

MEMORABLE CENTERS: A PRIMER

The centers of communities have always occurred at intersections between natural transportation routes. Towns were founded historically where a waterway was easiest to cross, where a rail line meets a town, and where two major roads converge. Trade of all kinds, especially retailing, has always occurred at these locations for obvious reasons; they are the places where the most people can be served, from the most directions. Modern metropolitan areas are often home to many centers of different types and scales. Every settlement of any size will have a center, although some are more prized than others for the contributions they make to character.

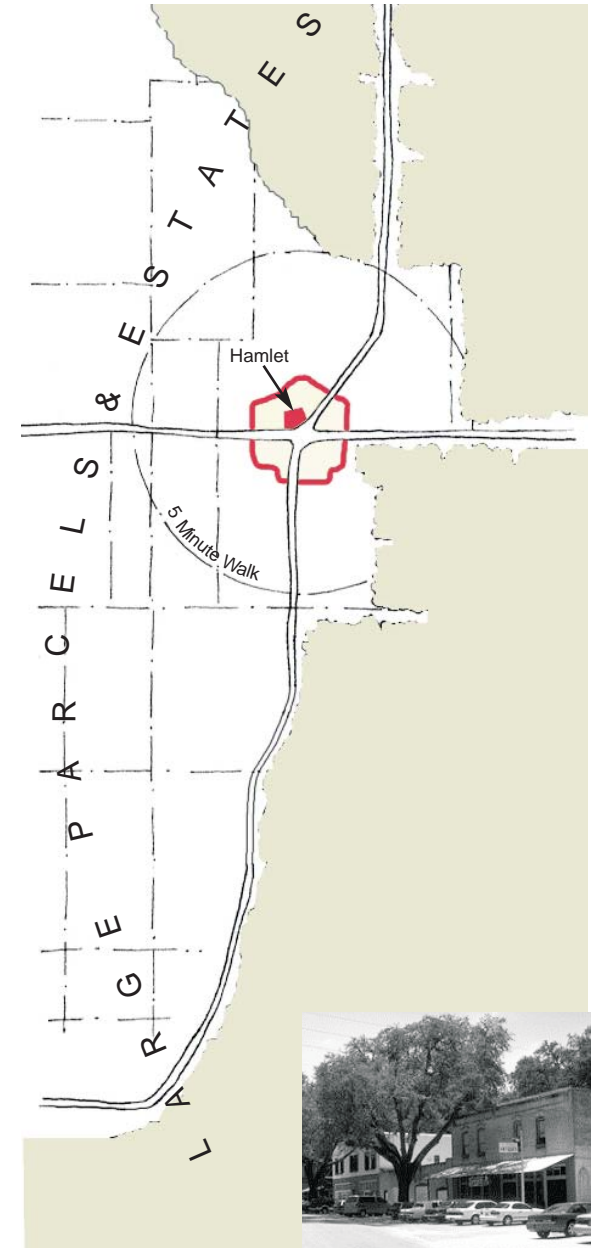
The center is a place of intensified activity that serves an important role both for economic reasons and for social interactions. The center where one shops for necessities can also be a place to greet friends, spend leisure time, or enjoy community events, and change from one mode of transportation to another. Vital centers are essential to livability, social cohesion, economic growth, efficient delivery of municipal services, and sustainable mobility. They are also good places to channel growth, reducing the pressure for sprawl. For residents of surrounding neighborhoods, a pattern of multiple centers means shorter trips on the congested roads. Linear "strip" development along corridors is at odds with the

THE RURAL CROSSROADS



Rural Crossroads

THE HAMLET



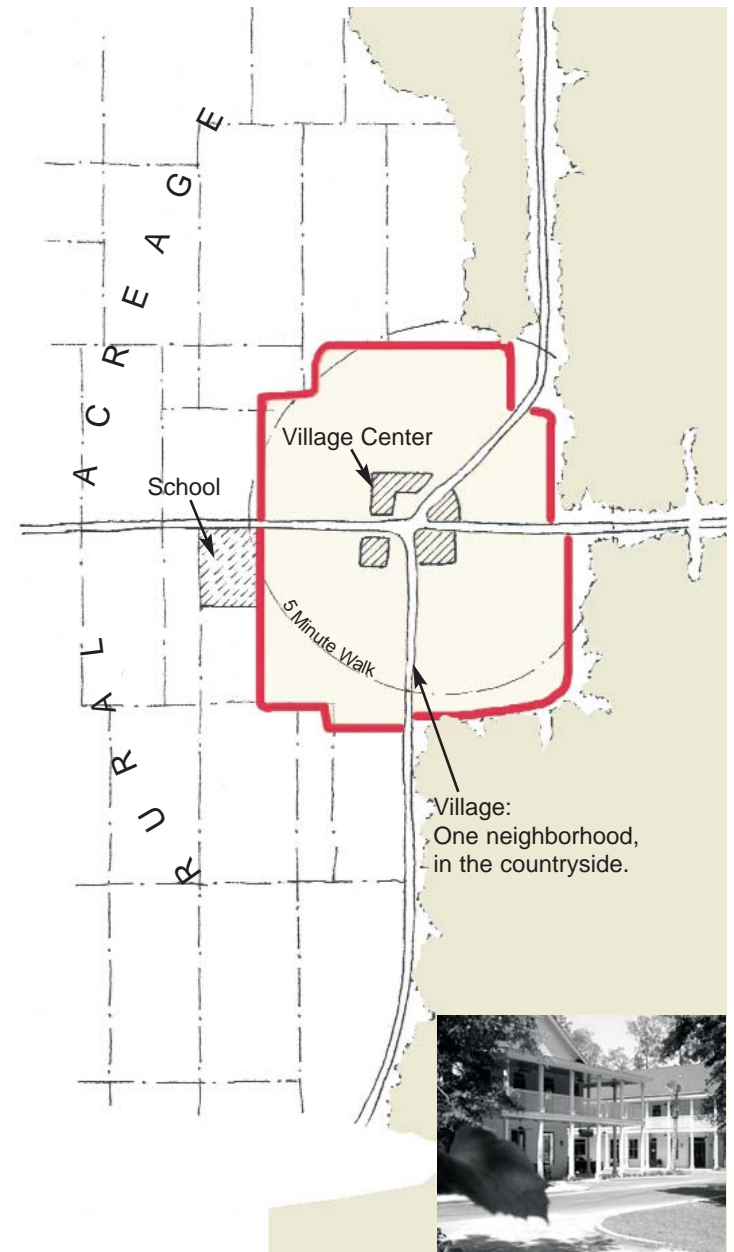
Hamlet

goal of having economically vital centers. An activity centers concept is therefore a hallmark of the county Comprehensive Plan and growth management philosophy, and an official map directs where centers are to take shape. However, development in these locations does not meet expectations for community image and character. Now the urgent need is to advance better design techniques so that the activity centers can emerge as intended.

Collier County has high quality centers and centers in the making. Fifth Avenue in Old Naples is characteristic of one type of center, a downtown. The mall is another type of a center. While these two centers serve some similar functions, both have stores and restaurants, for example, they differ dramatically in their built form and character, just as a farmer's market is quite unlike a supermarket, even though both sell fruits and vegetables. The experience each offers is markedly different. These differences reflect the subtleties of urban design and the intrinsic value of strong character; real estate on Fifth Avenue is the most valuable of any center in the region. Collier County will always offer a spectrum of experiences in its many centers, but the instructions from citizen participants who helped create the Character Plan were quite clear: they prefer to create more places like Fifth Avenue. Now revitalized, Fifth Avenue enjoys a striking customer loyalty and holds a very special place in the heart of citizens. No one suggested more strip plazas, "power centers" or regional malls.

Indeed, one critique of the unsatisfactory centers that typify commercial sprawl is that they are not lasting economic propositions that easily adapt to changing times. In an era of overbuilt retail square footage, for example, the "dead and dying malls syndrome" has become a national phenomenon. This is in part due to the ever-shifting travel patterns induced by government's own investments in highway infrastructure (see *Rethinking the Corridor*, above). It is also due in part to the fickle nature of retail customers; customers are drawn to retailing venues that are the newest and most entertaining. The challenge is to hold customers' interest when flashier offerings in the latest formats open elsewhere. Real estate consultant Peter Katz has said, "Conventional regional malls are rarely ever really worth more than on the day they open. It's all downhill from there."

THE VILLAGE



Village Center

THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE TOWN

The answers to this dilemma are to:

- 1) create convenient centers that are worthy of customer loyalty year after year because of the *quality of experience* they offer;
- 2) create centers that include *diverse offerings* (retailing, workplaces, housing, and other uses) so that they can appeal to multiple market segments and have more than just one profit center; and
- 3) construct these centers using *durable, flexible building types* that can be converted to new uses as markets change.

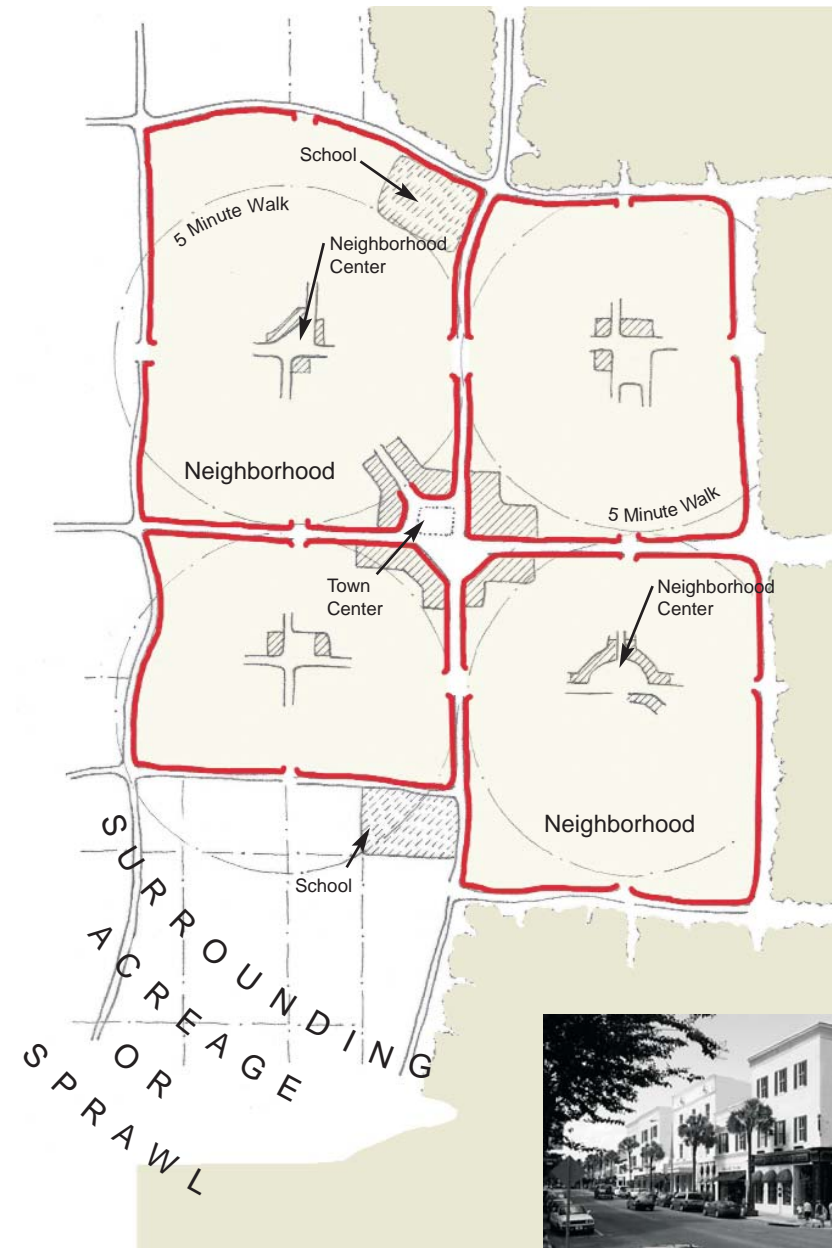
Many changes are underway that will affect the fortunes of Collier's centers. Some examples:

- a. Shifts in the channels of distribution and evolving technology (including online sales) pose significant challenges to conventional retailing, particularly discount operations, in the coming decade. "Big box" shopping centers, which seemed nearly victorious just a decade ago, have experienced plummeting returns on investment, generating lower returns every year for the past five with no end in sight (source: ZHA Economic Advisors, 2000).
- b. The multiplex cinema industry, whose movie theaters anchor most entertainment-based centers, is in disarray.
- c. The changing nature of work demands a much greater variety in office space options, including live/work combinations and highly flexible, well-wired spaces that are close to both broadband access and the active city life demanded by the new generation of employees.
- d. Today's newly created households vary widely, too, and there is a corresponding increase in the need for both affordable and upmarket homes that appeal to empty nesters and retirees, singles, couples without children, those who work from home, and others.

Fortunately, all of these changes are best addressed in centers with the urban form favored by Character Plan participants, the kind of traditional town centers that have proven adaptable over hundreds of years.



