

# Vision Statement

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POLICY DOCUMENT

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## A VISION FOR THE CITY BEAUTIFUL ORLANDO'S GROWTH MANAGEMENT PLAN

As we look to the future, our past achievements provide inspiration for even greater things to come. Orlando is fortunate to have a rich heritage, grounded by a 100-year history of community planning that dates back to the City Beautiful movement. The City has long sought to protect the natural beauty and man-made amenities that attracted settlers in the first place, from the days when Orlando was primarily an agricultural town and the crossroads for the citrus industry, through the late 1960's and the advent of the Disney explosion, through the boom-time 1980's, and now as we near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.



From the beginning, the City's history has been marked by a concern for blending growth with natural amenities, for building around lakes and, whenever possible, keeping shores and other natural areas open to the public. Orlando's lakes have always been the focal point of its beauty, a beauty that was enhanced with the addition of a strong City-directed landscaping program in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the planting of countless hundreds of trees.

Protecting the lakes, planting more diversified, flowering foliage and promoting high-quality development have always made Orlando a truly desirable place to live. This was evident in the City's first Comprehensive Plan in 1926. An understanding of Orlando's heritage, incorporated into a plan that offers a clear vision for the future of Orlando, will provide the direction for progress as the City proceeds into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The City faces many challenges, but one concept remains clear. Orlando must define and strengthen the key components that, blended together, will make “The City Beautiful” an even better place to live in the year 2030. This requires an understanding not only of Orlando’s historical role, but also the City’s role within the Central Florida region.

According to current studies and projections, the Orlando Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) will continue to be one of the fastest-growing areas in the nation. By the year 2030, the population of the Orlando MSA will increase from its current 2,083,923 (April 1, 2007) to 3,283,776, with the City of Orlando proper growing from 228,765 to 332,982 during the same period. The City intends to reaffirm its role as the focal point of the region, a position it has held for more than 130 years.

Given the volume of growth expected over the next 20+ years, Metropolitan Orlando could follow the pattern of other, larger Sunbelt cities. It could easily develop into a sprawling metropolis requiring tremendous amounts of energy and financial resources for transportation alone. Similar communities have sacrificed their environment to “progress” and have thus destroyed many of the qualities that made them unique and desirable.

This Growth Management Plan (GMP) establishes a different agenda for Orlando, one that will ensure the preservation of its natural and man-made environments, reduce urban sprawl, promote the efficient use of transportation and financial resources and nurture its human assets. However, this plan is not a radical departure from the growth management policies established in the early 1980’s. Rather the policies and actions established in this plan further refine and expand on the planning efforts adopted by the Orlando City Council in 1980 and 1985.

The 1980 GMP established the basic growth management framework necessary for Orlando to evolve into a vibrant and diversified regional center. In 1985, the City further detailed the actions needed to achieve this regional center while also protecting neighborhoods and enhancing the quality of life. Specific actions, including development of a coordinated land development code, were evidence of the city’s commitment to accommodate the growth coming to the region while also protecting the unique character of the area. With the adoption of this GMP in 1991, Orlando clearly defined its vision for the future, a vision based on community consensus and shared values. That consensus was further refined through the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) processes conducted in 1998 and 2007.





Orlando’s vision, embodied in this GMP, will build on the planning, social and economic policies of the past and will remain the major focus and guiding principle for Orlando’s growth well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The vision outlined herein will be both proactive and build upon the strong public and private interest in making the Orlando region a true world showcase. The following elements outline the physical, economic and social framework within which the Orlando area will grow over the next twenty or so years leading to an enhanced quality of life for present and future residents.

## **ORLANDO’S AMENITY FRAMEWORK**

As “The City Beautiful”, Orlando’s vision is defined by a focus on its amenities. Key elements of that vision are strong urban design; historic preservation; the availability and maintenance of parks, recreation and open space; strong cultural arts facilities; and an outstanding library system. It is largely the presence of such amenities, in combination with the unusually lovely natural landscaping and water features of Central Florida, that will dictate the future quality of life in the community.

