

visioning process

The visioning process, culminating in the adoption of this Vision Plan, represents a commitment to pursue a common community vision through the implementation of specific actions and strategies. This commitment has been built through the momentum gained in the visioning process itself. Citizen involvement has provided a solid base for understanding desires for the future ensuring that the values and priorities identified by citizens are the foundation for the vision plan.

c h a p t e r t w o

Indian River County is engaged in a similar visioning process associated with its long-range transportation plan update. There is a significant debate that is taking place in the County with regard to the nature, disposition, and impacts of growth. It parallels many of the issues and concerns that emerged during the Vero Beach visioning process. It is important to coordinate the visioning, planning, and policy ramifications of these two plans.

2.1 CITY COUNCIL MANDATE

The vision process began in 2003 with the City Council's decision to pursue a visioning process and plan that would be open to the public and set the tone for future development in Vero Beach. The emphasis of the process and the plan, in accordance with the City Council's direction, was to incorporate and consider:

- Broad citizen participation
- Consensus building
- Community and architectural character
- Appropriate development regulations and design guidelines
- Key environmental resources
- Aesthetics of the community
- Integration of economic strategies

2.2 THE VISION TEAM

In January 2004, a "Vision Team" was established by the City Council to work with the city staff, consultants and citizens to accomplish project tasks associated with the development of the visioning process and plan. Fifteen people were selected from 85 applications to serve on the Vision Team. These fifteen people served diligently throughout the visioning process.

The Vision Team was an integral part of the visioning process by participating in public events, completing work tasks necessary for understanding Vero Beach, advising the City staff and the consultant team through the visioning process, assessing concepts and alternatives and, most importantly, through candid and detailed discussions representing a variety of viewpoints. The key to the success of the Vision Team in this project was the ability to work together, while sometimes representing opposing viewpoints with both passion and conviction.

This team of people found common ground on many points because they all recognized one common goal -- the preservation of the things that make Vero Beach a unique place to live.

2.3 PUBLIC MEETINGS

The public participation process began during the week of February 9th, 2004. During that week, six public meetings were conducted across the City. Additionally, a community survey was distributed, the Vero Beach Vision Team held its first meeting, approximately 30 individual interviews were conducted, and comments were heard from the Vero Beach Planning Board. Over 500 people were involved in the week's events.

The public meetings all followed a similar format. Key questions were asked in facilitated "brainstorming" sessions. Then participants were asked to prioritize the entire group's responses. A discussion was then moderated around the key priorities in each meeting.

The key questions asked were in the following categories:

- **Issues:** What are some of the issues, concerns, problems or items that need to be addressed in Vero Beach?
- **Descriptive Terms:** How do you describe Vero Beach to other people?
- **Strengths:** What are the current strengths or assets of Vero Beach?
- **Vision:** What does your vision of Vero Beach include? Describe what you see in your vision of the future.



PUBLIC MEETING

2.3.1 Priorities

Each public meeting led to a long list of issues, terms, strengths and visions. Recognizing that the vision plan must be strategic and realistic, a prioritization exercise was conducted in each meeting. Each of the participants were asked to identify their top three priorities needing to be addressed or incorporated in a future vision plan.



PRIORITIZING

It is important to note that the public generated the issues below. They do not represent the opinions of the planning consultant or staff. Important issues, such as tourism, education, or employment did not emerge as significant in this phase of the public process. Ultimately, however, they were addressed in the development of the Vision Plan.

Generally, there appears to be much agreement regarding the top priorities for Vero Beach. Looking at the results of all six public meetings, priorities are grouped in several thematic areas:

- **Community Character:** The appearance and definition of the City of Vero Beach within the context of Indian River County. Natural character, public spaces, gateways, history / heritage and neighborhoods.
- **Downtown/Commercial Destinations:** A vibrant downtown along with other commercial destinations that attract people and sustain community viability. Movement of people (auto, pedestrian, bicycle), street life, aesthetics, and diversity of experience.
- **Architectural/Site Design:** Creating and maintaining buildings and properties that reflect the desired community character. Heights, setbacks, densities, architectural elements, and landscape features.
- **Community Development:** Remaining a sustainable community through physical improvements and inherent community qualities or values. Family-friendly, the character of "old Florida", small town, and infrastructure investment.
- **Economic Development:** Recognizing and building upon the economic base of the citrus industry and other strong marketplace components. Technology, job creation and retention, research, and partnerships.
- **Implementation:** The ability of the community to follow through and achieve the desired vision that is determined. Government cooperation, financial and regulatory policy and processes, public participation, and capital improvements / supporting infrastructure.