Neighborhood Center



Town Center

THE ACTIVITY CENTER

The county should nurture several kinds of memorable centers, across a range of scales and intensities:

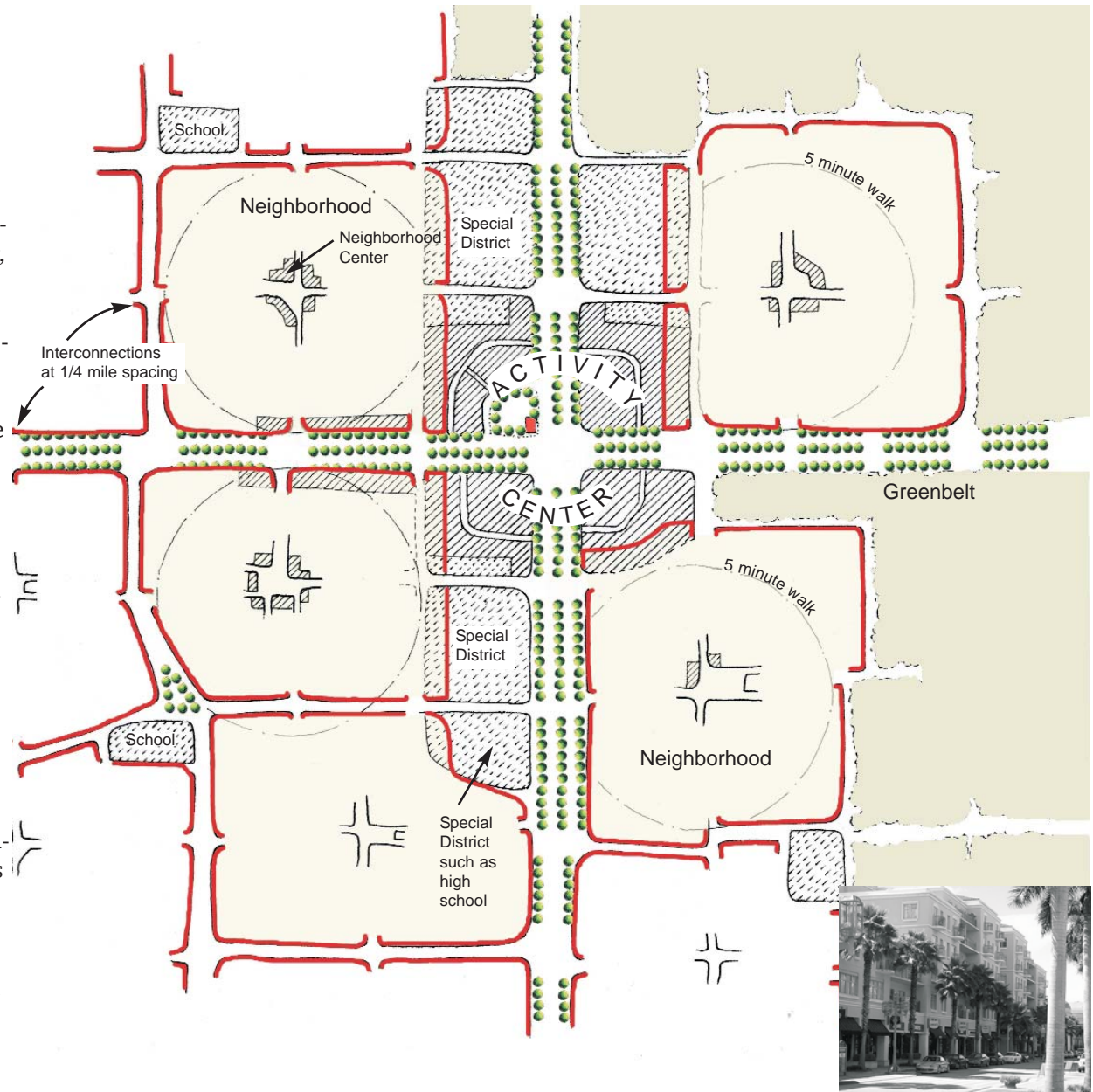
Rural Crossroads - A single intersection with a small roadside country store or convenience outlet in an otherwise rural setting; the commercial component must be forcefully integrated visually with the road (see *The Evolving, Subdivided Periphery*)

Hamlet - An informal, compact grouping of 5-20 buildings, which may be tightly focused around a small-scale commercial establishment, a place of worship, or civic building (see *The Evolving, Subdivided Periphery*)

Village Center - The heart of a self-contained neighborhood surrounded by countryside (see *Growing New Neighborhoods*), where provision is made for the eventual inclusion of at least a minimal commercial component

Neighborhood Centers and Town Centers - When multiple neighborhoods are grouped together in a town, the neighborhood centers are the quieter civic hearts of each neighborhood, while this group surrounds and shares a more commercially oriented town center that is located along primary thoroughfares

Activity Centers - Major settings for commerce, employment, housing, and entertainment, centered on the convergence of regional infrastructure (see *The Features of Enduring Activity Centers*); will include the "core" areas at the edges of certain neighborhoods



Activity Center

THE FEATURES OF ENDURING ACTIVITY CENTERS

Scale – The center must be particularly well defined spatially, and scaled for pedestrians. Generally buildings should be between two and four stories in height. Highways and oversized parking lots must not be allowed to dominate the scene at the heart of the community. Buildings should therefore be positioned so that they help shape the spaces of streets and plazas, and where they help visually screen service areas and parking. Instead of one big parking area, parking lots should be broken down into midblock units as small as possible. Architectural elements should be sized and detailed for close-up inspection, since they will be viewed not only by passing motorists but also by pedestrians.

Use – A variety of stores does not constitute a sufficient mix of uses. If the center is simply a agglomeration of national chain retailers, a huge opportunity has been missed and the precious land resource will be used inefficiently. A fine mix of stores, eating places, dwellings, offices, and civic uses generates the convenience and synergy needed for a healthy center. Flexible land use and design go hand in hand. The mix of uses and multistory buildings are needed to make the place feel right, and the right feel is the key to leasing those secondary uses. Although no one wants to live or work in the middle of ugly conventional commercial sprawl, good urban design makes it feasible to blend uses because design makes what would otherwise be just a "shopping center" into a livable place of charm and character.

Mobility – Activity centers should be accessible and accommodating to the automobile, but not at the cost of ruling out walking or biking.

Well-connected sidewalks, minimal curb cuts, and shade will help promote walking, transit, and cycling. As Collier County's public transportation system matures, transit stops should be integrated with the centers.

Public Space – The character of a place is determined by its public places, the three-dimensional volumes of space between buildings. A proper center must have real public space with shade and other pedestrian amenities. There must be places where the public feels welcome and encouraged to congregate, recognizable as the heart of the community. When citizens in Collier County were asked to draw and describe what they liked and did not like about their county, the places that scored highest varied in land use and locale, but public spaces oriented for pedestrians were always perceived favorably.

Generally the activity center should include a focal plaza or square, located in a prominent position, framed by occupied buildings that open toward the space. These size of these spaces vary in size and can take on many different geometries, but the best examples feature a range of proportions instinctively comfortable to the human eye; as a rule of thumb, for example, the square or plaza should be no more than twice as long as it is wide (see Camillo Sitte, *Town Planning According to Artistic Principles*). The open space of the plaza or square should be configured in a simple way, to allow many kinds of events to take place there.

Layout – The activity center physical plan must incorporate basic site design techniques to establish the balance between traffic circulation, retail planning logic, loading, maintenance, control of noise or other conflicts between uses, phasing, architectural continuity, privacy, secu-

rity, and flexibility for change, all at once. It may sound too hard to accomplish this balance and reconcile all the complexities, but it is not. The tool that permits this balance is a rational pattern of blocks and lots, a fundamental instrument of town planning that has been field-tested for more than 2,000 years.

The block-and lot pattern permits unified street designs, in which transitions between incompatible uses or building types occur across rear or side property lines. The block-and-lot pattern derives naturally from the connected street network, highlighted elsewhere as an essential aid to traffic circulation, but its benefits go beyond mobility. The rational block-and-lot pattern permits a distinction to form between the public areas of the streets and plazas and the private/service areas in the middle of the block, and, when combined with time-tested traditional building types, results in both privacy and character.

Blocks should be two lots deep, so rear property lines do not abut streets. Since almost all buildings need a front side and a back side, each lot should have a clear front property line, facing a street or other public space, and a clear back side. (The rare exceptions to this rule are monumental civic buildings and other exceedingly specialized building types, but the front/back principle applies across the spectrum of housing and private commercial buildings.) The front side is the "presentation face" of the lot, where architecture matters most, where community character is principally established, and regulatory attention should therefore be focused. The back side is the place for gardens, parking, and outbuildings. The middle of the block is the less formal and more utilitarian side, and should be afforded wide latitude in the rules.

Activity centers need to be laid out with a secondary network of alleys that crosses the blocks. Alleys permit attached building types without rows of garage doors facing the streets, and efficiently accommodate service needs. Alleys are particularly useful where they coincide with a transition between residential development and mixed-use Main Street buildings, because they provide additional separation. Alleys may be publicly dedicated or privately owned, open or gated.

Because many plans in conventional suburban sprawl were laid out without this front/back discipline, 'buffering' became vogue in sprawl design. 'Buffering' attempted to use landscaping and sheer horizontal distance to shield neighboring properties from obtrusive buildings and roads. Certainly extensive landscaping of private lots should be encouraged. However, excessive buffering can have the effect of dividing and pushing apart the uses and spaces that should be well connected in a town center, and can work against pedestrian accessibility. In traditional neighborhoods, the divisions between uses and the demarcation between public and private space are properly made by garden walls, fences, and hedges, instead of by wide swales, berms and ditches used in conventional suburban buffers. The best strategy for the activity center is to design buildings and streets of such appeal, neighbors are comfortable near them instead of withdrawing from them, minimizing the impulse for buffering in the first place.

Building Types – The low-slung, blank-walled boxes of conventional commercial sprawl, oriented only to parking lots, do not promote character. Building types in the activity center should be street-oriented, with doors & windows facing the streets. The norm should be buildings in front, parking in back. A blend of attached and detached buildings is to be expected in a center.

Multistory buildings are best, because they help spatially define the streets. One character-promoting technique is to draft height regulations that stipulate the maximum number of floors rather than the number of feet. This encourages a more varied skyline. It also rewards investors who provide gracious floor-to-floor heights, which in turn lend buildings more elegant presence on the street, and the higher ceilings reduce energy costs, too. Further, regulating the number of floors discourages the "pancake" practice of starting with the maximum height and working backward to see how many levels one can pack in.

A rich palette of durable, traditional building types satisfies these character-building objectives. Traditional urban buildings can handle being in areas of higher traffic, are self-solving with regard to security, and adapt well. Traditional building types for activity centers include:

1. Mixed-use shopfront buildings (which can include habitable space above the arcades over sidewalks)
2. Loft office / apartment buildings
3. Classic apartment buildings (with an address on a street, not in a campus-like complex)
4. Courtyard apartment buildings (which enables high density without highrises, yet affords outdoor open space to each unit)
5. Rowhouses (including those modified for live/work combinations)



Mixed-use Shopfront Building



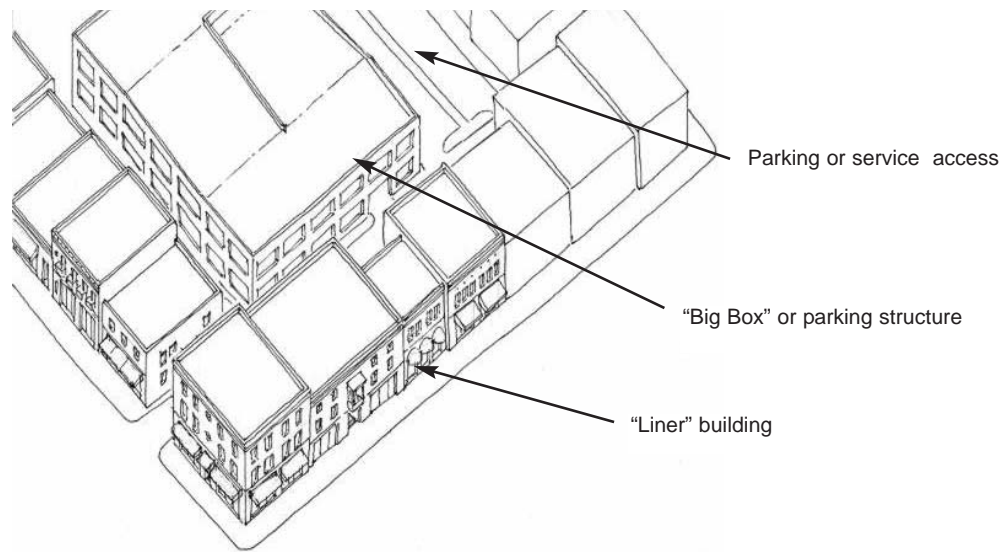
Lofts or Office Building



Urban Apartment Building



Rowhouses



Illustrative example of "liner" building, with wrap-around shopfronts lining larger big boxes or parking structures.

