy focusing on mixed-use development that spurs economic development to attract visitors and provide employment, services, and amenities for North Port residents.

Guiding Principle 3: Transportation

Improve multi-modal transportation connectivity and access within and through the Activity Center.

Guiding Principle 2: Placemaking

Create a cohesive gateway district vision that establishes a sense of place for North Port residents and welcomes visitors.

Guiding Principle 4: Flood Mitigation

Reduce flooding risk and mitigate the cumulative stormwater impacts from existing conditions and anticipated development projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

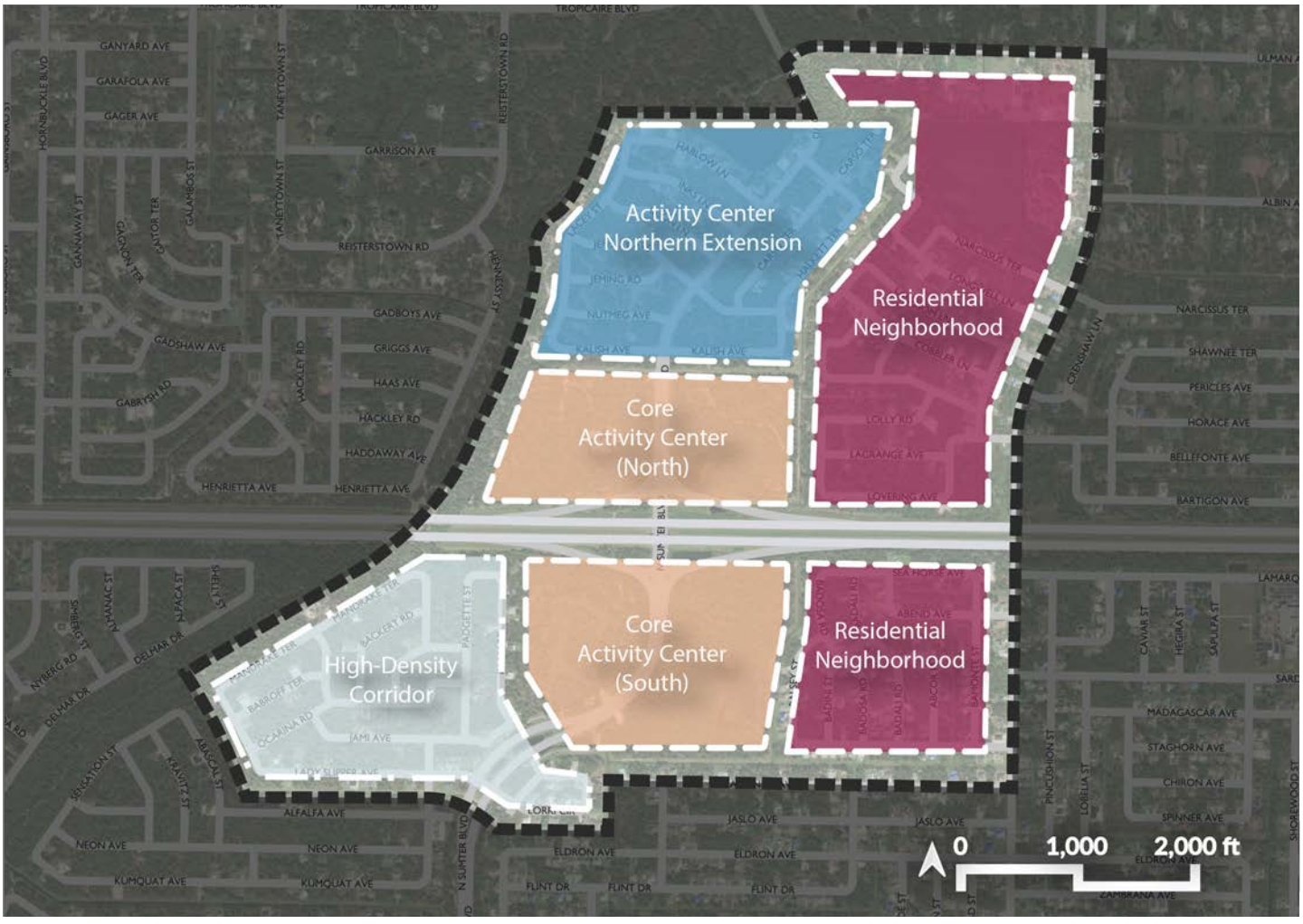
Gateway Activity Center Areas

This section presents the recommendations for the Gateway Activity Center and surrounding study area. The study area, shown in the map below, is made up of the following pieces, based on North Port's Future Land Use map:

- The Core Activity Center – the five undeveloped parcels of land surrounding I-75.
- The Northern Extension of the Activity Center – an existing residential area with few homes and a significant amount of vacant land that has been proposed to be reclassified as Activity Center.
- The Mixed-Use Area to the southwest of the Activity Center - an existing residential area with few homes and a significant amount of vacant land that has been proposed to be reclassified as High-Density Corridor.
- The residential neighborhoods to the east of the Activity Center, which have not been reclassified and are planned to remain low-density residential.

This section presents three land use scenarios for the Core Activity Center. The three scenarios focus on possibilities for the undeveloped land at the interchange. In addition, the City of North Port has reclassified the neighborhoods to the north and southwest of the Activity Center for future growth, and these areas must be considered alongside the Core Activity Center. Unlike the five undeveloped parcels in the Core Activity Center, these areas have the additional challenge of pre-platted land with multiple owners. Therefore, the development of these areas is likely to occur after the Core Activity Center, as new development activates the area and

Gateway Activity Center Study Area



creates demand for more opportunities. Separate land use scenarios have not been developed for the Mixed-Use Area and the Northern Extension of the Activity Center because development depends on what occurs in the Core Activity Center.

The land to the southwest of the Core Activity Center has been proposed to be reclassified as High-Density Corridor. This area is expected to develop accordingly, with a mix of uses including housing, small office, and retail development that complement the activities in the Core Activity Center. Senior housing may be located here to take advantage of the proximity to the hospital; however, a large portion of this area is in the 100-year flood zone. Residential development will need to be particularly sensitive to flooding concerns and residents' safety.

The land in the Northern Extension is almost entirely in the 100-year flood zone. Like the northern parcels in the Core Activity Center, development of this area will be challenging. However, as the Activity Center develops and creates demand for more activities at this interchange, the land to the north may be important to provide additional capacity for activities that complement those in the Core Activity Center.

Transportation Connections

One of the key challenges identified for the Core Activity Center is the lack of transportation connections for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists between the four quadrants around the interchange and with the surrounding neighborhoods. The Recommended Transportation Connections map (on the following page) shows locations where connections can be added to make movement easier as the area begins to develop.

As the land around the interchange becomes developed, safe and easy ways to cross, enter, and exit Sumter Boulevard will need to be provided for all users, including vehicles and those on foot or on bike. It is recommended to place entrances to the two southern parcels directly across from each other, where there are existing stubs on Sumter Boulevard. This location is as far as practicable from the I-75 interchange, and minimizes conflict between the two intersections. Traffic signals

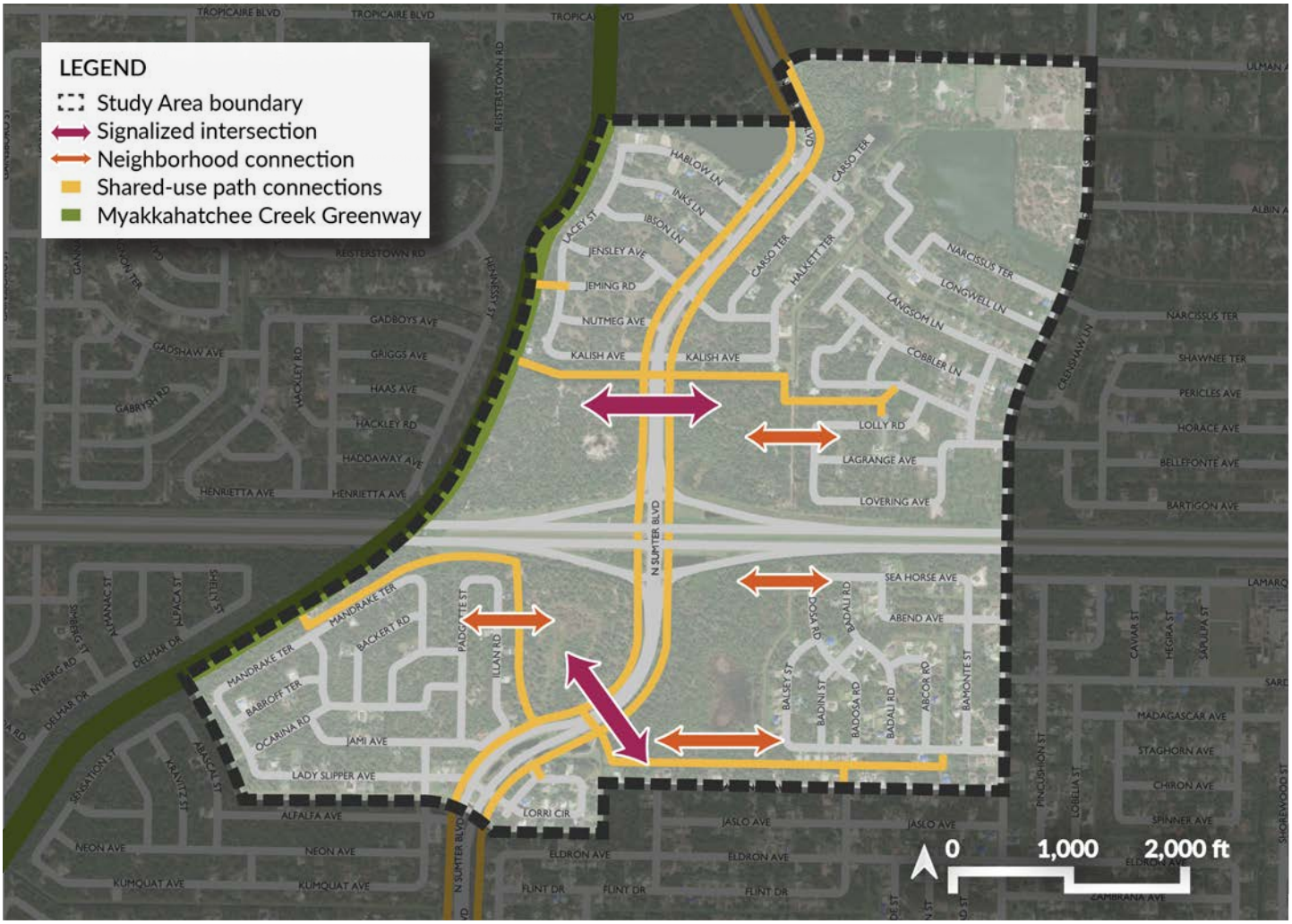
Existing intersection of Sumter Blvd. and Lady Slipper Ave.

