



CITY OF LAKE WALES

**Strategic Plan
2008-2009**

City of Lake Wales STRATEGIC PLAN 2008-2009

The purpose of strategic planning is to guide organizations in decision-making by documenting what and where they are now, what they want to be and do in the future, and how they will get from here to there.

In these early years of the 21st century there have already been a number of events that can be regarded as *defining moments* for the Lake Wales community. These events are evidence that Lake Wales is a special place with people who care enough about the future of the community to organize to address a specific challenge. Their success has not only resulted in institutional changes and improvements, but has brought outside interest, as other communities are watching our progress.

This is a most exciting time to be a member of the Lake Wales community! We need to continue to build on these efforts. With the City's focused and measured effort to address some long-standing challenges, we will ensure continued success.

Situation

The past four years have been tumultuous for the residents of Lake Wales. We have experienced turbulent events, as well as subtle changes, along with positive improvements. A list of the events that have changed us and other key indicators of our situation would include the following:

- Some of us are still feeling the effects of three hurricanes in the span of five weeks in 2004. One area that stands out as not having re-built is the apartment complex known as Sunrise, owned and managed by the Lake Wales Housing Authority. The complex had been scheduled for demolition, and this effort was hastened by the storms. The 120 units were demolished and the Housing Authority has not yet found a funding source for replacement;
- The need for code enforcement. The effects of the hurricanes exacerbated the continuing need for code enforcement in our town. In addition, the hurricanes were the final blow to the commercial area of Lincoln Avenue: it has seen the closing of nearly every business. In the last two years, with funding from a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for Disaster Response, there have been 21 hurricane damaged and abandoned houses and three commercial buildings demolished. Four homes have been rehabilitated;
- The vote by the City Commission to abandon the development of the Lake Wales Trailway between Fifth St. and Buck Moore Rd., and the referendum that overturned the vote, were significant. This question generated what many believe to be the most controversial issue for the city in decades. The first phase of the trail has now been completed by a contractor hired by the Florida Department of Transportation; but controversy continues, as 16 homeowners

have reported damage to their homes due to the contractor's use of a vibratory compactor. The City is encouraging the contractor to resolve the problem. The second phase of the trail, extending from Kiwanis Park east to Buck Moore Road, is the subject of a grant that is scheduled to be received in 2008;

- CRA efforts for re-development. The Lake Wales Vision group was asked to comment on the updating of the City's Strategic Plan, and they focused their comments on the need for redevelopment downtown. This interest parallels the interest already expressed by the CRA board, which is made up of the five City Commission members. In the past three years the City Commission has:
 - Conveyed the old City Hall to Polk Community College and agreed to make street improvements for parking for the establishment of a branch campus downtown. The renovation work is now underway and scheduled for completion in 2009;
 - Proceeded with foreclosure on the Grand Hotel, which resulted in the owner deeding the property to the City. A "Request for Proposal" will be released in early January, with proposals due March 31;
 - Approved the funding for full-time Main Street Director: The director has been instrumental in coordinating events like the monthly Bikefest;
 - Made plans for resurfacing downtown streets with a portion of the CRA bond proceeds;
 - Approved a working relationship with the Chamber of Commerce's new group, the "CRA Steering Committee", to advise on re-development efforts. The CRA took the first step: It had received a grant of \$25,000 from developer Richard Quaid for a downtown study, and the Board conveyed these funds to the "CRA Steering Committee" for this purpose. The study is now underway;
 - Applied to and received approval from the County for impact fee relief for redevelopment in the "core improvement area." The agreement will forgive county and city impact fees, except water and sewer impact fees, in the area including downtown and the northwest community;
 - Set aside \$400,000 of CRA funds for the redevelopment of neighborhood commercial interests on Lincoln Avenue, as well as the hiring of a redevelopment consultant.
 - Foreclosed on three properties in the Lincoln Avenue area, bringing a total to eight parcels that are being planned for redevelopment.
- There are now signs that both downtown and Lincoln Avenue are beginning to attract private investment for projects:
 - The owners of the Bullard Building at Scenic and Stuart are remodeling the upstairs floors, with office and apartment lofts;
 - The upper two floors of the Bank of America building at First and Central have been leased for professional offices. The third floor of the building will be finished for the first time;
 - Tres Jolie bakery, restaurant, and catering has moved from the Arcade to a larger space on Park Ave at a significant investment;
 - Brenda's Gifts has opened a store on Park Ave in anticipation of their lease at the mall expiring;

