



CHAPTER 1

BUILDING ON THE PAST



As Orlando embarks on the dawn of the new millennium, it is time for the community to look at where it has been and where it is going. Orlando is the premier city in Central Florida, and downtown is its heart. Downtown Outlook is about anticipating the future . . . by building on the past.

1.1 A Rich History

Orlando has a rich and varied history. As Central Florida has grown and developed, Orlando has grown with it. From its beginnings as a small settlement around Fort Gatlin during the Seminole Wars to today’s thriving metropolitan city, the community has always acknowledged and taken pride in its history. High points include:

- 1840 ▪ Community develops around Fort Gatlin named after the Jernigan brothers who opened the first trading post
- 1856 ▪ Jernigan changes its name to Orlando
- 1875 ▪ Orlando incorporates as a city
- 1889 ▪ Railroad Depot constructed on Church Street
- 1908 ▪ Adoption of City Slogan: “The City Beautiful”
- 1960s ▪ Construction of Interstate 4
- 1970s ▪ Construction of the East-West Expressway
- 1974 ▪ Rosie O’Grady’s at Church Street Station opens
- 1989 ▪ Orlando Arena and Lake Eola Amphitheater open to the public
- 1992 ▪ New City Hall and realignment of Rosalind Avenue completed



The development of Church Street Station in the 1970s created confidence in downtown and served as a catalyst for other downtown investments.



The expansion of the Downtown Library rejuvenated one of downtown's most valuable institutions.

1.1.1 The 1970s: An Opportunity for Change

Like downtowns in many American cities, Downtown Orlando started to decline in the 1960s with the advent of suburbia. Rapid growth in both the physical size of the city and in population provided new housing and commercial opportunities outside the core. As residents vacated downtown neighborhoods for new developments on the outskirts of town, businesses located in the heart of the city struggled with the loss of their client base. The decline in Orlando's downtown business district and neighborhoods continued into the early 1970s.

The first major indication that changes were on the horizon appeared in the early 1970s. For the first time in its history, the City adopted a plan focused solely on downtown. A new agency, the Orlando Center City Neighborhood Development Board was created to facilitate and implement improvements to the downtown area. This board was later renamed the Downtown Development Board in 1978.

The 1973 plan emphasized major public-sector projects and capital improvements that would serve as catalysts for private reinvestment in downtown. Proposed projects included development of a convention center/sports arena downtown, expansion of the downtown library, renovation of the Municipal Auditorium (now known as the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre), development of a new state and federal office complex—Government Plaza, and identification of the importance of streetscape to the overall appearance and attractiveness of downtown.

The 1973 plan established the philosophy that the success of downtown was critical to the economic health of not only the City of Orlando, but the entire region as well. The plan served as notice that the City was committed to the revitalization of downtown and thereby attracted the attention, and investment, of the private sector.

As the first plan for downtown was in the process of being adopted, the first major private investment in downtown in several years was underway. In 1974, Rosie O'Grady's Goodtime Emporium opened on Church Street, the first establishment in a series of entertainment, restaurant and shopping experiences developed as part of Church Street Station.



The development of the Orlando Centroplex, including an arena, convention center and performing arts center in the 1980s solidified the public commitment to downtown.



The 1980s also brought a renewed focus to the downtown neighborhoods, culminating in the preservation and enhancement of many historic neighborhoods.

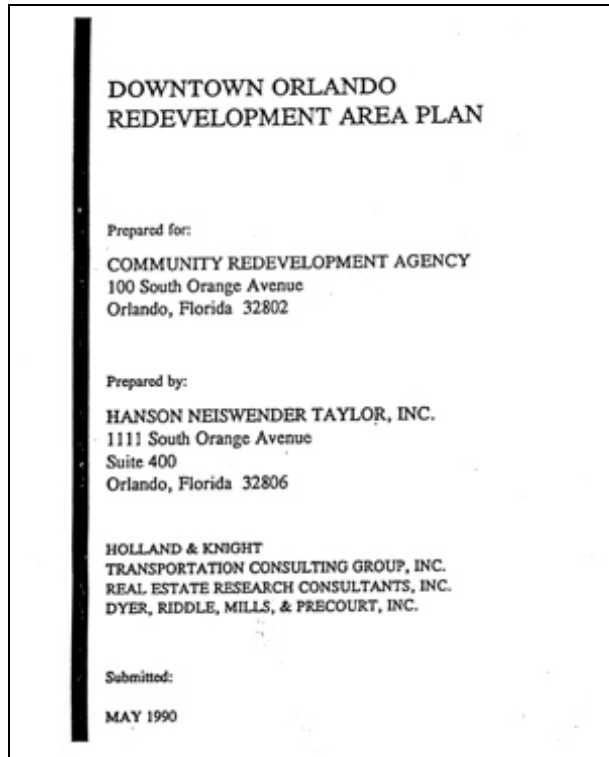
By the late 1970s, the promise embodied in downtown’s first plan was coming to fruition. Church Street Station was thriving as a tourist destination and public improvements identified by the plan were under construction. By 1978, the Municipal Auditorium had received its first major face-lift, as well as a new name, the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre, and the first state office building had been constructed.

