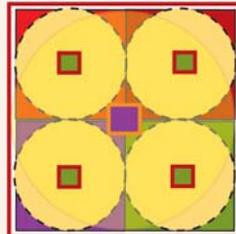




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# Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Community Visioning Workshop Report

December 2005



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# Introduction

The Mount Plymouth – Sorrento Community is located in Eastern Lake County on the edge of the Wekiva River Protection Area. Tremendous growth is happening in this region and will continue due to the proposed extension of the western beltway and the dynamic of our regional growth pattern. The Lake County Commissioners had the foresight to create a citizen advisory committee in Mount Plymouth – Sorrento to advise the Commission and the Growth Management Department about residents' vision for the future of this area.

The first study completed for the Mount Plymouth Planning Advisory Committee was in 2003 by Miller Sellen Conner and Walsh. This study served to inform local residents about existing trends and conditions as well as make recommendations for the future. New developments have come and several of the objectives and recommendations of that report have not been met. Two years later new issues face the community and residents wish to refine their vision.

The Central Florida Sustainable Communities Initiative (CFSCI) became involved with the Mount Plymouth – Sorrento Planning Advisory Committee in September of 2005. CFSCI offered to conduct a visioning session with the help of Lake County's Growth Management Department to take a fresh look at what the residents of Mount Plymouth – Sorrento thought about their community and what they want to see happen in the future.

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 a community visioning workshop was held in Mount Plymouth – Sorrento. CFSCI gave presentations at the workshop on regional trends and best planning practices. Lake County staff explained the current and future land use zoning along with the future transportation changes. Residents participated in two activities that enabled them to express their opinions. The final item on the agenda was a presentation by CFSCI that included recommendations and a sketch plan for how the community could grow. Seventy six residents came to the workshop and sixty four of them participated in the activities that gathered feedback. This report serves as a summary of the discussions and presentations at the workshop.



Mount Plymouth Park



Sorrento Post Office



A home in Historic Sorrento



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# Executive Summary

Mount Plymouth - Sorrento is in a prime location and is facing tremendous development pressures. These pressures come because of its beautiful rural landscape, proximity to the Wekiva River Protection Area, and regional accessibility with the proposed extension of the western beltway. Many large parcels of land within Mount Plymouth - Sorrento will develop in the next few years. The question is what should this community look like in the future?

Residents have expressed many desires about what they would like to see in the future including: a village center, more services, and places for recreation. Residents have also expressed many concerns about: increases in traffic, decline of the existing streets, being unprepared for growth, seeing “cookie cutter” housing come to their community, and seeing the streets dominated by commercial strip malls. The new developments coming to the community should be seen as investments and not as threats. The Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Planning Advisory Committee is a great community resource. This group serves as the voice of the community through its recommendations to the Lake County Commission. The recommendations from this group have the ability to shape the future look and feel of Mount Plymouth - Sorrento using design guidelines and programs to improve the existing community.

The Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Community and prospective developers must work with Lake County’s land use plans. The *Lake County Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map* displays the vision for land use in Mount Plymouth– Sorrento. The *Future Land Use Element* defines the area as an urban compact node containing, employment centers, and three neighborhood activity centers. This node allows for a density up to 5.5 units an acre. This density is intimidating to many residents but need not be. Dense developments if done properly are great assets. They make communities walkable, bring amenities closer together, and provide the population necessary to support services, community centers, recreation spaces, and local stores.

A clearly focused vision for the community needs to be agreed upon. If residents want to see a village center, unique neighborhoods that are walkable, and community amenities, several steps need to be taken to start implementing this vision.

- The zoning and future land use elements for the Mount Plymouth - Sorrento urban compact node need to permit the kind of village center and neighborhoods that are desired.
- New developments that are coming should work with the Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Planning Advisory Committee to become a demonstration project that meets the design standards of the community.
- Programs should be developed with funding to address community concerns such as improving existing streets, preserving street trees, promoting infill housing, refurbishing existing parks, developing a small business incubator program, and others. (See the list of opportunities on page 14.)

Community building is a process that should be tailored each individual community. Mount Plymouth - Sorrento can have a sustainable future for its residents if the community comes together, agrees on a vision, and works to see it happen.





# Local Existing Conditions

Population trends, land uses, and zoning



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# Population Projections

The area surrounding the Mount Plymouth - Sorrento study area was home to seven thousand people according to the 2000 Census. The anticipated population increases through 2030 for Lake County and Mount Plymouth-Sorrento area **are double or triple the current populations**. Table A displays the projected population for the study area and Lake County. Figure 1 is of the Census geography referenced. The Mount Plymouth urban compact node boundary is marked within the Census Tract.

Figure 1  
Census Tract 309.02

Table A

Local population projections				
	2000	2010	2020	2030
Mount Plymouth	2,814	4,359	6,035	7,890
Sorrento	765	1,185	1,641	2,145
Census Tract 309.02	7,715	11,950	16,545	21,632
Lake County	210,528	326,092	451,489	590,286

Source: US Census Bureau and FL Bureau of Economic and Business Research

Population projections were calculated using the Bureau of Economic and Business Research population projections for Lake County and applied to the Mount Plymouth - Sorrento area. The Mount Plymouth - Sorrento study area includes land outside of the Census designated places of Mount Plymouth - Sorrento thus a larger geography was used, Census Tract 309.02 shown (Figure 1).

