

SEMINOLE HEIGHTS BUSINESS DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN



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INTRODUCTION

Background

Today, Seminole Heights is known as one of the original traditional residential neighborhoods in Tampa. This community, over the past few years, along with the other “original” neighborhoods of Tampa Heights, Ybor City, Hyde Park, West Tampa has been undergoing a “rediscovery” attracting suburbanites wishing to return to the inner-city along with young couples and “empty nesters”. Considerable effort and investment has been made by commercial and business owners and residents representing this community.

Seminole Heights has several wonderful natural amenities, historically having the Hillsborough River serve as its northern and western boundaries and its impressive tree canopy, characteristic of other older neighborhoods of Tampa. In addition, it is strategically located in close proximity to the interstate, just minutes from the downtown central business district.

The major business corridors of Florida, Sligh, Hillsborough and Nebraska Avenues funnel large volumes of traffic in and out of Tampa’s Central Business District, serving as an alternative to battling traffic along a busy interstate. Today, these principal roadways are host to a broad spectrum of uses, from small specialty stores and low-density offices to large commercially intensive operations. These corridors could have a very positive effect in determining new uses for properties in this area.

The residential and commercial communities of Seminole Heights have gone along different paths. Residents have been very organized and focused in developing their neighborhood, significantly improving the housing stock as evidenced by appreciating home values and establishing one of the largest and well known neighborhood associations in the entire City. Through their historic preservation efforts, they have received attention in several national publications. Businesses however, have been hindered by physical and regulatory constraints, along with very little commercial redevelopment.

In recent times, there have been instances where residential and business interests have had conflicting positions regarding several proposed commercial redevelopment projects along the business corridors of the greater Seminole Heights Area. The proposed commercial projects were wholeheartedly supported by the commercial interests, who were anxious for something that could serve as a catalyst for positive economic development in the area. The residents, however, were not supportive of these types of development, as they felt the proposed designs were not compatible or in scale with the historic character of the residential neighborhood.

These projects brought to the surface what had been an underlying issue in the Seminole Heights community for some time: a basic distrust between residents and the business community. Positions had been established; residents being very protective of maintaining the residential character of the area, business owners being protective of

their investments and supportive of additional commercial redevelopment. In an effort to arrive at some middle ground, several representatives of the business community attended monthly meetings of the neighborhood association's land use committee for almost two (2) years. Members of Planning Commission staff attended meetings primarily in the role of an observer and occasional contributor of data. Rarely were the meetings productive, with ultimately no resolution as the same issues resurfaced repeatedly. Members of the business community who attended the meetings voiced their concerns, not wholly supportive of the structure of the process. Meetings were held in the evening and were difficult for business owners to attend. Since residential interests initiated the process, businesses felt residents could not fully empathize with commercial concerns. Residents, on the other hand, felt there was not significant representation by the at-large commercial interests in the area attending the meetings.

Realizing there was no significant progress being made, an effort to reach out to the citizens of Seminole Heights was made by the Planning Commission, which offered to facilitate a process, bringing both residential and commercial stakeholders to the table, to establish a common vision that could ultimately benefit the entire community. The process was initiated via a mail-out conducted by the Planning Commission to over 800 businesses and commercial property owners, inviting them to an organizational meeting held at the Seminole Heights Garden Center in January, 2004. The meeting served a dual purpose: providing general demographic and statistical information on the current state of the business community in Seminole Heights and soliciting volunteers representing both commercial and residential interests, to be members of a Commercial Business District Committee. The meeting drew approximately 80 people, and an initial commitment from 25 individuals to be on the committee.