2.4 COMMUNITY SURVEY

During the months of February and March, a community survey was distributed to attendees at the public meetings, through the project web site, and through newspaper circulation. Almost 1600 responses were submitted to the City of Vero Beach Planning Department. It is important to note that this was not a scientific survey. It did, however, provide the community with another opportunity to give input early in the visioning process.

2.4.1 General Findings

The survey asked a number of general questions to elicit a sense of how respondents viewed Vero Beach and what they valued about the community. The majority of the respondents were age 40 and above and lived in Vero Beach or Indian River County.

When asked to agree or disagree with several statements, a large majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following:

- Vero Beach is a great place to raise a family
- There are a variety of cultural and social opportunities in Vero Beach

- There are sufficient entertainment opportunities in and/or convenient to Vero Beach
- I enjoy a high quality of life in Vero Beach
- Vero Beach is unique compared to other Florida coastal communities
- It is important to preserve and enhance the existing character of Vero Beach in the future

Additionally, the results of the survey pointed to two key contributors to the quality of life in Vero Beach - small town character and the natural environment. Other important contributors included outdoor and cultural activities. Vital physical characteristics to preserving the character of the community were identified as the tree canopy, the low density/low rise building scale and massing, public access to the waterfront, public open space and historic preservation.

Finally, respondents were asked what their vision of Vero Beach was for the future. This was an open-ended questionnaire, and the specific responses were all different.* A number of commonalities or themes, however, arose around the concept of remaining a unique and distinctive place along Florida's "Treasure Coast." There was a strong desire to retain and incorporate the existing qualities of Vero Beach that have attracted people here for many years. It was also recognized that growth in the area would continue to occur, but that growth must meet the standards that the community desires.

**A summary report of the survey results tabulated to date and the individual comments made is available from the City Planning Department.*

2.5 KEY PERSON INTERVIEWS/INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

A series of personal interviews and meetings with individuals and groups in Vero Beach supplemented the broader community participation process. Approximately 75 people were interviewed. Many had applied to be members of the Vision Team, but they were not selected to serve in that role. Others were identified by the City Staff, the City Council, and the Vision Team or through citizen input during the process. Still others were interviewed through casual contact and conversation "on the street" by the consultants. These interviews frequently focused on the same issues that were identified in the public meetings -- issues, goals, priorities, and vision for the future.

A number of Vero Beach groups also asked that the consultants informally meet with them during the visioning process. They included high school students, as well as business and community groups. The findings from these interviews and meetings typically affirmed the findings from other participation activities.