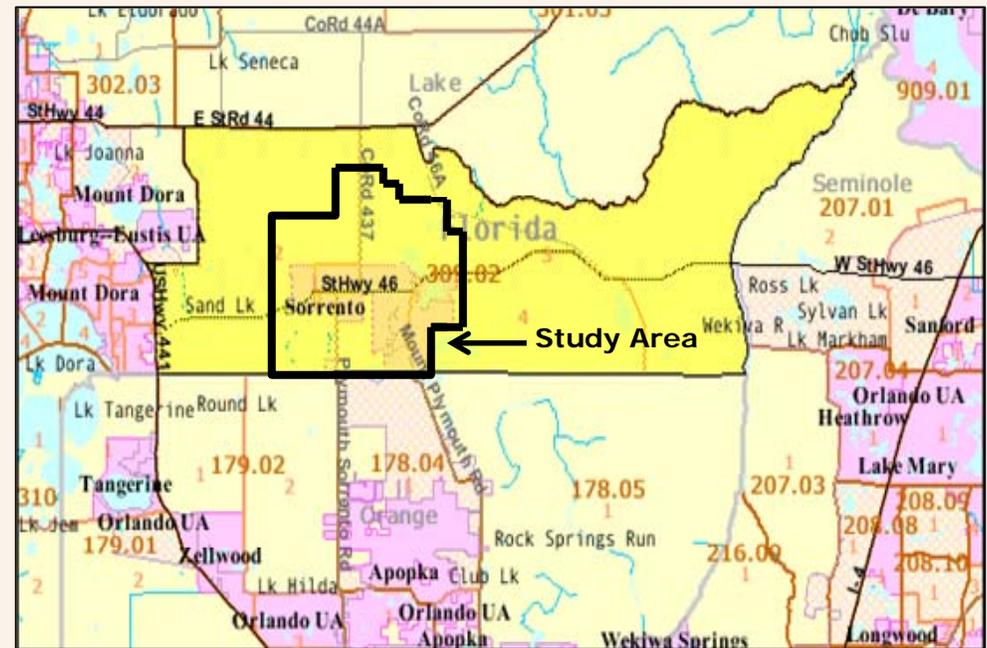


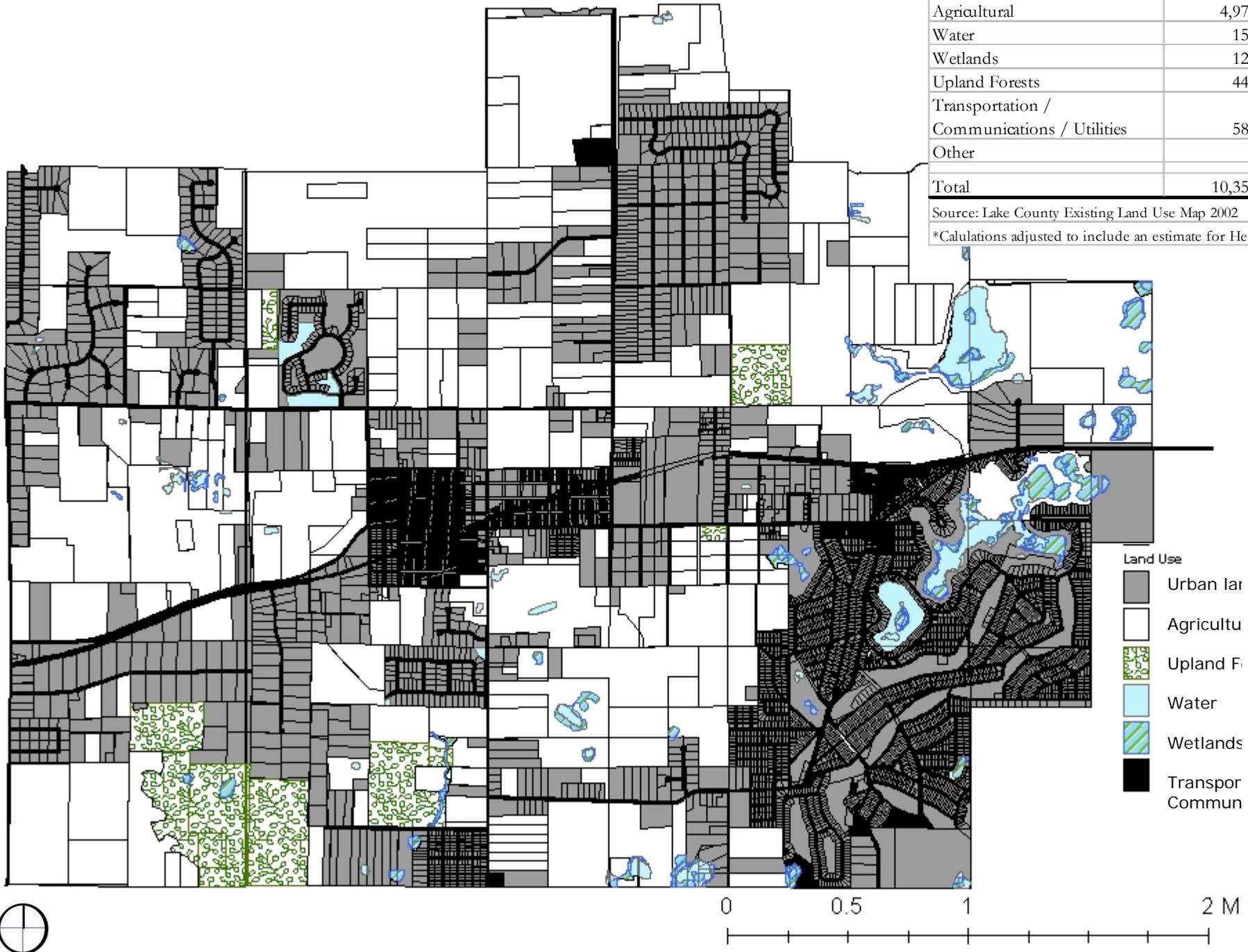
Figure 2

# Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Land Uses

Table B

Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Land Uses		
	Acres	Percent of Total
Urban Land*	4,058.62	39.2
Agricultural	4,978.91	48.1
Water	154.94	1.5
Wetlands	127.83	1.2
Upland Forests	448.81	4.3
Transportation / Communications / Utilities	580.23	5.6
Other	1.49	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,350.83</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Lake County Existing Land Use Map 2002  
 \*Calculations adjusted to include an estimate for Heathrow Country Estates

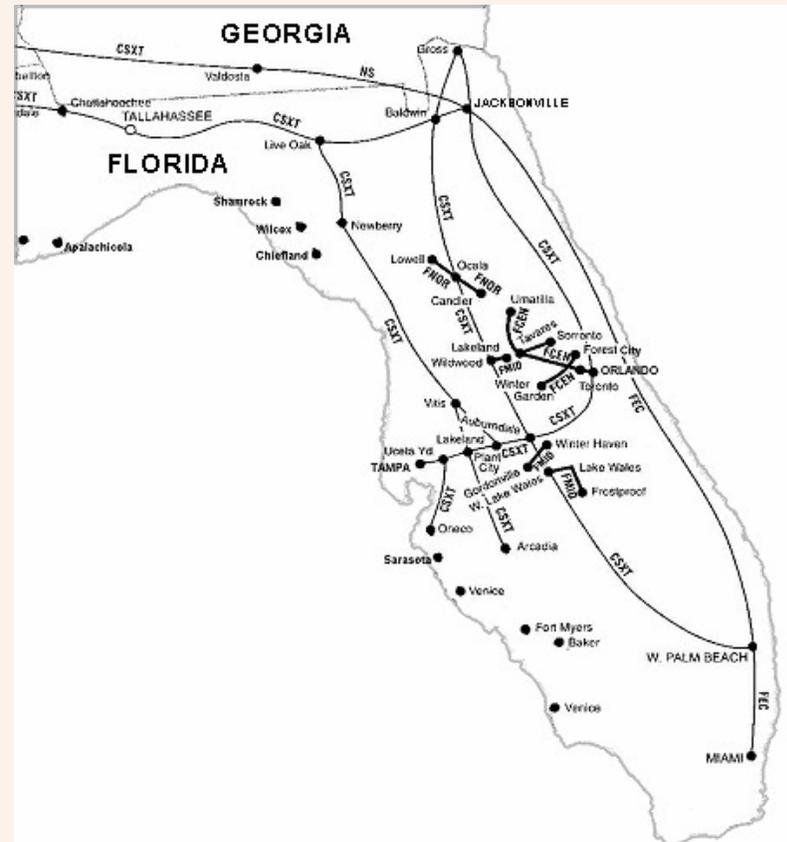


# Land Use Analysis

The Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Study Area is just over 16 square miles. Forty eight percent of the land in the study area remains undeveloped and is used for agriculture currently. These are the areas that will face strong development pressure in the next few years.

Wetlands and upland forests identified in Figure 2 make up 5.5 percent of the study area. Wetlands should be preserved and upland forests areas restricted to very low density development to preserve mature trees.

Transportation networks within Mount Plymouth - Sorrento include the CSX rail line which runs through the community. The existing rail road could be an asset for two reasons: a rails to trails program could convert sections of the existing right of way to a recreational trail and/or the rail line could be preserved with the anticipation of it being used as a commuter rail line in the future.