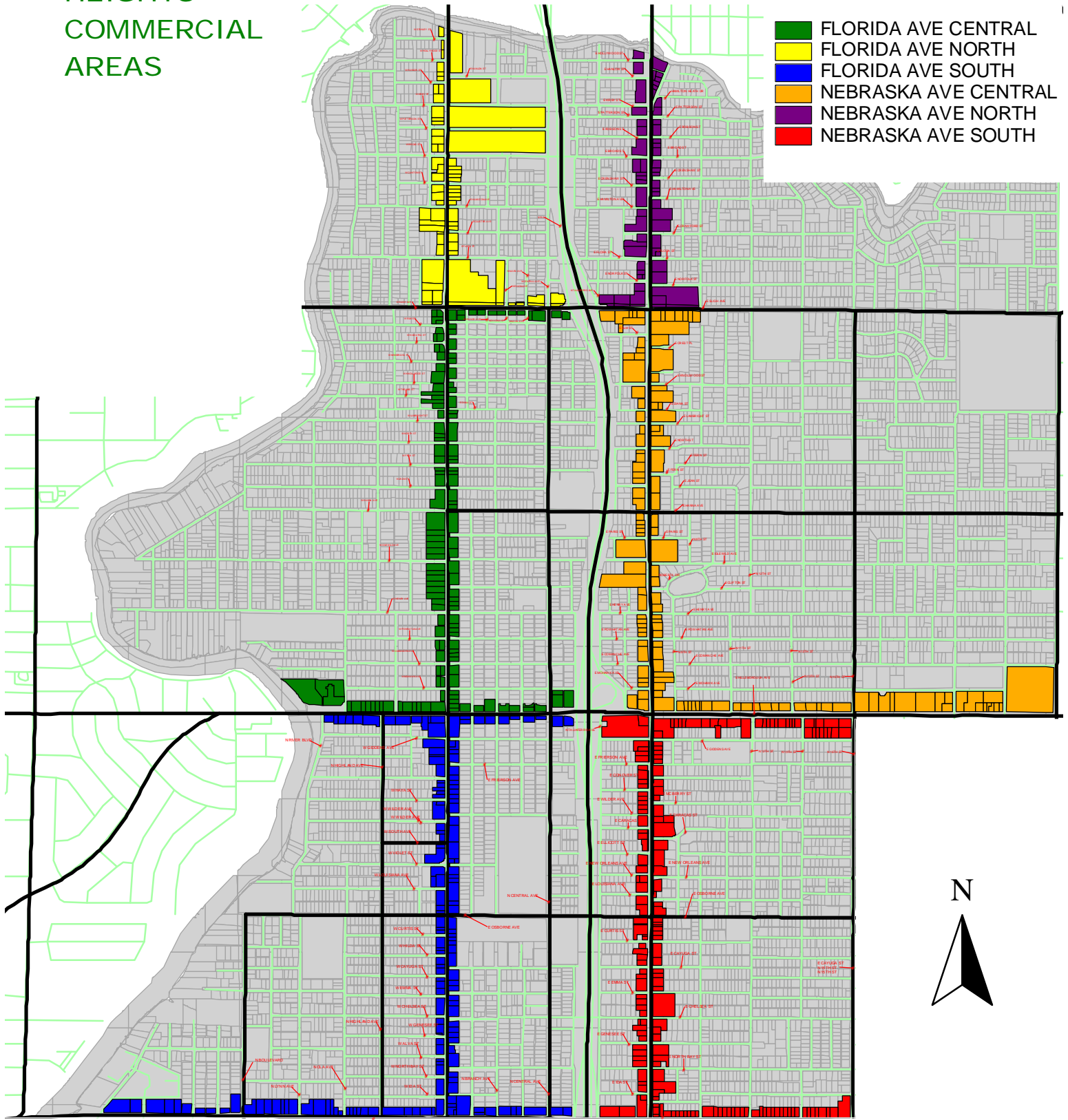
At the initial meeting of the Seminole Heights Business Advisory Committee in February, general guidelines were established:

- Outlining the meeting format
- What was generally expected of the volunteers
- Establishment of sub-committees
- The overall purpose of the process
- The projected timeline for completion of a draft plan, which would be the end of the calendar year of 2004.

Following the initial meeting, the format for all future meetings was for the committee members to break into sub-committees, briefly preparing their monthly committee findings for presentation to the other members. There were four (4) sub-committees created, representing the components that would form the foundation of the strategic plan:

- AESTHETICS
- INCENTIVES
- REGULATORY
- MARKETING

SEMINOLE HEIGHTS COMMERCIAL AREAS



- FLORIDA AVE CENTRAL
- FLORIDA AVE NORTH
- FLORIDA AVE SOUTH
- NEBRASKA AVE CENTRAL
- NEBRASKA AVE NORTH
- NEBRASKA AVE SOUTH



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THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Mission Statement – to create a business district plan that will result in the development of a financially successful business district that serves the needs of the community-at-large, that is aesthetically pleasing, has a unique identity and compliments the character of the Seminole Heights community.