HOW TO AVOID "BLANK WALL SYNDROME"

Certain functions are normal in activity centers yet limited in the extent to which they can conform to the requirement for doors and windows facing all streets, at least in their standalone configurations. These include supermarkets and other large-footprint retailers as well as cinema multiplexes, theatres, and warehouses. Parking structures also rarely project an adequate image toward the street. Yet a layer of habitable space facing the block edge is crucial to natural surveillance and character. There are two ways to surround these buildings with other uses so as to screen their inhospitable sides from the street.

The first is to size the block and position the building midblock so that its best façade fronts the street, and the remaining sides are embedded into the private/service area. Other standard buildings thus surround the blank sides of the exceptional one, with only minimal attachment. (This usually requires an oversized block, since these buildings tend to cover a considerable footprint; one or two larger-than-average blocks are acceptable in a major activity center, though restraint is warranted

to preserve pedestrian mobility.) In the case of a "big box" retailer, the footprint of the building positioned in this way restricts the area available for midblock parking.

Parking structures may not be required as a center first develops. However, to prepare for intensification of the center over time, at least one block near the Main Street or plaza should be sized for a future parking structure, located wholly within the block with standard buildings all around.

Retailers tend to prefer corner locations, and this calls for a second solution. The large store can have a primary entrance facing the corner, with the rest of its footprint embedded within a building that incorporates secondary uses in an outer layer; these secondary uses provide the doors and windows facing the street. Even better, thin "liner buildings" can be attached to the sides of the box, with housing or offices facing the side streets. This approach both reconciles the inherent front/back dilemma of the box store while reducing its visual impact, improving the scale of the street, and providing natural places for affordable housing and small businesses. Liner buildings are particularly well suited to live/work units and studio apartments, which make good "zero-commute" housing options for employees in the center.

REGARDING LARGE-FOOTPRINT BUILDINGS

Big box retailers pose challenges to the designer, because they are difficult to arrange with the urban fabric without detracting from the overall scale, connectivity, image and walkability. Yet such stores perform a useful economic function up to a point, serving as anchors for the activity centers, bringing in sales tax revenue, and adding regional drawing power and advertising presence that benefits other businesses.

Beyond a footprint of about 20,000 square feet, the store and its associated parking inevitably begin noticeably eroding the walkability and the block pattern. Beyond 50,000 square feet, the pattern falls apart. Big box retail buildings in footprints exceeding 50,000 SF are damaging to the pedestrian nature of the activity center and should be minimized, permitted only as special cases. Megabox stores bigger than this are best consigned to warehouse districts.

The Community Character Plan nevertheless recognizes that these large-footprint store formats will be part of the Collier scene for the foreseeable future, and therefore does not propose prohibiting them, but rather prescribes that they be **(a)** designed so as to minimize their negative impacts on the center as a whole, **(b)** subject to intense scrutiny on a site-specific, case-by-case basis, and **(c)** not a pre-permitted use as of right, but a conditional use subject to review and approval.

The requirements for small blocks, façades with real doors and windows, and the discouraging of front parking lots, do not inherently prevent a big box store. These goals do mean that the store must be adapted in ways that deviate from the typical chain-store prototypes. Of par-

ticular concern is the noisy commotion that takes place on the backside of such a store, with its all-hours loading docks. Applicants proposing large-footprint buildings (larger than 20,000 SF) must demonstrate by substantial and competent evidence that all avenues have been exhausted for resolving the negative impacts, by, for example, incorporating liner buildings, dividing parking lots, and so forth.

The easiest way to accommodate the required bulk of the big box retailer, then, is to place the store on two or more levels and divide its parking so that far fewer of the spaces are in front of the store. This scenario is demonstrably workable for numerous retailers; department stores, for example, have used such an arrangement in downtowns for a century.

Because of recent trends in retailing (and in response to the rising outrage at the character of these stores from residents around the country), many big box retailers are seeking alternative formats for communities of character. One striking new trend is simple, and targeted to sophisticated communities like greater Naples: the smaller, more customized building is making a comeback. (Home Depot, for example, has introduced its small "Villagers Hardware" format in test markets where standard home-improvement megastores are increasingly tough to permit.) Retailers are reporting that their new, smaller-format stores, when well located, generate some of the best sales-per-square-foot figures in the chains. These stores reflect the evolving channels of distribution, including the "just in time inventory" system that has become common in the last fifteen years.

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURAL STANDARDS

Collier County adopted architectural and site design standards for commercial buildings in 1996. This was a milestone, as architectural standards are generally attempted only in fairly homogeneous cities. County governments rarely address such design issues, in part because of the diversity of counties and the resulting difficulties in preparing appropriate design standards.

These standards have succeeded in improving how new buildings look, proving that even big-box chain stores don't have to occupy generic boxes. Adding architectural embellishments to the fronts of buildings and placing tree islands in parking lots, while far less important than proper building placement, can nevertheless improve community character.

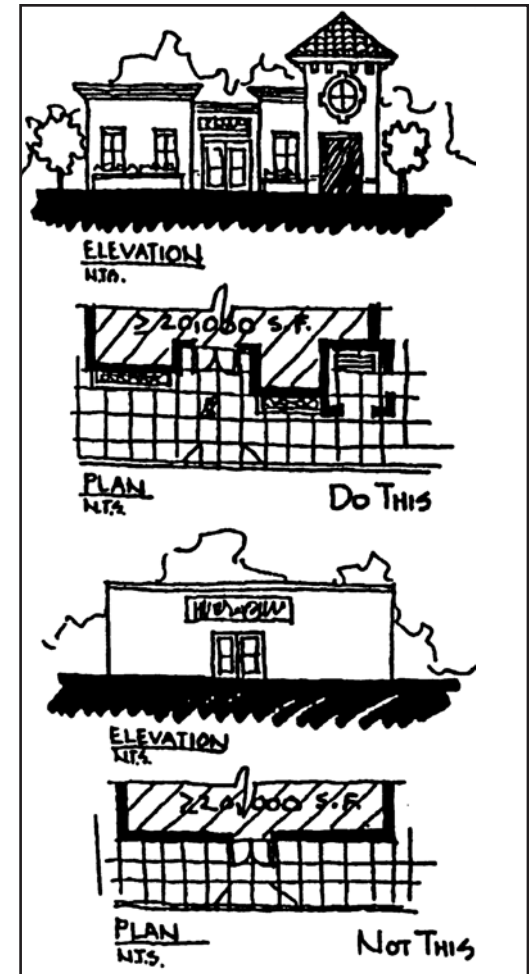
The 1996 standards also address site design - the placement of buildings, parking lots, and outparcels. The site design standards, however, have not accomplished their stated purposes: "[for commercial developments] to provide safe, convenient, and efficient access for pedestrians and vehicles... The parking area shall be integrated and designed so as to enhance the visual appearance of the community."

The site design standards have not proven effective at orienting buildings toward public spaces, nor have they moved parking lots behind build-

ings and away from public view. Interconnections for vehicles and pedestrians are now provided, but the current standards are not strong enough to make these connections as useful as they should be.

These site design standards should also incorporate recommendations of this plan's mobility manual. For commercial buildings being placed on existing lots, shared driveways and cross-accesses should be provided wherever possible. Larger commercial parcels, whether they are being subdivided or developed under single ownership, must be planned for short- and long-term goals. Buildings, parking lots, and utilities should be placed on the site in a manner that will allow them to evolve toward mixed-use neighborhood centers as retailing trends change and as prime commercial sites become too valuable to devote to large parking lots.

Collier County's architectural standards for commercial buildings can also be improved in a number of ways. For instance, buildings in core areas should be different than those in edge areas. Buildings located close to streets need larger display windows and better pedestrian access. Large buildings that are unavoidably set far back from major roads can be treated differently, but they still need display windows or liner buildings along all major faces unless they



From Collier's architectural standards, adopted 1996



The built result

are visually screened from the road.

The current standards differentiate between buildings larger and smaller than 20,000 square feet. A third class of standards is needed for larger buildings (or complexes) over 50,000 square feet. These larger buildings have tremendous impact on their surroundings, are almost never almost never carefully adapted to their sites, and usually have outparcels and access points that will affect the site far into the future, long after the initial users have departed. This is especially a problem for shopping centers and big-box retail stores that rapidly cycle out of fashion and often litter their host communities with hulks of obsolete buildings.

Ideal commercial centers use durable, resilient building types that can be converted to new uses as markets change. They are convenient to reach by automobile, public transit, and or on foot or bicycle, and offer attractions beyond a single shopping trip. Collier County should encourage this form of commercial development over all others. However, when a conventional shopping center or big-box store is unavoidable, the county should insist that its site be laid out in a rational street-and-block pattern, even if the first-generation building is placed in the standard location behind a parking lot.

To accomplish this, the county would need to amend its site design standards to describe the desired street and block pattern. For instance, the new standards could require that:

- very large parking lots would be subdivided into more than one block, with real streets between them, include side-walks, street trees, and on-street parking;
- the anchor store would be placed on a single block, with other stores fit into a liner around the anchor, or placed across a narrow street, or in an outparcel block;
- special permission would be required for an anchor store so

large that it could not fit on a standard block;

- parking would be shared between the anchor store and all others (including outparcels);
- employee parking and peak-period overflow parking would be located to the rear of the anchor store; and
- drainage and utilities would also follow the street and block pattern so as not to interfere with future buildings.

Also, the site design standards would include dimensional standards, such as the following:

- maximum block perimeter (1320 feet)
- maximum block face between pedestrian paths, alleys, or streets (450 feet)
- maximum spacing between doors (125 feet)
- maximum average spacing between all doors (100 feet)
- maximum contiguous parking in a single "parking block" (250 spaces)
- maximum parking ratio (three spaces per 1000 square feet of leasable area)

Through regulations of this type, Collier County would accommodate current retailing patterns while avoiding permanently committing prime real estate to a development pattern that has often proved unsustainable over even a single generation. The future pattern for redeveloping the site into an integral part of the community would be established in advance by the street and block pattern.

In addition to these changes, the standards should establish an appeal process to recognize that even the best architectural or site design standards will not "fit" certain situations. A well-trained design review board would be empowered to grant exceptions to the architectural or site design standards when exceptions are clearly warranted.