Source: Florida Central Railroad Website [www.fcrr.com](http://www.fcrr.com)



# Future Land Use Map Components

Figures 3 and 4 simplify the Lake County's future land use designations for the study area. The study area is urban compact node and contains eight categories.

An **urban compact node** designation is meant to concentrate development in less environmentally sensitive areas as part of implementing the Wekiva River Protection Act. (Objective 5 of the "Future Land Use Element" of the *Lake County Comprehensive Plan*.)

## Sending Areas

Allow for a maximum density of 1 dwelling unit to 20 acres or 1 dwelling unit to 5 acres if the Development Point Rating System criteria are met.

## Receiving Areas

Permit a maximum density of 1 dwelling unit to 20 acres, or up to 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres if Development Point Rating System criteria are met, or up to 1 dwelling unit per acre if Development Point Rating System criteria are met and Transfer of Development Rights area purchased and used.

## Urban Compact Node Wekiva

Allow up to 5.5 dwelling units per acre if Development Point Rating System criteria are met and Transfer of Development Rights area purchased and used.

## Urban Compact Node non Wekiva

Permit up to 5.5 dwelling units per acre

## Neighborhood Activity Centers

Commercial allocations from 10,000 to 50,000 sq ft of gross leasable area (approximately 1 to 5 acres)

**Joint Planning Area** with Mt. Dora overlaps with the study area and contains an employment center and a maximum of three dwelling units per acre.

Figure 3  
Future Land Use Map Components

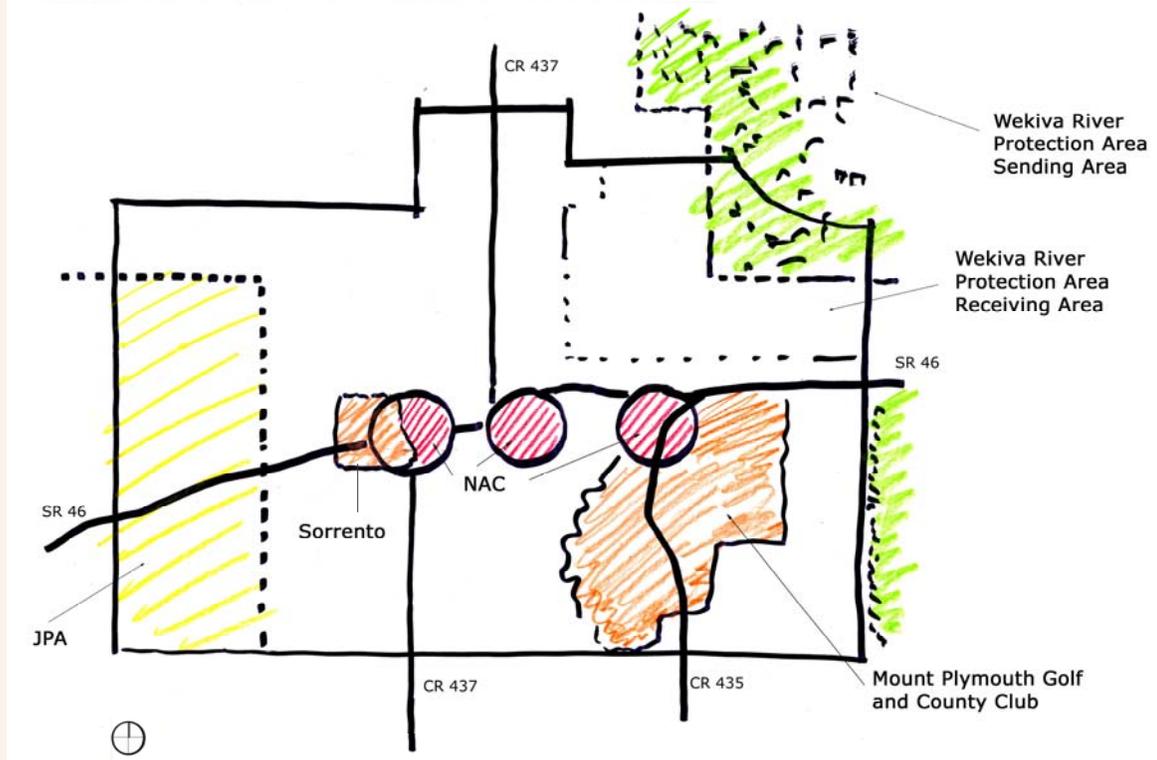
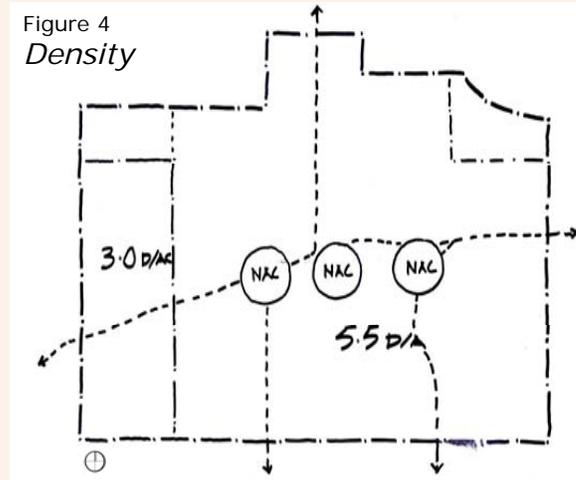


Figure 4  
Density



\*\*\*\*\*  
The *Lake County Comprehensive Plan* objectives for implementing the Wekiva River Protection Act place limitations on the total acreage of commercial developments at intersections within the Mount Plymouth - Sorrento urban compact node. The current language restricts commercial development to two acres of commercial development in aggregate.  
\*\*\*\*\*



