

Section III – Public Planning Process

A. Background of the Public Planning Process

Recognizing the importance of public input and involvement in the planning process, the Westgate/ Belvedere Homes CRA and the consultants sought to maximize the amount of public comment particularly during the initial stages of the process. This was accomplished with a series of stakeholder interviews, which included property owners, business owners, neighborhood residents and County planners and officials. The stakeholder interviews were followed by a community charrette held during the week of September 11 -18. The public planning process continued after the public charrette and included a series of public meetings and hearings to present the master plan. The following is a discussion of the public planning process.



Fig. 3.1 Jeff Koons, Palm Beach County Commissioner

B. Stakeholder Interviews

During the months of May through July of 2003 the consultants, Civic Design Associates, conducted over 25 “stakeholder” interviews. Each interview consisted of twenty seven prepared questions and each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interviews assisted the consultants in discovering the key issues and in giving the stakeholders an understanding of the strategic planning assignment. The results of each interview are available for review. Those interviewed included the following persons:

1. Jeff Koons, Palm Beach County Commissioner;
2. Jerry Allen, Department of Airports, Palm Beach County;
3. Remar Harvin, Director of Housing and Community Development, Palm Beach County;
4. Barbara Alterman, Director of Zoning, Palm Beach County;
5. Lorenzo Aghemo, Planning Director, Palm Beach County;
6. Patrick Rutter, Chief Planner, Palm Beach County;
7. Ken Todd, Jr., Water Resources Manager, Palm Beach County;
8. John Tatum, Recovery & Mitigation Program Manager, Palm Beach County;
9. Maziar Keshavarz, PE, Consulting Engineer;
10. Joseph Pitts, Realtor & Westgate resident;
11. Tony Hoffman, Surveyor;
12. Fred Wade, Business Owner and CRA Board member;
13. Jose Sosa, Executive Director, Westgate/Belvedere Homes CRA ;
14. Joe Kirby, Realtor and CRA Board member;
15. John Little, Builder and former CRA Board member;
16. Ron Daniels, General Contractor and CRA Board member;
17. Fred Stubbs, Planner, Palm Tran, Palm Beach County;
18. Bob Weisman, County Administrator, Palm Beach County;
19. Verdenia Baker, Budget Director, Palm Beach County;

20. Jon MacGillis, Department of Zoning, Palm Beach County;
21. Ken Rogers Director of Land Development, Palm Beach County;
22. Audrey Wolfe, Director of Facilities, Palm Beach County;
23. Dan Weisberg, Director of Traffic, Palm Beach County;
24. Charlie Rich, Department of Engineering, Palm Beach County;
25. Dennis Koehler, Attorney and CRA Board member;
26. John Sainsbury, Property Owner and CRA Board Member;
27. Alan Preston, Property Owner and CRA Board Member;
28. Steven McRainey, Property Owner;
29. Bill Tyson, Business and Property Owner



Fig. 3.2 Stakeholder Interviews

The results of the interviews revealed several key issues. These are summarized as follows (not in order of preference but grouped into categories):

Visions for the future:

- High density, mixed use development on both sides of Congress Avenue, north of the L-2 Canal;
- Hotels on Belvedere Road;
- Combine Hotel/Parking with Dog Track;
- No county owned property in the CRA;
- Belvedere Homes will be rehabilitated;

Drainage:

- CRA in C-51 Basin; lowest elevation in Palm Beach County;
- Current requirements prohibit infill development;
- Must buy two lots to provide for drainage;
- Need master plan for drainage;
- Mobile Home Park in lowest elevation – worst flooding, has been evacuated frequently;
- New drainage lake an option;
- Swales are now being used for parking cars- clearing them would help reduce flooding;
- Belvedere Homes area floods;
- FDOT built a dam on the L-2 Canal behind Belvedere Baptist for storage of Okeechobee Blvd. on L-2, but it blocks Westgate drainage;
- Small drainage ponds could be redeveloped;

Sewer/Infrastructure:

- Only approximately 60% of Belvedere Homes is on sanitary sewer; rest is on septic collection;
- Need sewer system in Belvedere Homes;
- New infrastructure will improve the area;
- Improvements need more funding;

Canals:

- Want a linear park along canals;
- Shopping carts and trash are in the canals;
- Need to make into amenity;

Residential:

