

## 2009 FAPA Awards Program - Nomination for Neighborhood Planning Award: Fifth Avenue/Pleasant Street Redevelopment Planning

1. Fifth Avenue/Pleasant Street Redevelopment Plan; Fifth Avenue/Pleasant Street Strategic Planning. (Please see attached documents)

2. **Project Description:**

Fifth Avenue/Pleasant Street (FAPS) is one of four Community Redevelopment Areas located in Gainesville, FL. Located just north of University Avenue, between Downtown and the University of Florida, FAPS was once the epicenter of Gainesville's African-American community, a thriving mix of residential, educational, spiritual, commercial, and leisure offerings. Today, the neighborhood struggles with the negative effects of decades-long disinvestment, and the decline of the once-vibrant 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue commercial corridor. While the neighborhood faces significant redevelopment and economic development challenges, it also retains great potential due to its central location, vibrant heritage, historic architecture, walkable layout, and passionate citizens. In order to better pursue redevelopment activity, and to promote environmental and economic sustainability within the area, both CRA staff and the FAPS citizen advisory board felt that the old Redevelopment Plan (adopted in 1997) required an extensive update that would promote a stronger, more proactive role for the CRA.

In 2008, the Redevelopment Plan was therefore updated and amended in its entirety, a task undertaken by the CRA staff (in-house expertise includes planning, engineering, finance, and landscape architecture.) As foundation for the new Plan, the CRA utilized, in part, a draft document prepared for the Agency by planning consultant Herbert-Halbeck, Inc. This document was prepared for the CRA in 2005, though due to internal setbacks, was never adopted. Through numerous meetings with the FAPS citizen advisory board and a series of neighborhood workshops with other community groups, the CRA was able to rewrite the FAPS Redevelopment Plan in its entirety, creating a new policy document outlining the vision for community revitalization.

Although all stakeholders were extremely pleased with the updated Redevelopment Plan, adoption of the document alone could not ensure implementation of the vision described in its pages. The purpose of a Redevelopment Plan is to define the comprehensive redevelopment vision for a community and to provide policy tools for achieving this vision. However, simply assuming that the adoption of a comprehensive redevelopment plan would translate into project implementation is not realistic. In fact, this assumption ignores an important disconnect that exists between planning/visioning and project execution. The Redevelopment Plan, like many visioning/planning documents, is an important *conceptual* tool which defines goals and provides tools and strategies for meeting the challenges and opportunities associated with achieving those goals. The Plan provides guidance and support to identify and pursue projects which will help achieve the stated goals for the area. However, once potential projects are identified, the Redevelopment Plan, like any comprehensive visioning document, begins to reach the limits of its utility. In moving from *concept* to *action*, a visioning document provides little to no guidance regarding the practical details of project management, coordination, and implementation.

Recognizing the need for linkage to connect comprehensive redevelopment planning with the nuts and bolts of project implementation, the CRA embarked on journey to link the two facets of community redevelopment. In an intensive strategic planning process that spanned the Winter 2008-Spring 2009, the CRA worked with the community to establish a new process to align intangible planning concepts (such as sustainability, revitalization, etc.) with concrete realization. Using the Redevelopment Plan, FAPS budget, and project management/scheduling expertise, the CRA and the community established a new method for evaluating and executing all potential redevelopment initiatives. Through strategic planning, the CRA and citizens created a system to ensure that all redevelopment projects maintain clear linkage to the goals and policies outlined in the Redevelopment Plan. Additionally, once this linkage is verified, strategic planning provides an essential framework for moving projects towards implementation, by assessing the scheduling, budgeting, project management and other practical constraints in executing redevelopment initiatives. The end result is not only a procedure for evaluating the merit of a diverse array of potential CRA projects, but also the creation of a high-level "roadmap" document that outlines CRA activities in FAPS over the next three years. The 3-Year-Roadmap links projects to both the

Redevelopment Plan and to the budget, and ensures an efficient and practical use of CRA resources in order to achieve the maximum benefit to the Redevelopment Area.

