In 2011, the City of Orlando established the Downtown South Neighborhood Improvement District (NID), generally bounded by Toll Road 408 (to the north), Michigan Avenue (to the south), I-4 (to the west), and Orange Avenue (to the east). The NID has the ability to adopt (through referendum of the taxpaying property owners) a special tax assessment that would fund improvements only within the District. This mechanism allows for District projects to be funded and completed faster than if they had to compete for funding with the rest of the City.

The City has hired VHB MillerSellen to complete a Plan for the District that will support the referendum. To begin this project, a workshop was held on October 29, 2012 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Beardall Senior Center (located at 800 Delaney Avenue, Orlando). A comment form and a map of the Downtown South Neighborhood Improvement District (DSNID) were available as handouts as individuals signed in. The meeting included an overview of the project’s history, description of what this Plan will include, and discussion about the District’s needs. Here are the meeting highlights.

Welcome and Project Overview
Kevin Tyjeski, City of Orlando, began the meeting by welcoming the group and introducing the project team. Commissioner Patty Sheehan also welcomed the group and noted that this Plan will reflect the District’s ideas. It will only occur with their support. Commissioner Sheehan encouraged the group to ask questions during the meeting so they could fully understand the process.
Mr. Tyjeski provided background about the project. He began by defining the Neighborhood Improvement District (NID) as a special purpose local government that operates within a specified area. The NID was created to finance, construct, operate, and maintain capital infrastructure, facilities, and services that the local government either can’t provide or can’t provide within the timeframe desired by the District’s property owners.

The Downtown South Vision Plan was prepared in 2007 and identified the needs for the area, focusing on the ultimate development potential for the area. In 2008, the City adopted the Vision Plan recommendations into the City’s Growth Management Plan.

The goals of the Downtown South Vision Plan are:
- Accommodate future development within the Orlando Health campus;
- Accommodate new medical office, retail and residential development outside the Orlando Health campus;
- Encourage mixed-use development in proximity to the commuter rail station;
- Support redevelopment and intensification of industrial areas along I-4; and
- Protect existing property rights, so existing businesses can continue to flourish.

Target areas were identified in the Vision Plan with the most intensity to occur around the SunRail station, the second most intense around the Kaley Avenue/Division Street area, and the third most intense within ½-mile of the SunRail station. The intensities and mix of uses recommended in the Vision Plan would only be allowed if funding can be identified for the infrastructure needed to support such development.

The City of Orlando established the Main Street program in 2008 for five areas throughout the City. One of the Main Street programs (Downtown South) is in this area. In 2009, the Orange Michigan Vision Plan was completed with the intent to create a more pedestrian-oriented place. In 2010, the City adopted the Orange Michigan Special Plan Zoning Overlay.

In 2010, the City created the NID Exploratory Committee. This Committee recommended that the City should allow NIDs to be created. In 2011, the City adopted an ordinance that allowed NIDs. Also in 2011 the Downtown South NID was created, the City’s first NID. There is an Advisory Committee which consists of five members, with a representative from: Orlando Health, Downtown South Main Street, Industrial properties, and two at-large members.

The Downtown South NID was created to:
- Identify unique interests;
- Identify common interests;
- Identify, plan for, advocate and pursue funding for infrastructure and services;
- Plan for a referendum on a district wide tax assessment (up to 2 mills and/or $500 per parcel) to fund District services and improvements; and
- Encourage district wide revitalization.
VHB MillerSellen has been hired to work with the Downtown South NID to identify the infrastructure and improvements that are needed for the District, set priorities, and help the Advisory Council determine whether or not to proceed with a referendum. This workshop begins this process. Mr. Tyjeski reminded the group that it will be the District’s decision as to whether or not to accept a district wide tax assessment; the City and consultant team are available to help the NID make that decision.

Overview of the Downtown South NID Plan
Jim Sellen (VHB MillerSellen) reviewed the intent of the Downtown South NID Plan, the steps that will be used in completing the Plan, and the general schedule. Mr. Sellen encouraged the group to actively participate in this process; they bring a lot of perspective and should ask the question “what added valued would there be that would lead me to decide to tax myself”.

There will be three District meetings:
• Workshop #1 (October 29th) – Plan kick off and opportunity for the NID to share ideas;
• Workshop #2 (week of November 26th) – Consultant team will share initial alternatives (matching potential projects with estimated costs) for NID to review and share reactions; and
• Workshop #3 (week of December 17th) – Consultant team presents the final recommended Plan.