- Redesign some single family housing for affordable housing;
- Habitat for Humanity will be building several houses, but had to buy land for drainage;
- Medium density residential on Westgate;
- Apartments on Congress;
- There will be a market for new development when sewer and drainage are installed, and property is maintained;
- Poor property maintenance;
- Townhouses; upscale residential;

Mobile-Home Parks:

- Southern Mobile Home Park provides housing for seniors and is well-maintained;
- Too many mobile home parks;
- Use Mobile Home Park area for water storage;

Retail:

- Mom and pop type stores on Westgate;
- Ice cream parlor;

- Strip mall with neighborhood services;
- Need more retail and restaurants on Westgate;
- “Tropical Bistro” in Lake Park is a model for Westgate;
- No place for lunch on Westgate;
- Neighborhood retail like dry cleaners, bakery, hair salon;
- Get rid of auto repair and auto sales;
- Big box retail on Okeechobee;
- Need a Publix supermarket;

Mixed-Use:

- Mixed use on Westgate;
- Medium-density on Westgate;
- Thinks mixed use on Westgate is hard to achieve;

Office:

- Incubator building on Westgate Avenue;
- Office development, in mixed use buildings, on both sides of Congress Avenue, north of the L-2 Canal;

Industrial:

- On county owned land on Belvedere;
- Landscaped industrial project between Westgate Ave. and Okeechobee Blvd.

Crime/Code Enforcement:

- There is no code enforcement;
- Need community police in Mobile Home Park;
- Need community policing in whole neighborhood;
- Need police substation;
- Prostitutes come out at night at Congress and Westgate;
- Night-time bad element;
- Adult entertainment causes problems in the area;

- Drug problem;
- Homeless problem;
- Need more frequent trash pick-up;

Airport and Related Uses:

- Consolidate rental car agencies on County land;
- Get auto rental off airport site;
- very little international air traffic; trying to get more;
- plans non-terminal development in Golfview area;

Airport Restrictions:

- Noise regulation requires insulation in homes in Westgate/Belvedere Homes;
- Height regulations;
- Do not want birds in the lakes;

The Kennel Club (Dog Track):

- Build a hotel and office buildings on the site; include parking garage;
- Conference center;
- Will probably always be there;
- 2,500 people on a Saturday night;

County Land:

- Consolidate rental car facilities there;
- Put Park and Ride Lot there;
- Use for multi-modal airport facility;

King's Academy Land:

- Airport does not want children in flight path;
- No residential uses there;
- Office/warehouse/industrial uses;

- Use land to hold storm water;
- 5-10 years to develop;

Hotel:

- Build hotel and office buildings on Dog Track site;

Parking:

- Remote parking on Westgate;
- Need tram for shoppers;
- Okeechobee stores needs more parking;

Land Development Regulations:

- Need regulations to control the quality of development

Parks/Recreation:

- Need pocket parks;
- Need skating rink; gym has been a big help for the kids in the area;
- Need adult programs;
- County Park needs access to Westgate;

Pedestrian ways, bikeways, and greenways:

- Make all streets more pedestrian friendly;
- Schools:

Transit:

- Need covered bus stops;
- Transit on Westgate;
- Think about regional coordination with surrounding municipalities;
- There is bus service on Cherry Road;
- Trolley Loop around neighborhood;
- Bus Rapid Transit on Okeechobee is pending;

Traffic:

- Slow traffic on Westgate Avenue;
- Speeding in whole neighborhood;
- Eliminate cut-through traffic;

Streets:**Westgate Avenue:**

- Need traffic calming;
- Roundabout on Westgate and Congress, Seminole;
- Commercial entire length of Westgate Avenue;
- More restaurants;
- Like Atlantic Avenue in Delray Beach;
- Fewer auto uses and convenience stores;
- Westgate should be a tree-lined boulevard;
- Eliminate turning lane;
- Extend Westgate Avenue into Old Okeechobee, and link with drainage project;
- Used as a bypass for Okeechobee;

Belvedere Road:

- Commercial and Office development;
- Mixed use;
- Needs a hotel;
- Florida Mango to Congress is underutilized;
- Airport related uses;

Congress Avenue:

- Needs a median;
- Many streets need landscaped medians;

Sidewalks:

- Need lighting;
- Need landscaping;

Wal-Mart:

- Not convinced it will be good for the neighborhood;
- The traffic may adversely affect the community