# Regional Context

Transportation, growth, and the environment



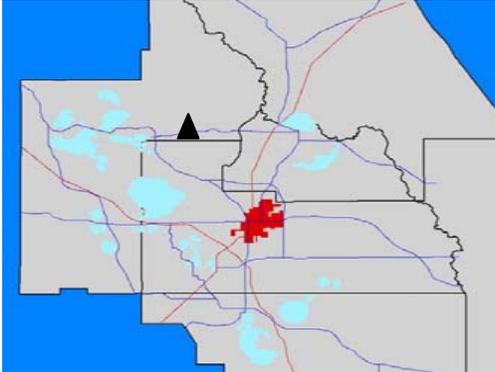
Figure 5

# Fifty Years of East Central Florida Growth

Urban edge in red

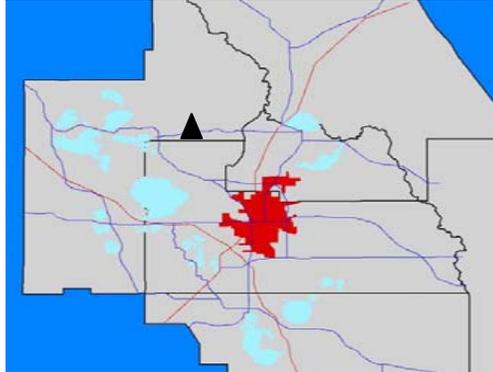
Location of study area ▲

1950



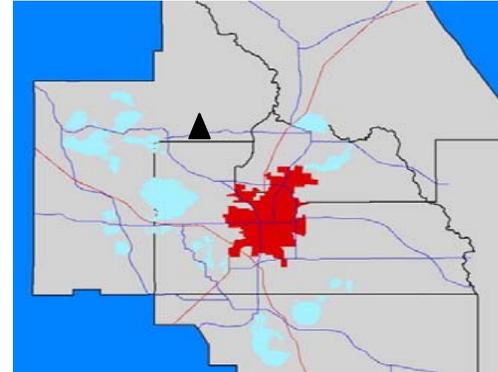
Central Florida Population: **414,825**

1960



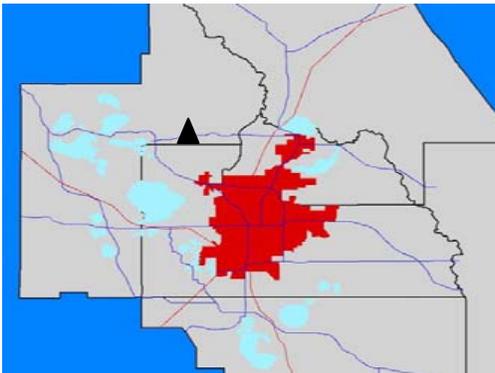
**831,358**

1970



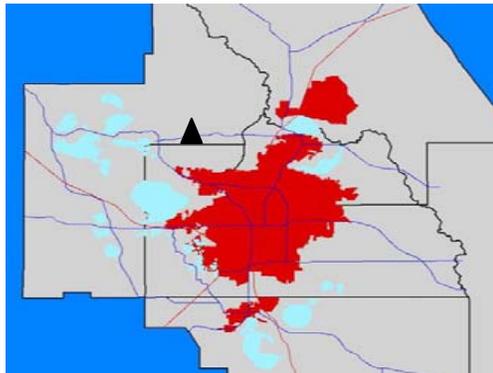
**1,153,744**

1980



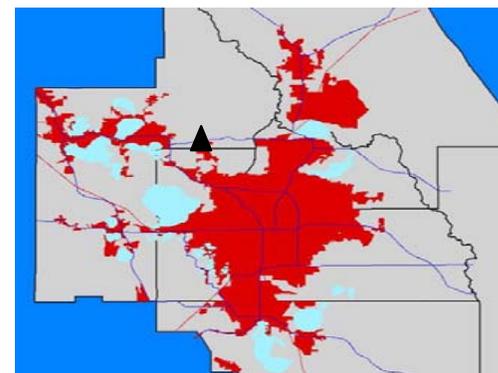
**1,669,050**

1990



**2,428,642**

2000



**3,097,892**

Figure includes the Brevard, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Polk, and Volusia Counties  
Sources: East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and US Census Bureau



Figure 6

## The Next Fifty Years of Growth in Central Florida

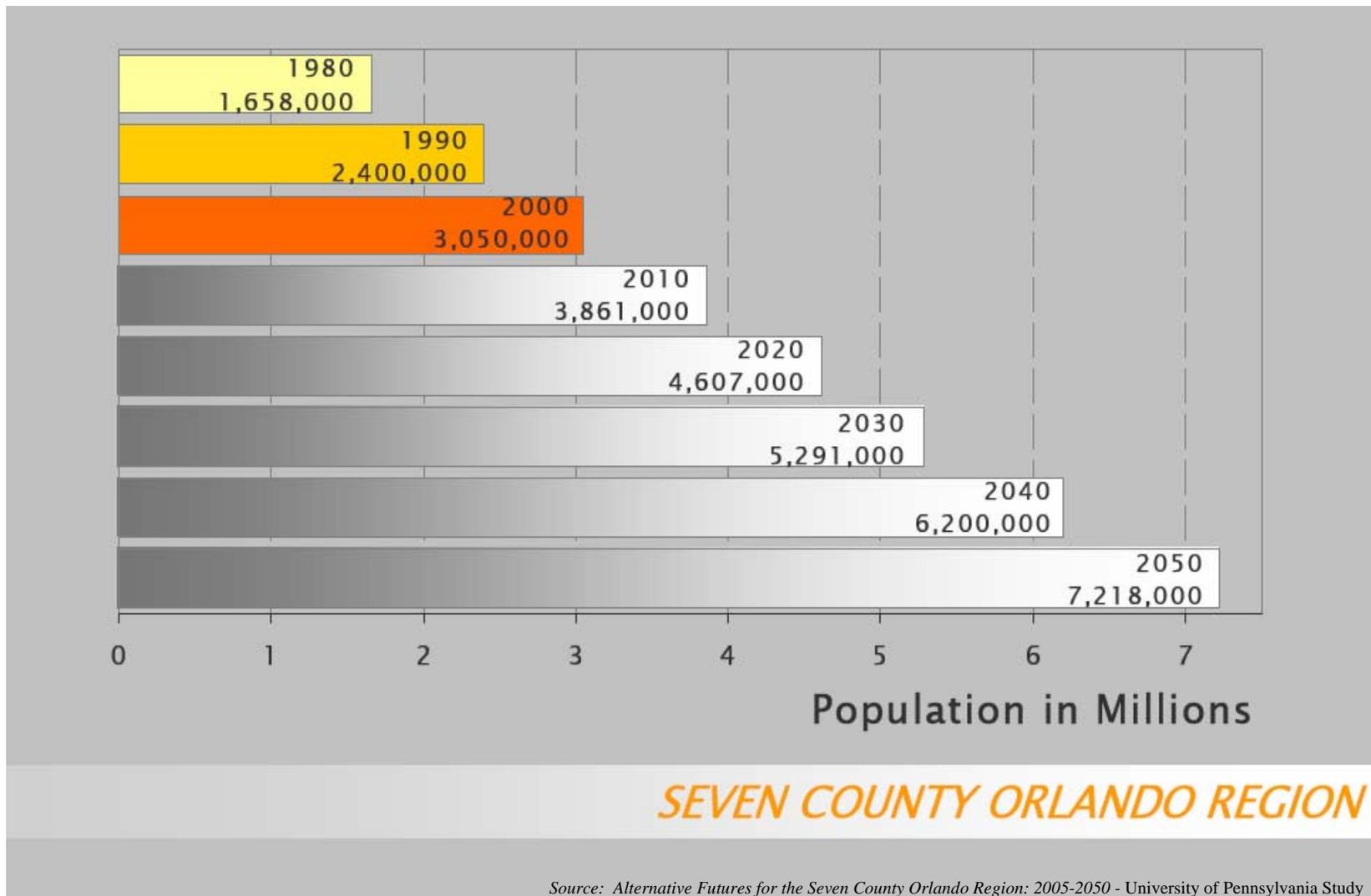
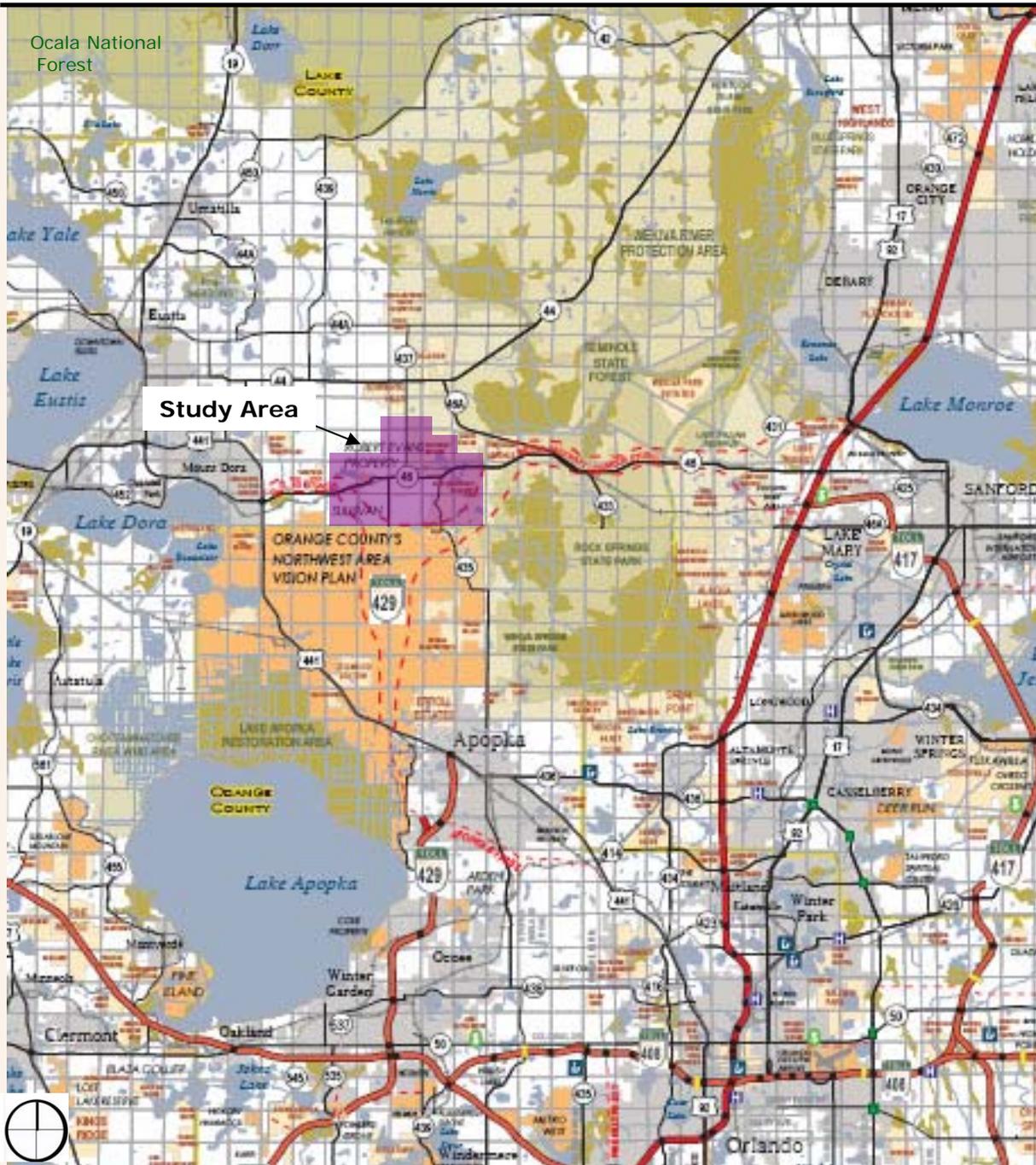