### 3. **Innovation**

A Redevelopment Plan is the guiding document which serves as a blueprint for CRA activities within a Community Redevelopment Area. The Plan outlines goals and objectives for the area, and addresses various strategies for serving the redevelopment needs of the community. Legally, all CRA activities must be linked to concepts identified in the Plan, and while the Plan may identify certain projects (or types of projects) to pursue, it is not necessary for each potential project to be specially listed in the Plan. In July 2008, the Gainesville CRA adopted a newly updated Redevelopment Plan for the FAPS Community Redevelopment Area. This plan builds on the established, fundamental concept of a redevelopment plan and serves as a good “second generation” model for a redevelopment planning document, replacing an earlier document, adopted 11 years previously. That original document shared many characteristics with other redevelopment plans from CRA’s around the state: general goals for stabilizing a declining area and strategies to help alleviate slum and blight. The 1997 plan was appropriate for a newly established redevelopment area; however, as initial redevelopment initiatives take place, and neighborhood improvements beginning to take root, the plan should be re-assessed to continually meet the changing needs of the district, and the growing capabilities of the CRA. The newly updated FAPS Redevelopment Plan expands upon the existing model for CRA Redevelopment Plans by providing a more ambitious and proactive approach to redevelopment. The role of the CRA is boldly defined, and the Agency’s ability to initiate and coordinate an array of both large and small scale redevelopment projects presents an innovative approach to community revitalization. As such, the new Plan, serves as a good model to grow with the redevelopment area. Compiled after numerous sessions with the citizen advisory board and with other neighborhood groups, the updated Plan is much more action-oriented than the previous document. Redevelopment initiatives and strategies are more clearly defined and the document is structured to support a more action-oriented CRA role in redevelopment. Geared towards implementation, the new plan provides much greater detail and breadth than did the previous document. The plan outlines challenges and opportunities throughout the entire physical boundary of FAPS, and provides CRA strategies for addressing these issues, while remaining flexible enough to support CRA work on unforeseen issues/opportunities that may arise in the area.

While the new FAPS Redevelopment Plan is structured towards project implementation, the document remains a planning tool, a high level document intended to guide redevelopment efforts. In order to efficiently transfer the concepts of the Redevelopment Plan into an implementation timeline, CRA staff led FAPS citizen advisory board through a strategic planning process designed to link CRA projects to the Redevelopment Plan, to the budgeting process, and to a timeline for implementation. This strategic planning exercise, and the linkage between Plan and implementation may sound mundane or superfluous, but the CRA believes it be both innovative and indispensable. Far too often, a community comes together to create visioning/planning documents, but the overall concepts then languish for lack of connection between conceptual planning and real world implementation. Hoping to avoid similar pitfalls, CRA created a strategic planning process to merge planning/visioning with project management. While neither project management nor redevelopment planning are new concepts, the CRA developed an innovative approach to link these two critical fields together, to ensure that the overall redevelopment vision for FAPS will be achieved. After all, there is no benefit to creating a very good redevelopment plan if the document’s vision is never translated into reality. Likewise, it is foolhardy to pursue redevelopment projects without giving thoughtful consideration to ensure that the projects support the greater vision for the community.

In the months following adoption of the new Redevelopment Plan, CRA led a number of sessions with advisory board members and other citizens in order to ensure all stakeholders were thoroughly familiar with the information outlined in that guiding document. Next, stakeholders subdivided FAPS into smaller, sub-areas, in order to better understand the needs of individual residential, commercial, and mixed-use/transitional sections of the community. Each sub-area was discussed and considered as stakeholders created a “wish list” of redevelopment activities for FAPS. For this exercise, members were asked not to consider limitations such as time, budget, site control, or other logistical difficulties. Rather,

the goal of the session was to identify the projects which were most desired, or would prove most beneficial to FAPS. In all, 34 potential projects were identified.

Moving forward, each potential project was analyzed with respect to the FAPS Redevelopment Plan in order to understand if/how the project aligned with the Plan's objectives. CRA staff created a matrix to compare projects to Plan objectives and stakeholders were able to utilize this tool to determine the number of Plan objectives potential projects might execute. Through this analysis, a numerical value (count) was determined for each project, corresponding to the number of Plan objectives the project could potentially employ.

The next step in the strategic planning process was to translate these counts into meaningful project rankings. To do this, CRA staff and stakeholders developed a formula weighting each Redevelopment Plan objective based on the objective's ability to encourage/spur additional redevelopment. Weightings were determined in a collaborative forum, and the values/importance assigned to each objective were considered relative to those of the other objectives outlined in the Plan. The weightings were then applied to the objective count for each project, providing weighted project values were used to rank projects in order of compatibility with the Redevelopment Plan/ability to produce catalytic change in the community. Although the overall process may sound complicated, the resulting project rankings provided an easily understandable classification to understand which projects might provide the greatest potential for achieving progress in FAPS. Of these projects, the top 27 initiatives encompassed approximately 90% of the total points awarded to all theorized projects. Staff and stakeholders recognized that CRA resources could not feasibly implement 100% of the proposed "wish list" projects, and participants agreed that the top 27 projects would be pursued, as projects ranked higher than this limit exhibited a notably steep decline in points (indicating fewer Plan objectives being met per project.) The top 27 projects were utilized to create the 3-Year-Roadmap, which was affirmed through the CRA budgeting/funding allocation process.

### **Transferability**

FAPS Redevelopment Planning comprised two major activities: visioning/creating of the Redevelopment Plan, and Strategic Planning (translating the Redevelopment Plan into a course of action.) A major criticism of the planning field is that too often, planning documents (Redevelopment Plan or otherwise) simply "sit on a shelf" and the concepts spelled out in these documents never reach implementation. The strategic planning process utilized by the Gainesville CRA provides a crucial link between planning and implementation, providing a framework for assuring that the vision of the planning document translates into action/projects, while simultaneously assuring that projects are not conceived and undertaken without first reaffirming a linkage to the driving vision established by a community.