Civic Building

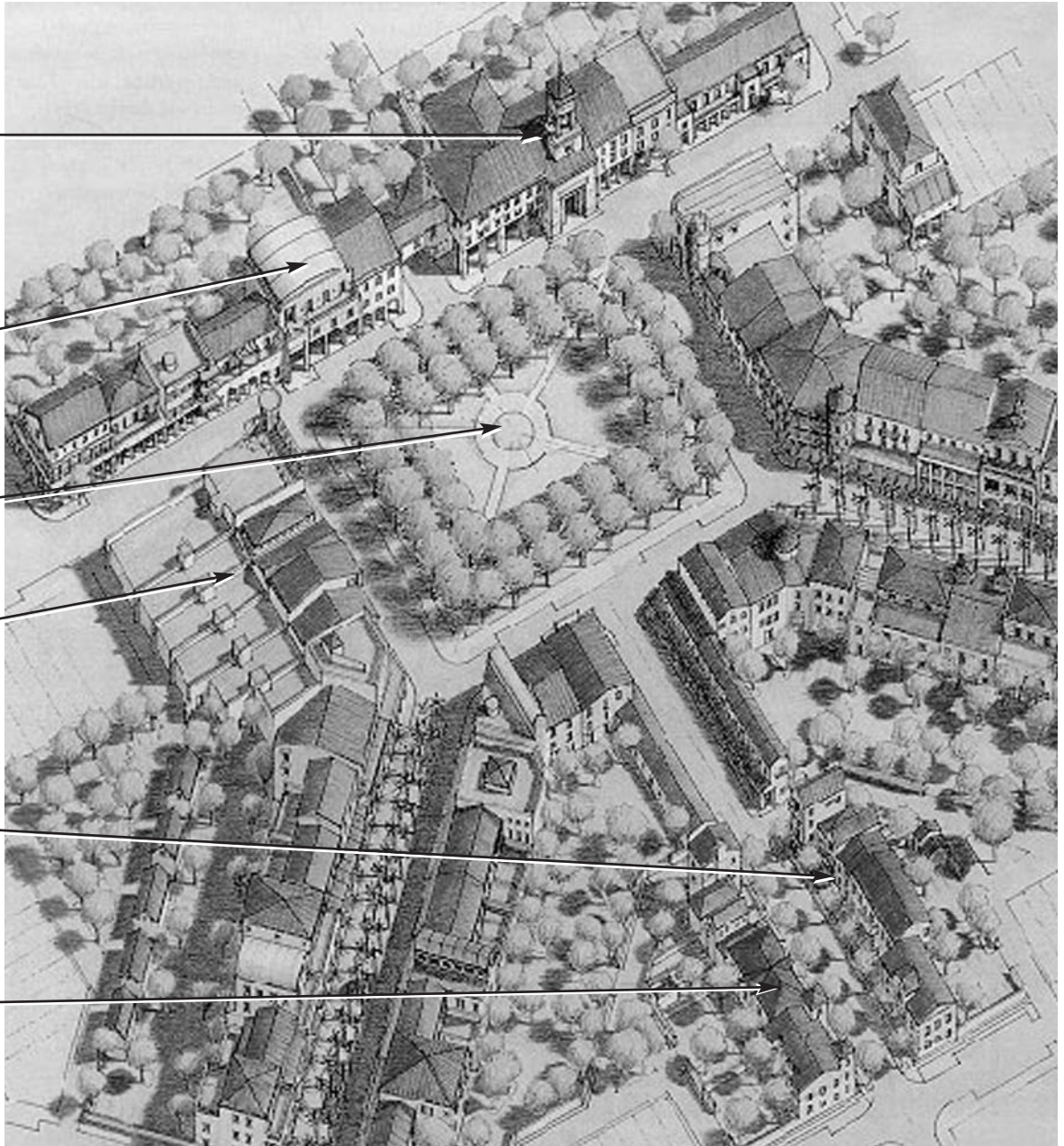
Shopfront Building,
Apartments Above

Square

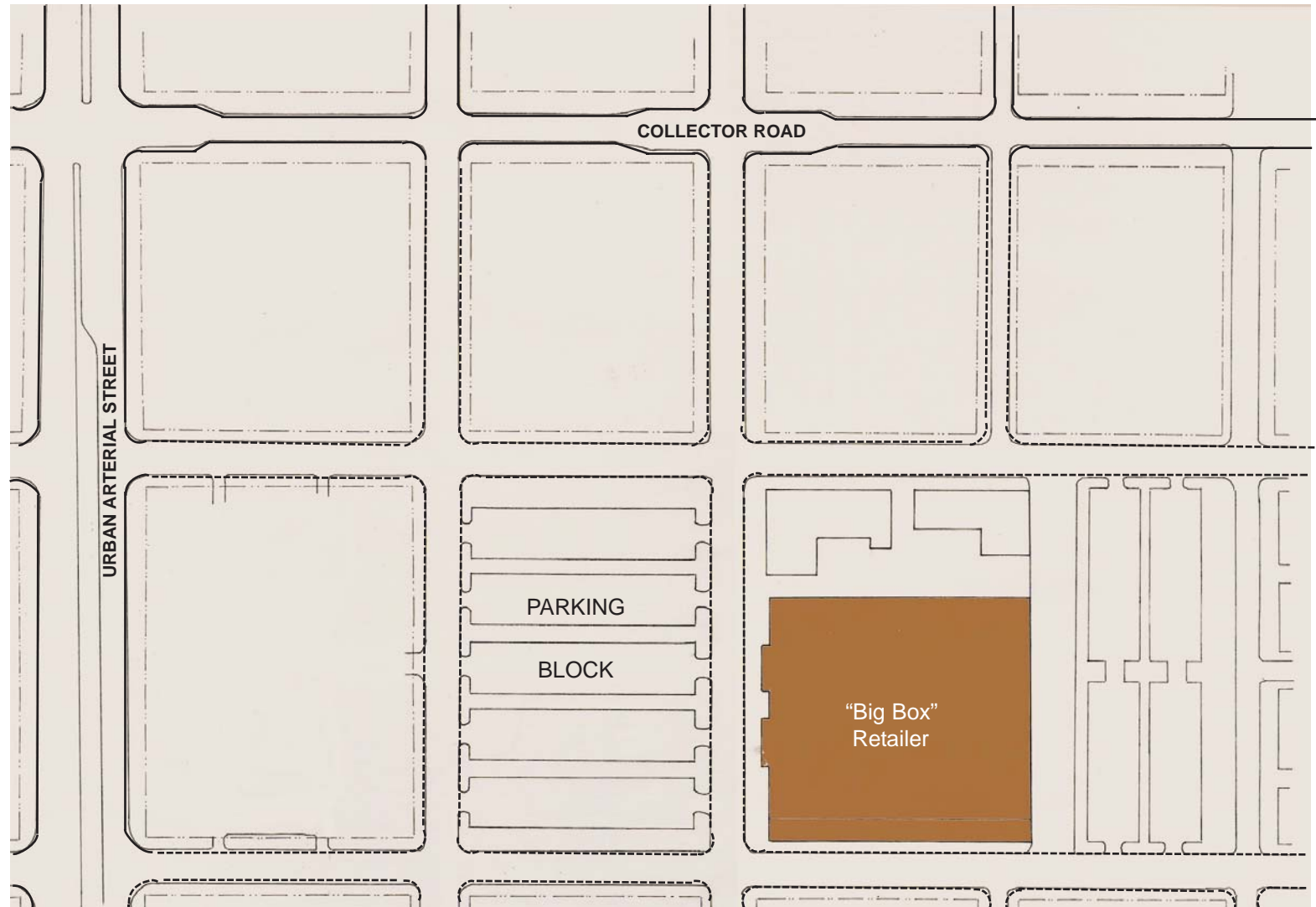
Multiplex Cinema

Apartment Building

Rowhouse



Mixed-use Town Center with a variety of street-oriented building types

EXAMPLE: Laying Out a Shopping Center and Anchor Store

Simplified site diagram illustrates the concept of creating blocks in a street network. Drive aisles are arranged as streets; the big box building occupies one block, with its front door facing a street, while its parking occupies a specially designated "parking block."



COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURAL STANDARDS

SETTING THE COURSE

Collier County's architectural standards have improved the look of big-box retail stores, but have not been effective enough in arranging buildings on commercial sites. These standards should be upgraded to improve interconnectivity, and also should require the largest commercial buildings to be laid out on a resilient pattern of streets and blocks because that pattern will long outlast the first generation of buildings and land uses that are placed on these sites.

GETTING THERE

Growth Management Plan

- a. Add an achievable objective #3 under goal #3 committing to upgrade the county's architectural and site design standards within one year.
 - i. Add a new policy to maintain architectural and site design standards in the land development code and to improve them by refining the standards based on neighborhood type, mandating interconnectivity between adjoining parcels, and orienting most buildings toward public spaces.
 - ii. Add a new policy to create new site design standards for large building complexes that require a street-and-block pattern for new conventional shopping centers and other large retailers.
 - iii. Add a new policy to require special permission for any anchor store so large that it cannot fit on a standard block.
 - iv. Add a new policy to reduce the parking requirements for truly walkable, interconnected developments that have all three primary uses (dwellings, workplaces, and storefronts), whether they are freestanding neighborhoods or segments of activity centers.

- v. Add a new policy to establish architectural and site design standards for parking garages and office buildings.

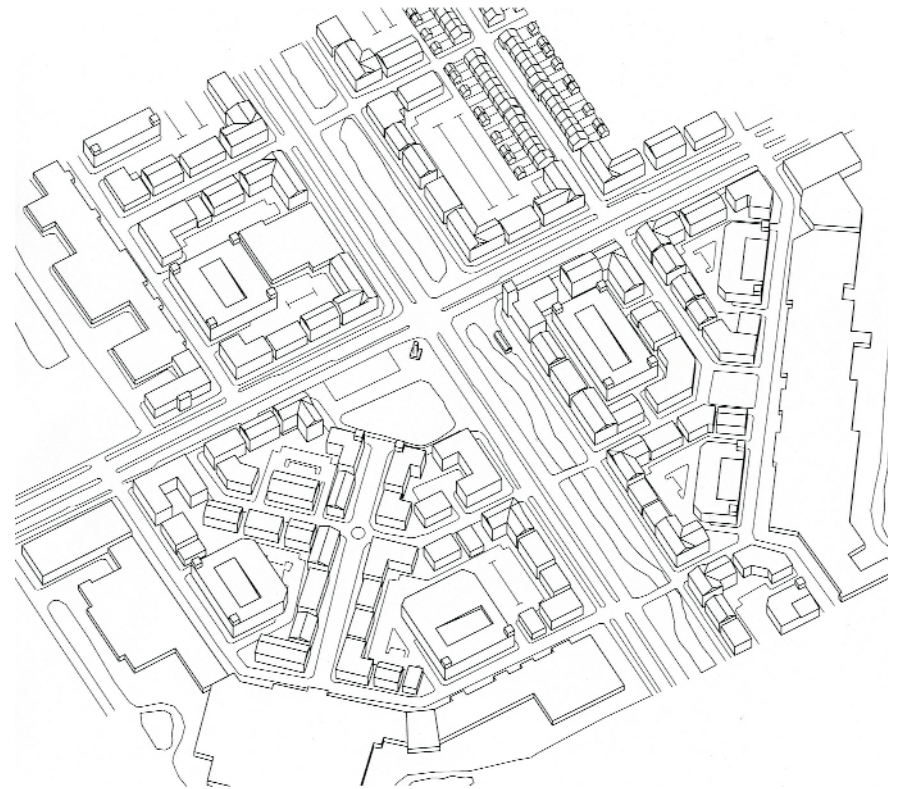
Land Development Code

- a. Upgrade the architectural and site design standards in §2.8 of the land development code to:
 - i. Establish standards for differing neighborhood and building types, such as mixed use mixed-use shopfronts and live/ work units.
 - ii. Include precise illustrations desirable building types.
 - iii. Rewrite the site design standards to significantly improve pedestrian access and to orient buildings toward public spaces.
 - iv. Establish special standards for building complexes larger than 50,000 square feet that requires a street-and-block pattern so that their site designs can evolve over time, and that also requires special permission for any anchor store so large that it cannot fit on a standard block.
 - v. Mandate reasonable interconnection between adjoining commercial parcels and surrounding developed or undeveloped land; these connections should be aligned to serve as future streets or alleys.
 - vi. Establish a design review board that would be empowered to grant exceptions to these standards.
 - vii. Reduce parking requirements for walkable, interconnected, mixed-use developments.
 - viii. Modify the parking requirements to minimize parking between stores and streets and to require all surface parking lots larger than the code's minimum requirements to provide substantial additional landscaping.
 - ix. Establish architectural and site design standards for parking garages and office buildings.

ACTIVATING THE ACTIVITY CENTERS

As described above, Collier County has wisely begun to channel commercial development into 'activity centers' designated to include a mix of uses. But when the first rounds of development occurred at the activity centers, a "form follows parking" philosophy governed the design; character was secondary. Parking lots were sized around the busiest day of the year (for retail, the day after Thanksgiving), no matter the impact of those lots on the other 364 days. Parking lots dominate the appearance of these activity centers as seen by passersby because the large expanses of asphalt are placed between the road and the building. This visual blight conceals the full potential for success of these activity centers. As these activity centers mature and property becomes scarcer, the surface parking lots will come to be viewed as a land resource. With rising property values will come the realization that the vast acreage of unbroken parking is inefficient, and this lost space will be captured for infill development.

This process of transformation can begin without multi-story parking structures. Because different land uses need parking spaces at different times, mixed-use development can exploit shared parking. Today the typical center has only storefront uses (retail and restaurants) but a substantial amount of office, residential and lodging uses could be added without more parking, under a shared-parking scenario.



EXAMPLE: Pine Ridge Road / Airport-Pulling Road Activity Center

1. Existing Conditions

Strip retail behind fields of parking.



Intersection of Airport- Pulling Road and Pine Ridge Road, 2000.

2. Redevelopment Begins

Shared parking allows infill of surface lots with street-oriented mixed-use buildings.



Retail Logic

A sense of success and vitality is part of memorable character, too. The psychology of commerce must be respected for the activity center to thrive. A few key rules include:

- maintaining clear views to signage and merchandise;
- avoiding excessive "streetscape" elements like decorative pavers or banners that are more distracting than helpful;
- laying out the Main Street blocks so motorists have several opportunities to make easy right turns to parking;
- incorporating on-street parking;
- keeping sidewalks spotlessly clean;
- regularly refreshing storefronts; and
- arranging tenants for synergy.

It is also important to concentrate the primary commercial heart into a focused, walkable area; the best shopping environments are about 1000 feet long or even less.

(For more on this subject, see "What Main Street Can Learn From the Mall," *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1995.)

3. In Our Generation

As property values rise, infill development pressure extends to adjacent sites.



4. Evolving to Maturity

New development adds up to create a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use center.



ACTIVATING THE ACTIVITY CENTERS

SETTING THE COURSE

For ten years Collier County has channeled commercial development into major activity centers. Despite the original mixed-use concept, most activity centers are dominated by huge parking lots for retail stores and restaurants. New activity centers should only be approved with complementary mixes of uses. As existing activity centers mature and vacant land becomes scarce, their inefficient parking lots should be converted to parking garages surrounded by mixed-use buildings.