are recommended at these intersections, along with highly visible crosswalks with all applicable safety enhancements, as cars coming from the interstate are likely traveling at a high speed. The same configuration is recommended for the two northern parcels, with a signalized intersection for both entrances placed as far north as practical. The approximate recommended locations of these intersections is shown with purple arrows on the map.

The neighborhoods to the east of the Core Activity Center currently have no direct connection to Sumter Boulevard. Section 53-3 of North Port's ULDC requires that any development in the undeveloped eastern parcels must connect to these neighborhoods with two-lane vehicular bridges with sidewalks on both sides. The approximate location of these future connections is shown with orange arrows on the map.

The assessment found that there is a need for more pedestrian connectivity and bicycle facilities within the Gateway Activity Center and study area. Developing multimodal connectivity to historical, cultural, and recreational locations, including neighborhoods and environmental points of interest, is a priority of the City's Strategic Vision Plan. One way the Vision Plan aims to improve the pedestrian

Gateway Activity Center Recommended Transportation Connections.



Gateway Activity Center Recommended Transportation Connections

experience is by designing and filling gaps identified in North Port's sidewalk network beginning in Fiscal Year 2025. There are opportunities to work toward this Vision within the Gateway Activity Center.

The existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the study area consists of the sidewalks on both sides of Sumter Boulevard within the I-75 interchange and a sidewalk/shared-use path on both sides of Sumter Boulevard south of the I-75 interchange, near the North Port Park and Ride parking lot. However, there is a gap of about ¼ mile between the interchange sidewalks and the shared-use path. Closing that gap, as well as extending this off-street facility to the northern boundary of the Activity Center, would significantly expand bicycle and pedestrian access to the Activity Center and other places of interest in North Port. There is also an opportunity to create a new pedestrian connection for the neighborhood on the south end of the study area using an existing road stub on Lorri Circle. These connections are shown in yellow on the map.

Finally, the City of North Port created a master plan for the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway, a proposed recreational corridor following the creek from Myakkahatchee Environmental Park in the north to Tamiami Trail in the south. This corridor would pass along the Activity Center's western edge, creating an opportunity for residents, workers, and visitors to connect to recreation along with better connectivity between the southwest and northwest quadrants of the Activity Center. This greenway corridor is shown in green on the map.

LAND USE SCENARIOS FOR THE CORE ACTIVITY CENTER

Purpose of the Scenarios

Scenarios A, B, and C explore potential land use possibilities within the undeveloped land at the core of the Activity Center. These parcels are likely to be the first to develop and will set the tone for the surrounding area.

The purpose of these scenarios is three-fold: present multiple ways that the undeveloped land around the I-75 interchange could be developed; evaluate the benefits and feasibility of each type of development; and form a basis for recommendations that will guide future development in the Activity Center. They consider the issues identified in the assessment, the guiding principles, and the City of North Port's vision for the Activity Center. The purpose is not to prescribe particular land uses to each parcel, but to consider a variety of possibilities and inform the City's next actions.

Each scenario is evaluated by the following:

Guiding Principle 1: Economic Development
How well the proposed scenario supports mixed-use development that spurs economic development, attracts visitors, and provides employment, services, and amenities for North Port residents.

Guiding Principle 2: Placemaking
How well the proposed scenario creates a cohesive gateway district that establishes a sense of place.

Guiding Principle 3: Transportation
How well the proposed scenario improves multi-modal transportation connectivity.

Guiding Principle 4: Flood Mitigation
How well the proposed scenario reduces the risk of flooding and mitigates stormwater impacts.

Environmental Responsiveness
How well the proposed scenario responds to the environmental challenges of the area and prioritizes environmental outcomes, such as conserving green space and preserving wildlife habitat.

Economic Return
How well the proposed scenario is expected to drive economic development, create jobs, and generate tax revenue.

Development Feasibility
The feasibility of the scenario in terms of cost, market demand, and stormwater considerations.

SCENARIO A: HOSPITAL-ORIENTED HIGH-INTENSITY DEVELOPMENT

Scenario Overview

This scenario is based on the Hospital-Oriented Development case studies explored in the assessment (see Appendix A) and represents a high level of development for this Activity Center. The pending Sarasota Memorial Hospital development at 4900 Sumter Boulevard can be a significant driver of future Gateway Activity Center growth. The case studies demonstrated that following the development of a new hospital, the surrounding area is commonly developed with uses that are complementary to the hospital and serve hospital patients, workers, and visitors.

In addition to the hospital itself, the uses considered in the Hospital-Oriented Development scenario are:

- Hotel
- Medical offices
- Retail, including restaurants, pharmacy, and medical supply
- Non-medical offices
- Housing, especially senior housing

This scenario aligns with the guiding principles of economic development and economic return. However, it places a significant amount of impervious surface on the northern parcels, which are almost entirely in the AE flood zone. Because there is no opportunity for stormwater storage on those parcels, the costs to manage stormwater for those sites would be exorbitant and would likely involve large-scale mitigation. In addition, buildings would need to be designed to withstand flooding, and any residential included would need to be elevated.

Amendments needed for Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations

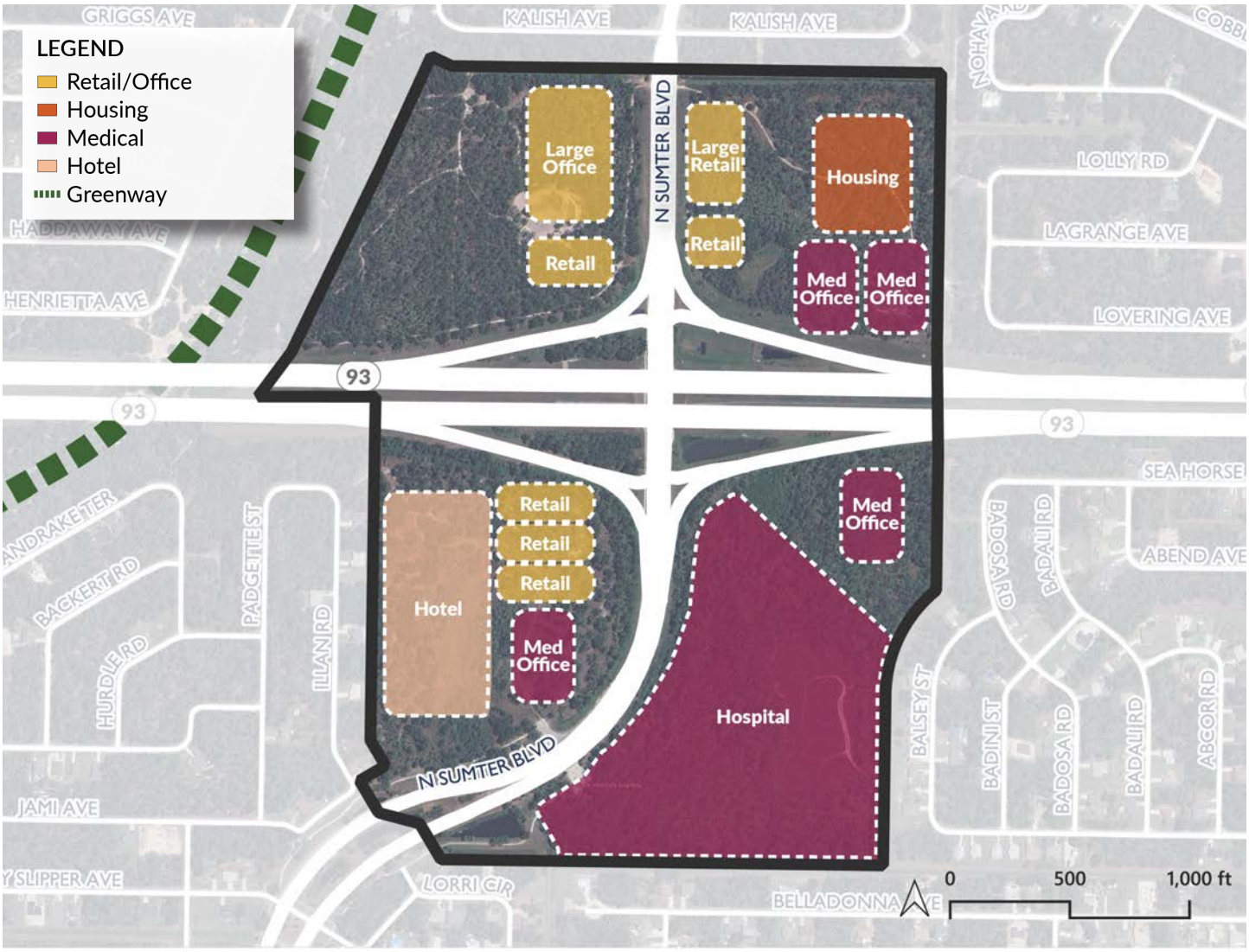
No amendments are needed for this scenario. A base FAR of 1.0 for buildings in the activity center allows for tall buildings on parcels where impervious surface needs to be limited.