The unique urban design of Orlando is one of the strongest and most pronounced elements that must be preserved and enhanced as growth continues. For Orlando to flourish, there must be a balance between the natural and man-made environments. The City must care for that which already exists, and provide for what will come during the next 20 years.

Orlando is blessed with vital, vibrant neighborhoods, which are characterized by their old brick streets, variety of housing styles and sizes, access to lakes and parks and mixtures of their residents’ ethnic and economic backgrounds. As new neighborhoods develop in the region, programs and regulations should not preclude their development in the same time-honored Orlando tradition. While acknowledging the advances of modern times, new neighborhoods must incorporate the best of the past and emphasize amenities, graciousness and diversity.

The physical homogeneity of many new developments has not resulted in a better lifestyle for its residents, but instead has fostered stereotypes by clustering people with similar socio-economic backgrounds. It has closed much of the city’s housing stock and neighborhoods to broad segments of the population, precluding the very process by which Orlando’s community has grown and evolved. It is Orlando’s intent, through the GMP, to preserve neighborhoods, particularly the neighborhoods that form an encircling “emerald necklace” around the downtown



business district. This unique, beautiful setting helps make the heart of downtown the focus for the entire metropolitan area. Further, this plan encourages diversified infill development and redevelopment that is sensitive in character and compatible in scale with traditional neighborhood

design. This approach will enable all Orlando residents to access the housing and support systems they need in order to be productive citizens of the local economy.

Preservation of historic sites, buildings and neighborhoods is a proven way of protecting the tangible aspects of Orlando’s history. In addition, historic preservation can assure that the old and new will be blended into a pleasing, meaningful urban fabric – one that will be enjoyed and appreciated by longtime residents and, at the same time, show newcomers Orlando’s history and provide them with an immediate sense of place. Such preservation, sensitively blending past and present, also makes Orlando truly unique as a venerable, high-quality urban environment for people and families of all ages.

Development regulations and incentives must be implemented that are sensitive to traditional neighborhood design practices where possible or appropriate. Flexibility for new development to proceed in ways that even better accommodate new lifestyles must also be incorporated. Similarly, architectural or other review processes are needed to ensure infill development and redevelopment is appropriate and sensitive to the traditional design of a neighborhood.

Strong urban design also includes a commitment for the City to outstanding civic architecture, which sets a standard of excellence for the private sector. Such a clear, readily visible statement of expectations should result in a much more humane and long-lasting pattern of development.

Attention to urban design will also allow the City to integrate infrastructure, such as roads and drainage facilities, into the amenity framework. Highways, for example, must do more than simply move traffic from one place to another. As in the 1920’s, when snowbirds and tourists rolled happily down a grove-lined, brick-paved Orange Avenue on their return to a favorite winter paradise, the highway system must create a sense of place. This system must set the stage for the beauty of city neighborhoods and frame the direction of community development. To implement this plan, policies and regulations that deal with all segments of Orlando’s infrastructure and natural features will be developed and designed.

A key element in the City’s amenity framework is its water resources, including its lakes and the related amenity of landscaping. This plan encourages a more active use of city water features, of the many parks and lakes that dot the region, through a return to the old availability and appreciation of the lakes, beaches and, generally, lovely vistas they provided. This plan proposes to make the lakes more public, fronting development on them as was the custom at the turn of the century, as opposed to the more recent practice of creating private or walled lakes that can be seen only from the air.



In addition to its obvious physical amenities, Orlando will continue to be enhanced by a strong, diverse and supportive cultural, performing and visual arts community. Thanks to the City's involvement, United Arts and its approach to cultural arts funding have put in place a foundation that will nourish Orlando's major arts groups in the future, protecting yet another of Orlando's important amenities.

## **ORLANDO'S HOUSING FRAMEWORK**

A strong and comprehensive amenities package can accomplish very little if adequate housing for a community's citizens is not available. Orlando, through its long-time protection of downtown residential communities, is particularly fortunate to have a diversity of housing types and opportunities. A comprehensive approach to make more housing attainable and affordable is a key component of the vision that animates this plan. Today, as in the past, a range of housing types, locations and prices, will help maintain Orlando's long-time ethnic, economic and social diversity.