Other Redevelopment Comments:

- Hotel/Office on corner of Belvedere/Australian;
- Office/Flex space development on airport land along Belvedere;
- Assemble land for development;
- Redevelop Belvedere and Westgate;
- Major developer needed for commercial/residential development;
- Parcels are too small for developers;

Other Comments:

- Location is the area's biggest asset- near airport, downtown West Palm, and I-95;
- Business associations needed on Westgate Avenue and other streets: each could use the services of others;
- Need marketing program to create awareness of neighborhood;
- Need funding from Palm Beach County Housing and Community Development;

Aesthetics:

- Need architectural standards;

C. The Charrette

A seven-day community design charrette in which the public was invited to three public meetings to express their visions for the neighborhood and to comment on the urban design consultant's recommendations was held between September 11, 2003 and September 18, 2003. The Westgate/ Belvedere Homes CRA notified residents, property owners, business owners and stakeholders in the area announcing the charrette.

The first public meeting was held on the evening of Thursday, September 11, 2003 at the Westgate Community Center located at 3691 Oswego Avenue. Jose Sosa, Executive Director of the CRA, Fred Wade, CRA Chairman of the Board, and Jeff Koons, Palm Beach County Commissioner, and Chris Brown of Civic Design Associates opened the meeting with a welcome and enthusiastically encouraged the citizens to be visionaries. Next Jim Hill of Civic Design Associates outlined the process for the all-day Saturday planning session and engaged the audience in a unique experience by conducting a "consumer preference survey." The survey was organized by presenting to the audience approximately 40 photographic slides of urban conditions. The slides included pictures of housing, streets, sidewalks, retail stores, office buildings, architectural styles, parking lots, highways, mass transit, and other subjects. The participants were asked to grade each slide on a scale of minus ten (-10) to positive ten (+10) to express their opinions or preferences for each condition. On Saturday morning Mr. Hill presented the results, discussed in the appendix. Approximately 60 citizens attended the Thursday evening session. The purpose of the Thursday evening planning session was to assist the participants in thinking about the Westgate/Belvedere Homes area and

in developing their own vision for the area. They were asked to be urban planners and to design their visions the next day.

The second public meeting was the day-long charrette planning session held on Saturday, September 12, 2003, at the Community Center. Jim Hill opened the session by presenting the audience with the results of their visual preference survey. The urban design consultants organized the citizens into design teams of 6 to 8 persons, and each team was given a table, maps, aerial photographs, and drawing tools. At least one facilitator was assigned to each table. The facilitators were professional planners from Palm Beach County, CRA Board members, and the consultants, Civic Design Associates. Six teams were formed, and each team presented their schemes of a redevelopment plan of the study area (in both written and drawing form) to the entire group. Approximately 40 citizens participated in the Saturday planning session.

Charrette Team Results

The following section describes the results of each team's vision.

Team 1: Gina Bewley, Edward Kaye, Dennis Koehler, Debra Patera, Rachel Waterman, Jackie Van Deusen

- Kings Academy and the flood-prone mobile home park become drainage lakes, connected by the L-2 Canal;
- Westgate Avenue: landscaped boulevard with mixed use and parking behind;
- Two roundabouts on Westgate, at Congress and Seminole;
- Bicycle lanes on Westgate leading to the drainage lakes;
- Connect Westgate over new drainage lake east to Old Okeechobee Blvd.;
- Build quality residential high rise buildings surrounding new eastern drainage lake;

- Make Congress Avenue a landscaped boulevard that extends up to Okeechobee Blvd. and continue existing commercial development along it;
- Light Industrial Parks on County Facilities land and along between Church Street and Florida Mango Road;
- Build a hotel complex across from Kennel Club;
- Belvedere Homes needs a park and community center;
- Adult Living Facilities with stages of care;

Team 2: Don Bauer, Roberto Bolauor, Euraista Cardenas, Doran Hanley, C. Claire Keefe, John Little, Jorge Otalora, Marlene Quadros, Jose Sosa