- The Green and Gold Foundation has opened a Farmer’s Market on Lincoln Avenue two days each week; and
 - The first new business on Lincoln Avenue in years will open soon, a meat store.
- Feeling connected to the community: As more residents move to the City, there are indications that they do not feel “connected” as a member of the larger community. This comment has been heard in the new retirement-oriented developments. Another factor, citywide, is that some new residents are Spanish-speaking and are not completely fluent in English;
 - Under-representation of African-Americans in public safety: While progress is being made, additional African-American police officers and fire fighters need to be hired as vacancies occur to better reflect our community;
 - The City’s financial situation is challenging. Several years ago we had the highest city property tax rate in our County. This is a result of the financial crisis that was discovered in 2001. Since that time, we have made progress but much of it was reversed by unanticipated health insurance claim levels in the past two years. This led to the City Commission approving a new health insurance plan with a conventional carrier rather than the previous self-insured arrangement. During this period the City Commission also reduced the tax rate by slightly over two mills. With scarce resources and increasing demands for service, there is a great deal of pressure to ensure that spending is unusually frugal. There is also a goal to continue to build fund balance in the General Fund;
 - In the last few years City staff has begun to compare our city budget to those in Auburndale and Haines City, two cities of comparable size. The tax base of these cities reflect a higher percentage of industrial and commercial property versus residential property when compared to our community. We are working to increase the industrial and commercial tax base in Lake Wales. The recent openings of Harley Davidson, Lowe’s, Chilli’s, and the start-up on construction of the Hampton Inn and Suites, the first new hotel in the City in many decades, are all encouraging signs;
 - Over the past ten years or so, some of our core services, most notably streets and storm-water maintenance, have been stretched and those services have suffered as a result. Expense in public safety has increased significantly. The CRA has recently issued a \$9.5 million bond, with the largest portion of the proceeds to be used for street resurfacing and drainage work. A second CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization Grant has recently been awarded through the State competitive process. This grant will correct a flooding problem on First Street near Seaboard Avenue. A flooding problem still exists on Grove Avenue, and it affects the Georgetown Apartments. A contractor for the City recently completed piping improvements, but the level in Twin Lakes must be addressed;
 - The impact of the growth explosion on city infrastructure. Development interests have been moving south from Orlando for over a decade. Evidence of the growth is seen in the Four Corners area and all points south along US 27 coming to Lake Wales. The demands for service generated by growth require the construction of new infrastructure that is now being

planned. Considerable progress has been made in this area. In the last year the City made arrangements for the funding of an expansion of the wastewater treatment plant through the State Revolving Loan Fund, and that debt must be serviced by developer contributions. The first draft of construction plans for the expansion is completed, and it is being amended to allow for the phasing of the expansion. The first phase will also include a number of improvements to the existing plant to correct design deficiencies in the current plant. The need for a second wastewater treatment plant has been discussed, with a general location identified in the northeastern area of the City. In the water operation, a 16-inch well is being drilled and a 450,000 gallon ground storage tank is being constructed at the airport, the first phase of water service to the western SR 60 corridor. A new water tank is also being planned near the intersection of Hunt Brothers Road and Scenic Highway, and a new sewer force main will soon begin construction to serve that area as well as new development in the Buck Moore Road area. The City Commission recently approved an agreement to begin a major “re-use utility” project, which will convey treated wastewater to the new Whispering Ridge subdivision. This should help the City get approval from the Southwest Florida Water Management District for an increase in our water “consumptive use permit.” The City Commission has also adopted a “Queue” ordinance, to have developers line up for future utility capacity. Utility service agreements can then be negotiated;