By the late 1980s, Church Street Station had grown to encompass more than four city blocks. Church Street Station and its commitment to the rich history of Orlando were one of the major catalysts for the revitalization of downtown. The success of Church Street Station showed that business could not only survive downtown, but succeed.

1.1.2 The 1980s: Continued Success

The 1980s brought many changes to the face of downtown. Under the provisions of the Community Redevelopment Act of 1969, the City Council in 1980 declared an area of downtown as blighted and in need of redevelopment. The establishment of a Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) to administer redevelopment and the adoption of a redevelopment plan and trust fund quickly followed in 1982.¹ Building on the successes of the 1973 plan, the 1982 Redevelopment Plan focused on providing infrastructure and allocating resources to generate private investment downtown. Major plan elements included:

¹ A complete description of the purpose of a Community Redevelopment Agency can be found in Chapter 16, Management Plan.



- Streetscape program
- Identification of infrastructure needs
- Development review
- Centroplex plan
- Neighborhood preservation
- Retail development
- Downtown identity
- Parking structures
- Transit circulator system

Through the creation of the CRA and Tax Increment Trust Fund, the growth in the downtown office market was complemented with public improvements that supported downtown as an employment and entertainment center as well as a viable residential area. With improvements to Lake Eola Park and the adoption of neighborhood protection policies, downtown neighborhoods like Lake Eola Heights and Lake Cherokee were rejuvenated. The 1982 plan also cemented public commitment to the provision of affordable housing downtown with the development of Callahan Oaks, Jackson Court and Division Oaks in the Parramore Heritage area.

1.1.3 The 1990s: Defining the Vision

As time shifted into the last decade of the millennium, a new set of revitalization issues appeared. The construction and real estate boom of the early 1980s had been tempered by a downswing in the economy. New development was stagnant throughout the region, but nowhere was it more evident than in downtown. The slowdown in development provided the opportunity to redefine the vision and set in motion an aggressive campaign to continue the redevelopment initiated in earlier plans for downtown.

The first step was a reassessment of the Community Redevelopment Area boundaries established in 1980. A 1990 *Study of Blight* demonstrated the need for revitalization outside of the existing plan area, in neighborhoods to the north, west and east.



Improvements to Lake Eola Park, including a new amphitheater, established the lake and the rest of downtown as the physical and social heart of the city.



The development of Church Street Market solidified the strength of the downtown entertainment district and attracted major retailers.

The adoption of this study expanded the CRA boundaries to include approximately 1,620 acres of land. The new boundaries of the Community Redevelopment Area adopted in 1990 were appropriate for the following reasons:

- To be more consistent with the boundary of the Downtown Development Board, the Downtown Development of Regional Impact (DRI) Area, and the Downtown Growth Management Plan (GMP).
- To be adjacent to the boundary of the Orange Blossom Trail redevelopment study area, later designated a Community Redevelopment Area by the Board of County Commissioners.
- To address specific blighted conditions on the southwest, east and north of the 1982 Redevelopment Area.

Figure 1-1 illustrates the change in boundaries from 1980 to 1990. The expansion of the planning area and the changing face of downtown necessitated an update to the 1982 Community Redevelopment Plan.