How This Scenario Supports Economic Development

As demonstrated by case studies (see Appendix A), in addition to jobs directly created at the hospital, the attraction of complementary services and amenities (such as medical practices, pharmacies, retail outlets, dining options, and hotels), will create more job opportunities. These jobs would cater to all levels of education and skill, from healthcare professionals to roles in hospitality, retail, and other service industries, thereby diversifying employment opportunities and supporting the community's economic resilience. This "healthcare ecosystem" of complementary and downstream services can create a multiplier effect, stimulating further economic activity and attracting more investment into the area. Creating incentives for local entrepreneurs to open businesses in the Activity Center can boost placemaking and help keep money in the local economy.

Furthermore, hospitals draw visitors from outside the immediate area, including patients seeking specialized medical care and their families. This influx of visitors supports local businesses, increases demand for accommodations, and boosts spending in the area, further enhancing economic

Scenario A: Hospital-Oriented High-Intensity Development Future Land Use



Scenario A: Hospital-Oriented High-Intensity Development Evaluation Criteria

development. Lastly, the development surrounding the future hospital is expected to necessitate improvements in infrastructure, including roads, utilities, and transportation networks. These improvements will not only support the hospital and associated developments, but they will also enhance the overall livability and attractiveness of the entire area for future investment and growth.

How this scenario supports the Guiding Principles

The hospital-oriented development scenario will spur economic development by creating diverse employment opportunities. This development scenario will also create amenities for North Port residents in the form of expanded access to healthcare services, increased multi-modal transportation connectivity, and expanded dining and retail options. In addition, this scenario will attract visitors, primarily those seeking hospital care and their visitors, particularly if the future hospital develops a specialization.

The accompanying table summarizes estimated building footprint square footage, total building square footage, and footprint within the flood zone for each use.

SCENARIO A			
Development Type	**Building Footprint Square Footage**	**Total Square Footage**	**Footprint in current 100 year Flood Zone**
Hotel	15,000	75,000	0
Small Retail	25,000	25,000	25,000
Large Retail	15,000	15,000	15,000
Medical Office	60,000	160,000	30,000
Large Office	25,000	75,000	25,000
Senior Housing	80,000	400,000	80,000
TOTAL	**220,000**	**750,000**	**175,000**

SCENARIO B: RECREATION AND CONSERVATION

Scenario Overview

The Recreation and Conservation scenario is based on an environmental review of the study area, which identified significant stormwater management and flood mitigation concerns on several of the Activity Center parcels. In response, Scenario B is focused on limiting impervious surfaces while still creating an Activity Center that improves quality of life for North Port residents and generates economic activity.

This scenario still assumes that the hospital will develop as planned in the southeast quadrant. However, it is very possible that environmental management and stormwater mitigation challenges may deter interest in intensive building on the northern parcels. To maintain some productive and economically beneficial use of these parcels, this scenario envisions ways to activate these parcels with minimal impervious surface development.

In addition to the hospital itself, the uses considered in the Recreation and Conservation scenario are:

- Natural park
- Medical offices
- Outdoor recreation
- Indoor Activity & Entertainment complex

The northwest parcel has the greatest environmental constraints, but it also has some of the highest quality natural features. These natural features could be leveraged into a conservation park with trails and other outdoor activities that connect to the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway and the local trail system. There is also potential for a small-footprint retail business, such as kayak rentals or a food and drink stand with outdoor seating to serve greenway users.

The southwest quadrant is the next most likely place for development since a significant portion of it is outside the AE flood zone. This parcel could support a significant facility for indoor entertainment activities, such as concerts, sports, or other

events that would make it a popular destination, attracting many attendees and visitors to the area. The quadrant also includes modest retail or office space to complement the hospital and indoor entertainment.

Th northeast parcel is in the flood zone but could be activated with environmentally-sensitive outdoor recreational uses, such as ballfields.

Overall, this scenario would give a health and wellness focus to the Activity Center while acknowledging the economic implications of sites with major environmental development hurdles.

Amendments needed for Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations

No amendments are needed for the suggested development in the southern parcels. Medical, office, and retail are all permitted uses. The base FAR of 1.0 for buildings in the Activity Center allows for tall buildings on the southeastern parcel as long as flood zone land is avoided. Recreational uses, including public, private, passive, and commercial, are also allowed, as well as conservation.

Scenario B: Recreation and Conservation Future Land Use

Scenario B: Recreation and Conservation Evaluation Criteria

How This Scenario Supports Economic Development

Establishing this activity center as a recreation and conservation focused area has potential to attract some visitors and contribute to North Port's economy, though to less of an extent than in Scenario A. The park and recreation facilities can attract locals and tourists, especially with connections to the existing trail and blueway network. An attractive park and recreation amenities are also likely to boost property values in nearby residential areas and contribute to enhanced community resilience and an increased quality of life for residents.

This scenario will also result in jobs creation, though fewer than Scenario A. The hospital is still expected to bring a significant number of employment opportunities, complemented by retail and office space across Sumter Boulevard. In the northern parcels, maintenance and park management staff will be needed; for example, the City can explore the expansion of a blueway entry point where visitors can rent kayaks or canoes. Furthermore, a park could spur the creation of a range of business opportunities, such as equipment rentals, food and beverage sales, guided nature tours, an outdoor amphitheater, event planning, and space rentals.

How This Scenario Supports the Guiding Principles

This scenario focuses primarily on mitigating the flood risk by limiting the amount of impervious surface that would displace stormwater on the northern parcels. However, it still supports the other guiding principles by creating a Gateway district that can attract visitors and economic development through recreation. It leverages the area's natural features and resources, improves quality of life, and increases property values in North Port.

The accompanying table summarizes estimated building footprint square footage, total building square footage, and footprint within the flood zone for each use.

SCENARIO B			
Development Type	**Building Footprint Square Footage**	**Total Square Footage**	**Footprint in current 100 year Flood Zone**
Natural Park	0	0	0
Outdoor Recreation	0	0	0
Indoor Activity & Entertainment	100,000	100,000	0
Medical Office	30,000	180,000	0
TOTAL	**130,000**	**180,000**	**0**

SCENARIO C: LOCAL ECONOMY AND ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL

Scenario Overview

This scenario has been developed as a middle ground between Scenarios A and B. The scenario still attempts to minimize impervious surface on the northern parcels, but takes a more active approach to the outdoor activities encouraged on those parcels.

In addition to the hospital itself, the uses considered in the Local Economy and Active Environmental scenario are:

- Mixed-use "mini-downtown"
- Medical offices
- Active outdoor recreation
- Retail
- RV/Glamping Park

All scenarios assume that the hospital will develop as planned in the southeast quadrant, but this scenario seeks to maximize economic development in the southwest parcel through the development of a mixed-use "Mini-Downtown" area concentrated around an internal main street. The southwest parcel would support commercial, retail, and residential uses. This type of development would attract local entrepreneurs and businesses, creating a resilient local economy through jobs creation and reinvestment, and could spur additional mixed-use development in nearby areas currently lacking commercial development. The scenario also includes building a new stormwater retention area that is purposefully designed as an attractive community gathering space, such as a pond with a multi-purpose trail surrounding it.

While Scenario B envisioned a more passive park on the northwest parcel, this scenario proposes an active park that includes low-impervious but economically oriented "adventure" activities that take advantage of the site's trail network and blueways. Active parks can support recreation and stormwater management, bolster placemaking, and attract residents and visitors to the area.

The northeast parcel has many possible opportunities that prioritize both conservation of the natural environment and recreation. One option is outdoor recreation, such as ballfields or soccer fields. Another option is utilizing the open space as a high-end camping or "glamping" area, which could generate rental revenue. Both options would be complimentary to the northwestern and southwestern proposed uses.

Amendments Needed For Comprehensive Plan And Land Development Regulations

No amendments are needed for this scenario due to the suggested development in the southern parcels. Retail and residential are both permitted uses, as long as the residential portion of the mixed-use development does not exceed 65% of the buildings total FAR. The base FAR of 1.0 for buildings in the Activity Center allows for tall buildings on the southeastern parcel if flood zone land is avoided. Recreational uses, including public, private, passive, and commercial, are also allowed, as well as conservation.

Scenario C: Local Economy and Active Environmental Future Land Use

Scenario C: Local Economy and Active Environmental Evaluation Criteria

How This Scenario Supports Economic Development

Establishing this activity center as a recreation and economic area that is conservation-conscious has potential to attract visitors and contribute to North Port's economy to an extent somewhere between Scenarios A and B. The park and recreation facilities can attract tourists, especially with connections to the existing trail and blueway network. An active park can market the town as a tourist attraction while also serving local residents. An engaging public use could promote foot traffic to the activity center and retain visitors for longer periods of time. These recreation amenities are also likely to boost property values in nearby residential areas and contribute to enhanced community resilience and an increased quality of life for residents.

Downtown-style development will attract businesses, resulting in jobs creation and economic reinvestment, especially if paired with incentives for local entrepreneurs. This scenario will support neighboring hospital and recreational uses by providing residents and visitors a place to shop, eat, and socialize.

The hospital is still expected to bring a significant number of employment opportunities, complemented by retail across Sumter Boulevard. In the northern parcels, maintenance and park management staff will be needed. Furthermore, recreation uses could spur the creation of a range of business opportunities, such as equipment rentals, food and beverage sales, guided nature tours, event planning, and space rentals.