The idea for the development of a strategic business district plan for Seminole Heights was created by the desire to establish an identity for its business community. Through the efforts of a committee of individuals representing mostly businesses from the area, strategic areas of focus have been identified that will serve as the major components in the development of this plan: AESTHETICS, REGULATORY, INCENTIVES and MARKETING. This process has also included and will continue to include the evaluation of public input to confirm, refine and implement the plan's objectives. The areas of focus are distinct, yet interrelated, dependent on each other to achieve the ultimate goals of the overall vision.

The overall vision for the Seminole Heights Business District seeks to:

- Convey the feeling of a safe environment
- Improve its physical deficiencies
- Provide a variety of commercial options as well as new business development.
- Retain its diversity
- Improve major corridors through the business district
- Tout its architectural character when feasible

The plan is an evolving document that will be continually reviewed as strategies and actions are completed and new ones commenced. A cornerstone to the implementation of this plan will be ongoing input and guidance partnering with the City towards the establishment of an overlay district or business improvement district.

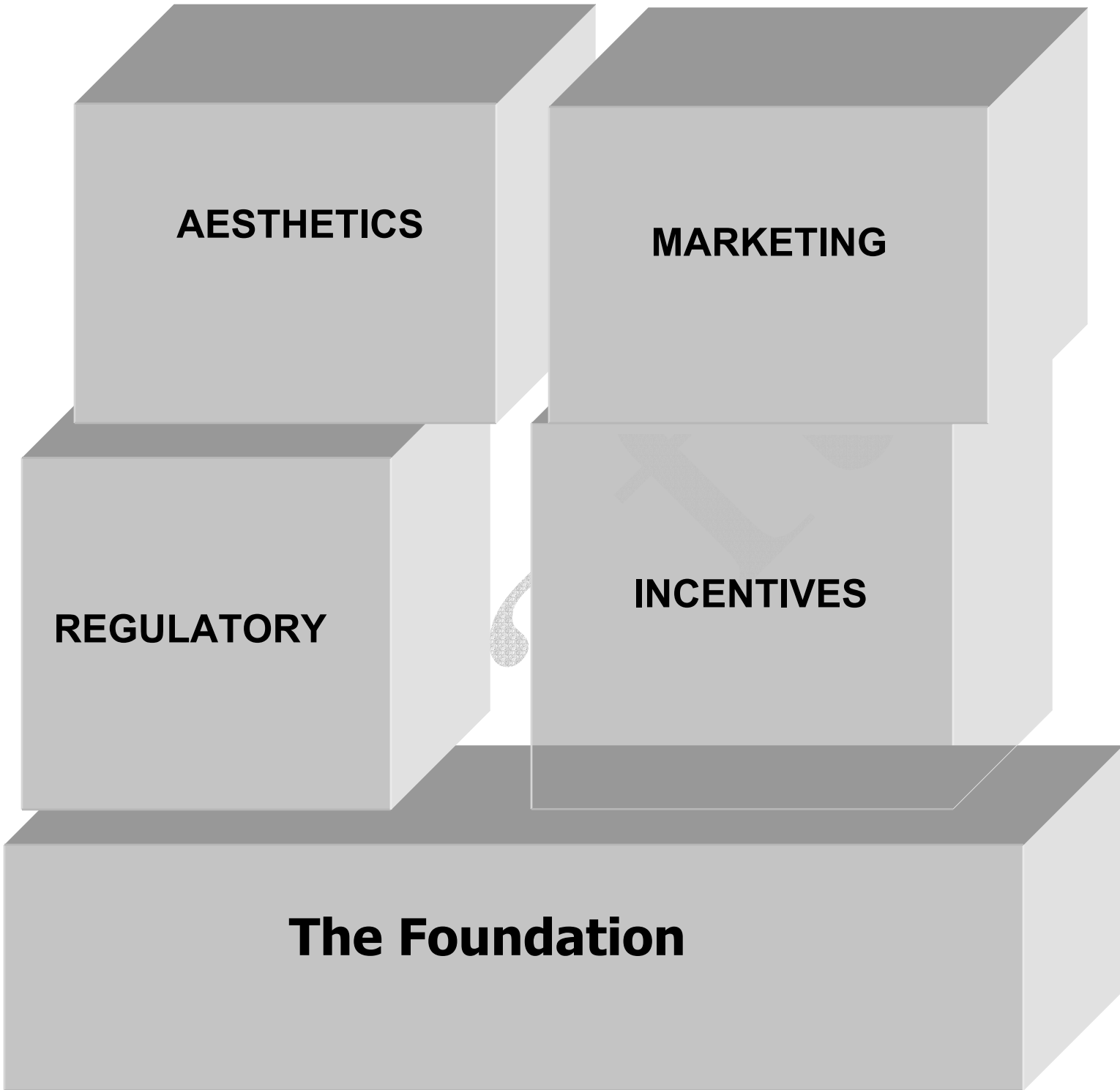
The plan will provide the citizens of Seminole Heights with the opportunity to develop as one cohesive unit using the collective strengths of the residents, businesses and property owners within the community.