- The City has been pro-active in preparing for growth through planning. A substantially revised comprehensive plan, land development regulations and zoning ordinance, along with new impact fees and a new emphasis on both short range and long range planning, have brought positive comments from the planning and zoning board. Site plans are more highly scrutinized than in the past, and a higher quality has been noted. Agreement has been reached with the City of Winter Haven on a future annexation boundary, and a meeting was held in late May with the owners of over 5,000 acres along Masterpiece Road to discuss annexation and services. City staff has made arrangements for a utility and land planning study of this area and is collecting commitments for contributions. Impact fee credits for funds contributed for the studies are being offered;
- The Visioning effort is on-going. Following the establishment of a countywide effort to create a vision for the future, the Lake Wales Vision has started to map out areas of concern and opportunity;
- The Lake Wales Charter School System is successfully underway! Many people are watching what happens as the first conversion, charter school system in the State (and perhaps the nation) continues its successful operation;
- The new ownership of the Lake Wales Medical Center continues its successful operation. With our community hospital now back in independent ownership, the health care services available in our community have improved.
- Emphasis on Partnerships: City staff is making efforts to seek partnerships for the betterment of the city: The field maintenance agreement with the Lake Wales Little League, the Olmsted Neighborhood Association agreement, the conveyance of 3 building lots to the Green and Gold Foundation for infill housing, the re-establishment of the Recreation Advisory

Committee and the holding of two Recreation Summits, the athletic field maintenance agreement with McLaughlin Middle School, the agreement to assist in public safety recruiting efforts with Unity in Community, and the construction of the new soccer/multi-purpose complex in conjunction with the State and County are recent examples of these efforts. More recently, the City has been working closely with the Lake Wales Housing Authority to improve the Grove Manor apartment complex, and with County staff to plan utility service in the Masterpiece Road area;

- The Unity in Community group needs community-wide support in its mission to foster understanding of persons from all cultures and ethnic groups;
- There need to be continuing efforts to remove barriers to employment: Initiated by Pastors Anthony Thomas and James Cleare, City staff and the B Street Center have helped to bring services from Polk Works to City residents and to provide several job seeking services at the B Street Center;
- Public health care facilities need to be expanded. The County Health Department office has been overcrowded and in poor condition for many years. The State Legislature has approved funding for a new facility to be built behind the IHOP restaurant on SR 60, which will significantly improve services. The City Commission has also directed City staff to find a suitable site for the County to build an adult day care center;
- Continuous improvements in communicating with residents are needed. In addition to community partnerships, forums, and committees, City staff has added a quarterly newsletter and a City column in the Lake Wales News;
- The need for more attention given to city parks. In the last 20 years there has been a gradual decline in the attention given to City Parks. Maintenance was at a highpoint over 20 years ago, while more recently basic mowing has been the primary focus due to budget constraints. The re-assignment of two positions for landscaping has resulted in better maintenance downtown and at certain city facilities like the Boys and Girls Club. Several other actions are anticipated to create better landscaping and maintenance:
 - The revisions to the City's Land Development Regulations require donations to a tree fund if the site being developed does not have room to plant trees that have been destroyed. Lowe's has made a donation of over \$70,000 for this purpose, and Ken Allen planted trees in the triangle at Scenic and Lincoln for this reason;
 - The new Parks Committee is working on landscaping plans, first in Lake Wailes Park, and funds from the tree fund will be utilized;
 - The state department of transportation is providing \$400,000 for the landscaping of the US 27 median from Vanguard School to Cypress Gardens Boulevard. This work is scheduled for 2008; and
 - The City Commission has approved a change in the operation of the cemetery that will transfer two positions to the parks maintenance operation and maximize the use of community service workers in maintaining the cemetery.