How This Scenario Supports The Guiding Principles

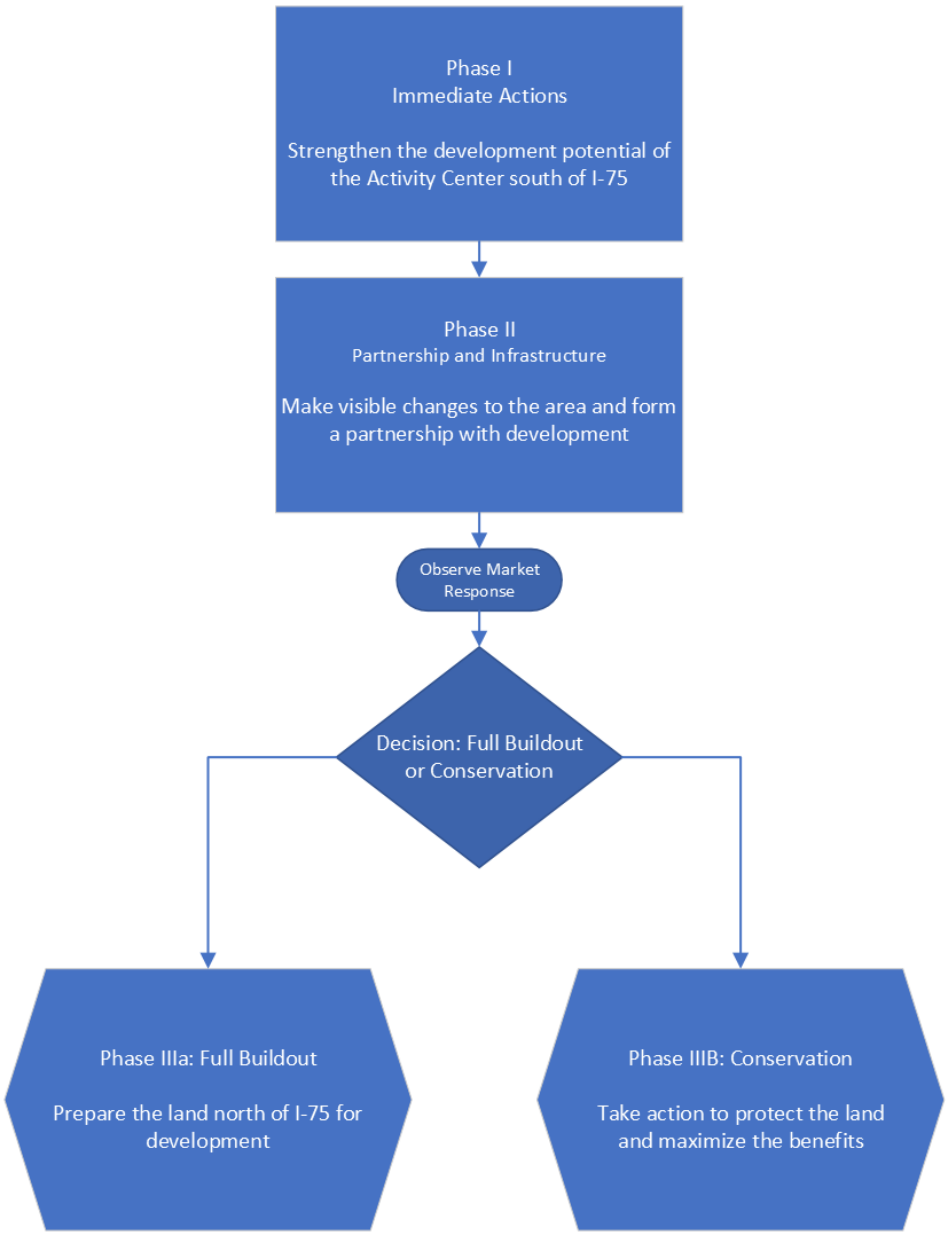
This scenario focuses on mitigating flood risk by limiting the amount of impervious surface that would displace stormwater on the northern parcels and managing stormwater through an active park facility. However, it still supports the other guiding principles by creating a Gateway district that can attract visitors and economic development through recreation and multi-modal transportation connectivity. Like Scenario B, it fully leverages the area's natural features and resources, improves quality of life, and increases property values in North Port.

The accompanying table summarizes estimated building footprint square footage, total building square footage, and footprint within the flood zone for each use.

SCENARIO C			
Development Type	**Building Footprint Square Footage**	**Total Square Footage**	**Footprint in current 100 year Flood Zone**
Active Outdoor Recreation	2,500	2,500	2,500
Retail	2,500	2,500	2,500
RV/Glamping Park	5,000	5,000	5,000
Medical office	15,000	40,000	0
Mixed Use	100,000	225,000	0
TOTAL	**125,000**	**290,000**	**10,000**

NEXT STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

This section presents a recommended plan of action for the City of North Port to begin to activate the Gateway Activity Center. The first phase consists of immediate actions that the City can take to make the area south of I-75 attractive for development. The second phase consists of actions that require some investment and time, such as infrastructure improvements, and a plan for making the most of the non-flood-zone land in the southwestern part of the Activity Center and High-Density Corridor. At the end of the second phase, development will be underway in the southwest. At this point or soon after, the City will have evidence for the market demand for the northern part of the Activity Center. It may be justifiable to invest in a major stormwater facility to make that land developable. However, if the market for development in the southwest does not meet expectations, it could support a decision to conserve the land to the north and focus on future jobs development elsewhere in North Port.



PHASE I: IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

The first steps for activating the Gateway Activity Center are actions the City can begin immediately. These are mainly policy actions that lay the groundwork for more tangible actions in Phase II.

Avoid and minimize floodplain impacts (Guiding Principles: GP4)

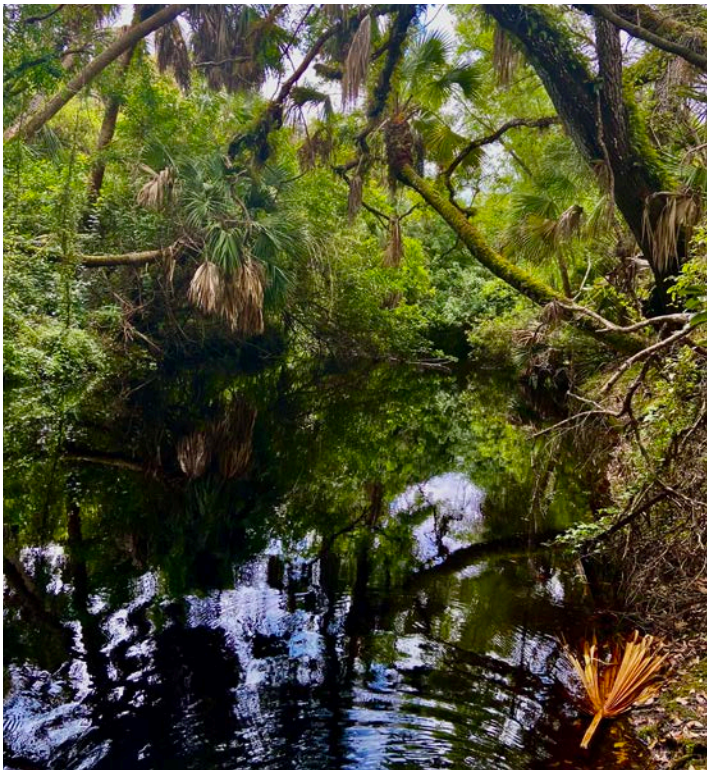
The northwest and northeast quadrants are almost entirely within an AE flood zone, also known as the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) or the 100-year flood zone. For development to occur in this area, compensatory storage (such as a pond) will be required by permitting agencies to ensure no net loss of stormwater storage occurs. This is commonly known as "cup for cup" compensation. Compensatory storage refers to the practice of offsetting impacts of development into the storage capacity of the SFHA by providing hydraulically equivalent floodplain storage capacity. Generally speaking, available storage is calculated as the cubic difference between the elevation of existing ground and either the base flood elevation (BFE) or the seasonal high-water table, whichever is lower. BFE is the surface water level that will likely be reached during a 100-year storm event. Within the Gateway Area, the BFE in the northern quadrants is from 1 to 3 feet higher than the existing ground surface. Therefore, very little, if any, storage capacity is available. Additionally, most properties adjacent to the north quadrants are within the SFHA and are therefore not suitable for stormwater storage.

The Gateway Activity Center also contains multiple wetlands, a critical piece of "natural infrastructure" when dealing with stormwater. Wetlands can retain flood water during storm events and provide water quality treatment as the water percolates through the wetland and the vegetation removes nutrients and pollutants. Wetlands can also be utilized as emergency overflows during flood events.

The benefits of avoiding impacts to the SFHA and wetlands include:

- **Risk reduction:** Building in floodplains increases the risk of property damage, disruption to communities, and in extreme cases, loss of life. Not developing these areas greatly reduces these risks.
- **Maintaining the natural functionality of floodplains:** Floodplains also serve important ecological functions. They often contain wetlands that absorb and store excess water as well as filter pollutants in stormwater.
- **Cost savings:** Development in floodplains will require additional infrastructure to mitigate flood risk. These measures can be expensive to not only build but also maintain.

If development is inevitable, the parts of the Gateway Activity Center within the SFHA should not be slated for any land use that includes housing or transient lodging as it would likely incur a safety risk to residents and first responders during a major flooding event, especially given that evacuation routes throughout the City have proven to be inaccessible during larger storm events (e.g. 100 yr/24h flood event). Avoiding these uses eliminates the potential for residents and first responders to be put in harm's way.



