

**Introduction**

The Westgate Belvedere Homes Community Redevelopment Agency, (CRA) was established in 1988 by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) as a special district for the redevelopment of the area. The agency was created pursuant to Chapter 163, Part III of the Florida Statutes, which outlines a comprehensive program providing the legal framework and financing mechanisms available to a local government for addressing the slum and blighted conditions of an area. The purpose of the CRA therefore is to revitalize the physical environment and economy of the district.

After the BOCC created the CRA, it appointed a CRA Board of Commissioners (Advisory Board,) to act as a policy making body. Subsequently, with the assistance of the County and private consultants, the CRA Board commissioned the preparation of a Redevelopment Plan for the district. The resulting document, the 1989 Redevelopment Plan, was adopted by the BOCC by Ordinance No. 89-6 on May 9th 1989.

The original redevelopment plan of the CRA was primarily a physical plan concentrating on land use issues, infrastructure needs, transportation, and the methods of financing improvements to address those needs. Unfortunately, however, the plan’s projections for funding were not realized, and therefore initial funds were minimal, and redevelopment began slowly.

Since the Plan had determined that one of the major issues was the poor drainage and excessive flooding of the Westgate Estates neighborhoods, the BOCC assisted the CRA in securing bond financing (a loan) for an Infrastructure Improvement Program. The improvements included retrofitting of the storm-water drainage system, replacement of the sewer septic system, construction of sidewalks, and pavement of streets in the South Westgate Avenue area, among other things. These improvements were finished in 1996 at a cost of approximately four (4) million dollars, an expense the CRA

is currently paying. Though these improvements benefited the South Westgate area, it was clear that the limited finances, coupled with the immense needs of the entire CRA district, would make redevelopment a lengthy process. Over the next several years, the CRA concentrated on acquiring land and developing financing for the North Westgate Avenue Infrastructure Improvement Program. This program is currently under construction.

By 1999 the tax increment (Ad Valorem) dollars that finance the CRA were sufficient for the CRA Board to hire staff, and by 2001 the current Executive Director and Administrative Assistant were charged with continuing the process of implementing the Redevelopment Plan and handling the day-to-day operations. In a January 2003 workshop, the CRA Board directed the staff to update and amend the 1989 Redevelopment Plan to reflect current conditions and demographics. In December 2003, this current amended Plan was ratified by the CRA Board

**Executive Summary**

Like the County’s Comprehensive Plan, the Community Redevelopment Plan is an evolving document that must be evaluated and amended on a regular basis in order to accurately reflect changing conditions and community objectives. This Plan has been prepared to amend and update the original redevelopment plan of 1989, and to establish future actions based on new priorities set forth by stakeholders of the CRA in a series of meetings.

The update of the original plan began with a CRA Board workshop in January of 2003. In March, the Board retained the services of Civic Design Associates, an Economic Development, Urban Design & Planning consulting firm, to assist with the planning process. During the spring and early summer, Civic Design and CRA staff conducted numerous interviews with residents, the business community, and County staff. The next step was a community charrette in September wherein the participants were invited to share their perspectives on the

immediate needs of the community, as well as their visions for the CRA for the next 10-20 years. Through this process, the stakeholders identified a number of pressing needs which, not surprisingly, were similar to the needs and concerns in the original redevelopment plan, i.e., poor drainage, and overall blighted appearance of the neighborhoods. While everyone recognized that there has been improvement in the overall appearance of the district, there is still much to be accomplished in order to leverage and stimulate the type of public interest and private investment necessary to achieve revitalization and redevelopment.

The amended Plan provides the framework for programming activities within the CRA. Obviously, it is not possible to fund all of the programs within the first few years; therefore, the Plan continues to prioritize the most pressing needs (infrastructure improvements and neighborhood revitalization,) while providing some funding for other programs (commercial corridor development,) intended to attract immediate attention and investment to the CRA. For example, beautification of the Congress Ave medians and other neighborhood areas, as well as the street lighting program, are several of the short term programs intended to continue the momentum of the planning process.

The CRA will continue to work with all stakeholders including the County Departments and Divisions to streamline the development process. While the CRA will lead the efforts toward redevelopment, it cannot do it alone. Some of the programs in Section V Redevelopment Programs, for instance, will need flexible development standards and regulations. Most County regulations are designed for larger sites in newer subdivisions. These regulations penalize older areas like the CRA that have smaller lots, minimal road capacity and inadequate or deteriorating infrastructure. Regulatory relief will be a necessity to spark development.

Allowing a wider range of permitted uses will provide more development opportunities. Similarly, as stated in the economic development section, the CRA will develop incentives to involve the business community in the commercial corridor planning process. While the amended plan is a starting point for initiating action and evaluating progress, it is clear that the plan and programs contained therein will take time and additional financing to develop. Additionally, implementation of the plan will depend on a partnership of many, including public, non-profit, and private-for-profit entities, to make redevelopment happen.

Finally, a special thank you to all those individuals who contributed time and effort to the development of the amended plan and also to those who, due to other commitments, could not fully participate. To the residents, owners, business community and public officials, we challenge you to continue your commitment to make the CRA a great place to live, work, and play. This is a new beginning so let's get to work and have fun in the process.

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Executive Director