GETTING THERE

Growth Management Plan

- a. Add an achievable objective #4 under goal #3 regarding the various "center" types in Collier County.
 - i. Add policies under this goal that define and describe the variety of "center" types: rural crossroads, hamlet, neighborhood / village center, town center, and activity center.
 - ii. Add policies that incorporate the fundamental principles stated in this plan for the scale, land uses, building types, mobility needs, and site layouts for the various center types, including references to related standards for parcel-level connections, architectural requirements, and site design standards.
 - iii. Amend the description of the "urban residential subdistrict" (page 19 of the Future Land Use Element) which applies to 80% of all land west of the urban boundary, to state the conditions under which town centers and lesser-intensity centers including schools, day care, and non-intrusive workplaces can be integrated into neighborhoods. Shopping centers and office parks would still not be allowed.
 - iv. Amend the description of the "urban commercial district" and its subdistricts (pages 27-31) to state the conditions under which town centers and activity centers can be developed.
 - v. Amend the description of the "mixed-use activity center subdistrict" (pages

27-30) to no longer permit an activity center to be devoted entirely to commercial uses; a complementary mix of uses, including housing, would be included in each activity center.

- vi. Add a policy encouraging mixed-use buildings and mixed-use developments by not excluding commercial land when calculating maximum residential densities.
- vii. Add a policy modifying Collier County's policy on time extensions for unbuilt development approvals within activity centers.

Land Development Code

- a. Amend §2.2.20.3.1.1 so that land in PUDs that is used for commercial purposes is encouraged to include dwelling units. For purposes of computing density, the number of such units is limited by parking, drainage and other development regulations and is not deducted from the residential density limits of the PUD.
- b. Amend §2.2.20.3.4 so that on-street parking spaces within PUDs are no longer excluded when computing minimum parking requirements.
- c. Amend §2.2.20.3.5 to reduce the usable open space requirements in PUDs with fully mixed uses and to no longer exclude planting strips between internal streets and sidewalks from open space calculations.
- d. Amend §2.7.3.4 to shorten the period that unbuilt PUD approvals remain valid from five years to three years, and to substantially increase the amount of continuing progress that is required to retain PUD approval for unbuilt or partially built PUDs that are no longer consistent with the growth management plan or land development code. The purpose of this change is to require the design of unbuilt portions of PUDs to be modified to comply with regulatory changes before the PUD approval is extended.
- e. Amend the C-1, C-2, and C-3 zoning districts to no longer require "conditional use" approval for mixed residential and commercial uses and to eliminate the two-story height limit and other unnecessary barriers to mixed uses.
- f. Amend the C-4 and C-5 zoning districts to allow mixed residential and commercial uses.

PRECEDENTS: Activating Activity Centers

Around the United States, aging strip shopping centers and malls are being changed in the ways recommended by the Character Plan.



Mizner Park, Boca Raton, Florida:
before (above) and after (below)



Winter Park Village, Winter Park, Florida:
before (above) and after (below)



Mashpee Commons, Massachusetts:
before (above) and after (below)

EVOLVING THE SUBDIVIDED PERIPHERY

Golden Gate Estates is profoundly different in character from the urban or rural parts of Collier County. County leaders and citizens requested that the Character Plan take a new look at this enigmatic sector and suggest customized strategies for its evolution.

HISTORY

Golden Gate Estates and its immediate environs, including Golden Gate City, cover over 150 square miles of the county. This vast area is subdivided into large lots that range in size from 1.14 acres to 5 acres. A coarse grid of long, straight, undifferentiated roads and canals crisscrosses the area.

Golden Gate Estates was created as a variation on the "Florida land scam" lot-sales pattern that began in the 1950s. In this case, the developers marketed extra-large lots, many of which were swampy or exceedingly difficult to develop, to buyers all over the world. Apart from the minimal roads and canals, almost no infrastructure and community services were provided. Actual homebuilding on the lots occurred very slowly, in a near-random distribution.

The "north blocks" (north of Interstate 75) are now commonly known as North Golden Gate Estates (NGGE). In the past decade, NGGE homesites have become very popular as a source of moderate-cost ungated lots. But little in the way of groupings of homes resembling communities has emerged. Looking to the east from airplane flights over the area today, one can see an astonishing manmade patchwork: a house here, another



Typical undeveloped section of North Golden Gate Estates



Golden Gate Estates from the air, 2000

**“An Open Letter From Leonard Rosen,
President of GULF GUARANTY LAND AND TITLE COMPANY**

January 20, 1961

Land is the basis of all wealth. So said Theodore Roosevelt...and so, too, in other ways, said Andrew Carnegie, the Astors, the Vanderbilts, Marshall Field and many other investment-wise Americans.

But what they left unsaid is even more important... because the facts are that land to be valuable must have a use... now or in the foreseeable future!

*If it is located a remote, off-the-beaten path area, distant from all indicated growth areas, it is not an **investment**. It is a risky speculation!*

Land located in the wrong direction from a city, although it may be but 10 miles away, might as well be 100 miles away... if progress is not pointed in that direction. Actual development of an area may just be as distant now as it was 50 years ago!... and might remain as distant as 50 years from now!

*That's why I take such pride in our **Golden Gates Estate offering**. No in-the-middle-of-nowhere land, this, Golden Gates Estates, as you all know, is strategically located in the path of progress... and what it may lack... **we will provide!***

*To that end, we, ourselves have set aside two tracts of several thousand acres each at opposite ends of Golden Gate Estates for the **proposed development** of the **twin cities of Golden Gate and North Golden Gate with plans**, which **when adopted**, would provide "**dream cities**," **modern, gracious, carefree, perfect in every well-planned detail**.*

From this you can see that Golden Gate Estates is destined to grow because it is planned to grow! That's why the acreage which is Golden Gate Estates has huge profit potential... the profit potential of excellently located choice suburban property... property that will be directly influenced by the price of homesites in suburban Naples as its outer fringe expands towards Golden Gate Estates as the twin cities of Golden Gate and North Golden Gate come into being.

*However, although plans are already on the drawing board for our proposed twin cities, - the completion of these plans and the commencement of city development is not at this moment an accomplished fact. It is well to remember that preparatory plans for a city of qualitative stature are time consuming. Every phase and facet of modern city planning must be considered and made letter-perfect... engineered, checked and double-checked for soundness of drainage, provisions made for utilities, for intelligent protective zoning, for civic dedication of land for schools, parks, churches, playgrounds, etc. all of which requires **Time, Thought, Skill, Know-how and Patience**.*



Because of this, investors are urged to consider the advisability of an investment in Golden Gate Estates only on its own merit as well-drained strategically located, prime suburban-type acreage with graded access roads to every tract... and such further merit of only what already exists around it.

I stress this point because I know that those of you who elect to join with us during the inceptive stages of this project are men of seasoned judgment who, like us, are prepared to ride it out as a long-range speculative venture if need be... and who recognize that the greater profit potential for early participation more than justifies its every calculated risk.

On that basis, I heartily and sincerely recommend Golden Gate Estates as a potential golden gateway to a prosperous future for everyone, everywhere! – and a prime opportunity here and now for the brokers, builders and investors at this gathering to profitably share in its future with us at the Special Pre-opening Wholesale Prices we are making available to you today as detailed on the following pages.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Leonard Rosen."

**On January 20, 1961, Golden Gate Estates had no drainage or roads.*

there, on and on, stretching across the horizon, a gridiron of empty lots laid out against the natural backdrop beyond.

Gulf American Land Corporation, sellers of most of the territory, went bankrupt in 1979. That same year, the state inaugurated the Conservation and Recreational Lands (CARL) program and began painstakingly purchasing property in South Golden Gate Estates. State land buyers have now purchased or have contracts to buy almost 75 percent of South Golden Gate Estates, and plan a restoration that could begin as early as 2002. Eventually, it is hoped, much of this SGGE property will be restored to a semblance of its natural state as part of large-scale ecosystem restoration in the Everglades.

But a gradual march toward buildout is continuing in NGGE. As vacant lots have become relatively unaffordable in coastal areas, many county residents have turned to the Estates.

The original developers told purchasers they could subdivide their 5-acre tracts and profit further from the magic of Florida real estate. Although densification of large tracts has a long history in urban planning, in this case there was no logical pattern for converting the tracts into anything resembling a town or city. In the absence of either a logical development pattern or any commitment to provide urban infrastructure, the random subdividing of tracts into lots smaller than 2½ acres was outlawed in the early 1980s. But relatively few lots of 5 acres remain.

Collier County adopted a special Golden Gate Area Master Plan 1991 to take account of the unique problems of Golden Gate City and North Golden Gate Estates. This plan was updated in 1997 and continues to evolve today, largely as fragmented responses to petitions from individual landowners.

PROBLEMS

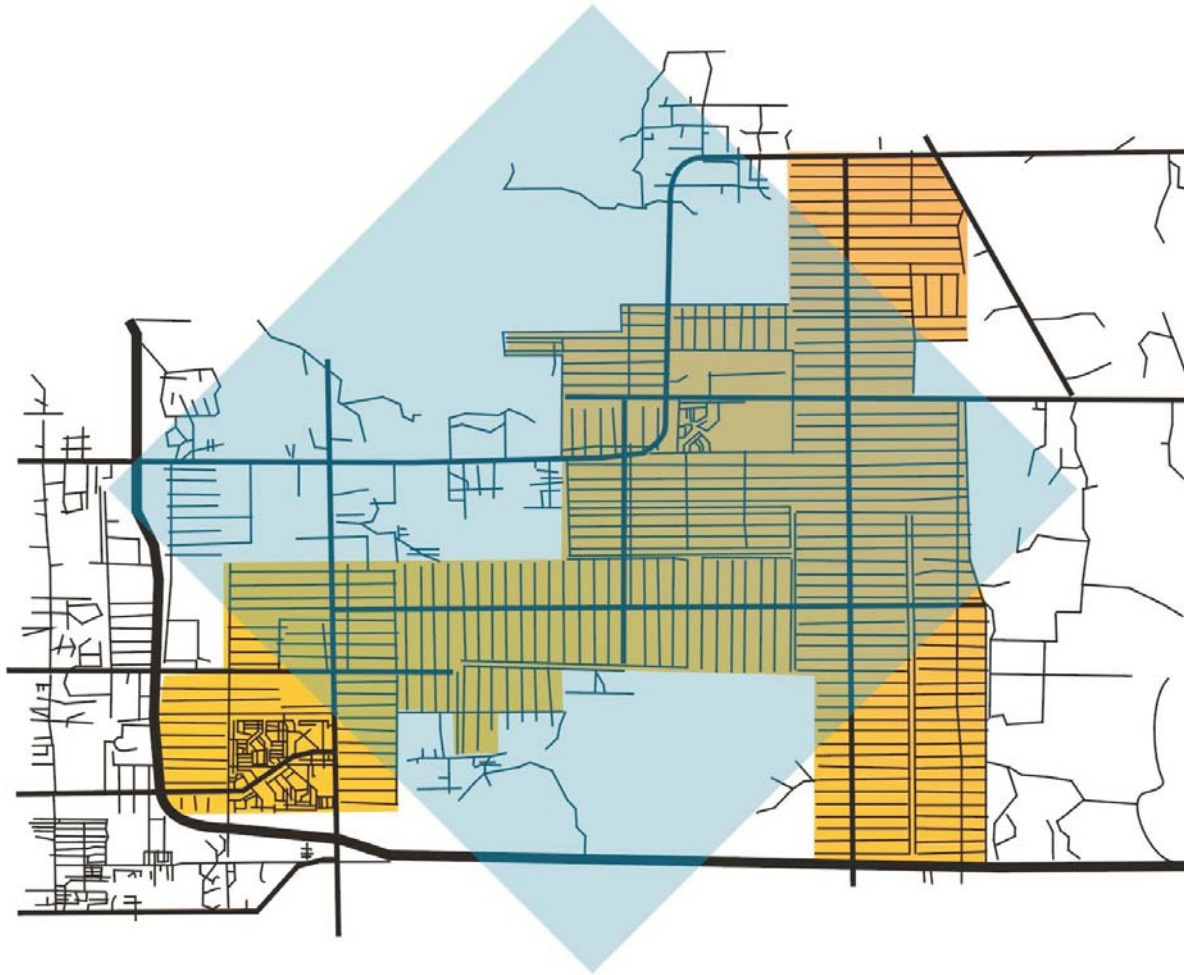
No Longer Countryside

Longtime residents complain about the disappearing "rural" character of NGGE, as more of the lots established decades ago are built upon. This captures the dilemma of the Estates. People were drawn to its remoteness and quiet solitude. Because so few of the tracts were built upon and even those were large, the great distances between homes fostered an initial perception of isolation and privacy, and this was very appealing to residents known for their independent spirit. But gradually, as more and more homesites are built up, the semirural charm is giving way to a very different scenario, one in which lawns replace trees, larger homes replace open spaces, and traffic mounts, year by year.