To succeed in this objective, Orlando must ensure that the stock of existing homes will be preserved and reutilized – partly because it will contribute to the valuable mixture of old and new and partly because of the practical consideration that such an approach is the most cost-effective and environmentally sustainable way of using services and facilities already on hand. Moreover, existing housing stock tends to be located closer to the urban center, making possible a reduction in reliance on cars as a primary mode of transportation.

At the same time, new housing can be provided in activity centers through requirements, as well as by incentives, to create pedestrian friendly mixed-use centers. As has occurred spontaneously in Orlando's past, infill housing is to be encouraged and supported in order to take advantage of existing infrastructure. Diversification within neighborhoods will be promoted and encouraged through flexible regulations and review procedures.



The City will also provide leadership to stimulate affordable housing demonstrations within new and existing neighborhoods throughout the City. The City will institute strong and directed housing policies and work with the Orlando Housing Authority, non-profit development corporations and the private housing sector to meet the very real and growing affordable housing needs of the community.

But simply preserving the housing that already exists and providing affordable new housing in and near the City's activity centers are not enough to solve the problems facing Orlando. The City also is aware

of the fact that low-income housing will become more and more difficult to provide, and that the homeless and economically disadvantaged in our society must be re-incorporated into an economic system that has, by and large, passed them by.

## **ORLANDO'S ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK**

Orlando's economy is increasing in range and diversity. It is important that the City's economic development strategy be coordinated with that of the region as a whole, and that the strategy takes advantage of the demand for Central Florida locations. Expansions of Orlando's economic base should be selective, and targeted toward greater diversification and employment that focuses on long term, well paying job opportunities.

While tourism is certain to remain a major component of Metropolitan Orlando's economic base in the foreseeable future, selective recruitment of economic activities should take place to build on the City's strategic locational characteristics. Particularly crucial are regional distribution, university and research activities, high technology, bio-tech and medical arts facilities, and digital media and information-based companies. The City must fully utilize the potential of the Orlando International Airport, encouraging Orlando to become a gateway to Central and South America as well as to Europe. Such a focus would provide the greatest opportunity for diversified economic health and growth into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

New economic opportunities such as advances in bio-tech and medical arts, a growing number of small businesses, and the rise of the "creative class" have created challenges for city planning. Major factors in attracting economic growth will continue to be availability of a well educated labor pool, and the ability to offer a desirable living environment to attract and keep the best people in the community. Orlando's economic growth is integrally tied to the amenity framework and to the education and well-being of its residents.

## **ORLANDO'S LAND USE FRAMEWORK**

The relationship between Orlando's amenities, housing, economic and social structure coalesces into a land use pattern, one that is traditionally associated with the GMP. A clear picture of the City's land-use vision can be summarized best through its focus on high-intensity, mixed-use activity centers. Throughout its history, downtown Orlando has functioned as a model for the sort of activity center the City now proposes to re-create in other suitable locations, albeit at differing levels of intensity. As a high-intensity, mixed-use urban center, downtown Orlando serves a clear-cut role: it supports surrounding neighborhoods, provides regionally centered offices and services and is a destination point for a mass-transit system. Downtown Orlando will continue to attract pedestrians - both those who walk to town, and those who drive and park before strolling - and its beauty, convenience and dynamism will encourage people to use the shops, businesses, cultural and recreational facilities and various amenities.

While the downtown will remain the predominant regional activity center, activity centers of various sizes are a critical component of Orlando's land use pattern. By providing opportunities for support services close to neighborhoods, they will help to reduce Central Florida's transportation needs. Even



the smaller-scale, mixed-use neighborhood activity centers with housing are essential, and will be encouraged.