The principal goal of the 1990 plan was to continue to aggressively pursue redevelopment and revitalization activities within the Redevelopment Area to create a world-class downtown. Major focal points in the 1990 plan included improving the transportation system and attracting residential development. Identification of five “vital issues” provided the framework for a comprehensive set of goals and objectives critical to the successful implementation of the Plan: Revitalization, Function, Image, Form, and Movement.

DOWNTOWN OUTLOOK



The downtown LYMMO circulator system provides convenient access between the Central Business District and the Parramore Heritage area.



The principles identified in the 1990 plan promote a type and scale of redevelopment consistent with surrounding areas, such as Washington Street neighborhood district shown above.

Vital Issues

Revitalization emphasized the overall intent of the Community Redevelopment Area to utilize public resources and encourage private resources to eliminate and prevent the development of blighted conditions; to provide for rehabilitation and redevelopment; to encourage housing affordable to residents of low and moderate income; to provide a full range of housing opportunities; and to guide public improvements.

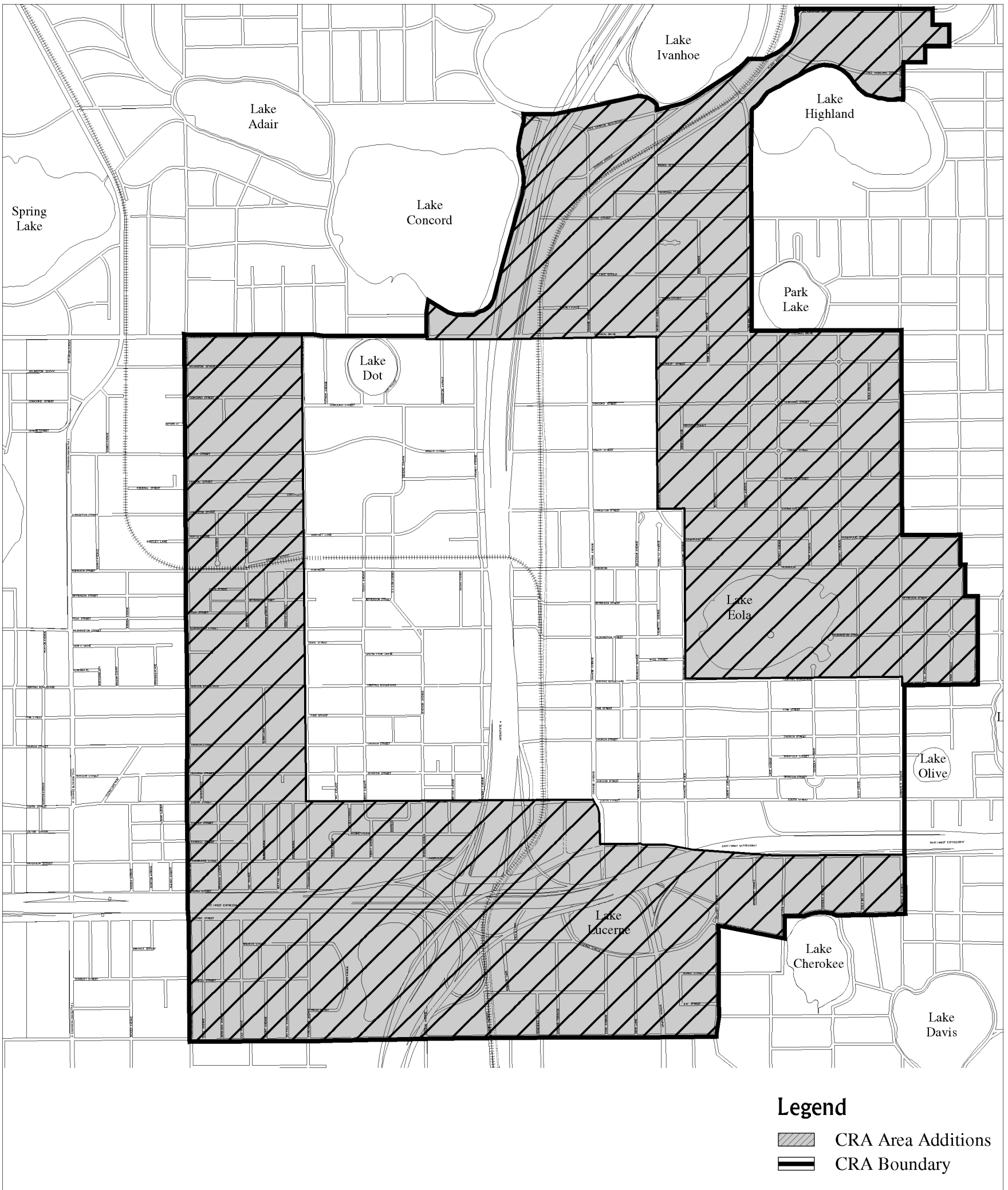
Function established downtown as a regional center promoting it as a world-class downtown serving as the region's economic hub. Function further established downtown's presence as a center for diversity and vitality created by the promotion of entertainment and cultural functions, specialized retail, educational opportunities, public spaces for social interaction and active residential areas.