Myakkahatchee Creek in the northwest quadrant of Gateway Activity Center

Strengthen the incentives for development and parcel assembly, with a focus on the southwestern quadrant of the Activity Center and the High-Density Corridor. (Guiding Principles: GP1)

The proposed High-Density Corridor to the southwest of the Activity Center presents a great opportunity for development. About 40% of the land, or approximately 26 acres, is outside of the 100-year flood zone, and is adjacent to the most developable part of the southwestern quadrant of the Activity Center. Taken together, these two areas offer about 40 acres of developable, non-flood-zone land along Sumter Boulevard. Both locations are in existing or proposed Future Land Use categories that allow relatively dense mixed-use development and are easily accessible from I-75.

One of the barriers to making the most of this high-potential land is the pre-platted nature of the land in the High-Density Corridor. The land is divided into small parcels sized for single-family homes, and would need to be assembled from various owners to create an opportunity for larger-scale development. The City currently offers a density bonus for parcel assembly that adds up to 1.5 to the permitted FAR for parcel assembly. Considering the limitations on building footprints created by stormwater requirements, and the size of the potential newly assembled parcels, FARs greater than 0.5 would result in a larger scale of development than North Port has seen to date and can contribute to a thriving Activity Center. If market demand is slow to take advantage of this incentive, North Port should be prepared to provide additional incentives to promote parcel assembly. Waiver or reduction of parking requirements is an example.

Another incentive that North Port could offer in this area specifically is the public provision of a stormwater facility in the form of a park that can mitigate the effects of development and attract people to live, open businesses, and shop in new development. The City could offer a public-private partnership to maximize the benefits of development, in which the right project could receive public assistance in the form of a stormwater park, as well as regulatory and process incentives.

Create a conceptual design for a park that doubles as a stormwater mitigation tool, with design features such as retention ponds and streams, underground channels, and a major box culvert system. (Guiding Principles: GP1, GP2, GP4)

Sustainable design elements can provide improved stormwater and flood mitigation, while enhancing the aesthetics of a future park. Such design elements could include retention ponds and creeks, underground channels, box culverts, and the use of vegetation that can tolerate and absorb heavy rainfall. In addition, design features such as the use of permeable pavements, green roofs (if the park includes buildings), and strategically elevated landscapes can further ensure the park is resilient to stormwater impacts.

The park should include spaces that serve multiple purposes, such as sports fields that can temporarily hold flood water, or interactive water features, like streams and fountains, that can be used for play and relaxation during dry periods but can manage excess water during heavy rains. Critical infrastructure should be strategically located away from flood-prone areas, and hardscape features (such as benches, walls, and permanent tables) should be built with concrete and other materials that can withstand flooding.

Rain gardens, bioswales, and new and existing vegetation should be utilized to absorb rainwater, reduce erosion, and act as windbreaks during storms. A retention pond and creek should be employed to mitigate runoff and abate flooding, enhance water quality, and filter pollutants from runoff. In addition, an underground filtration system can be developed to help alleviate water that overflows from the stream. Lastly, current wetlands should be maintained and restored within the park to improve stormwater resilience and to retain the natural wildlife habitat.

Case Study: The Downtown Cary Park

The Downtown Cary Park in Cary, North Carolina utilizes an upper retention pond and a winding creek that slows the water flow down as it moves into a middle pond. The water then cascades across a stone weir that aerates the water before it enters the largest, lowest pond. This tiered water feature, as well as other design elements such as fountain and absorbent vegetation, ensure the park is resilient to heavy stormwater. These water features are designed to add to the visual aesthetics of the park, and strategically elevated elements, such as a skybridge over the ponds, create a unique and appealing visitor experience.

Downtown Cary Park, Cary, NC

Case Study: Cascades Park

Tallahassee's Cascades Park contains an attractive and effective stormwater management system consisting of a network of underground channels, box culverts, above-ground streams, fountains, waterfalls, and retention ponds. Before construction, the site contained around one acre of open water and wetlands, but following construction, around three acres of open water and six acres of wetlands were created. The park is purposefully designed to flood during major storm events and helps to mitigate runoff and absorb pollutants; despite experiencing several significant storm events since its completion, all facilities have remained functional. The centerpiece of the park is its amphitheater, providing an outdoor venue that attracts a variety of artists and music lovers.

Downtown Cary Park, Cary, NC

Cascades Park, Tallahassee, FL

Apply for state and federal grants to fund infrastructure improvements and stormwater solutions. (Guiding Principles: GP1, GP3, GP4)

There are no easy solutions when it comes to development within the floodplain and the solutions that do exist are typically expensive. Grant funding could greatly improve the financial viability of activating the Gateway Activity Center, including some large-scale infrastructure, stormwater, and floodplain management projects, as well as grants to conduct studies.

The tables below list grant opportunities that are available from state and federal programs, including

INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM DETAILS

Program	Agency	Purpose	Timing
Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)	US Department of Transportation (DOT)	Grants to support road, rail, and other transit projects, with funding priorities for projects that improve environmental sustainability, economic competitiveness, and quality of life.	Annual grant program. FY2024 application period was held November 2023 – February 2024.
Innovative Finance & Asset Concession Grant Program	Build America Bureau	This program offers $100 million in funding over five years to assist public entities in facilitating and evaluating public-private partnerships and exploring innovative financing and delivery opportunities for Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) eligible projects (roadways, bridges, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure).	Annual grant program. FY2024 application period is March 2024 – May 2024.
Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP)	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	Grants for projects that will strengthen safety and improve bicycling, walking, and access to public transit in communities across the country. Grants are intended to help communities plan, design, or construct safe and connected active transportation networks such as sidewalks, bikeways, and trails that connect destinations such as schools, workplaces, residences, businesses, recreation areas and medical facilities within a community or metropolitan region.	Annual grant program. FY2024 application period is March 2024 – June 2024.
Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program	Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO)	Grants for economic development and community revitalization projects, including infrastructure projects such as water, sewer, and stormwater improvements, street and sidewalk improvements, and park facilities. Grants are administered by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUB).	Annual grant program. FY2022 application period was held March 2023 – May 2023.
Public Works	U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)	Grants to help communities revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure to attract new businesses, diversify their economies, generate local investment, and create employment opportunities. Eligible infrastructure projects include water and sewer improvements, business parks, and land acquisition and development.	FY2023 application period began March 2023, and is ongoing until the program ends and/or all available funds have been expended.
Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA)	U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)	Grants for a wide range of technical, planning, public works, and infrastructure assistance. Eligible projects include market and environmental studies, as well as infrastructure improvements such as site acquisition and preparation, and building construction and rehabilitation.	FY2023 application period began March 2023, and is ongoing until the program ends and/or all available funds have been expended.
Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP)	Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)	Grants for acquiring and developing land for public outdoor recreation purposes, including infrastructure improvements related to recreational facilities.	Annual grant program. FY2024 application period was held August 2023 – September 2023.

FLOOD CONTROL GRANT PROGRAM DETAILS			
Program	**Agency**	**Purpose**	**Timing**
Resilient Florida	Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)	Grants intended for projects that improve resilience to climate-related hazards, such as flood risk reduction, sea level rise adaptation, and improved stormwater runoff. The funding supports the planning, design, and construction of infrastructure improvements that support resiliency goals.	Annual grant program. Application period is held July 1 to September 1 annually.
RESTORE Bucket 2	Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)	Grants to support flood risk reduction, water quality improvements, and hydrologic restoration.	The next open call for proposals is 2026.
Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC)	Florida Department of Emergency Management (FEMA)	Grants to improve resilience to future risks of natural disasters, including flood risks. Grants can fund infrastructure, facilities, and services that improve resiliency.	Annual grant program with variable timing. FY2023 application period was October 2023 – February 2024.

resilience, economic development, recreation development, and land purchase grants. Additional grant funding opportunities are available for water quality projects through multiple state and federal agencies. There are several steps that lead up to a successful grant application. They include:

1. Identify and prioritize projects – make sure the projects address the issue and meet goals of stakeholders.
2. Be committed to matching funds- being financially dedicated to implementing the project will be favored.
3. Ask for help whenever needed – reach out to experienced grant writers and ask the agency offering the grant questions, should any arise.
4. Know your competition – research and understand why other projects in your area won grants.
5. Keep track of the timeline – don't miss an application deadline.

Prioritize acquisition of areas outside the flood zone and implement distributed stormwater solutions. (Guiding Principles: GP4)

The City of North Port has expressed interest in purchasing repetitive loss properties, defined as properties that have had flood-related damage multiple times, within the study area. For property owners located within the floodplain, FEMA employs a "buyout" strategy in which residents sell their flood-prone properties to the state or local government and relocate to areas with lower flood risk. The federal government makes funds available to help states and localities buy these properties from willing sellers through an array of agencies and departments, primarily the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