Nonetheless, the activity center concept will fail unless the entire metropolitan area recognizes projected growth patterns and provides incentives and properly zoned land in amounts that are limited so as to encourage the development of such centers. Without restrictions in supply, land prices will allow the evolution of low-intensity, non-mixed-use developments, which will result in inefficiently used roadways, unnecessary infrastructure and the destruction of the natural environment.

It is interesting to note that the activity center concept was emphasized in the recent myregion.org planning process known as “How Shall We Grow”, and that the City’s approach to land use planning fully supports and complements the preferred alternatives identified in that effort. The City will involve itself in the review process of regional development proposals in order to focus growth into Orlando’s urban core and into activity centers that are suitably located within the City’s boundaries, appropriately designated areas of Orange County, and other nearby municipalities. Proposals for development that are premature, poorly located and cause or contribute to the destruction of sensitive natural or environmental resources in the Orlando metropolitan area will not be supported.

## **ORLANDO'S TRANSPORTATION FRAMEWORK**

To work properly, the activity center land use pattern must be supported by a strong transportation system that responds to the City's specific needs. It is urgent that transportation be improved in Orlando. However, the City's policies require that transportation improvements must clearly support the overall goals and objectives for future development. The transportation system should not dictate the land use pattern, it should further the desired land use objectives.

While older established metropolitan areas will continue to grow, their basic shape and identity is set. It is virtually impossible to take a large, mature urban area and transform it wholesale into something better. Orlando, on the other hand, is still young enough to design its own shape and identity. Many older Sunbelt cities continue to struggle with urban development and their transportation systems. Orlando can take advantage of the lessons from these areas - or Orlando can repeat their mistakes.

The Orlando metropolitan area is at a point where transportation could destroy the very quality of life that has led to today's growth. Central Florida cannot support indiscriminate, unsuitable or unilateral expansion of the highway system, nor do City policies support such expansion. Highway expansion cannot be undertaken based on capacity needs only, particularly when it is at the expense of neighborhood livability. Therefore, the City of Orlando will continue to work toward the formation of a multi-modal regional transportation authority within the context of the comprehensive planning process.

The most important thing about implementing a multi-modal transportation system is recognizing that Orlando does have the choice to design our urban area with the specific objective of making it transit-feasible in the future. Through this plan, Orlando will consciously shape development patterns with mass transit, including rail transit as a specific objective. The policies of this plan are designed to reach the threshold necessary for rail transit to be feasible. Orlando believes that through specific policies and actions, it can avoid becoming a large sprawled-out megalopolis entirely dependent on motor vehicles for personal mobility.

Financing of roadways and location of new transportation corridors must not be dictated by development desires, but based rather on the most effective means of serving metropolitan and regional activity centers and providing access to existing neighborhoods and employment centers. Unfortunately, building more and more roadways simply in order to provide development opportunities farther and farther away from downtown Orlando and other activity centers may destroy neighborhoods within the urban area, eroding the appeal and vitality that drew development to the City in the first place. To avoid this impact, the City has developed an innovative roadway capacity measuring system. This system evaluates transportation capacity based on transportation districts rather than individual links. This approach recognizes the very nature of urban development and balances the need for responsible transportation solutions with other goals and objectives in the plan.

Central Florida is the focal point of a number of important transportation projects. Every effort should be made to integrate high-speed rail linkages and new expressways into the overall land-use driven transportation plan. The City will also seize opportunities to make existing transportation projects

better serve the goals of the Plan. To support downtown's central core and adjoining medical districts, the City advocates using the CSX rail corridor to support commuter rail.

Developing the Orlando International Airport is also crucial for Orlando's evolution as we continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Orlando's strategic location and the ability of the airport to expand are two factors that enable this critical resource to play an important role in the economic, as well as transportation, future of the region. The role of the airport as a major transportation hub, linking air, rail (including high speed technologies), and automobile is an aspect of this plan that has enormous potential for influencing the future character of the region.