- The Re-Construction of the 1919 School as a Center for Music Education and Performance. In the late 1990's the City launched into the re-construction of this building, thought to be the oldest school building in the City, to make it a performance auditorium. It was said that grants would pay for the project. Nearly 10 years later there has been much progress made, but the project is estimated to be over \$1million from completion. Recently this project was given new energy and a new focus when the City Commission hired Dr. Gabe Statom to consult on the project. This action put a much-needed focus on the end use, which will in turn attract donors. It is anticipated that Dr. Statom will be retained to manage the facility after completion. This project builds on the strong music tradition of our town, evidenced by the superior band at Lake Wales High School, and the success of the Lake Wales Chorale;
- The need for Historic Preservation: Although the City has areas designated as Historic Districts, these designations have no regulations to protect the buildings in the district. The City Commission is now considering an historic preservation ordinance that establishes one historic district in the downtown area for the purpose of regulation, and a process for other areas to vote to establish an historic district in their area. The ordinance provides for a technical board to review applications for exterior building renovations, as well as new construction for compatibility with surrounding buildings;
- The City's ISO rating has improved. The City Commission has approved expenditures over the past 10 years that have resulted in the City's Insurance Services Office rating to be substantially improved – from a split rating of 5 and 9 to a rating of 3. There are relatively few cities across the country that have this enviable rating. It is anticipated that the new rating will save property owners money on the cost of insurance;
- Recreation services are improving. The City is moving forward in improving recreation services despite the challenges of budget constraints. Lt. Burney Hayes, the City's Recreation Manager, has initiated the establishment of a Police Athletic League program, with the goal of bringing under one umbrella the services provided by all of the active recreation groups serving the City:
 - The independent, parent operated leagues, including little league baseball and softball, youth football, and youth soccer;
 - Independent adult leagues, such as adult softball and shuffleboard;
 - Non-profit organizations like the YMCA, who offer soccer; and
 - City-operated programs such the Junior Magic Basketball program.

The new soccer/multi-purpose sports complex on Hunt Brothers Road will be opened in 2008, bringing high quality facilities for youth soccer to the City.

There is also a need to expand into new areas. The City has wonderful tennis facilities that could support an active instructional program and leagues for players of all ages, and the Kirkland Gym has facilities for volleyball. Again because of budget constraints, these programs will have to wait until volunteers step forward to establish new leagues.

A unique youth recreation opportunity in Lake Wales deserves mention: the Pram Fleet, an organization that has been teaching youngsters to sail on Lake Wailes for decades.

Response

The list indicates some difficult challenges as well as wonderful opportunities for our City. City staff believes that the City of Lake Wales should carefully and pro-actively map out a strategy for addressing the challenges and maximizing the opportunities. City staff recommends that the City's adopted strategic plan be discussed, reviewed, and re-adopted every two years. This document will be subject to change as the Lake Wales Vision group completes its work and as conditions change. While the Strategic Plan will stand alone to guide decision making in the upcoming year, it will also be reflected in the adopted budgets.

Strategic planning is a dynamic, on-going process. It is anticipated that when the Lake Wales Vision group completes its document, it will influence changes in this strategic plan.

In the City of Lake Wales, strategic planning has been done in the past primarily through budget workshops, since most of what is done by the City must be included in the budget. However, City staff feels this process can be improved. The end product of this planning needs to be a stand-alone document that citizens can access and have input into throughout the year. It is hoped that the plan will help unify the community and focus our efforts in a concerted direction. In addition, it will help us to make the best use of our very limited resources, and help ensure continuity from year to year.

Foundation Statements

City staff recommends that the plan begin with six "foundation statements":

- ◆ We will be financially strong and sustainable.
- ◆ We will provide core services to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all our citizens.
- ◆ We will provide additional services to enhance recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities for all of our citizens.
- ◆ We will promote a strong sense of community.
- ◆ We will promote a vibrant economy.
- ◆ We will be pro-active caretakers of the environment.

Each of these foundation statements will be explored further with an analysis of the challenge, a statement of our commitment, the strategies or methods for carrying out our commitment, and the key indicators to determine our progress.

We will be financially strong and sustainable.