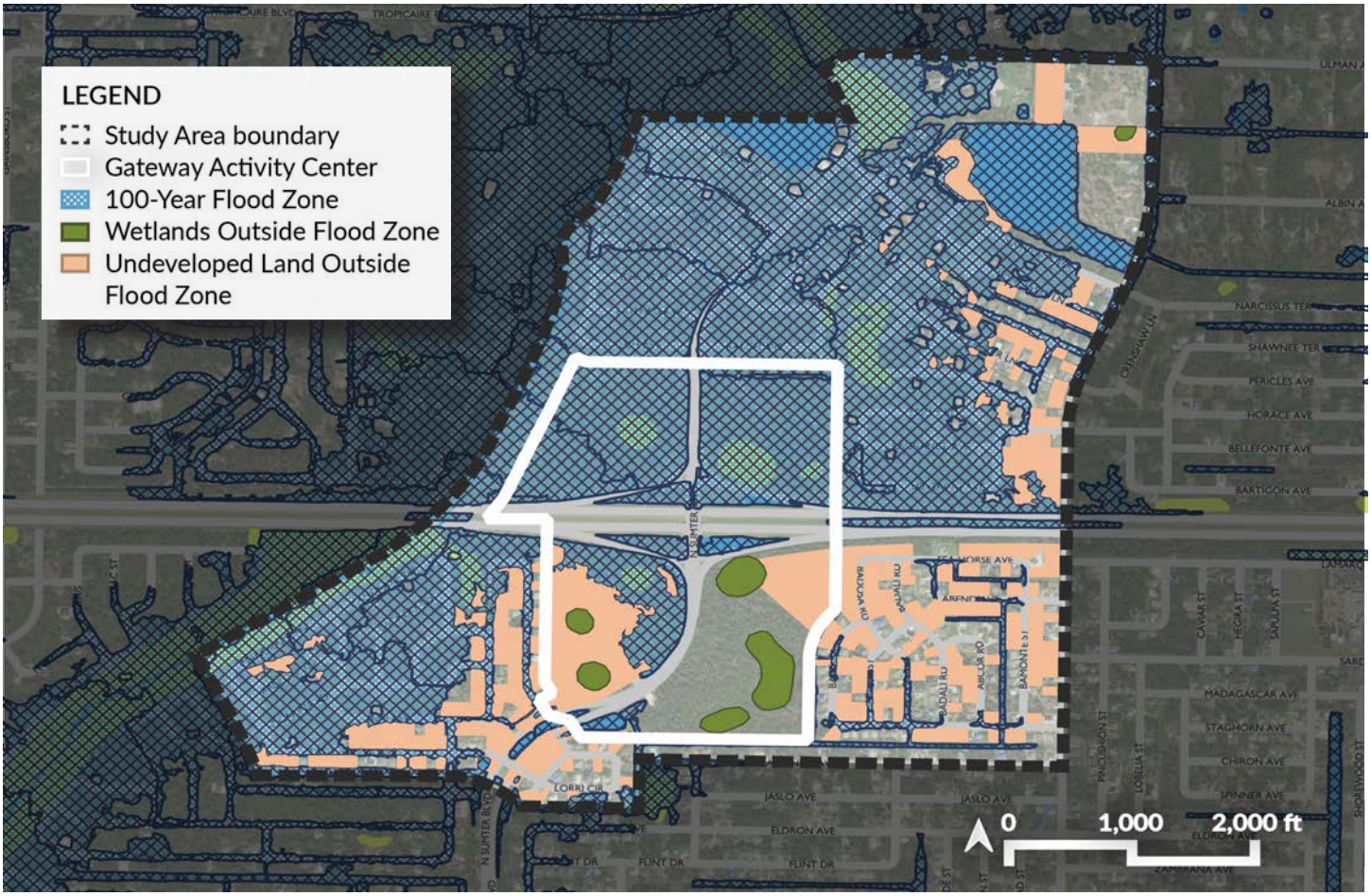
However, acquisition of properties outside of the floodplain should also be a priority because 1) these properties provide an opportunity to mitigate floodplain impacts within the Gateway Activity Center and 2) with additional properties in hand, a more cohesive development plan can be developed.

For these reasons, it is recommended that the

acquisition of both property types be evaluated. the figure below depicts undeveloped parcels that are located outside the 100-year floodplain where ponds or other stormwater features could be installed to compensate for floodplain impacts. Further drainage and geotechnical analysis are needed to determine which of these areas are suitable for stormwater features. In addition to federal grants, North Port has a number of local tools for acquiring or conserving land in the flood zone. North Port has a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program that allows landowners with flood-prone or environmentally sensitive land to sell their development rights. Those rights can be purchased by property owners with land in Activity Center or Village FLU areas, enabling them to build more densely in those places. This allows the sellers to get value from land that is difficult to develop, and may allow the City to purchase the land more affordably once the development rights have been transferred.

The City is also working to allow use of the tree fund to purchase land for conservation. If this is approved, it will provide another source of funding for land acquisition.

Stormwater Storage Opportunities



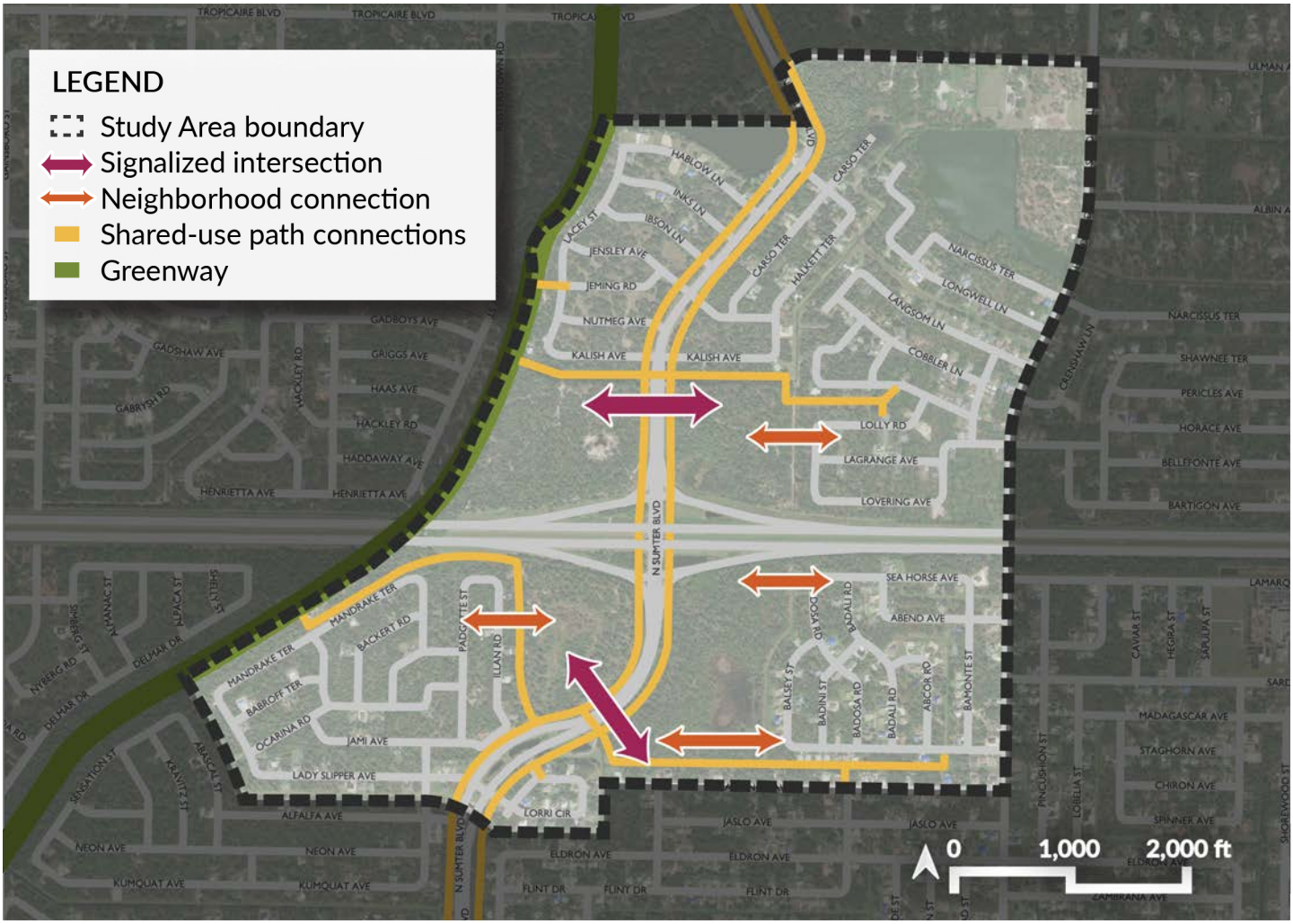
Make a plan for a connected trail network throughout the study area, to be implemented alongside development and stormwater improvements. (Guiding Principles: GP2, GP4)

The Gateway Activity Center and immediate surroundings would benefit from a connected non-vehicular network, a network that could serve both as an alternative to driving for short trips within the study area and as a local amenity for residents and visitors.

Trail connections between the Myakkahatchee Creek and the core activity center parcels have the potential for highest usage, but all parts of the study area would benefit from a larger, integrated trail network. The residential neighborhoods on the eastern side of the study area would benefit from a trail network that increased direct connections to and across Sumter Blvd, as the neighborhood's current connections to Sumter Blvd are indirect. Providing a shared use trail along Sumter Blvd that fills in existing gaps in the pedestrian network would increase north-south connectivity, which would help tie together the disparate portions of the study area and help connect the area to the more populated areas of North Port.

The conceptual connectivity map here represents general suggestions for future trail pathways, taking advantage of easements and publicly owned land wherever possible. A more detailed evaluation of trail options would be necessary before advancing this network.

Transportation Connection Opportunities



Conduct a feasibility study for constructing a greenway or a bypass canal along Myakkahatchee Creek. (Guiding Principles: GP2, GP3, GP4)

In 2007, the City of North Port published the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway Master Plan. This plan envisions a recreation corridor along the creek that stretches from the Myakkahatchee Environmental Park to the north to US 41 in the south, with a "Nature/Hiking trail" beside the creek.

The 2019 Big Slough Flood Reduction Study recommended construction of a bypass canal on city-purchased property along Myakkahatchee Creek on either the east or west side, and provides a set of recommendations on how the canal should be placed and designed.

The creek forms the western edge of the Gateway Activity Center, and the future use of land beside the creek will impact the Activity Center significantly. A bypass canal has the potential to alleviate flooding and make the land north of I-75 more developable. A greenway would create a pedestrian connection between the north and south of the Activity Center and enhance its connectivity and recreation potential. A feasibility study of these two options, complete with costing and implementation steps, can help provide certainty and next steps for development in this area and has implications throughout North Port. If a canal is found to be infeasible, the City can focus on other stormwater solutions and move forward with a greenway along the creek.