2.6 VISION/PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK ALTERNATIVES

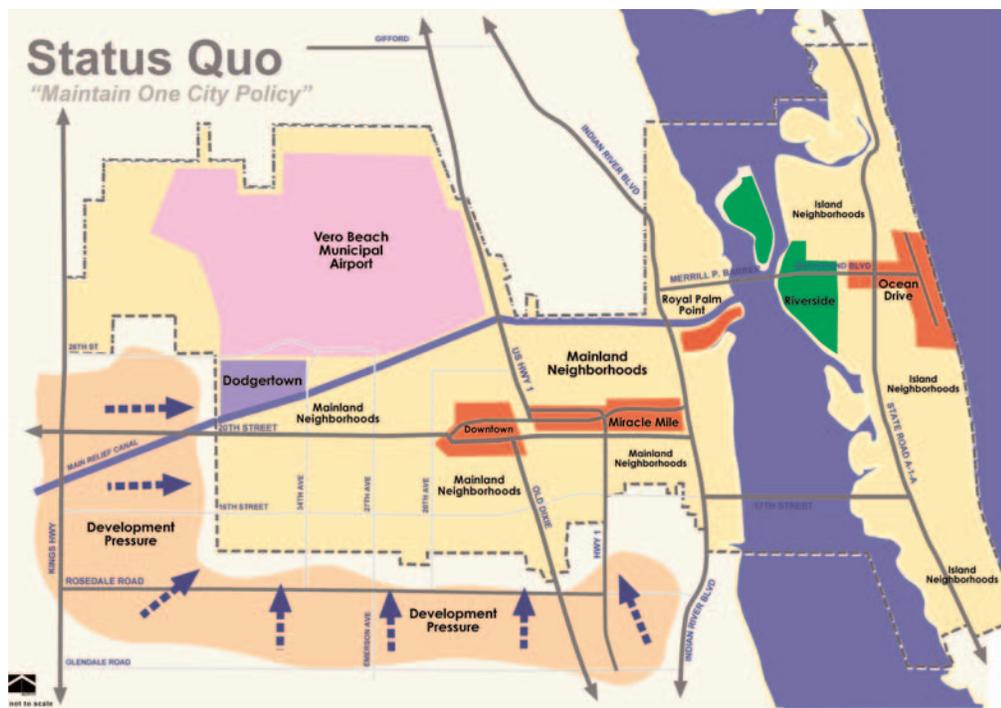
The public activities and Vision Team exercises during the first phase of the visioning process provided a sense of community values and priorities for the future. This general findings described above, along with an understanding of the current conditions and trends identified in Section 1.0, provided the context that lead to the development of three potential alternatives for the future of Vero Beach.

Alternatives are a way that a community can "visualize" its potential future. They are developed to elicit an open dialog about the assets and liabilities inherent in each alternative. A single alternative is not to be selected in its entirety.

The specifics of each of these alternatives were based upon perceptual mapping and visual preference information gathered from the Vision Team that identified key pathways, landmarks, districts and nodes, as well as desirable development traits.

During a public open house in May 2004, participants were provided information about the status of the project and findings to date. Additionally, they were asked to take part in a brief visual preference exercise, provide suggestions on a potential vision statement and goals for Vero Beach, and assess the three physical framework alternatives. These alternatives are summarized below.

2.6.1 STATUS QUO ALTERNATIVE - MAINTAIN A "ONE CITY" POLICY



SOURCE: GOULD EVANS ASSOCIATES

Represents a "stay the course" attitude regarding citywide development policies. This alternative would not regulate land development on a district-by-district basis, rather regulations would be enforced on a citywide, one policy fits all basis.

Key Features

- Extends current trends and policies
- More reactive in nature
- Easy implementation/few changes/incremental
- Can be contentious and prone to disagreements
- Edge development pressure for larger scale / out of "Vero Beach character" development in Indian River County

Neighborhoods

- Continued private reinvestment in unique neighborhoods (such as McAnsh Park, Country Club, and RioMar) on a site by site basis
- Little stimulus for redevelopment or reinvestment in deteriorating neighborhoods
- Pressure for tear downs / large "out of character" houses

Municipal Airport / Dodgertown

- Greater demand as a general aviation airport
- Underutilized potential for employment activity

Ocean Drive / Beachland Commercial

- Maintain building scale and stock
- Office use becomes more dominant
- Hotel / restaurant pressure increases
- Some national commercial chains appear
- Beachland Boulevard experiences loss of setbacks
- Persistent parking issues

Open Space

- Continued preservation of green space (i.e. islands, sensitive lands) as a public investment
- Continued investment in public functions and park qualities
- Preservation of the tree canopy

Downtown

- Downtown is a traffic "throughway"
- Difficulty in achieving pedestrian-oriented retail center
- Individual entrepreneurial and government investments
- Main Street efforts continue