- Westgate Avenue: landscaped median, roundabout at Westgate and Congress, extend to Florida Mango, turning lanes;
- Streetlights in neighborhood;
- Sanitary sewers in neighborhood;
- Storm drains on both sides of Cherry Road and sidewalks, clean existing storm drains annually;
- Hotel on Belvedere;
- Eliminate Wabasso Bridge;
- Gateway entrance to neighborhood at Cherry Road and Congress Avenue;
- Traffic light to handle traffic at future Wal-Mart;
- Use King's Academy land for warehousing and a walking track;
- Mixed-Use along Congress with 2 or 3 story residential;
- New park near future Wal-Mart;
- Better community policing, open police substation;
- Address absentee landlord problems;
- Increase home ownership;

Team 3: Sal J. Frasco, Carmen Gonzalez, Wade Martin, Allen Preston, Adelaide Santana, Maggie Smith, Bill & Mary Spengler

- Congress Avenue: mixed use with parking garages, tree lined street;
- Drainage on 4 points of neighborhood: NE, SE, NW, SW;
- Roundabout on Westgate and Military Trail;
- Walkways, trails along Westgate;
- All major streets lined with buffer trees and bike pathways;
- Open up the streets in Belvedere Homes, north to Cherry and south to Belvedere;
- Make dog track a tourist attraction;
- Add library to Westgate Community Center;
- More open space;
- Financial help for homeowners to remodel, example of remodeling at corner of Cherry Road and Hemlock Road;
- Funding to help businesses and residents;
- Crime prevention;
- Brownfield clean-up funding;
- Various forms of transit: Express buses, Trolleys, horse and carriages;
- Locate light industrial southwest, near future Wal-Mart;

Team 4: Alice Boedeker, Donna Bowman, Janet Ford, Ruth Moguiallansky- De Rose, Isabel Whittemore, Robert Wright, Sarah Thomas

- Make entire neighborhood a green-friendly area;
- Make canal banks into pedestrian friendly walkway with covered bridges to connect neighborhood;
- More bike trails, wider sidewalks;
- Create designations between commercial and residential areas;
- Streetlights all over neighborhood;
- With future Wal-Mart, keep traffic out of the community;
- Use King's Academy land for a park;

- Drainage pond near King’s Academy;
- Clean out and landscape canal near King’s Academy;
- Put in sanitary sewers for whole neighborhood;
- Mixed use, small scale, for sale apartments on County property;
- Encourage home ownership;
- Westgate Avenue: landscaped median with retail and residential, and parking in rear;
- Address crime, better police response, police substation, community policing;
- County must determine future infrastructure needs;
- Make commercial area more attractive;
- Encourage neighborhood retail: small bookstores and cafés, not big chains;
- Take care of people in mobile homes if they are relocated;
- Funding assistance for elderly homeowners who don’t have the resources to improve their properties;
- In high rises along lakes, have office use rather than retail on ground floor, so people will shop on Westgate Avenue;
- Get the shopping carts out of the canals have stores pick them up;

Team 5: Michelle Hoyland, Joe Kirby, Melanie Marvin, Steven T. McCraney, Noel Saunches

- Drainage pond at site of mobile homes;
- Congress Avenue: commercial, light industrial, quality retail;
- Commercial uses on Military Trail;
- Westgate Avenue: streetscape improvements and mixed use;
- Use L-2 Canal for passive recreation;
- Walking trails and passive parks along canals, paths for elementary school children;
- Pocket parks (tot lots) throughout neighborhood;
- Hotel on County owned land;

- Airport related commercial near airport;
- Office Park/hotel on dog track site – make owner of the dog track a partner in the development;
- “Restaurant Row” across from the dog track;
- Bus/electric tram running along Belvedere Road to the airport;
- Centralized airport car rental;

Team 6: Joanna Aiken, Paulette Bendick, Norman Borden, Jennie Burt, Ron Daniels, Betty Eaton, Emily Fischbein, Joe Pitts

- Create greenway along canal, using land from north side, paths for children to walk to school;
- Herb gardens for science and learning for families;
- Pedestrian connections across canal;
- Covered school bus stops;
- Drainage lake on site of King’s Academy, build up land for more retention;
- Drainage lake on site of mobile homes park with commercial and restaurants overlooking lake;
- Drainage structures along L-2 Canal;
- Extend Westgate Avenue into Old Okeechobee Blvd.;
- Westgate Avenue: landscaped boulevard with commercial on north side, 2 story “soft” commercial and residential on south side, keep commercial traffic off Nokomis;
- Congress Avenue: landscaped boulevard street;
- Large scale commercial between Westgate and Okeechobee;
- Encourage home ownership and property maintenance;
- Recreation for Belvedere Homes residents on airport property along Belvedere;

Consensus from the Charrette

On Saturday, September 12, 2003, the participants summarized the results of each team's suggestions. The consultants synthesized the concepts described below.