Figure 7

## Regional Context



The eastern portion of Lake County is rapidly developing. Its prime location near the Wekiva River Protection Area and the Ocala National Forest along with its accessibility to the Metropolitan region have made it an attractive location in which to live. (Figure 7)

This rapid growth can have lasting impacts on regional transportation networks and the quality of life for current and future generations in East Lake County. At present there are only two major east west roads within an eight mile distance. A land use transportation study for the region needs to be conducted to understand the future land use demands and transportation needs of this unique area.

This portion of East Lake County is bound by a chain of lakes, the Ocala National Forest, Wekiva Protection Area, and the Orange County line making transportation a potential future problem. The impacts of the completion of the Western Beltway and the Wekiva Parkway interchanges will have a significant impact on this sub region of Lake County.





# Resident Perceptions

S.W.O.T. Analysis and Community Values Survey



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# SWOT Analysis

The December 3<sup>rd</sup> Community Vision Workshop in Mount Plymouth - Sorrento successfully brought together 76 residents to discuss the future of their community. Residents participated in discussions and a survey about their preferences. The following is a summary of the community discussion that took place. SWOT exercises are meant to assess resident perceptions of their community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are the physical and social elements that are currently within the community. Opportunities and threats represent the future physical and social elements that may cause the community to change.

## Strengths

- Small community feel - narrow roads, dirt roads, no heavy traffic, dark skies, local merchants and businesses, no big box stores, wells and septic systems, tranquil and quiet, open landscape, country setting
- Environment - Wekiva River Protection Area, clean air, wildlife, wetlands, mature trees and abundant natural vegetation
- Community Spaces - churches, golf courses, library, chamber of commerce
- Historic Sorrento
- Diversity and character of homes along with properties (lot sizes)
- Mixed uses
- Location – near the Wekiva, Ocala National Forest, and well connected to the Metro area
- Mount Plymouth – Sorrento Planning Advisory Committee – official committee that report to the county, read up on the issues, and have a commitment to the community

## Weaknesses

- Transportation – increasing congestion, truck route on SR 46, no public transportation, traffic laws not enforced
- Infrastructure – no control over development because of the use of septic, roads are not maintained, dirt roads, no fire hydrants, no long term plan to provide infrastructure
- Schools – no local schools, overcrowding, no long term plan to provide schools
- Recreation – too many golf courses, not enough parks, lack of ball fields or community recreation center, no Senior activities
- Community Control/Government – no master plan for Mount Plymouth - Sorrento, no design guidelines for new developments, no plan to assist small businesses, existing and future zoning in conflict with residents' desires for the area, increasing traffic noise, communities don't work together, unleashed dogs, lack of access to healthcare, no tree protection program, no local employment opportunities, need for more retail and grocer like Publix, need for local non chain restaurants

## Opportunities

- Organize to increase citizen involvement through expanding communication using the chamber of commerce, a web site, and/or a community newspaper
- Increase the responsibilities of Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Planning Advisory Committee to address social concerns – small business incubator, community college satellite campus, increasing employment opportunities, senior activities, community recreation center, farmers market, medical facilities
- Define planning mechanisms to:
  - Create a master plan for the area's housing, commercial corridor, and traffic, the preservation of wildlife
  - preservation of agricultural lands
  - Set up a park system (rails to trails) and manage current parks
  - Create programs to restore housing
  - To create a sense of community using design standards and an architectural design committee
  - Create a walkable village center with calmed traffic, sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and public transportation
  - Program funding for parks, streetscape, community center, and maintenance (incorporation or special taxing districts to avoid annexation)

## Threats

- Not creating a community vision and being unprepared for growth - developers are able to build what they want, community is forced to incorporate or be annexed, and the police, schools, EMS are overburdened and not compensated
- Increases pollution, air traffic noise, and crime



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# Community Values Survey

The Community Values Survey is a medium used to quantify the preferences of residents for the appropriateness of different kinds of development in their community. The Community Values Survey (CVS) is based on a series of images both from the community and outside of the community and is grouped into categories with images specifically tailored for the community. The seven categories selected for the Mount Plymouth– Sorrento Community Visioning Workshop were: single family housing, multifamily housing, residential streets, village/market corridor, community parks and open space, major roads, and employment centers.

The December 3<sup>rd</sup> CVS was completed by 64 residents:

- 19 from Mt. Plymouth,
- 17 from Sorrento,
- 18 from rural places in the study area, and
- 10 other places (either outside the study area or unidentified.)