It is only now becoming apparent that the 5-acre lots themselves, originally thought to be a great feature, are now part of the problem; they are "too small to plow, too large to mow," neither farms nor neighborhoods. As they are built out, the semirural character is vanishing – one resident even talked about "crowding" – even as the low density makes it cost-prohibitive to extend conventional municipal services. Some of the newer residents, paying higher prices and building fancier houses, are accustomed to better fire protection, ambulance service, street upkeep, and shorter trips for a loaf of bread. There is an understandable tension between these newcomers and longtime residents, who for years have been filling coolers with ice back west to keep their groceries cool for the long drive home.

It is as if the Estates are beginning to feel the shortcomings of ordinary suburbia or city life, but without the advantages or conveniences.

Scale comparison: North Golden Gate Estates (background) and Washington, DC (superimposed).



the problems inherent in the original Gulf American plan, and today's residents clearly do not want that anyway. However, some affordable initiatives can be undertaken which, with patience and persistence, can have a substantial impact on the appearance of the whole and improve the quality of life in Golden Gate Estates.

The Absence Of Commerce

There are almost no stores or other commercial uses within convenient distance of homes in the subdivided periphery. Residents who need to buy almost anything must drive a long way west toward town, usually on busy Golden Gate Boulevard. As more people move into the area, the additional trips exacerbate the current traffic problems; yet expanding Golden Gate Boulevard beyond its new four-lane configuration is unimaginable to people who have chosen to move to the country.

Size

The sheer size of Golden Gate Estates makes planning daunting. The diagram comparing the whole of Washington, DC to the footprint of the Estates makes the point; no replanning initiative could suddenly reverse the legacy of the land scam over so wide an area and result in full-blown sustainable communities. The evolution of the Estates, given its staggering dimensions, will therefore inevitably occur slowly, and much of it will remain a patchwork of multi-acre tracts for many lifetimes, neither completely broken nor fixed. Minimal interventions are called for, recognizing that no single grand solution will eliminate

At the same time, many outspoken residents do not want any large-scale shopping centers or discount stores. In public meetings, many people have seriously objected to anything larger than country stores in the Estates. They have good reason to be suspicious of how new shopping centers might be designed; conventional shopping centers or large-format retail stores ("big boxes") with huge parking lots out front are clearly out of sync with the semirural character, natural beauty, and countrified image of the Estates.

There appears to be, however, significant support for smaller, neigh-

neighborhood-oriented stores, if they can be provided under carefully regulated circumstances. The commerce needs can be appropriately scaled to this area and provide much needed goods and services for the surrounding residents. Part of the solution is to provide additional commerce in the Estates, but with tightly controlled design and at a scale that fits the surroundings.

Roads and Traffic

Even in areas where there are more concentrated populations in the subdivided periphery, there are relatively few roads that connect where they will be needed eventually. Some road links are missing because there was no money for canal bridges when the area was first settled, and at that time the need was not obvious because the Estates were never planned to become a bedroom community for Naples. As a result, auto trips today are longer than necessary as drivers circle out of their way and double back to one of the few roads that do connect. One long car trip can therefore have the upsetting traffic impact (as perceived by neighbors) of many normal-length trips.

Traffic is also rising due to the arrival of more residents. The amount of driving per household is growing as part of a national trend, too. Yet these are not the only reasons traffic in the Estates seems to be growing faster than the population. Living in this area reflects an inherently auto-dependent lifestyle choice made upfront, and that is apparently fine with many of the residents. Homes with four or five occupants often have five vehicles parked in the yard. No alternatives exist. The pattern of large lots, few roads, low density, and outlawed commercial uses makes walking, biking, and transit unlikely if not impossible, so ever-increasing traffic should not come as a surprise.



Golden Gate Estates

Typical existing buildout pattern in North Golden Gate Estates features sporadic development of single family homes.



Golden Gate Estates

Future hypothetical buildout of the same street shows how piecemeal single family developments on multi-acre lots can still create sprawl and traffic congestion.

Living So Close to Nature

The swampy subdivided periphery also overlaps with critical habitats and natural flow-ways. When the Estates area was laid out, the modern environmental movement had not yet begun. Few regulations governed the transformation of the place, and scientists did not even have the tools to grasp its implications. Now with satellite imagery, infrared



Golden Gate City, aerial view, 2000

aerial photography, and radio tracking collars on endangered animals, the extent of the violence is clear, first with the draining and elevating of roads, and then with occupation. The aerial images make it easy to understand why public buyout of the lots in South Golden Gate is necessary. North of I-75, too, there are parts of the Estates that similarly obstruct the routine flow of water and the movement of wildlife. Yet these areas are steadily accumulating more homes.

Golden Gate Estates lies within the Big Cypress Swamp, which is the western part of the greater Everglades system. Berms and deep drainage canals were installed to prevent flooding, but this protection has proven inadequate. An even larger problem is that the flood protection system blocks the native flow-ways that ran southward through Golden Gate Estates. The result is that NGGE is drying out, while land to the north floods severely because it is forced to absorb more water than that land can handle.

Although a fire cycle is historically a normal part of the Everglades' process of continual renewal, the frequency of fires seems to be increasing as development dries out the swamps. Needless to say, even if one's home is not in the direct path of the fires that sweep this part of Collier County from time to time, the wildfires can be quite jarring to new human residents. Over the years the area has experienced a series of significant fires that covered thousands of acres, most recently in 2000. At least a partial solution must be found to make firefighting practical as part of striking a tenuous balance between nature and human occupancy of the subdivided periphery. One promising step would be minor road improvements that would allow more than one circulation path for residents who might otherwise be trapped by wildfires. Another would be restoring parts of the original flowways

through NGGE as firebreaks and raising groundwater levels wherever possible to maintain natural vegetation during the dry winter months.

Golden Gate City

The four square miles now known as Golden Gate City were originally planned to be one of two "twin cities" in Golden Gate Estates. The other was far to the northwest and was never developed; its site is now known as Orangetree.

Golden Gate City is quite different than Golden Gate Estates; it was developed in a pattern more like Naples Park, though with a more picturesque street layout instead of a gridiron of straight streets. Many of the ideas described earlier in this manual for revitalizing maturing neighborhoods would be applicable to Golden Gate City and could be examined more closely when the Golden Gate Area Master Plan is next updated. Golden Gate City share another similarity to Naples Park: its eastern boundary runs along a major arterial road, with the same opportunities and problems faced in both communities.

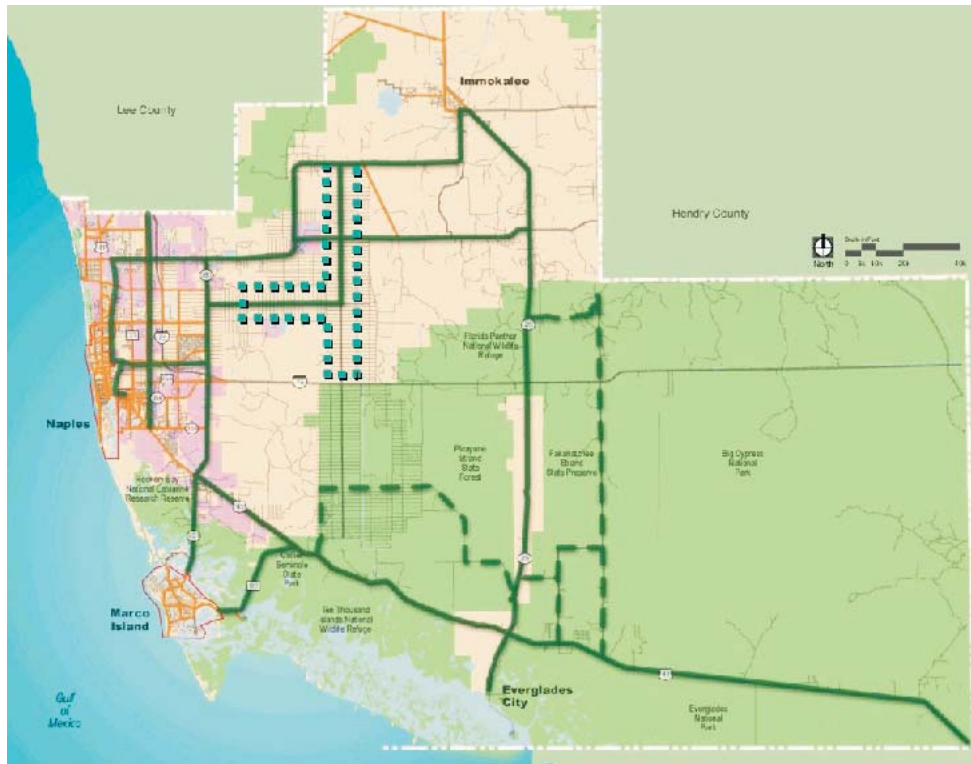
OPPORTUNITIES & GOOD TIMING

In public meetings during 2000 it was very clear that citizens are interested and aware of the changing situation. Many residents of the subdivided periphery speak passionately about the future of the place and are dedicated to improving life there.

The Golden Gate Area Master Plan is clearly overdue for a major revision to address the new issues that have arisen with the 1990s population boom in Golden Gates Estates. It would also identify opportunities to improve neighborhoods in Golden Gate City and its interface with Collier Boulevard.

Another important element would be to prepare plans for land around the new interchange to be built where Interstate 75 intersects Golden Gate Parkway, which will profoundly shift traffic patterns and open new alternatives for convenient movement, yet will probably make the subdivided periphery newly attractive for even more homebuilding. Without great care and planning, this interchange could end up as a generic waystation for travelers rather than a memorable entry into Naples and Golden Gate.

The time has come to consider new options for the future of this area. The decisions made by Collier County and its residents during the next five years will affect life in Golden Gate throughout this century and beyond.



Conceptual greenway and canal system

The "Golden Threads" Plan for Improving the Estates

This part of the Character Plan can serve as a starting point for a new policy toward the subdivided periphery. The sketches and concepts presented here are not worked out in exhaustive detail, and some might be deemed more applicable than others after further investigation, but they are provided to challenge the next step in the planning process to consider options beyond continuing the status quo.

The western stretches of NGGE are much more occupied than the eastern parts. Clearly an opportunity exists to choose a future for the eastern sections that is different from the western sections. The entire area is diverse, and should grow more so. The final plan, like those of maturing neighborhoods, should be created in close consultation with the citizenry in each

locale. Outreach should be given great consideration, so that an improvement or a minor change in the rules for a given area, if residents want it, need not be thwarted by opposition from others who live five or ten miles away.

Rather than treat this sector of the county with one-size-fits-all regulations, it would be broken for policy purposes into smaller subareas, each with carefully tailored expectations and design standards. Where some parts are naturally urbanizing, this can be recognized as an opportunity; a few of these could be made more townlike. Other areas can be kept genuinely rural. In between, some inevitably suburbanizing areas seem to resist evolving to be either town or country, but their appearance can still be improved. Another group of areas need to be restored to their natural state and linked back into the critical flow ways and habitats.

Even though no reasonable plan will set off wholesale change in all corners of the Estates, there are some larger scale elements that could serve to bind the area together and improve things for everyone. Think of these concepts as memorable "golden threads" that can unify the whole and weave a net around which the Estates can mature. The conceptual maps illustrate a possible pattern, but the exact locations of all the elements are likely to change as the plan evolves.



An existing roadway in North Golden Gate Estates that illustrates the parkway concept

1. Greenways and Historic Flowways / Firebreaks

The Greenspace Manual contains maps that identify wetland systems that existed previously (or still exist today). Other maps show major historic (and existing) flowways through Collier County (see, for example, Exhibit 10 in the *Greenspace Manual*) that show the regional drainage patterns prior to the excavation of the ditches and canals that now carry most stormwater toward the south and west. Most of these lands remain in private ownership.

The Greenspace Manual also proposes an expanded open space system in North Golden Gate Estates based on the existing canal system. These canals

could be developed into a system of greenways that include bicycle/pedestrian paths as well as habitat for a variety of small wildlife species. The greenways could be created either within the existing canal right-of-ways, if space allows, or possibly through easements along canal banks. A system of neighborhood parks, approximately 1 - 2 miles apart, would also be created along the greenways. These parks would also provide wildlife habitat through the protection of existing vegetation or the restoration of disturbed sites.

It is unquestionably difficult to recreate natural flowways and to retrofit Golden Gate Estates with a greenway system. Unless started immediately, it will be nearly impossible because more and more homes are being built on the key lots that would be needed. With a concerted effort, however, both systems may still be practical. The greenways would be primarily recreational and aesthetic, with some wildlife benefits. The flowways would have little recreational value, as they must generally follow the historic patterns and would unavoidably pass through more developed areas. However, the flowways could be part of a coordinated effort to raise groundwater levels in the existing canal system, which could have significant benefits to the native vegetation that has had to adjust to very dry conditions. Wider flowways could also serve as natural forested areas and even as firebreaks, especially if groundwater levels are raised and prescribed burns reduce the fuel loads that build up in the total absence of fire.