Central Florida cannot build all the roads needed to serve a totally automobile-oriented development plan. It is inevitable that some traffic congestion will still occur. The City of Orlando therefore will take a leadership role in implementing multi-modal transportation opportunities, and in developing a land use pattern that will allow for a balanced transportation system. To accomplish this, not only must the existing and planned road network be utilized to the maximum, but a mass-transit system must also be established and maintained that will contribute to a more livable environment.

#### **ORLANDO'S INFRASTRUCTURE FRAMEWORK**

The growth and evolution of the metropolitan area will require that a wide range of urban facilities and services be provided. These facilities and services will also be designed to support the overall vision of the community and to preserve the amenities of urban life.

Environmentally sound water, sewer and energy services will be located so as to enhance activity center development and will be ecologically sound. Water resources will be carefully analyzed in the development review process, and the reclaimed water system will be used as efficiently as possible. The activity center foundation of the Plan will allow more efficient use of sewer and water lines. The urban pattern will include a network of public parks and open spaces to provide opportunities for active recreation. Excellent police and fire facilities and services will be provided to protect the populace and its property. And finally, the City has committed to working closely with the Orange County School Board and Orange County government to ensure that schools continue to form the cornerstone of our neighborhoods. Schools are central to the growth and development of the City.

Financing for the provision of necessary infrastructure, including transportation, will require considerable public and private participation. This plan includes a combination of service fees, impact fees, and general property taxes, utility fees, special assessments, users fees and other resources necessary to eliminate existing infrastructure deficiencies and provide the infrastructure needed for new development at the levels of service desired by the City.

## ORLANDO'S SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

Orlando's population is more diverse today than ever before in its history. Residents come from many economic, social and cultural backgrounds. Recognizing diversity and incorporating it into the physical environment includes considerations for universal design and access by people with disabilities, multi-lingual or universal signage, variety in housing to accommodate diverse family types, and variety in transportation choices.

As Orlando grows and changes demographically, it will become ever more important that resources and energy be directed toward enhancing the human and family orientation of the community. This can be done by focusing strongly on the provision of critically needed support services, education and amenities. Critical elements include continued development of the cultural arts, parks and recreational facilities, particularly in relation to Orlando's signature parks and lakes.

Opportunities must be provided for a broad range of family situations, keeping in mind the importance of cultural diversity. As lifestyles change, support for both traditional and non-traditional family lifestyles will, to a large degree, determine the quality of life in a community that has been known for its sense of family. The Plan recognizes competing priorities by providing for day-care resources, parks, cultural activities and opportunities for shopping and employment, in close proximity to residential areas so that individuals may choose to spend more time with their families and on leisure activities instead of commuting to meet such demands.





Enhanced educational opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds, especially the economically disadvantaged, are critical if Orlando is to reach its full potential for economic development and preserve its social fabric. While developing educational opportunities is not directly within the City's prerogative, it is a critical factor in Orlando's growth and evolution and must be included in its vision of the future. The community must establish an effective means of educating the population and more fully integrating all of its residents into the mainstream economic pattern of Central Florida.

The City's vision will be implemented not only by government employees and elected officials. Citizens are the key. Orlando's vision will be implemented in great part by many non-profit and community-based organizations. Their successes have grown as their capacity increases. Local partnerships and creative projects are critically important to providing innovative choices in housing, social services, the arts, and environmental awareness. The City will continue to look for ways to foster positive community development.

### **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Orlando's vision for the future is noble, and the stakes are high. The crucial question is how it can be attained. The means for realizing the vision are embodied in the GMP. Through the GMP, Orlando will work toward a strong, regionally focused growth-management program that recognizes Orlando's historic, current and future role as the Central Florida regions' employment and cultural core.

This plan acknowledges that competition among the region's various local governments could easily result in an inefficient, scattered, low-density, sprawling developmental pattern. The City is dedicated to advocating for a more rational and sustainable urban form, and will work closely with its regional partners through such organizations as myregion.org to ensure that we provide future generations with a high quality of life. The City of Orlando challenges other local jurisdictions, the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council and the State of Florida to ensure that the proper coordination will be maintained so that Central Florida can grow in a manner that is as efficient and sensitive to the environment as possible.