Other Immediate Actions

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORY	Guiding Principles
Transportation (T) Recommendations	
Undertake operational traffic modeling to study traffic demand from future development to inform how the increased traffic can be managed. Focus evaluation and recommendations on efficient use of infrastructure, safety, and demand management rather than road capacity expansion.	3
Develop a policy for new development to set aside easements or build connections to existing or planned trails on adjacent land.	3
Land Use (LU) Recommendations	
Require that all new development in the Activity Center provide direct pedestrian access from the sidewalk to building entrance(s) and between buildings within developments.	3, 2
Ban contaminating uses such as Dry Cleaners, Truck Stops, and Vehicle Fueling Stations from the Activity Center due to the risk of flooding and proximity to a drinking water source.	1, 2, 4
Explore allowing temporary land uses on the northern parcels, such as truck parking, a farmer's market, or sports fields until such time that market demand is suitable for a more permanent use.	1, 2
Provide guidance for sustainable site design and construction, and offer incentives for sustainable design and construction practices.	4
Infrastructure (I) Recommendations	
Set requirements for electric vehicle charging stations in new development, and consider providing incentives for the provision of electric vehicle charging stations beyond what is required.	1, 3
Natural Resources (NR) Recommendations	
Require that developers abide by Florida Friendly Landscaping Principles.	2, 4
Protect local ecosystems and natural areas through design requirements and easement purchases, among other strategies. Encourage the use of Low Impact Design (LID) principles in all new development.	2, 4
Recreation (R) Recommendations	
Ensure policies are in place that require passive and active recreation options for all ages and abilities to promote physical activity.	2
Community Identity (CI) Recommendations	
Design consistent branding throughout the Activity Center via logos, clear and uniform wayfinding (including on trails), and other marketing strategies.	2
Economic Development (ED) Recommendations	
Establish additional regulatory incentives for the provision of affordable housing, including reduced parking minimums, expedited permitting, and other regulatory and financial incentives.	1
Provide incentivies for North Port residents to open businesses in the Activity Center, including tax breaks, economic consulting, and advertising and marketing services.	1
Explore the creation of a local business incubator.	1
Explore the creation of a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) for infrastructure creation, environmental remediation, and site preparation.	1, 3, 4
Explore the creation of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, or a similar tax structure or tax incentives, to fund infrastructure and gateway development.	1, 3, 4

PHASE II: PARTNERSHIP AND IN-FRASTRUCTURE

Make Sumter Boulevard a more inviting place for activity by constructing a new gateway treatment (including signage, landscaping, decorative lighting, traffic calming, and other elements) across Sumter Boulevard south of I-75. (Guiding Principles: GP2, GP3)

Sumter Boulevard is currently a high-speed thoroughfare that moves cars and trucks from I-75 into the center of North Port. For an Activity Center to function as a place where people want to spend time, Sumter Boulevard must be reimagined into a more urban street, where people can walk from one part of the Activity Center to another. A street is a public space, and placemaking efforts can be made to infuse Sumter Boulevard with its identity as the Gateway to North Port.

A gateway treatment for the Gateway Activity Center would create a classic, elegant, and memorable entrance into the city limits. Gateway treatments use design elements to welcome visitors to an area and create a unique sense of place. They typically include welcome signage, landscaping, lighting, and distinctive branding.

Gateway treatments enhance the walking environment and sense of community of a neighborhood or business district. They also function as a traffic calming strategy, alerting drivers they are entering a slower area. In addition to making the area safer for pedestrians and cyclists, slower speeds allow drivers to better take in the scenery of the activity center. To enhance the experience of visiting the Activity Center, the city should employ traffic calming measures on Sumter Boulevard such as reducing speed limits, narrowing lanes, and curb treatments.

Ybor City Gateway, via Karl Greeson

Lenior Gateway Sign, during the day (left) and at night (right), via City of Lenior, NC

San Pedro Gateway, via San Pedro Property Owners Business Improvement District/Integrated Engineering Management IEM

More information on these traffic calming strategies can be found below:

a. Lane narrowing reduces speeds and minimizes crashes on city streets by reducing the right of way. They also make drivers wary of traffic and adjacent users such as pedestrians or bicyclists. One of the recommendations from the Global Designing Cities Initiative is to use the additional space for green infrastructure and/or pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

b. New intersections should be designed with narrow curb radii. Curb radii narrowing reduces vehicle turning speeds as well as the crossing distance for pedestrians. Tightening and/or reducing corner radii is an important step to take in creating safer and more compact intersections.

c. The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) recommends combining stormwater management features, such as bioswales or rain gardens, with curb extensions to absorb rainwater and reduce the impervious surface area of a street. These stormwater management features can also visually enhance the area.

The gateway treatment could include landscaping with native plants and using a consistent font and branding on a welcome sign and signage throughout the activity center to develop a specific "gateway brand." The Federal Highway Administration provides a variety of examples to consider when identifying a district, including welcome signs, flower planters, banners, decorative street lighting, unique street name signs, and other details to celebrate unique characteristics. Gateway treatment examples can be viewed on the next page, and include the following:

» Ybor City in Tampa, FL utilizes unique architectural elements to create a beautiful gateway into the historic district.

» The City of Lenior, NC incorporates landscaping in their gateway treatment, as well as lights to ensure the sign still captures attention at night.

» San Pedro, CA utilizes consistent local branding in their gateway signage, helping to welcome visitors to the downtown.

Construct a signalized intersection that is ready for new development at the hospital entrance and the stub for the southwest quadrant. (Guiding Principles: GP1, GP2, GP3)

As the southern portion of the Core Activity Center develops, there will be a need for access from and across Sumter Boulevard. There are existing driveway stubs on both the east and west sides of the road, where a new signalized intersection will make it easy for development to connect to Sumter Boulevard. The City of North Port can begin progressing the design and construction of this new intersection to facilitate the future connection to the developable land on the west side of Sumter Boulevard. This can be done in coordination with Sarasota Memorial Hospital as they progress their site plan for the east side.

A safe and comfortable pedestrian connection between the east and west sides of the road is key for making the Activity Center a vibrant and connected place. Therefore, the intersection should include highly visible crosswalks with all applicable safety enhancements, as cars coming from the interstate are likely traveling at a high speed. As noted in the previous section about gateway treatments, the intersection should be constructed with narrow curb radii and following NACTO design guidance .

The southern parcels of the Core Activity Center are connected to Sumter Boulevard with driveway stubs. Source: Sarasota County aerial imagery

Initiate a partnership for development of the southwest and High-Density Corridor. (Guiding Principles: GP1)

Engage with property owners and private developers to create the desired type of development in the southwestern portion of the Activity Center. This could be an entertainment facility with supporting retail and residential (as in Scenario B), a mixed-use mini-downtown (as in Scenario C), or anything else that supports the City's vision for the Activity Center. The City can offer a number of incentives to the "right" project. This can include the provision of a shared stormwater park, as described in Phase I, and can also include simpler incentives such as parking and design flexibility or assistance with parcel assembly.

Mitigate Impacts with Green Infrastructure and Best Management Practices (Guiding Principles: GP4)

Mitigating the impacts of development within the floodplain requires a combination of approaches like proactive planning and detailed engineering.

PROACTIVE PLANNING. Floodplain management, stormwater management, and land use planning are all tools that should be used to evaluate options when determining whether to allow development in a floodplain. Floodplain management includes detailed mapping and regulating development in floodplains through zoning ordinances and building codes. Stormwater management involves the implementation of techniques aimed at reducing both runoff volume and velocity, as well as minimizing pollutants entering natural water bodies. Decreasing runoff volume and velocity mitigates flood risk, while reducing pollutants enhances water quality. This is tied closely to engineering solutions. Land use planning is critical in mitigating flood risk because it is the mechanism to guide the location and intensity of development in flood-prone areas. The revised Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Coastal Risk Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) are effective March 27, 2024, modifying portions of the City of North Port that are influenced by storm surge, high tides, and wave action in addition to freshwater inputs. These FIRMs show major changes in the special flood hazard area (SFHA) flood zone AE boundaries and base flood elevations (BFEs) for the North Port areas with tidal influences near the Myakkahatchee Creek and Myakka River.

Comprehensive land use plans, zoning regulations, and development ordinances can be used to steer development away from high-risk areas and toward safer locations. Requiring the use of certain engineering solutions can also be incorporated into local development plans.

DETAILED ENGINEERING AND MODELING. Engineering options will need to be explored in detail for any development to occur within the floodplain. A mix of traditional stormwater management and green infrastructure measures should be utilized where practicable.

An H&H model is critical for the evaluation of any development in or adjacent to AE Flood Zones. Any proposed development in the Development Gateway Center should utilize a detailed and updated H&H model. This H&H model should be developed under the guidance of City stormwater and engineering staff for the watershed that includes the Gateway Activity Center in a more widely used model format, such as ICPR.

The existing stormwater model for this area uses a less widely used model format that is less familiar to many stormwater engineers. The benefit of an updated H&H model in a more universal format is that it can more easily be provided to developers. Developers can input the stormwater parameters of the proposed development and a stormwater report would be generated and provided to City staff for review. City staff will have already reviewed, vetted, and approved the H&H model, which will provide for consistent reporting for all proposed develop-

ments. The conceptual land use scenarios can be further refined with the use of an appropriate H&H model.