The process for evaluating projects is an important tool, with a utility extending beyond the initial strategic planning exercise. Moving into the future, new project opportunities will arise, however it is unreasonable to assume that any organization's resources can accommodate an infinite number of projects. Utilizing the criteria established in the strategic planning exercise, stakeholders can evaluate new opportunities according to the same framework to which all other projects are assessed. (In this example, the evaluation is based on a project's ability to implement objectives defined in the FAPS Redevelopment Plan, though this criterion is easily translatable to the needs of other groups/agencies.) New projects can be added to the 3-Year-Roadmap, with the understanding that existing/planned projects may need to be delayed or deleted. Thus, the strategic planning process and the 3-Year-Roadmap are dynamic tools, easily adaptable to changing conditions, challenges, and opportunities, yet providing a valuable linkage back to the fundamental tenets of the guiding planning document (in this case, the Redevelopment Plan), ensuring that the basis of community visioning remains relevant and reflected in the projects being pursued.

### **Quality**

The CRA and the community are very pleased with the quality of analysis, writing, and thoughtful consideration found in both the FAPS Redevelopment Plan and in the strategic planning analysis. Copies of each document are included with this application.

### **Implementation**

The FAPS Redevelopment Plan was formally adopted in July 2008, and implementation of redevelopment objectives is identified in Plan is outlined in the 3-Year Redevelopment Roadmap. Each of the projects identified on the 3-Year Roadmap has been assigned to a CRA staff member who will serve as project lead for the initiative. The project lead is responsible for creating a scope/outline for each project; this person serves as a project manager to guide all team members involved in the planning and implementation of the project.

Work is currently underway for those projects scheduled for FY 2009, and scoping is currently in process for the FY 2010 and FY 2011 projects, in order to ensure timely implementation according to the 3-Year Roadmap. The strategic planning process has proven so beneficial to CRA board members, staff, and citizens that the CRA has elected to undergo the process in all four of Gainesville's Redevelopment Areas. To date, the College Park/University Heights and the Fifth Avenue/Pleasant Street Redevelopment Areas have completed the exercise. Strategic Planning is currently underway in the Eastside district, and the Downtown will begin the process in the coming months.

### **Comprehensiveness**

In creating the FAPS Redevelopment Plan, great effort was made to comprehensively consider the needs of the neighborhood and the spectrum of issues affecting the economic development and redevelopment potential of the community. Numerous public meetings were held, both with the FAPS citizen advisory board and through general neighborhood workshops, to allow citizens the opportunity to identify issues and opportunities in the area and to suggest goals for FAPS redevelopment. The resulting Plan identifies general, conceptual goals for the community. These conceptual goals are then fleshed out through a series of Redevelopment Objectives (Housing Revitalization, Redevelopment Opportunity Sites, Historic Preservation, Infrastructure/Utilities, Streetscape, Urban Design, Recreational/Cultural Amenities, Sustainability/Green Building, and Funding/Financing/Management/Promotion.) Each of these objectives is further expanded into several sub-categories and the Redevelopment Plan provides examples of types of projects (and in some cases suggests specific projects) that the CRA can pursue to achieve each objective.

Although the Redevelopment Plan is structured to position the CRA in a proactive, implementation-oriented role in assisting the community, it is important to understand that the Plan itself is only a guiding document. It outlines a vision for the community and suggests tools to achieve this vision, and as such, it is a very powerful tool. However, the Redevelopment Plan itself cannot coordinate the implementation of redevelopment initiatives, as that level of action is outside of the scope of the document. For this reason, strategic planning proved essential to redevelopment efforts in FAPS. Through the strategic planning process, citizens and the CRA were able to establish a lasting framework and evaluation process for assessing all potential redevelopment projects in order to ensure that CRA undertakings truly reflect the principles and the vision established in the Redevelopment Plan. Implementation of redevelopment initiatives is dependent on CRA resources which are finite in nature (such as funding, time, etc.) Additionally, the timing and viability of projects may be linked to participation from other public agencies or private section partners. The strategic planning process provides a toolset for considering diverse factors, including those listed above, and assigning a quantitative measure to each potential CRA initiative. This evaluation technique is extremely useful when comparing projects and determining which initiatives to pursue and which initiatives to decline or defer. Further, the decision matrix is structured to allow CRA staff, advisory board members, and residents visibility into the implementation of the FAPS Redevelopment Plan, ensuring that the CRA pursues projects that cover both the full physical extent of the FAPS Redevelopment Area, as well as the breadth of redevelopment objectives outlined in the FAPS Redevelopment Plan.

4. A map of Gainesville's Community Redevelopment Areas is included with this application. Additionally, a number of images of the FAPS Redevelopment Area are attached. The CRA hopes that these photographs convey the character, challenges, and potential of Fifth Avenue/Pleasant Street.

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Project Client: Gainesville CRA, citizens

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Payment sent to FAPA.