1. Create new drainage lakes on the east and west side of the study area to consolidate retention areas – suggested areas: King's Academy site and mobile home park;
2. Widen the L-2 Canal, which will connect the new drainage lakes;
3. Create a greenway and recreational parks along the L-2 Canal;
4. Include pathways for school children along the greenway, and pedestrian bridges across the Canal;
5. Financial and other support from the CRA for home ownership and remodeling;
6. Address absentee landlord problems;
7. Code enforcement;
8. Streetscape Beautification (landscaping and/ or boulevard streets) along Westgate Avenue and Congress Avenue;
9. Gateway entrances to neighborhood;
10. Roundabouts for traffic calming;
11. Sanitary sewers needed;
12. Streetlights needed throughout the neighborhood;
13. Community policing and police substation;
14. Keep canals clean and free of trash;
15. Maintain existing single family home neighborhoods;
16. Hotel along Belvedere near the dog track;
17. Mixed use retail/residential development along Westgate Avenue
18. Commercial/office uses near Palm Beach International Airport;
19. Light industrial uses along Florida Mango Road or near future Wal-Mart site on Military Trail;
20. Keep traffic from future Wal-Mart from going into the neighborhoods;

The Design Studio and Concept Presentation

From Sunday September 14, 2003, through Thursday, September 18, 2003, the planners and designers worked on synthesizing the ideas of the citizens into a common plan. The design studio was set up in the Board of Education meeting room and the community was invited to visit the studio during the week to contribute further ideas and look over the work-in-progress. Happily, several community members visited frequently. The design team continued to refine the Charrette concepts throughout the week. The result of the studio effort was a preliminary urban design plan for the area.

On the evening of Thursday, September 18, 2003, Chris Brown and Jim Hill of Civic Design Associates presented the urban design drawings and conducted a PowerPoint presentation displaying the design concepts and recommended programs to the community. The citizens were quite pleased to find almost all of their suggestions from Saturday's session were addressed in the drawings and programs. The community was aware that this was a plan in progress and that their continued input is desired as the planning process continues.



Figure 3.3 - Photographs of the Charrette



Figure 3.4 - Sketches of design teams

D. Constraints and Opportunities in the Redevelopment Area

The charrette participants and stakeholders considered a number of issues that the Westgate/Belvedere Homes CRA is facing that currently prevent it from reaching its full potential as a thriving and growing community. These issues, defined as constraints, must be addressed so that the many opportunities that do exist in the area can be reinforced and strengthened. The following is a list derived from the consultants and citizens during the workshops and stakeholder interviews.

Constraints

1. Low land elevation and extensive drainage requirements;
2. Airport Height and Noise Restrictions;
3. Airport owns large amount of land along Belvedere;
4. Individually located car rental agencies;
5. Crime, lack of code enforcement and sufficient policing;
6. Lack of through street connections;
6. Lack of sidewalks and pedestrian connections through neighborhoods;
7. Dog Track is located on prime developable land;
8. Not enough neighborhood retail and restaurants;
9. Streets are not well lit;
10. Absence of a strong cluster of retail in a neighborhood center;
11. Absence of mixed use;

Opportunities

1. Turn canals into attractive waterways lined with a greenway (parks and landscaping);
2. Create pedestrian and bicycle paths in greenway to connect neighborhoods;

3. Create new drainage lake amenities surrounded by housing and connected by the greenway;
4. Accessible location close to PBI airport, I-95, and downtown West Palm Beach;
5. Streetscape enhancements, such as lighting fixtures, signage, street furniture;
6. Infill development possibilities;
7. Opportunity for higher density residential living options;
8. Mixed-use residential and office buildings with retail on the ground floor on Westgate Avenue;
9. Large scale land available for commercial and light industrial development;
10. Gateway entrances to signal arrival in the Westgate/Belvedere Homes neighborhood;
11. Boulevard streets with landscaped medians;
12. Opportunities to consolidate rental car agencies, and operate an airport shuttle circulator;
13. Airport shuttle circulator to rental car;
14. Opportunity for remodeling homes, and ongoing maintenance;
15. New neighborhood associations;