Development of the plan will be incremental, with the marketing and regulatory groups eventually taking the lead with the development and implementation of an effective marketing plan and establishment of a business improvement district or commercial overlay district. Both will involve commitment from the existing business and commercial property owners in the area with assistance from existing institutions and the City administration.

It is important to understand that the implementation of this strategic business plan will be supervised by business and commercial property owners in Seminole Heights. Business and residential communities at large must work with city officials in

developing current and future redevelopment plans. This plan will be successful if both commercial and residential property owners work together.

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As stated previously, businesses have been hampered in part by their physical and regulatory constraints. The main objective of the Aesthetics committee was to scout the business corridors, and provide an honest assessment of the good, the bad and the ugly that make up these corridors. The positive physical assets existing within the community must be embraced by the committee and used as the focal theme towards establishing an individual identity. When people drive the business district, these corridors should have streetscapes that shout, "This is who we are, this is what we have to offer".

Initial Objectives

- Evaluate the overall physical attributes of the business corridors.
- Survey the physical characteristics and features that best personify the character and identity of the area.
- Note which areas are blighted or underutilized.
- Create a desirable character/ ambiance.

Recommendations

- Establish general guidelines for redevelopment.
- Public art – Art in the public environment can help to establish a stronger sense of place and continuity between the past, present and future.
- Development of a streetscape program and/or façade program.
- Encourage beautification awards.

Possible Strategies

- Establish "Gateways" – make a unique and attractive statement that conveys to people that they are entering or leaving the business district.
- Extended or expanded hours of operation for businesses. A lack of activity gives the perception of an unsafe area and breeds opportunities for crime.
- Define different "sectors" – some roads and even segments of roads exhibit different character and may develop at different rates.
- Enhanced transit stops – allows better accessibility and does not inhibit traffic flow.
- Creation of a commercial or mixed-use overlay district or business improvement district.
- Street lighting and street trees, creating a more aesthetically pleasing site for passing motorists (directional lighting to avoid impacting adjacent residential)
- Have all utilities placed underground.

Incentives such as grants, job training and business development assistance, provided by a variety of funding sources and programs are essential to properly address the physical issues facing the business districts of Seminole Heights. There are also hundreds of community plans across the country similar to this one, competing for the same incentives. Communities that make the effort and have an established, focused plan of action stand the best chance of acquiring some of these incentives, instead of just qualifying for them.

The primary objective of the INCENTIVES Committee was two-fold: first, to actively explore public and private resources to assist existing and start up businesses in addition to attracting desired businesses; second, to analyze these incentives determining which ones would work best for their community. In the process of their data gathering, the committee conducted personal interviews with government officials and private business owners, researched the incentive programs of cities of comparable size and gathered additional information from internet searches.

Objective

- Identify Types of Incentives
- Assess those incentives most suitable for Seminole Heights

Recommendations

Financing

Redevelopment/Revitalization Loans - Loans are available to businesses which appear to have a good chance of success, but have experienced difficulty in borrowing funds. These are provided by the City of Tampa and are used to encourage private investment and improve the neighborhood economy.

Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) - Created in 1998, the LISC Tampa Bay Area has committed over \$1.3 million in grants and loans. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for low and moderate income and special needs families and communities through housing and economic development. They have leveraged over \$8 million from public and private sources. LISC Tampa Bay financing includes:

COC/504 Loan Programs - This program provides growing businesses with long-term, fixed rate financing for major assets. While a COC is a Certified Development Company which is a nonprofit corporation, established for economic development in an area, a typical 504 project includes a loan secured with a senior lien from a private sector lender covering up to 50 percent of the

project cost, a loan secured with a junior lien from the CDC (which is 100% backed by the SBA) covering up to 40% of the cost and a contribution of 10% equity from the small business being helped. The maximum SBA debenture is \$1,000,000 for meeting the job creation criteria or a community development goal. Generally a business must create or retain one job for every \$50,000 provided by the SBA. Proceeds must be used for fixed assets and cannot be used for working capital, inventory or repaying debts.

Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program - While section 108 Loan Guarantees were established for small cities, community development block grants, it may be possible to obtain some someday through this program. Some typical projects eligible for section 1098 projects are:

- Rehabilitation of public or privately owned real property.
- Demolition, clearance and site improvement for eligible community development block grants
- Public infrastructure

Some examples of Section 108 projects are:

- Shopping centers
- Industrial expansion
- Business relocation
- Retail stores
- Riverfront commercial and recreational development
- Capitalizing a local revolving loan fund

Developed Incentives

- Enterprise Zone Programs
- Storm Water Retention Waiver
- Parking requirements Waiver
- Tax Increment Financing

Strategies

- Creation of a business improvement district
- Establish an impact fee free zone
- Real estate tax relief
- Step up crime prevention
- Build partnerships with community institutions that have a stake in the future of the area (private foundations, lending institutions and government agencies)
- Use Community Redevelopment tax to our advantage.

The REGULATORY Committee will coordinate future efforts assisted in part by the findings of the AESTHETICS Committee. One of the major reasons for the current lack of growth and investment in the area can be attributed to a land development code that does not recognize the unique physical constraints of this area. There are also parts of Seminole Heights designated as historic districts that have their own regulatory requirements. Methods to alleviate the physical impediments that have hindered growth in the area need to be fully explored.

Physical Impediments

- Underutilized, unsightly properties
- “Gaps” - vacant parcels
- Large number of small parcels
- Perceived lack of safety
- Pedestrian safety – transportation
- Lack of parking
- Transportation congestion
- Storm-water management
- Lack of pedestrian-oriented businesses
- Above ground utilities

Recommendations

- Creation of a Community Redevelopment Area /Taxing District
- Creation of an overlay district or business improvement district
- Establishment of a streetscape program
- Identification and prioritization of areas that need to be revitalized
- Support commercial uses that promote more pedestrian-oriented options.

Strategies

- Transportation Congestion Management – this area supports large amounts of traffic. Any area that accommodates or has the potential to accommodate a great concentration of economic and social activities within a pedestrian-scaled environment is going to be congested. Community leaders need to establish a relationship with the City and State transportation departments to more fully understand what transportation alternatives and methods are available to address the congestion issue.
- Establishment of an overlay district or business improvement district to assist the community in resolving issues that cannot be properly addressed by the existing land development code.

- Establish a Pride of Place – all businesses in the area should always be respectful and aware of the condition of their properties as they relate to current codes.
- Mixed-Use Development – maximizes the use of smaller areas, allowing both commercial and residential uses.
- Common Parking areas – encourage pedestrian activity, also mixed used projects could utilize the same parking areas for different uses at different times of the day.
- Improved Right-of-way- The street right-of-way is the term used to describe the publicly owned area between property lines. It can include a variety of elements, such as lanes for vehicle travel, parking, bicycling, walking areas, street furniture, bus stops, utility poles, planting strips with landscaping and trees and signs.
- Underground utilities would free right-of-way for aesthetic development.



Creating great streets is not just a design concern; it is a basic economic concern. Downtown environments create economic value because of the density of activity. If the street environment inhibits pedestrian activity, then you get lower traffic, sales, attendance, etc. This translates to less value for land, commercial and residential space."