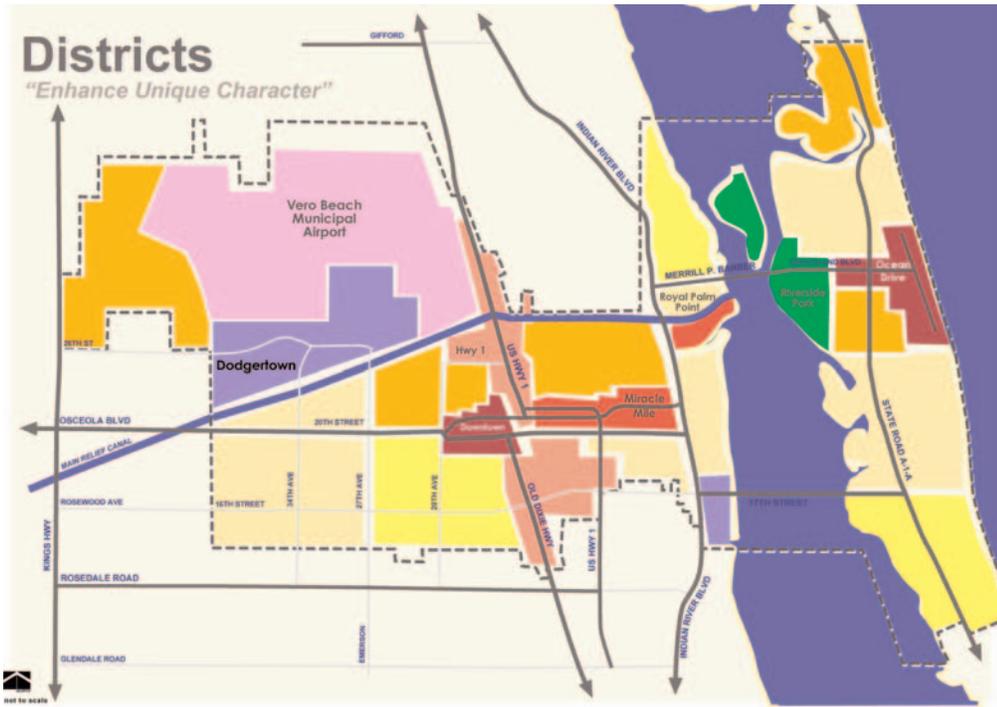
Miracle Mile

- Growth pressures for more national chains and "larger box" buildings
- Public efforts to maintain streetscape improvements
- Increased competition from commercial development in Indian River County

Royal Palm Pointe

- Persistent parking issues
- Loss of ground floor commercial to other office / residential uses

2.6.2 DISTRICTS ALTERNATIVE - ENHANCE UNIQUE CHARACTER



SOURCE: GOULD EVANS ASSOCIATES

Vero Beach is a "tapestry" of districts, each having a unique character, rather than imposing a single development and regulatory policy on the city as a whole.

Key Features

- Unique districts each have distinct characteristics, plans, and guidelines
- District characteristics are based on community self-assessments
- Planning and community participation is intensive
- More cumbersome planning with more definitive implementation

Neighborhoods

- Policy and development decisions based on self-assessment as preservation/conservation/stabilization/rehabilitation classifications
- Neighborhood districts are regarded as equal to commercial districts in emphasis

Municipal Airport/Dodgertown

- Develop a regional business park and recreational complex

Ocean Drive Commercial

- Maintain ground floor retail
- Employ a historic preservation strategy to maintain "contributing" building stock
- Encourage "walkability" through enhanced pedestrian features.
- Maintain existing "building bulk" and setbacks through architectural guidelines
- Emphasize on-street parking and surface parking behind buildings, as well as a district approach to parking

Beachland Boulevard

- Reinforce consistent "green" setback with landscaped parking allowed
- Utilize architectural guidelines to regulate building mass
- Enhance "gateway" character
- Develop as a premier, low-rise office development corridor with some residual retail uses

Downtown

- Reinforce "walkability" of downtown district through streetscape improvements and "traffic calming"
- Maintain key buildings through a historic district strategy as appropriate
- Allow flexibility in uses, while reinforcing a retail/service commercial ground floor
- Utilize a district parking strategy
- Build on downtown's function as a government, employment and entertainment destination