## Methodology

The survey data was combined and compared across four geographies: Mt. Plymouth, Sorrento, rural areas within the study area, and other (outside the study area or unidentified). There were no major differences across these groups. Each slide's scores average was calculated three ways the arithmetic mean average, median (middle vote), and mode (or most frequent vote). The standard deviation was also calculated to determine the spread of the votes, meaning the votes were within an equal distance above and below of the mean average. The standard deviations ranged from 1.7 to 3.1.

The arithmetic mean was accurate in capturing the most and least appropriate slides when compared to the other averages. The median and mode revealed more subtle differences in voting preferences. Any slide that received an average score of 2 or higher or -2 or lower were determined to show statistically significant differences



December 3<sup>rd</sup> Mount Plymouth– Sorrento Community Visioning Workshop



# Community Values Survey Results

## Residential Development

Residents strongly agree that horse ranches and homes on large lots are appropriate for Mount Plymouth - Sorrento. This is not surprising as this is the typical development that exists currently. Residents agree that traditional style modest homes on small lots - typical of some homes in Historic Sorrento - are also appropriate.



#1



#2

Residents feel that neither “cookie cutter” suburban development nor mobile homes are appropriate in Mount Plymouth - Sorrento. In general residents did not want to see multifamily housing, although they did not express a strong dislike about apartments placed in units that look like single-family homes.



#3



Multi Family Housing least opposed

## Residential Streets

Residents felt that the most desirable residential streets have street trees that provide a canopy. There was a very small difference between streets that had sidewalks and no sidewalks, the preference was slightly stronger for streets without. There was no preferential difference between streets with more manicured lots or more natural looking lots. Streets that were voted least favorably were typical suburban streets without street trees and no variety in the housing.



#1



#2



# Community Values Survey Results

## Village Center/ Market Corridor

Residents want to see retail and commercial buildings that are more than one story tall, have unique facades, served by wide sidewalks with street trees, street furniture (decorative signage, lighting, benches, and out door cafés). Parking spaces on the street and in small parking lots were preferred.

Residents strongly agree that they do not want to see the typical suburban one story tall strip mall with big box stores surrounded by acres of parking. Residents do not want to see commercial development with poor design, no landscaping or trees, dominated by power lines, pavement, and large signs.



#1



#2

---

## Employment Centers

Residents favored employment centers that appear pleasant to walk around. They should be landscaped with trees and have more than one story.



#1



# Community Values Survey Results Continued

## Community Parks and Open Space

The images receiving the highest scores in the entire survey were the recreational trails both for equestrian and pedestrian/bike uses. Residents also agreed that a central community park with benches, trees and vegetation, active recreation space was appropriate for the Mount Plymouth - Sorrento Community.

Residents did not want to see open space that is unusable or surrounded by parking or busy roads.



#1

3.56



#1

3.39

## Major Roadways

Residents agreed that they would prefer major roads with trees in the right of way and plantings in the median.

Roads that residents do not want to see are those with no trees along them, dominated by power lines, and signs. Residents do not want to see busy roads with bus stops and parking unprotected on the shoulder.



#1

2.11



#2

1.05



# Community Values Survey Results

Residents strongly agreed with what they did not want in their community. Residents overwhelmingly voted against poor design, monoculture of housing and streetscapes, poor quality development, and a lack of street trees. They felt that commercial areas should not be dominated by one story strip malls, acres of parking lots, and big box stores.



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# Conclusions about Residents Perceptions

The results of both the SWOT analysis and the CVS reveal two conflicting messages: residents do not want to see changes in residential development but do want more services and amenities.

The SWOT analysis revealed that residents would like to see more services including: public transportation, better road maintenance, and retail and recreation opportunities. These elements can not be supported without significant investments and a consumer population to support them. The reality is that change is coming and the status quo will not be maintained. Residents can continue to work to make Mount Plymouth - Sorrento a place that they are proud of and serves their needs. Mount Plymouth - Sorrento needs to unify as a community to work for a common vision. Detailed plans and programs need to be written and implemented in order for residents to have a village center, new community amenities, and improved transportation networks.

Mount Plymouth - Sorrento should work with both Lake County and prospective developers to create a master plan for the area that includes incentives for developers and provides funding for amenities in the community. This is a process of negotiation and compromise. The Mount Plymouth - Sorrento community has the opportunity to choose how to grow and whether or not to create a vision for the future. Mount Plymouth - Sorrento has the opportunity to take advantage of new investments coming to their community and make the area a place where residents want to live in the future.





# Study Area Sketch Plan Concept

Recommendations for how Mount Plymouth - Sorrento should grow



# More Background Data

In developing a sketch plan concept for the Mount Plymouth - Sorrento study area (approximately 16 square miles) the existing land cover and development patterns were taken into consideration. This part of East Lake County is a unique location because of the many mature trees and upland areas sometimes dispersed among a fragmented pattern of existing development. These mature trees should be preserved and protected when new development occurs, not removed (Figure 9). The existing development pattern shows a lack of a cohesive vision for the area. Figure 8 displays how developments have historically been allowed to “leap frog” without a connected transportation system. Development has followed along the SR 46 corridor as it is the major thoroughfare through and around the community. The sketch concept plan was designed with transportation connectivity, existing developments, and vegetative cover in mind.

Figure 8  
*Study Area Development Pattern*

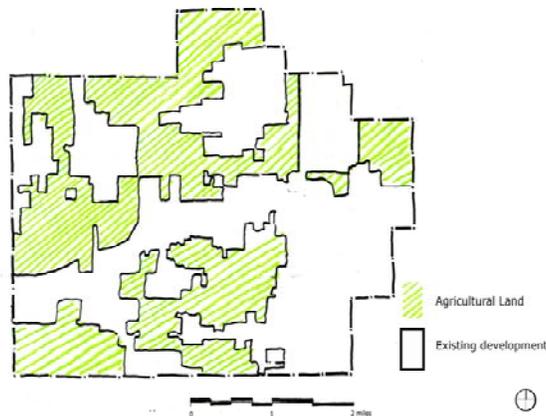
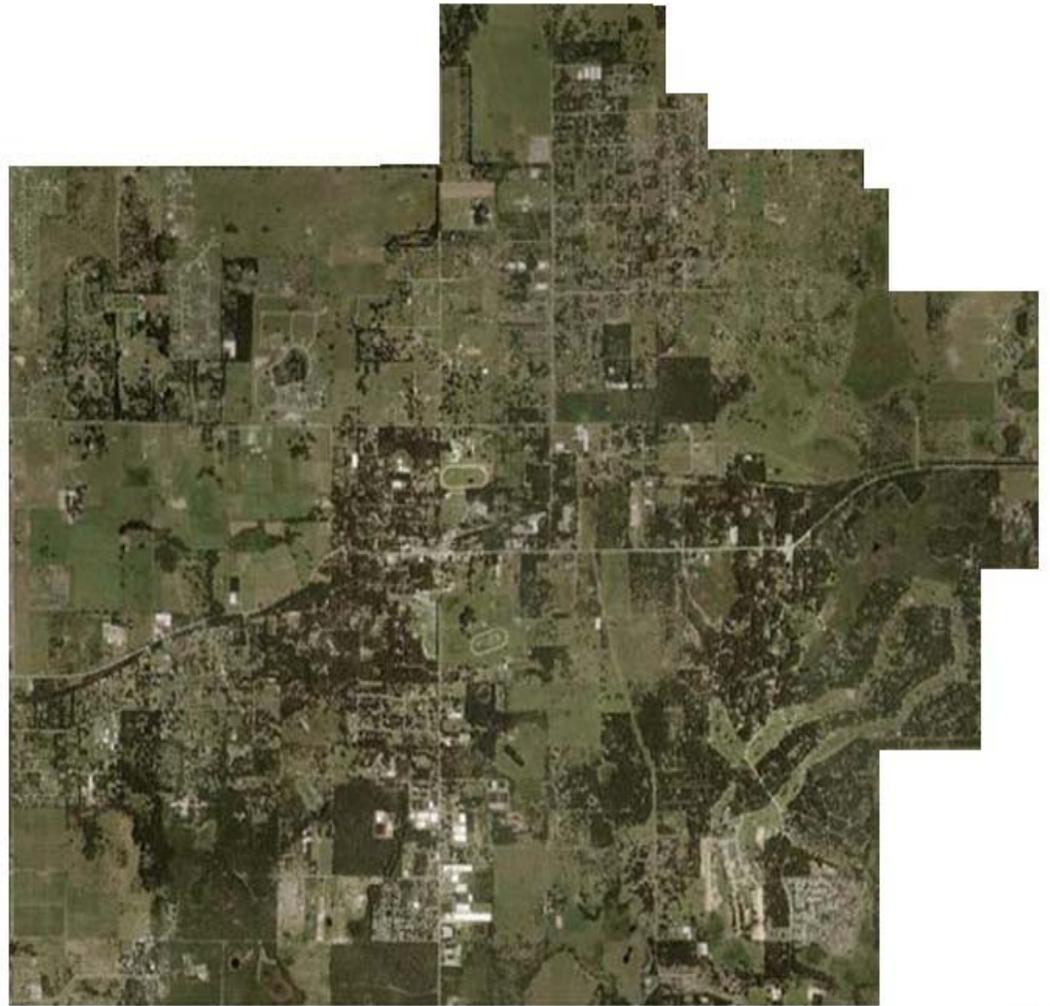