This Plan will build on the two previous Vision Plans for this area – Downtown South Vision Plan and Orange Michigan Vision Plan. In addition to existing conditions, this Plan will consider:
• Future development of Orlando Health;
• New medical office and retail supporting Orlando Health;
• Mixed use development will be encouraged at the SunRail station;
• Redevelopment of industrial areas along I-4; and
• Property rights of existing businesses and residents.

The project team will look at the capacity of infrastructure (water, sewer, and stormwater) and has looked at comparable projects in other cities where hospitals have been at the center of successful redevelopment activities.

The following key principles will be used in completing this Plan:
• Create centers and nodes of activity;
• Survey infrastructure to see what can support new development;
• Retain quality infrastructure use and accommodate changes over time;
• Improve and enhance community character;
• Improve and enhance transportation corridors and connections;
• Enhance open space and recreational opportunities; and
• Include workforce housing opportunities.

This Plan will move from the aspirational (as presented in the two previous Vision Plans) to pragmatic. This Plan will identify the costs for making specific improvements, showing what the District can afford to do with given revenues. The Plan will be the basis for supporting a referendum concerning assessments within the District.

Jim Hall (VHB MillerSellen) reviewed the financial components of the Plan. According to the Orange County Property Appraiser’s Office, there are just under 1,300 parcels within the NID. Of that total, just
under 1,200 parcels are taxpaying parcels with a total value of about $350 million. Self-imposed funding for the NID will be an assessment of up to $500 per parcel and/or up to 2 mills. A range of funding alternatives will be considered from what the assessment generates to bonding to matching funds with other funding partners.

Questions and Clarifications
During Mr. Sellen’s overview, the audience asked questions to clarify items. Here is a list of those questions with the reply provided in brackets.

- **Who is paying the consultant’s fees?** [Through an advance from Orlando Health, the City of Orlando is paying the consultant’s fees. Orlando Health has committed up to $175,000 per year in cash and/or in-kind services for a minimum of two years to support the NID until revenues can be generated through assessments. Orlando Health has also offered to pay up to $250,000 per year as a fee in lieu of taxes if the referendum is approved. The $175,000 per year advance will become a credit against the fee in lieu of taxes once the District generates its own revenues.]

- **If only the property owners within the NID can vote on the assessment issue, why were so many individuals outside the District invited to this meeting?** [The City sent notices to property owners within the NID. Downtown South Main Street or others may have sent notices to property owners outside the NID.]

- **Is the basis for the NID to accommodate Orlando Health?** [No; the NID will serve all business and property owners within the District; Orlando Health will be one of the catalysts to spur development]

- **A statement was made indicating non-hospital properties, taken collectively, greatly outnumber the hospital properties.**

- **The project team confirmed that only the owners of taxable property can vote on a referendum for ad valorem taxation.**

- **A request was made for a copy of the previous Vision Plan.** [The Downtown South Vision Plan and the Orange Michigan Vision Plan can be found on the City’s website]

- **Is the Vision Plan really aspirational?** [Yes; this Plan will be more pragmatic]

- **Where are more specific improvements identified?** [Listed in the Vision Plan; also will be presented at Workshop #2]

- **What projects will be identified and will the associated costs be identified?** [The project team will be looking at the list of potential improvements along with costs and will present this information at Workshop#2; need to look at how to balance what you want with what you can afford]
General Discussion
The group was encouraged to share their ideas about the District, focusing on: infrastructure, place making, and identity. Some comments related to more than one category, which accounts for some repetition. During the discussion, some questions were asked and the team’s response is shown in brackets.

Stormwater
- Preserve water quality (including lakes)
- Need to address stormwater management issues
- Look at the stormwater issues associated with Lake of the Woods; receiving runoff from Kaley Avenue, Gore Street, and I-4
- Look at impacts/needs for sewer, traffic (Division and other side streets), and fire flows as the existing smaller industrial parcels redevelop into larger industrial parcels
- Look at infrastructure needs at Lake Lucerne, near the Presbyterian Tower