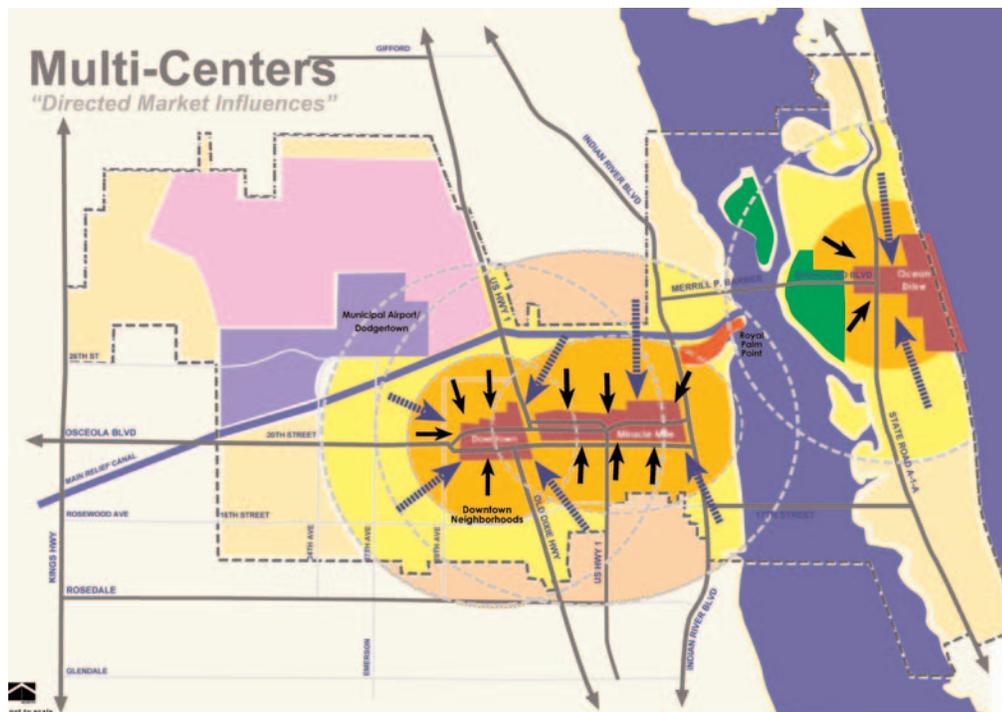
Miracle Mile

- Visually unify all property through architectural and site development guidelines
- Provide a district landscape and streetscape standard
- "Buffer district from adjacent neighborhoods through landscape and/or architectural features
- Maintain Miracle Mile as Vero Beach's only "big box" retail district

Royal Palm Pointe

- Emphasize restaurants, entertainment and boutique retail
- Enhance entrance gateway and function from Indian River Boulevard
- Provide a district shared parking solution including parking in the landscaped median

2.6.3 MULTI-CENTERS ALTERNATIVE - DIRECTED MARKET INFLUENCES



SOURCE: GOULD EVANS ASSOCIATES

Market influences are recognized, enhanced, and directed to create a series of mixed-use centers, each with a unique character.

Key Features

- Builds on existing commercial district districts
- Protects neighborhoods through zoning policies and design guidelines
- Provides services through market catchment areas
- Requires a more proactive development approach
- Coordinate with Indian River County on commercial development decisions to keep strong "market catchment" areas

Neighborhoods

- Protection of neighborhoods through guidelines that prevent the intrusion of commercial development
- Neighborhood development is market driven - optional guidelines for neighborhood character and scale

Municipal Airport / Dodgertown

- Requires an active and targeted job attraction program
- Protection of Vero Beach character through additional zoning and design guidelines for industrial uses

Ocean Drive Commercial

- Promotes boutique retail and office/residential mixed-use environment
- Preserves retail ground floor by allowing mixed-use development on upper floor(s)
- Requires a district parking approach

Beachland Boulevard

- Enhances the boulevard street qualities of setback with a green spine
- Reinforces corridor as a premier office area
- Address parking and setback issues through consistent site design application

Downtown

- Creates a full service, multi-level, mixed-use district
- Emphasis on a "walkable" center
- Relieves pressure on island commercial and retail
- Requires "twin pairs" traffic management solution
- Requires a district parking approach

Miracle Mile

- Maintain and enhance as Vero Beach's regional commercial district
- Requires the development of design guidelines to maintain district character
- Continued enhancement of streetscape and parking lot landscaping

Royal Palm Pointe

- Site-by-site redevelopment in an opportunistic manner - market driven manner - including residential, office, and commercial uses