Image identified downtown's role as a world-class center for residents, workers and visitors alike. The image for downtown emphasized water, trees and a strong sense of history integrated with architecturally significant new developments. Downtown's image further idealized a distinctive, varied skyline integrating a street-level environment responsive to people and their desire for human-scale development that encourages social interaction.

Form emphasized downtown as linear in nature with a series of compact nodes of varying intensity and character. Form further allows downtown to focus development intensity, establish unique centers, promote neighborhood living and allow redevelopment and enhancement.

Movement promoted a balanced transportation system to create greater accessibility to downtown, ultimately implementing transportation strategies and improvements that reduce automobile dependence, increase transit use, and create a high quality pedestrian network.

Figure 1-1: 1990 Community Redevelopment Area Expansion





This view of Downtown Orlando at sunset shows the city's skyline before the construction boom of the late 1990s.

To address each of the vital issues, the Community Redevelopment Area was divided into Linear Core Districts and Support Districts. The Linear Core Districts were designated as high intensity districts that formed the principal non-residential center for downtown. Support Districts surround the Linear Districts and host complementary uses and activities. The plan described each district and the problems and opportunities inherent to each one.

The plan also translated these vital issues, as well as proposed land use designations, into strategies and actions necessary for successful redevelopment and revitalization. Redevelopment actions included identifying anticipated development and proposed improvements. Specific actions in the areas of housing and neighborhood preservation, commercial development, cultural and civic facilities and urban design considerations were also identified.

In conjunction with the adoption of the 1990 Redevelopment Plan, the City created the Downtown Orlando Development of Regional Impact (DRI) to help facilitate new development and adopted a Downtown Element as part of the City's Growth Management Plan (GMP). The creation of a DRI encompassing a majority of the redevelopment area provided a mechanism to ease the way for developers by exempting individual projects from the state's mandatory DRI process. The DRI not only addressed the type and amount of future development downtown, it also addressed infrastructure issues such as transportation. The adoption of the Downtown Element of the GMP allowed the City to focus on specific goals and objectives for the Downtown area, including specific policies to address the five vital issues identified in the 1990 Community Redevelopment Area Plan: revitalization, function, image, form, and movement.

DOWNTOWN OUTLOOK



The Lincoln Office Building at the northwest corner of Orange Avenue and South Street is just one of many buildings under construction.



Stemming from the efforts put into the 1990 Redevelopment Plan, several significant projects have been completed. Traffic circulation was improved with the construction of the Rosalind Avenue causeway over Lake Lucerne and the development of the LYMMO system. Progress was made in improving home ownership opportunities in Parramore with the construction and rehabilitation of a number of homes in the Arlington/Concord area. The first steps in making downtown a cultural entertainment and education center were achieved with the conversion of the former Orlando Utilities Commission water plant to the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, the development of the University of Central Florida Downtown Academic Center and the initial concept for a performing arts center in the heart of downtown.

1.2 Taking the Next Step

Because of the hard work and dedication of the community to downtown's future, Downtown Orlando today is enjoying more success than ever before. Most residential neighborhoods are not only thriving, they are among the premier addresses in Central Florida. Construction downtown, depressed since the early 1990s, is booming with the construction of new office, hotel and multi-family residential projects. The momentum has been created for an exciting 21st century.

Efforts to create a lively, successful, and sustainable downtown continue. There are neighborhoods that have not achieved their full potential and new obstacles that must be overcome before the dream for downtown can be achieved. Continuing to build on past successes and learning from mistakes are essential to downtown's future. To that end, refining the vision and updating the plan for downtown will lead the community at the dawn of the new millennium, and beyond, providing the framework to bring it to reality.