*Tom Gougeon
R/UDAT Review 2000*

Residential development and the trend of inner-city living is in full swing. Tampa's downtown area is trending towards developing a significant residential component. The end result will bring more consumers into the City, creating potential opportunities for business and property owners in surrounding neighborhoods like Seminole Heights. Areas that will benefit most are those that have properly prepared and planned for this eventuality by having a marketing plan that effectively conveys the opportunities their community offers to targeted businesses. The Marketing committee's work has yet to really begin, since the strategic plan will be an integral tool to use as part of their overall strategy. There are two objectives that the committee has been able to accomplish in the interim:

- Evaluation of the current business climate
- Creation of a business needs assessment

Identification of Physical Assets

- Historic homes – the bungalows of Seminole Heights
- Centrally located - Downtown, Ybor City , Channelside, Interstate
- Hillsborough River
- Close proximity to Lowry Park
- Trees
- Diversity of businesses
- Schools

Recommendations

- Promote and encourage the growth of new and existing businesses within the Seminole Heights business district.
- Establishment of sub-districts should be defined by the character and physical limitations of the individual area.

Strategies

- Develop a business district website.
- Increase the membership and active participation of the existing business alliance.
- Revisit the strategic plan on an annual basis to be sure that objectives are on target.
- Create a marketing alliance with the three existing neighborhood associations.
- Recognize the importance of local volunteers.
- Promote and celebrate local business success stories.
- Support the development and continuation of community based organizations.

- Support local events related to cultural and community development.
- Develop a brochure on neighborhood businesses.
- Develop PSA's (Public Service Announcements) for distribution to media for a "Business of the Month" promotional.
- Provide articles to the local media on a neighborhood business that includes its history, current operation, and a profile of the owner.
- Meet and involve local realtors in the general area to discuss ideas and share information
- Promote neighborhood entrepreneurs.
- Have neighborhood businesses establish citywide promotions.
- Highlight a business monthly in the neighborhood newsletter.
- Form a welcome committee to demonstrate neighborhood support and highlight new and existing businesses.

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OBSERVATIONS ON THE CURRENT BUSINESS CLIMATE AND POINTS OF CONSIDERATION

- Many consumers are bored with the traditional mall and are searching for new shopping experiences that are better customized to their needs.
- Businesses in the area are diverse and not necessarily dependent on the local neighborhood as a consumer base. Most businesses have customers from other locations. Some businesses buy and sell to each other.
- Consumers like to feel a sense of community where they shop.
- Being able to park once and shop in a pedestrian-friendly area is increasingly valued by consumers.
- Mixed-use developments that combine retail, offices, housing, restaurants, and entertainment are becoming more successful and expected by the consumer.
- Finding a retail niche, targeting stores that fit that niche, and creating activities or events around that niche can create an identity for a business district.

Downtowns and existing neighborhood business districts should be prepared to deal with competition from the emerging popularity of lifestyle retail centers

THE NEXT STEP(S)

- This plan will go to the committee for final review, discussion and edits. Upon completion of a final draft, and reaching consensus on the overall intent of the plan, a community-wide meeting will be held to present this document to the community at-large and City administration for review and comment. The ultimate goal is to receive a favorable response regarding the direction and message conveyed by the plan.
- Presentation of the plan to Tampa City Council for acknowledgement and acceptance.
- The establishment of an economic development committee comprised of City staff and stakeholders from the area to determine the best method of addressing the physical limitations that currently exist in the area (i.e. Business Improvement District, Overlay District).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This space is reserved to acknowledge those members of the Seminole Heights Business District Advisory Committee for their efforts in pioneering this effort. For the first time, residents, property owners and business owners volunteered to meet over the last year and a half, contributing their time, ideas and effort towards the development of this plan. Every person who made the effort to attend these meetings or stay connected to the process did so because they believe in the community of Seminole Heights. Those individuals can have a sense of accomplishment that they have had some ownership in contributing towards the development of a plan that benefits the entire community. These individuals recognize that Seminole Heights has much to offer the City of Tampa and its citizens, not only as a premiere residential neighborhood, but also as a viable commercial district.

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