Transportation
- Look at impacts/needs for sewer, traffic (Division and other side streets), and fire flows as the existing smaller industrial parcels redevelop into larger industrial parcels
- Interested in knowing what the ultimate transportation improvements for the I-4/Kaley Avenue area will look like, how will it function and work within this part of the District, what happens to travel patterns
- How will SunRail work within the District?
- Need traffic relief
- Want a more bikeable and walkable setting, especially with additional people coming to the area
- Want to be able to get around within the District without needing a car; for example, someone arriving by train, how do they get around in the District while visiting
- Add streetscape to make the District more walkable
- Today, as some trains come through the District there are traffic delays up to 45 minutes
- What happens to parking and traffic at Orange and Michigan Avenues with the new market coming in; traffic especially bad at this intersection at lunch time and rush hours; evenings are a bit better
- Division Street needs improvement when considering the traffic from the Amway Center, the hospital, and other development
- Traffic along Orange Avenue is bad throughout the District (Gore Street to Pineloch Street)
- Orange Avenue traffic affects adjacent neighborhoods along Kaley Avenue, Briercliff Drive, and Delaney Avenue
- If Orange Avenue is widened, consider the impacts; involve everyone that would be affected and let them know what would happen over time; consider the adjacent property owners and non-voters
- Address the Orange Avenue “dip”
- Consider walk over (over the railroad tracks) for access between Atlanta Avenue/SunRail station and Orange Avenue; potential partnership with the DSNID and SunRail
- Widen sidewalks, provide crosswalks and off-street parking, landscaping, and bulbouts; make Orange Avenue walkable
- Make decisions about roadways early in the process [part of the alternatives that will be presented at the next meeting]
• Make streets bicycle friendly by slowing down the traffic; don’t just make brick streets bicycle friendly
• Is the Urban Trail coming to the District? [not at this time; currently ends at the Magnolia Avenue, north end of Downtown; the challenge is the constrained right-of-way; once the Trail goes south through Downtown it is likely to be placed in the road due to the constrained right-of-way]; look at partnering opportunities to extend the Urban Trail south into the DSNID

**Other Infrastructure Needs**
• Need to have computer infrastructure (T-1 line) in place along 27th Street
• Put power lines underground

**Place Making**
• Add streetscape to make the District more walkable
• Widen sidewalks, provide crosswalks and off-street parking, landscaping, and bulbouts as part of streetscaping
• Push parking to the back of the buildings [the Orange/Michigan area Overlay Zoning District requires this for new development]
• Parks are needed between Orange Avenue and I-4; Downtown South looking for places to hold community events; need to be investing in a system and not just one project

**Identity**
• Make the area less homeless friendly; area has a homeless image
• Crime is a concern; lots of thefts related to copper and Freon

**Other Topics**
• Look for opportunities for funding partners for projects; for example, use the DSNID funds as a match for state and other grants
• Look at phased improvements
• Is zoning a part of the addressing these issues? [not in the NID Plan; for the Orange and Michigan Avenues area, there are existing zoning restrictions related to encroachment]
• Downtown South organization would like to attract new businesses; currently work with brokers; there are 17 banks in the area and they have never closed
• Need to mix uses; increased density doesn’t necessarily mean that there will be increased traffic; not if one can live and work within the DSNID; today there are 1700 residents and 19,000 employees
• People want to live here; need density to make this happen and will get traffic off the streets
• Area has held real estate values even during the last few years
Submitted Written Comments
Three comment forms were submitted at the meeting and one email was submitted. Here is a summary of these shared comments.

- Need to include streetscape along Orange Avenue, with several benefits: commercial property owners will see an increase in property values; design enhancement will encourage many new businesses to open within the District and get rid of the blighted pockets within the District; and local governments as a whole will benefit from the increases in the tax base
- Need to reference the Orange Michigan Vision Plan, particularly with reference to the urban transect and Orange Avenue streetscape
- Creating a more walkable District is the goal of all local residents and business owners; can be achieved by using: traffic calming devices like bulb outs at Orange Avenue intersections with Gore Street, Kaley Avenue, Grant Street, and Michigan Avenue; medians and crosswalks at intervals that will encourage pedestrian crossings; widen sidewalks with greenery between the sidewalks and traffic; underground utilities; and attractive streetlighting
- Not sure why invited since not a property owner within the District and will not be voting
- Presentation needs more visuals to improve: information understanding; information absorption; and attendee interest
- Mail meeting announcements to all residents; square mile to the east of Orange Avenue
- Hold as many of these meetings as possible to get it right
- Long time residents located east of Orange Avenue and south of Gore Street are concerned about traffic and density; doesn’t make sense to build higher density areas when so many units/mixed uses in Downtown are empty now
- Critical to have the infrastructure in place first
- The area already feels crowded now and will be so increasingly as the Southside Market is expanded
- History and the existing taxpayers will be lost if the Plan makes the traffic worse; people will move away

Next Steps
The consultant team will use this input as a list of projects (and associated costs) is prepared. At the next meeting (to be scheduled the week of November 26th), a range of projects and funding options will be shared and discussed.