Figure 9  
*Study Area Aerial*



# Prototypical Model of Walkable Neighborhoods and Villages

The principles behind making communities that are sustainable and regionally growth savvy are simple. These principles are designed for new developments but can be applied to redevelopment scenarios as well. The principles center around a five minute walk to the neighborhood center, the average length of time a person will consider walking before turning to an alternate mode of transportation. This residential pattern is dense and connected by a transportation network that is a grid pattern. Figure 10 displays these walkable neighborhood principles.

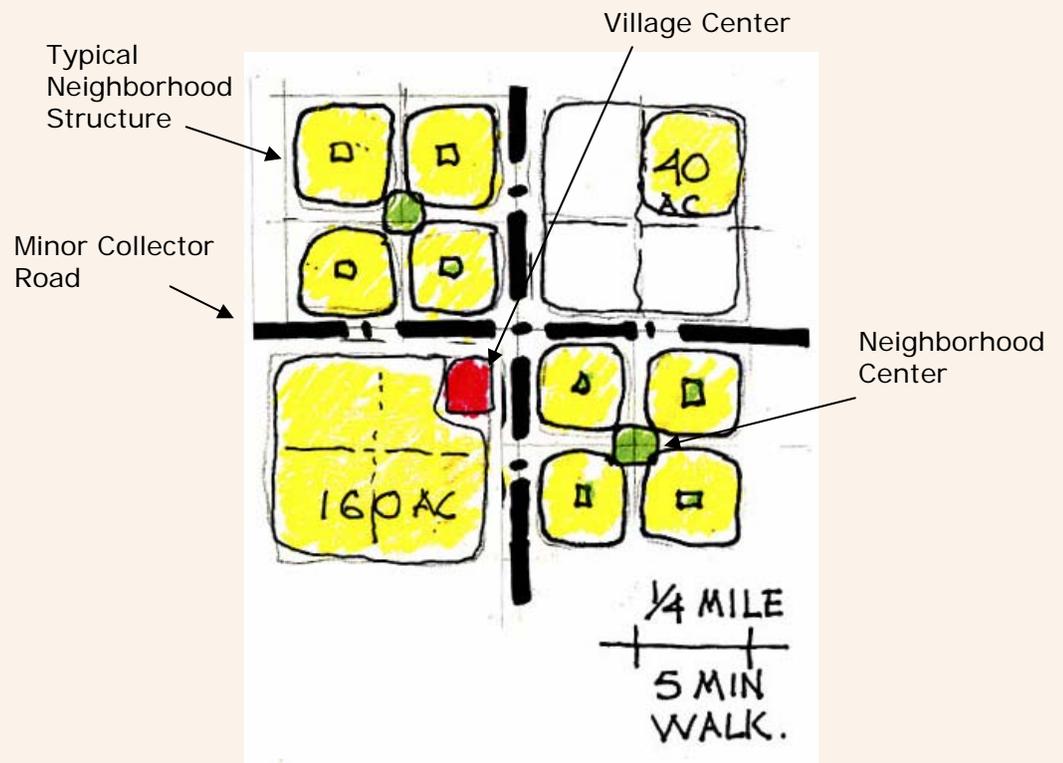
## Neighborhoods

The typical structure for a neighborhood requires 160 acres of land. There is a small park at the center of each neighborhood within a 5 minute walk of every home in the neighborhood. Other neighborhood pocket parks may be located within a 1 to 3 minute walk from homes. The neighborhood center may have a larger park, a school, and neighborhood commercial uses such as daycare centers or ice cream shops. All of these amenities would be within a five minute walking distance for all homes in the neighborhood (Figure 11).