The use of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) where practicable within the Gateway Activity Center. GSI can be a very effective stormwater tool to improve a developed site's stormwater treatment capabilities. GSI is used to infiltrate rainwater into the ground at or near the location where it falls. It is often a critical design element of stormwater infrastructure used to meet water quality targets set forth by the SWFWMD. It can also provide aesthetic appeal to the landscape. In the area of the Gateway Activity Center, because of the hydric soil, GSI should be used with discretion. It should not be considered as a tool to address flooding issues in the FEMA flood zones because GSI generally requires separation between the groundwater table and bottom of the GSI facility. During periods of high water or flood events GSI will not be able to infiltrate into the ground; therefore, dry retention or bioretention, for example, may not perform well unless substantial clean fill with higher permeability rates is used to elevate parking, structures, and associated stormwater management facilities.

Although there is no permit-required formula for determining an appropriate amount of pervious versus impervious surface when developing within the floodplain, drainage designs typically set aside 15-20% of a project area for pond development in non-floodplains for storage and treatment, and 25-30% is typically set aside for stormwater storage and treatment in floodplains.

Other Partnership and Infrastructure Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORY	Guiding Principles
Transportation (T) Recommendations	
Encourage the creation of bicycle amenities such as bicycle repair stations, covered bike parking, and bike storage options at new developments.	3, 2
Provide pedestrian amenties throughout the activity center, including street lighting, benches, trash and recycling receptacles, shade trees, street art, and safe crosswalks.	3, 2
Work with Breeze Transit to extend Route 9 north to the activity center.	3
Infrastructure (I) Recommendations	
Increase tree coverage as part of streetscape efforts to provide shade, improve aesthetics, and reduce the heat island effect. Encourage the use of rain gardens and other climate resiliency practices.	2, 4
Community Identity (CI) Recommendations	
Enhance the pedestrian experience underneath the I-75 interchange using lighting and art.	2, 3
Engage local artists in beautification efforts, including murals, statues, and other art pieces.	2
Promote community involvement in Gateway development through programming, events, and public participation. Programming could include a farmer's market, food truck rodeos, or outdoor concerts.	1, 2
Construct a new gateway treatment (signage, traffic calming, etc.) across Sumter Boulevard south of I-75, possibly in conjunction with a pedestrian crossing.	2
Economic Development (ED) Recommendations	
Identify and work with private-sector partners to help achieve economic and workforce development goals.	1

INFLECTION POINT

At some future point, the City will need to decide if it wants to pursue a more economically-oriented buildout of the Core Activity Center and surrounding areas, or a more conservation-oriented preservation of the northern portions of the Activity Center. A major finding of this Master Plan is that while these two paths have distinct pros and cons, both are theoretically viable in the long term depending on market conditions and public action. However, important steps must be taken first before knowing for sure which path is the best choice for North Port.

While the long-term path taken for the Gateway Activity Center is currently uncertain, the recommendations in Phases 1 and 2 are designed to be necessary first steps to determining a long-term decision. Phase 1 and 2 actions can set the stage for what kinds of private investment the Gateway Activity Center can facilitate and support, thus helping to determine the appropriate final strategy for the area, whether economic-oriented or conservation-oriented. If development of the southwestern parcel is of the sort that generates its own additional development demand, much in the way that the hospital generates development demand of the surrounding parcels, there may be enough economic benefit to invest in mitigating the substantial environmental hurdles to development of the parcels north of I-75. If instead, however, development demand for the southwestern parcel is more tepid than anticipated, there may be limited economic benefit to further Activity Center development, thus shifting the desired implementation strategy to one of environmental preservation.

As of today, North Port can support both paths without hindering either. The recommendations in Phase 3 are organized into two paths, one for a larger build-out and one for concerted conservation. When the community is ready to pick a path, the strategies in the appropriate section should be pursued.

PHASE IIIA: FULL BUILDOUT

Implement large-scale floodplain and stormwater management practices. (Guiding Principles: GP1, GP4)

North Port engaged consultants to conduct drainage studies within this study area in 2014 and 2019. The completed studies presented various regional solutions including deepening canals, installing locks/weirs, and even installing a new canal. To date, none of these recommendations have been implemented. With the development of the Gateway Activity Center, it may be time to consider some of these recommendations. Committing to investment in resilient stormwater and floodplain management infrastructure can help protect communities from flooding, increase property values, and minimize the impacts of extreme weather events. Projects can be prioritized based on flood risk assessments, cost-benefit analyses, and community needs to maximize the effectiveness of flood risk reduction efforts. As a bonus, these types of projects also help improve water quality and groundwater recharge.

Establish a definitive plan for water and sewer extension north of I-75, involving assessments, planning, regulatory compliance, permitting, implementation, and management. (Guiding Principles: GP1)

Establishing a definitive plan for water and sewer extension north of I-75 requires several actionable steps:

a. Preliminary Assessment and Planning – This phase would include an assessment of the anticipated water and sewer needs, and site assessments to identify environmental sensitivities. The city should consult with environmental scientists, regulatory bodies, civil engineers, and other stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive approach.

b. Environmental Impact Assessment – The city should determine how the proposed extensions could impact the environment and should identify measures to mitigate negative impacts to the greatest extent possible.

c. Regulatory Approval and Permitting – The city should ensure all plans comply with environmental laws and land use regulations and should submit plans to relevant bodies for approval.

d. Implementation Planning – The city should assist in developing construction plans, environmental management plans, and monitoring and contingency plans.

e. Long-Term Management and Monitoring – Lastly, the city should ensure that the water and sewer systems are managed sustainably. The performance and environmental impact should be closely monitored, and any identified adverse effects should be mitigated as necessary.

Other Buildout Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORY	Guiding Principles
Transportation (T) Recommendations	
Create a Gateway Activity Center shuttle, possibly in coordination with the hospital, that connects the activity center's four quadrants.	**3**
Create a North Port circulator bus route with stops in the Gateway Activity Center, as well as other activity centers, employment hubs, and population hubs throughout the city.	**3**

PHASE IIIB: CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

Pursue Transfer of Development Rights and property purchase to conserve the land north of I-75. (Guiding Principles: GP2, GP4)

As noted in Phase I, North Port has a number of local tools for acquiring or conserving land in the flood zone, and these will be key for this strategy. North Port's TDR program allows landowners with flood-prone or environmentally sensitive land, which includes all of the Activity Center land north of I-75, to sell their development rights. Those rights can be purchased by property owners with land in Activity Center or Village FLU areas, enabling them to build more densely in those places, supporting their ability to create economic development elsewhere in North Port. Once development rights have been transferred, the City may be able to purchase the land more affordably using grants or the tree fund.

Invest in bolstering economic development through eco-tourism. (Guiding Principles: GP1, GP2)

A conservation-focused plan for the Activity Center's northern parcels presents many economic opportunities, even without intense development. This strategy focuses on leveraging the natural assets of the area, including Myakkahatchee Creek, the wetlands, and the existing forests, to provide recreational and eco-tourism opportunities to visitors and residents alike.

Potential eco-tourism activities include the following:

- Development and expansion of nature trails and boardwalks. Such trails allow visitors to explore and engage with the ecosystem without harming it. Furthermore, creating a fitness trail, in which outdoor exercise equipment is integrated throughout, can allow both passive and active recreation opportunities that serve all ages and abilities. Such trails can serve hikers, runners, and cyclists, and could expand upon the existing trail network to create a comprehensive trail system.
- Wildlife observation areas. Such areas can be integrated into the trail system, and can provide a place for reflection, relaxation, and observation.
- Water-based recreational activities, including guided and self-guided canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up paddleboarding. A rental service for these activities can be established at a blueway trailhead and can present both an economic development opportunity for the city and a recreational opportunity for residents and visitors. Such programming can allow for further exploration and enjoyment of the surrounding area alongside the current and future greenways.
- Other low-impact sporting activities. These could include mountain biking, disc golf, or guided programming such as yoga classes, nature tours, and conservation workshops. Such activities would require minimal land clearing and maintenance and would present additional recreational opportunities without much environmental harm.
- Low-impact supportive businesses, such as a concession kiosk that can provide refreshments and sport equipment rentals, can make the area more attractive to visitors without creating much of an adverse impact on the surrounding ecosystem. Notably, well-established eco-tourism would in turn create a multiplier effect in which visitors would spend money on dining, lodging, and entertainment throughout other parts of the city.

This strategy requires careful planning and consideration of both the ecological impact and the potential to attract visitors, supported by an environmental impact assessment, market research into the existing and future demand for eco-tourism, and careful

infrastructure planning to ensure minimal ecological disruption while still providing the necessary development potential.

If the environmental and market assessments support such uses, the city should establish a strong eco-tourism brand that emphasizes the unique aspects of the wetlands, creek, and the surrounding areas. This branding should highlight the city's commitment to preserving the natural beauty of the Activity Center, while providing opportunities for visitors to connect with the local environment. Digital marketing (such as social media postings and other web content) should be employed, potentially sharing engaging content like images from wildlife cameras, visitor stories and photos, and information on history of the ecosystem. Traditional marketing should be employed concurrently, such as establishing a visitor's kiosk to inform visitors about eco-tourism opportunities and promoting the area alongside the city's existing natural assets, like the Warm Mineral Springs.

Other Conservation and Recreation Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORY	Guiding Principles
Transportation (T) Recommendations	
Create a Gateway Activity Center shuttle, possibly in coordination with the hospital, that connects the activity center's four quadrants.	3
Create a North Port circulator bus route with stops in the Gateway Activity Center, as well as other activity centers, employment hubs, and population hubs throughout the city.	3
Recreation (R) Recommendations	
Establish a guided nature walk or story walk with auditory and visual elements. Use trail education resources, such as interpretive signs, to highlight natural features and historic contexts.	2, 3
Explore creating a fitness trail, with fitness stations spread throughout the trail network.	2, 3
Formalize or construct city-owned parking facilities to serve recreation and other activities.	3
Economic Development (ED) Recommendations	
Explore the creation of a kiosk or information center that directs visitors to local businesses, attractions, and activities, such as the Warm Mineral Springs Park.	1, 2