2. Country Parkways

One way to diminish the negative visual impact of continuing development in Golden Gate Estates would be to designate sever-

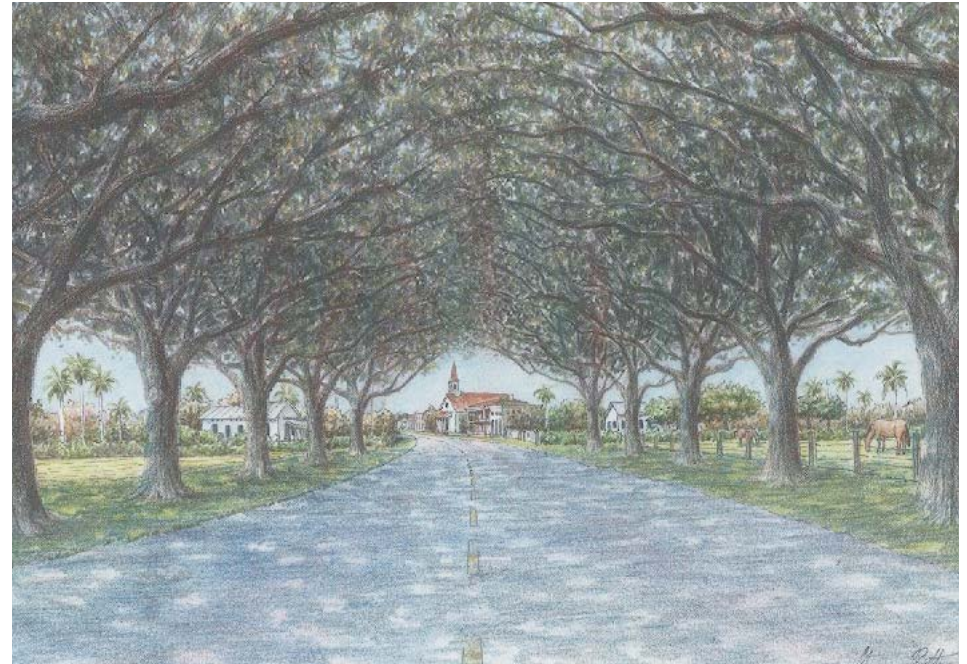
al key corridors as country parkways and change the development rules for the lots that front them. The idea is to preserve as much as possible of the country-road feel by screening private development from view. Along these road segments, deep setbacks would apply; the rules would require that the area between the houses and the road would be preserved (or thickly planted) with coarse native vegetation and trees. The roads would therefore remain (or become) thickly forested along their edges, and the houses would not be visible from the road. Driveways would be the most visible evidence of development. The houses will have a greater sense of privacy and solitude behind the forested setbacks, in exchange for giving up "usable" land on each lot and visibility of each house.

For this effect to be convincing, the setback will have to be deep (200 feet or more). This concept would therefore work best in contiguous locations where 5-acre lots remain the norm, but may not practical for areas where the 1.14- or 2-acre lots are less predominant.

The country parkways approach will change the visual impact of growth, but not other impacts of growth.

3. New Rural Road Connections

The Mobility Manual spells out the need for more road connections throughout Collier County, and this is a key part of accommodating the growth in Golden Gate Estates as well. On the conceptual thoroughfare map, several possible locations are called out for potential new connections in the western reaches of Golden Gate Estates. (The exact, most feasible alignment of each road would still need to be confirmed.) Similar two-lane



An example of a new rural roadway connection, with trees and terminated vista; a hamlet beyond

collector roads further east could also provide alternate routes for travel between Golden Gate Estates and coastal Collier County. There are also "missing links" in the Golden Gate Estates road system where short road segments or new bridges could be installed to make the existing road network more functional. All of these could be shown on the thoroughfare plan proposed in the Mobility Manual and constructed as the need and resources arise.

The Mobility Manual also explains that a network of several smaller roads is superior to one overly widened road. For the most part, the new road connections could largely resemble the country roads already in place around the estates, simple two-lane thoroughfares with swales on the sides and no fancy details.

In two ways, however, these roads should be made better than the typical roads in Golden Gate Estates:

First, native shade trees should be planted along these roads, closely spaced

in rows near the edge of the pavement. Where there is an open drainage swale or borrow ditch, the row of trees should be planted between the roadway and the ditch, not on the outside of the ditch. The tree canopy should be encouraged to overhang the roadway. This is a common feature shared by roads of rural character all around the world.

Second, these new connections should not run as straightaways for miles without interruption. While a curvy, pseudo-picturesque design is not needed, the alignment of the road can be shifted at key points to end the long vistas and provide for traffic calming. Angular shifts and offsets are preferable to high-speed curves. Only subtle offsets or grid shifts are needed, and therefore these will not show up on large-scale maps.

4. Creating Rural Crossroads

The householders in North Golden Gate Estates need more convenient access to basic commercial activities, especially, for example, in the eastern sections near Everglades Boulevard. Yet residents were adamant that they do not want NGGE overrun by strip shopping centers and bright plastic convenience marts. Nobody likes the artificial image of the typical strip center or those look alike franchises. But the answer is not an across-the-board barring of commercial uses. Like so many of the other elements of community character, the answer lies in design.

Even remote country settlements typically have a general store at an important crossroads, and these can be charming. A handful of such crossroads stores can meet many of the needs for which people are driving long distances west today, and become hallmarks of Old Florida community identity at the



New rural road connections can be very narrow, with built-in traffic calming.



Rural crossroads can provide for small scale commercial needs in remote areas of the subdivided periphery.



The Commissary on Third Street South, c. 1928:
appropriate architecture for rural crossroads

same time. These rural crossroads would have just one or two buildings each, closely associated with the roadside.

The update to the Golden Gate Area Master Plan would identify the design and locational standards for crossroads stores. An ideal style would be for the commercial buildings in the rural crossroads to emulate the best of the Old Florida style pioneer buildings around which Collier County was originally settled. Good examples for study include Ted Smallwood's Store in Chokoloskee, Anderson's Corner in the Redland, and the old Commissary on Third Street South, Naples. To accomplish this, the rural crossroads building should be two stories tall, and have a covered porch facing the road. For best results, windows should be vertically oriented and operable, with transparent glazing; ceilings should be high for good proportion; pitched metal roofs with generous overhangs should be the norm; signs should be hand painted and front-lit; pavement should be minimized; and overall lighting should be minimal. Other architectural features, such as balconies and awnings, are helpful, too. However, a simple rectangular footprint is best.

Beyond the building design, it's the position of the building and the site details that impart authenticity at the rural crossroads. It should be built up as close to the street as is technically feasible, set forward as opposed to set-back. A strict limit on the amount of parking in the front will prevent it from looking like a standard strip center. Gasoline sales and drive-through windows could simply be banned or very strictly controlled. Building footprints of the crossroads building would also be limited in size. (Today's just-in-time inventory management

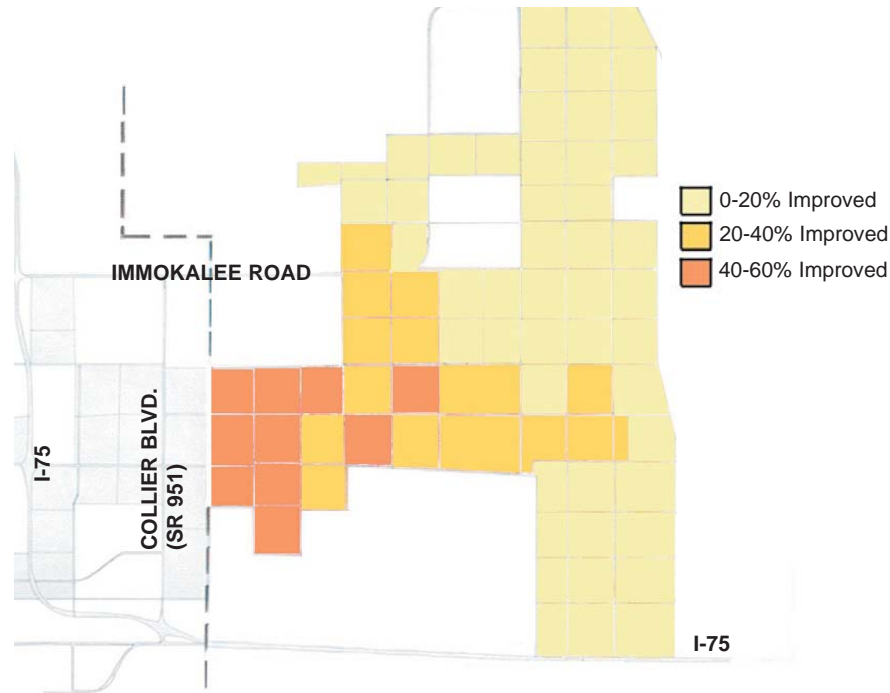


An example of a country store at a rural crossroad

systems make it feasible to offer customers a wide variety of items without storing large quantities and without enormous amounts of shelf space – just like in the country emporium of the past. Big store formats are not needed, and if a commercial enterprise wants to operate here, it will find a way to fit the requirements. If operators don't think the market is ready for a specialized store, then let them wait. There is no urgency to accept whatever someone proposes.)

Despite the intention of small-scale and tight control, the insertion of commercial uses into this vast area of residences is likely to be controversial and many people will be nervously watching the outcomes. Therefore in addition to customized standards, it would be appropriate to create a specialized design review process through which buildings proposed for rural crossroads must pass.

The spread-out nature of the limited market does in fact mean that only a few operators will be able to locate in Golden Gate Estates, but those that do will enjoy a remarkable position on an intercept course between home and competitors, in essence a captive customer base for an enterprise that thrives on convenience.



North Golden Gate Percentage Buildout Diagram This diagram illustrates the relatively low concentration of “improved” lots (that is, those with houses built upon them) in the eastern fringes of North Golden Gate Estates.

If these character guidelines are followed, each rural crossroads will be a visual asset to its surroundings, and will come to be recognized as a landmark. When giving directions to their home, residents will say, “turn at the country store.”

5. De-intensification

Although buildout has been spread out over a very long period of time in North Golden Gate Estates, it is occurring nonetheless, and eventually a house could sprout on almost every remaining lot. That would be an undesirable outcome from many viewpoints: traffic impact would increase dramatically; environmental restoration would be nearly impossible; and the image of country houses interspersed with woodlands will fade away, replaced by a suburban landscape of house after house. Yet growth needs to be accommodated, and longtime lot

owners have rights that need to be respected.

Golden Gate Estates could achieve a stronger identity, accommodate growth while avoiding a gradual buildout on every one of the remaining lots, and make life more practical by simultaneously allowing the creation of a limited number of small *hamlets* and *villages* (as described below) in targeted areas, in exchange for “retiring” platted lots in key areas. A simplified Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) strategy would be employed. The hamlets and villages would be the “receiver” areas, and lands most suitable for restoration, conservation, parks, greenways, or firebreaks would be designated the “donor” areas. In the hamlet and village areas, the subdivision of land into smaller lots than otherwise typical in GGE might be permitted, and the buildings would be clustered together to form a walkable, intimate, traditional rural settlement. In exchange, builders of these hamlets or villages would purchase lots (or development rights) in the donor areas and donate them to a community land trust or public agency.

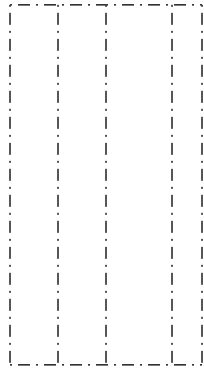
This concept would be most useful if begun in the very near future while some of the more remote portions of Golden Gate Estates are still largely undeveloped and many key lots needed for firebreaks, parks, and greenways do not yet have homes built on them.

A simplified system could be developed to accommodate this transfer of development rights. The system could be limited to only Golden Gate Estates so that all benefits would be retained within the community. Each new dwelling unit allowed on a smaller lot might be allowed only upon the retirement of the right to build one future home in a more remote location. Similarly, expanded commercial uses could require a number of homes to be retired, using a predetermined ratio of commercial square footage to homes. The entity receiving the donated lots would be allowed some latitude regarding which to keep and which to swap for other lots; in this way, small park sites or firebreaks, or even school sites, could be assembled in key locations.

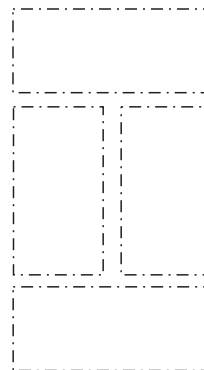
EXAMPLE: Subdividing a Large Lot



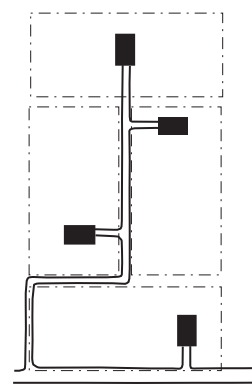
5 acre lot



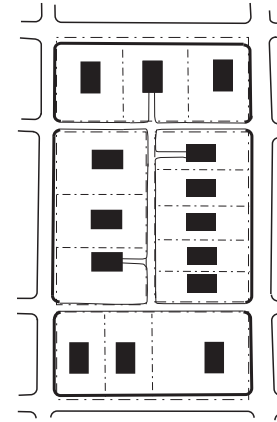
The **Wrong Way** to subdivide a 5 acre lot into four plots.