## Villages

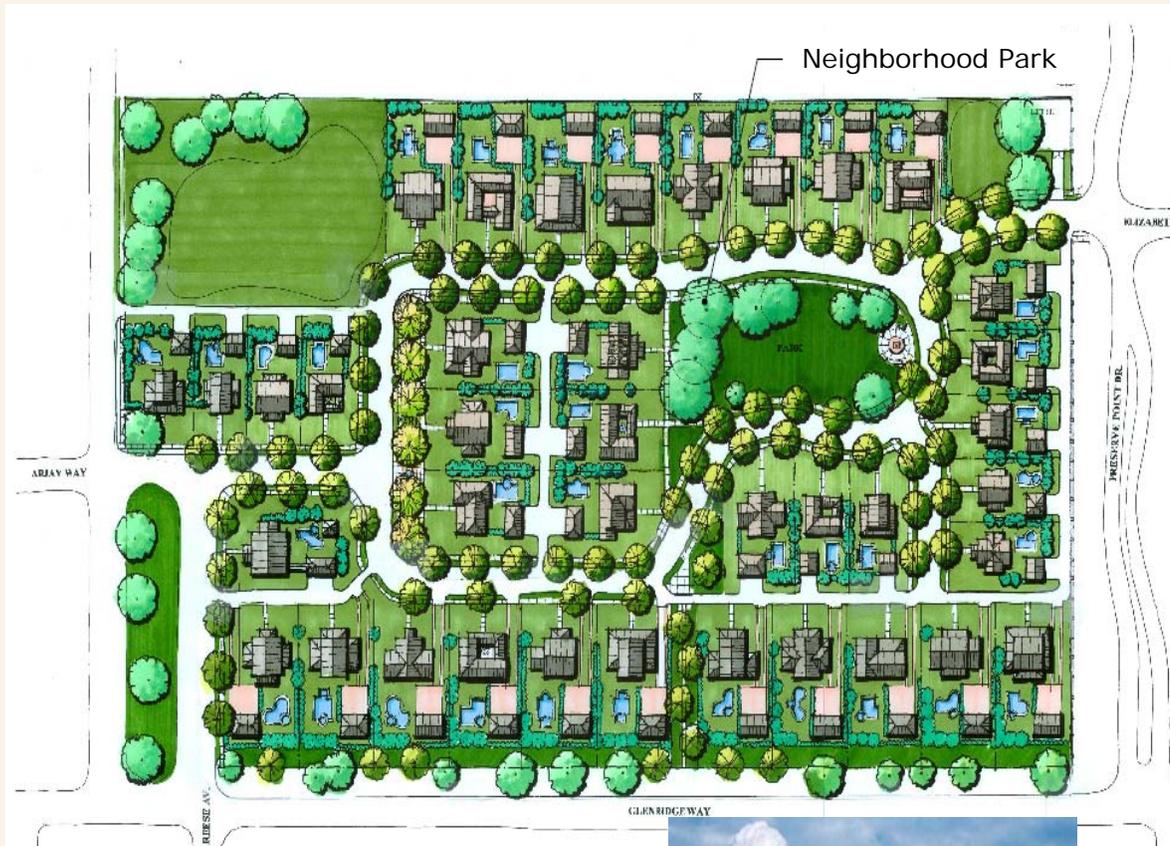
Four neighborhoods together form a village. Village centers may have spaces for a large park, grocery stores, restaurants, and retail stores. All of these uses should be compactly designed so that people can walk, bike, take the bus, or drive to them. The village center is also constructed on a grid which connects transportation systems within 640 acres and to the network outside of the village. Minor collector roads run through the village center and major collectors, are kept outside of the neighborhoods and village centers.

Figure 10  
Prototypical Villages or Four Neighborhoods



# Plan View and Thumbnails of a Walkable Neighborhood and Street Friendly Residential Architecture

Figure 11:  
Plan view of a walkable neighborhood



Park within a 1½ to 3 minute walk



70' lot home with a rear lane



50' home with a recessed garage

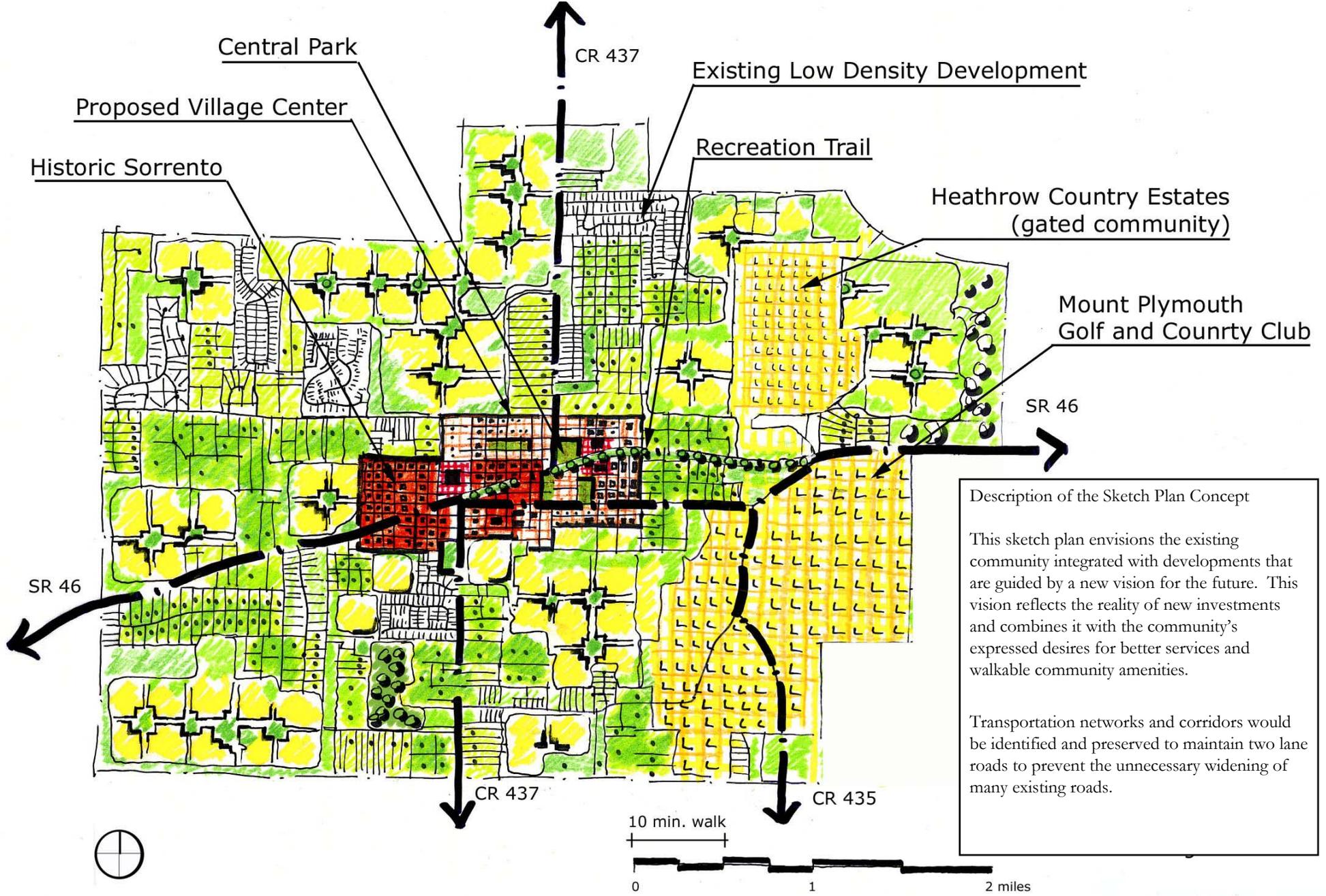


Residential Rear Lane



Figure 12

# Mount Plymouth– Sorrento Sketch Plan Concept



# Proposed Village Center Thumbnails



Infill Housing in Historic Sorrento

Figure 13:  
Sketch Plan Village Center



Central Park



Recreational Trail



Main Street in the Village Center



Village Center Farmers' Market



# Central Florida Sustainable Communities Initiative

## How the CFSCI started:

Over the past 25 years Brian and Myrna Canin have refined the craft of community building in Central Florida. Today, Canin Associates—with 65 architects, planners, urban designers, and landscape architects—are committed to creating sustainable communities and environments that enrich the quality of life treasured by current and future generations.

As a way of celebrating a quarter century in the craft of community building, Brian and Myrna Canin have established a non-profit corporation to share their expertise and support decision makers in their efforts to create great places for people.

**Sustainable communities are:** places that meet their residents' needs while respecting the greater good of the region. By planning with a clear vision and anticipating future needs, these communities improve in quality over time.

**Central Florida Sustainable Communities Initiative (CFSCI)** is a non-profit endeavor that offers technical visioning assistance to growing communities in Central Florida.

## The primary objectives of the CFSCI are:

- Education for stakeholders in Central Florida about growth trends.
- Development of a tool kit of planning and design solutions that promote sustainable communities.

Laura Knutson  
Program Director

### Central Florida Sustainable Communities Initiative

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