➤ The Challenge

In the 2000-2001 fiscal year revenues, the General Fund and Utility Fund fell far short of what was projected, while expenditures continued on pace. The City ended the year with a General Fund balance of less than \$250,000, and the Utility Fund revenue projections were off the mark by over \$600,000. Fund balance in both funds suffered as a result, and it was necessary to cut expenses. In the following year, 22 staff positions were closed, 10 through lay-offs and 12 through the closing of open positions. The city has been recovering from these events in years since. More recently the City has been hit with unanticipated health insurance costs, and the City now faces a fiscal challenge in the form of Tax Reform efforts in the state legislature.

➤ Our Commitment

We will become financially strong and sustainable.

➤ Strategies for Action

- ✓ The City will seek to have 20% of its operating budget in fund balance, as recommended by the city auditor.
- ✓ The City will keep debt to a minimum and utilize debt only when no other option is available.
- ✓ The City will make Budget Amendments as necessary on a quarterly basis.
- ✓ The City will seek to stay within expenditure targets throughout the year.
- ✓ The City's Finance Committee will meet at least once per quarter in open meetings to review the City's financial position.
- ✓ City staff will present interim financial statements every month with an analysis of revenues and expenditures as compared to the target for the time of year, and cash as compared to cash at that point in the previous year.
- ✓ City staff will benchmark the City's financial performance annually with other comparable cities in the County.
- ✓ We will carefully evaluate our spending to ensure that it is cost-effective and financially responsible at all times
- ✓ We will invest in the future by developing infrastructure, facilities, city staff capacity, programs, and services that are sustainable over the long term, considering all related costs.

➤ Key Indicators of Our Progress

- ❖ Financial trends, including fund balances, millage rate, utility rates, debt load
- ❖ Annual audit

We will provide core services to protect the health, safety, and welfare of all our citizens.

➤ The Challenge

The provision of the City's core services has changed over the years: Some services are well provided and others are struggling due to a lack of resources. In the past 20 years, the percentage of the city budget devoted to public safety has increased dramatically. Public safety now accounts for over 50% of General Fund expenditures.

There are mounting challenges facing our police and fire departments. The growth of the city is increasing the need for fire department services.

In the past few years, there has been a shift in emphasis in the police department, with a return to community policing goals. The department has a new program for police athletic league activities, a cadet program, and greatly enhanced recruiting efforts. Crime prevention efforts, which were previously provided by the Sheriff's Department, are now being offered in our police department. The fire department has recently opened a temporary sub-station in the northern section of the city. The need for capital expenditures in both departments is a concern, as in the FY '07-'08 budget there are no police car replacements.

The streets function suffered severe cutbacks due to the City's financial restrictions in recent years and is not fully recovered. The conditions of many streets need to be improved, as they appear to have been built with sub-standard materials. One of the worst areas for poor street conditions was addressed with the CDBG project in the Minnesota Ave area. Adding to the problem of street condition in some areas is the inadequacy or lack of drainage structures. The number of potholes to be filled is often an indicator of this situation. The recent purchase of a vactor truck will provide the equipment needed to begin a new program of checking every drainage structure once per year. In addition, City staff will take another look at the use of inmate work squads to assist in performing street work. Alleys, in many areas, are in deplorable condition due to sub-standard construction and the use of alleys by heavy garbage trucks. A comprehensive review of alley conditions is needed.

City staff is preparing the final list of City streets and alleys to benefit from work funded by the CRA bond.

The utilities' functions have increased, but the provision of equipment and routine services have not always kept pace. The recent purchases of a new vactor truck (used for both stormwater and wastewater functions) and a new loader, along with generators placed at key lift-stations, will improve operations and efficiency. City staff is also working with the new City engineer to develop plans to correct deficiencies at the wastewater plant. The re-use system is also underway at the Longleaf Business Park, and the new contract with the Southwest Florida Water Management District will provide needed funding for a major re-use project. There are a number of water and sewer projects in either the design or the construction phase, including improvements at the wastewater treatment plant, renovations at many lift stations, a new major

sewer force main serving Buck Moore and Hunt Brothers Road, and water projects including a new water tower to serve the south area of town, and a new water plant at the airport that will eventually serve the SR 60 west corridor.