Without people, Church Street Market would be an empty collection of buildings . . .



. . . and Lake Lucerne would fade into the background.

1.3 Building Blocks

“Downtown Orlando” typically brings to mind certain images: City Hall, the SunTrust Center, Church Street Station and Lake Eola Park. But downtown is about much more than buildings or places, it is about neighborhoods and the people who inhabit them. The businesses and residents that call downtown home breathe life into what would otherwise be an empty collection of buildings. However, the importance of the physical environment cannot be understated; the relationship between public spaces and private buildings creates a unique environment that not only attracts people downtown, but makes them want to stay and enjoy.

Downtown Outlook is a strategic plan to guide downtown into the new millennium. No one knows downtown better or has more of a stake in its future than the residents and business people that make their homes and livelihoods here. Therefore, the first step in the development of this plan was to actively involve all of the stakeholders in downtown: property owners, business owners, residents and government officials.

1.3.1 Downtown Summit

To kickoff the development of the plan, the CRA hosted the *Horizon 2000 Downtown Summit* over a three day period, February 25-27, 1999. Over 2,000 residents, business people and local government leaders were invited to discuss downtown’s future. The three-day event culminated in a working session where audience members identified the issues facing downtown and suggested solutions to those issues. The participants were divided into four groups, one for each of the four planning areas within the overall CRA redevelopment area: Uptown, Parramore Heritage, Central Business District and Eola. Each group identified issues and possible solutions for its planning area.

DOWNTOWN OUTLOOK



Uptown residents and business owners focus on establishing an identity for their community. . .



. . . while the Eola group identifies ways to preserve their unique neighborhoods.

Uptown

The participants in the Uptown group concentrated on determining the nature and character of future development. They envisioned an area with a core of mid- to high-rise office buildings and hotels located between Orange and Magnolia Avenues transitioning to a lower scale mixed residential and office district to the east and a large park to the west. Uptown in the year 2020 would be a community for people of all ages and backgrounds, a downtown neighborhood with its own unique identity.

Parramore Heritage

The main focus in Parramore Heritage was the revitalization of a historic downtown community through improving the overall quality of life (safety and security, education, housing opportunities, etc.) and reconnecting the neighborhood to the rest of downtown. Pressing needs include improvement of the housing stock with additional home ownership opportunities, creation of a comprehensive open space network, development of employment opportunities and relocation of targeted industrial uses to minimize land use compatibility problems.

Central Business District

Of utmost importance to the participants in the Central Business District breakout group was the character of the CBD as a “lifestyle district,” a place where business, culture, entertainment and housing come together to form an integrated whole. Identification of target markets and a reduction in the emphasis on tourism were emphasized as key issues, along with transportation and parking improvements and the addition of residential uses to the CBD to ensure a 24-hour downtown.



The first newsletter focused on the downtown summit and development projects underway in each of the planning areas.

Eola

The primary goal expressed for the Eola area was the continued preservation of all aspects of the existing historic neighborhoods: structures, residential character and tree canopy. Non-residential market demand was a concern to the established neighborhoods as they fight to protect the residential character that has proven so successful. Encroachment of the high-rise nature of the CBD into South Eola was also a major consideration, resulting in the recommendation of a transitional mid-rise mixed-use district between Lake and Eola Avenues to buffer the lower-scale residential uses to the east.

1.3.2 Citizen Planners

While the summit provided an opportunity for citizen involvement at the outset of the planning process, it was important that public input continue throughout the development of the plan. To ensure the maximum opportunity for community comment, the CRA provided several mechanisms to inform citizens of the progress of the plan update and to encourage them to offer their ideas:

- Quarterly newsletters mailed to 2,500 people
- Fax and e-mail updates
- Internet web site (www.downtownorlando.com)
- Eight neighborhood open houses, two in each planning area
- One community meeting

The quarterly newsletters, fax updates and Internet web site were an additional means of informing the community about the progress with this plan update. Neighborhood Open Houses were held during the last two weeks of July and the first two weeks of November 1999 to present progress on the plan and obtain comments and input. A final community meeting to present the Downtown Outlook plan was held on February 24, 2000.