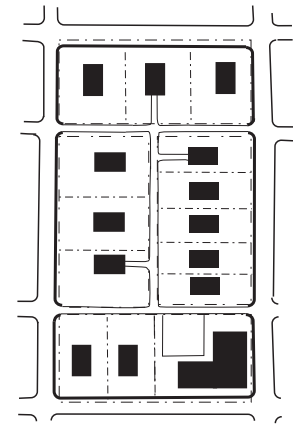
A **Better Way** to subdivide a 5 acre lot into four lots separated by *lanes*.



Subdivided lots should set up a pattern for further subdivision. Owners can make room for their children or friends. The fronts of the houses on each lot should face outward.



Over time, lots can be further subdivided. Streets can be added to accommodate traffic. The original lanes serve as alleys, providing rear access for parking and utilities.



Over time, as needs occur in the community, a corner store or day care center can be added.

6. Creating Hamlets

Smaller than a village or neighborhood, but larger than a rural crossroads, a hamlet is a compact collection of five to twenty houses surrounded by farms, forests or an otherwise largely undeveloped setting. The homes in a hamlet are typically clustered together around a focal element, such as a common green, or a civic facility, such as a place of worship, or a small store. Like the rural crossroads, a hamlet can contain limited commercial activity. Varied lot sizes, even attached houses, are welcome in the hamlet. Long, large lots – even those large enough for a paddock – are suitable at a hamlet's edges, provided the house is brought up to the front of the lot close to the other houses.

This intimate arrangement allows for neighborly interaction, pedestrian friendliness, and picturesque character. More importantly, it accommodates some population growth in the periphery, yet helps direct the growth away from areas where it doesn't belong.

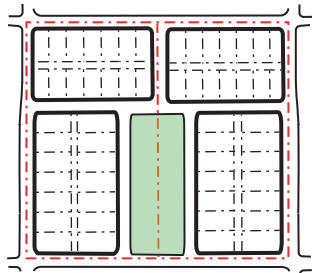
7. New Villages

A handful of locations around NGGE lend themselves to the creation of rural villages. These would be about the size of one small neighborhood. Each village would be a tightly focused area of compact growth surrounded by the low-density estates, agricultural tracts, or conservation lands around it. The villages would be designed according to principles of traditional neighborhood design, as described in *Growing New Neighborhoods*.

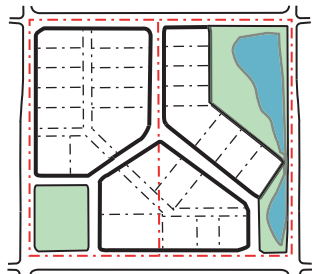
The villages should be reasonably self-contained, and preferably bounded by a greenbelt. They should be limited in size (preferably 40 to 100 acres, and approximately 200 acres maximum). Villages should incorporate commercial and civic uses, designed to serve both the village residents and neighbors in greater NGGE. This should include a grocery store, although its footprint should be limited to 20,000 square feet maximum. Other non-residential uses can be included which reinforce the Estates' semi-rural image and take advantage of the area's new role as an embarkation point for eco-tourism and wilderness recreation. For example, a general store, bait-and-tackle shop, outfitters post, or bed-and-breakfast lodge would all be appropriate for a village.

EXAMPLE: How to Subdivide Groups of Large Lots to Create Hamlets & Villages

Two 5-acre lots

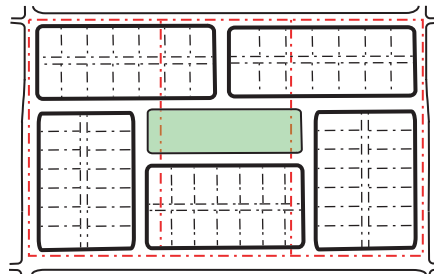


example 1

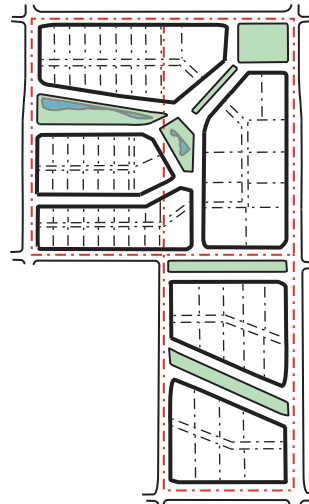


example 2

Three 5-acre lots

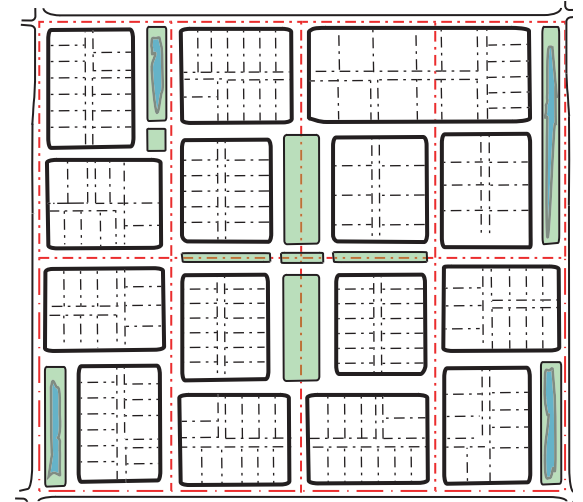


example 1

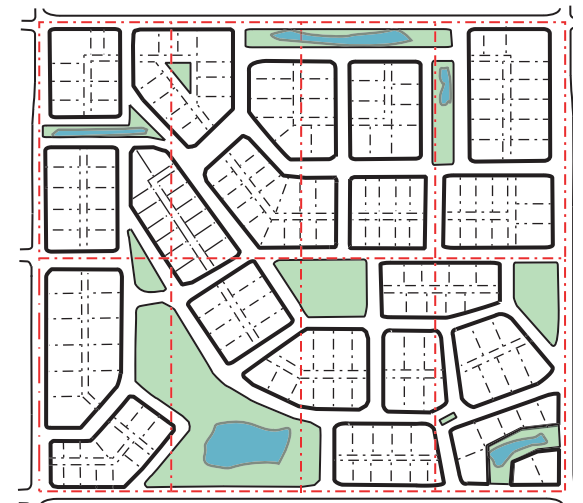


example 2

Eight 5-acre lots -- (one "ward" or "quarter")



example 1



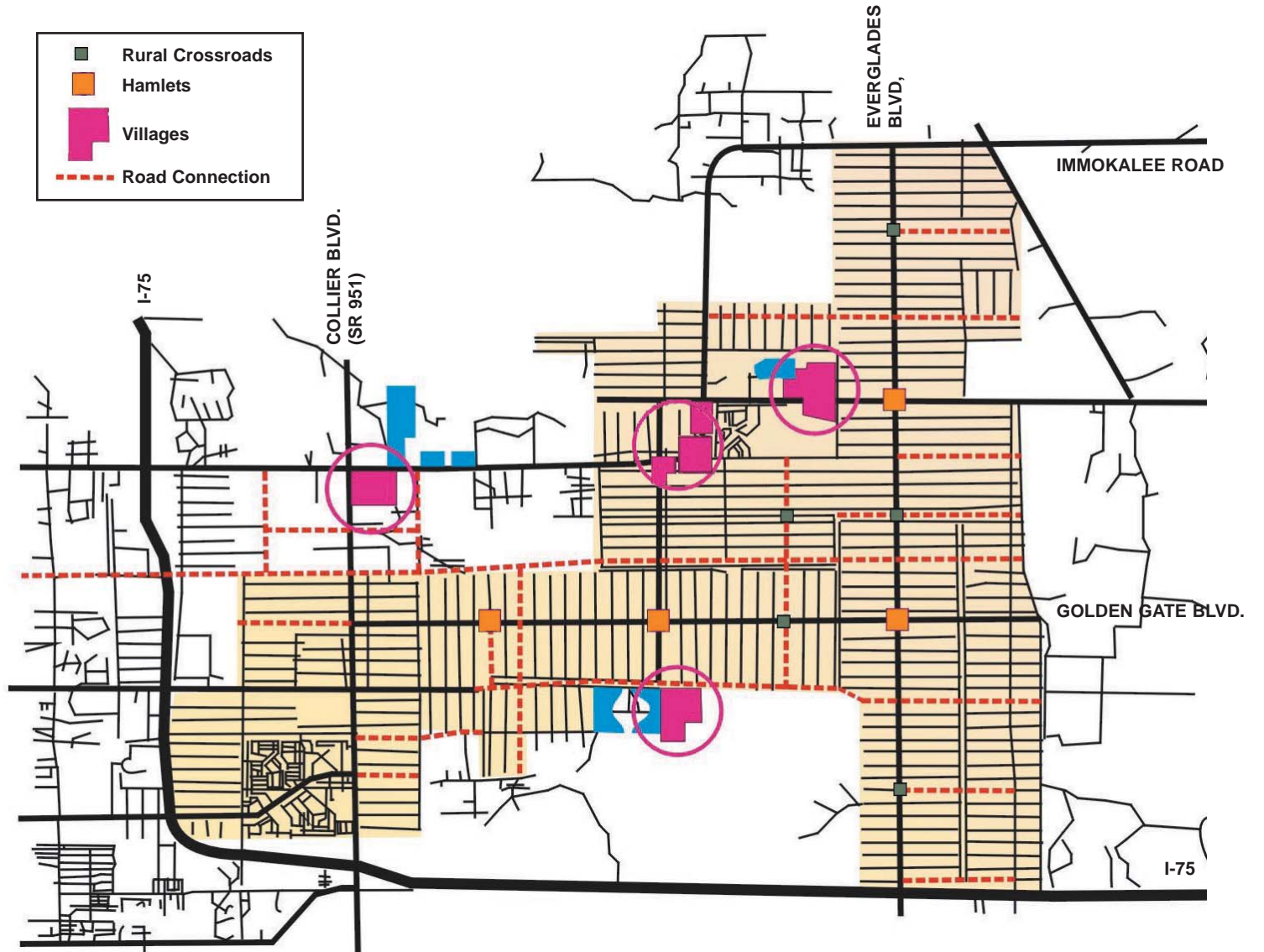
example 2



Illustrative plan of a typical hamlet, centered around a small green and civic building.



A hamlet is a loosely knit collection of homes, clustered together in an otherwise rural context.



Hypothetical plan of villages in North Golden Gate Estates

EVOLVING THE SUBDIVIDED PERIPHERY

SETTING THE COURSE

The Golden Gate Area Master Plan needs to be updated in response to rapid growth. Special rural design techniques should be worked out, in consultation with residents and property owners, to meet the demands of growth while maintaining valuable natural resources and rural character. Some initial ideas are presented here for residents to consider when updating this master plan.

GETTING THERE

Growth Management Plan

- a. Update the Golden Gate Area Master Plan, as follows:
 - i. Develop a plan for land surrounding the future interchange of Interstate 75 and Golden Gate Parkway so that it can provide a dramatic entry into Naples and Golden Gate instead of conventional interstate commercial uses.
 - ii. Define generalized alignments for two-lane collector roads and "missing links" in the NGGE road system and illustrate cross-sections for these roads that include rows of native shade trees that will grow together to form a tree canopy.
 - iii. Delineate general subareas of Golden Gate Estates having differing characters so that the updated master plan can consider appropriate treatments for each.
 - iv. Identify suitable locations for minor commercial uses in the form of rural crossroads, hamlets, or rural villages.
 - v. Prepare general criteria for a design review system for all new commercial development in Golden Gate Estates.
 - vi. Identify any specific areas of environmental sensitivity where further development

would be undesirable and other areas that may be suitable for a transfers of development rights into areas designated for minor commercial uses. Include the new "proposed publicly owned natural lands" acquisition area just north of Alligator Alley as shown in the greenspace manual.

- vii. Include a refinement of the trail and greenway system and proposed neighborhood parks as shown in the Greenspace Manual.
 - viii. Develop strategies for raising groundwater levels and reestablishing at least parts of the original flowways that ran through Golden Gate Estates. Flowways could be reestablished on public lands as actual sloughs or could remain as forested greenbelts running across private lands.
 - ix. Identify potential locations for new neighborhood centers that could serve Golden Gate Estates. These locations could include land within or near the Orangetree settlement area or unplatted land west of 12th and 14th Avenues SE.
- b. When republishing the county-wide future land use map, include an outline or hatched-pattern to indicate the regulatory area included in the Golden Gate Area Master Plan so that its special provisions would be immediately apparent.

Thoroughfare Plan

- a. Include on the county's new thoroughfare plan:
 - i. a series of two-lane collector roads that will provide alternate routes for travel between Golden Gate Estates and coastal Collier County; and
 - ii. "missing links" in the Golden Gate Estates road system where short road segments or new bridges could be installed to make the existing road network more functional.

Land Development Code

- a. Establish a design review system for new commercial development in Golden Gate Estates.