It is critical that the City continue to plan for the expanded utility services needed for growth. The City Commission has directed that these expansions be paid for by the developers and new customers, rather than the existing customers. To this end, the City Commission approved a system where developers join a “queue” to line up for service, and then sign a utility service agreement that locks in payments for utility expansions. The City staff is now processing the first customers in the new system.

The City Commission also authorized a study of utility rates, and a new schedule has been developed that provides a “lifeline rate” for low income customers, provides adequate funding for maintenance activities, and continues to encourage water conservation by customers.

➤ **Our Commitment**

We will strive to provide excellent core services for all of our citizens.

➤ **Strategies for Action**

The strategies for action focus on seven areas: police, fire/rescue, water, wastewater, drainage, streets, and garbage collection.

- ✓ Focus efforts on reducing crime
- ✓ Continue to implement Community Policing
- ✓ Expand youth programs.
- ✓ Improve fire department response
- ✓ Check every fire hydrant at least once each year
- ✓ Increase fire hazard awareness
- ✓ Exceed regulatory agency requirements
- ✓ Commence service of the re-use system
- ✓ Ensure compliance with standards for utility construction
- ✓ Complete and implement the master plans for water, wastewater, and drainage
- ✓ Improve utility service initiation and billing procedures
- ✓ Check every drainage structure at least once each year
- ✓ Keep streets and alleys in good condition

➤ **Key Indicators of Our Progress**

- ❖ Crime statistics
- ❖ Feedback from citizens
- ❖ Traffic accident statistics
- ❖ Fire incidence
- ❖ Fire department response times
- ❖ Water main breaks
- ❖ Wastewater leaks
- ❖ Pothole inventories
- ❖ Street condition assessments
- ❖ Utility billing complaints

We will provide additional services to enhance recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities for all of our citizens.

➤ The Challenge

Parks maintenance was at a low point several years ago: In the last three years this function has improved with the addition of seasonal staff positions; the utilization of contractors in certain areas, allowing City staff the time to complete jobs in other areas; the upkeep of the Little League Complex through a contract with that league; maximizing the use of neighborhood associations; and the utilization of recreation volunteer workers. The City Commission has also:

- Approved the maintenance at the Northwest complex with softball leagues;
- More recently, the City Commission approved a shift of two positions from the cemetery to parks maintenance. It is anticipated that this move will better utilize these positions as the new sports complex on Hunt Brothers Road comes on line, as well as taking over for the out-sourcing of some parks maintenance that has been terminated. One of the keys to success in upgrading parks maintenance is a strong equipment maintenance program, and new management in that area has already made improvements.
- Other areas that have been upgraded include the clearing of shoreline at Lake Wailes, a renewed emphasis on the median on Central and Municipal Administration grounds, downtown curb areas, the Austin Center, and the area near Harmsco on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Recreation opportunities are poised for advancements of grand proportions! As noted above, the new soccer/multi-purpose complex, a better utilization of the now lighted field at McLaughlin Middle School, the skateboard area planned in 2008 for Kiwanis Park, improvements to the boat ramp also in 2008, and the planning for the swimming pool, are all pending. In addition to facilities, programs will expand under the leadership of the new Recreation Manager position in the Police Department. In the last two years, adult softball has returned to the City with a participant-driven league located at the Northwest Complex that also has been contracted with to maintain the fields. Shuffleboard has also improved as the courts were renovated several years ago and new fencing was installed to resist vandalism.

Planning for recreation is also the subject of three committees:

- The Recreation Board, which focuses on active recreation programs;
- The Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee, which focuses on making our town a “walkable” community and plans for trails; and
- The Parks and Community Appearance Committee, which focuses on the landscaping and hardscape features in parks.

The City Library and Depot Museum are important resources for education. The library is a member of the County Library System, and is well used by both City and unincorporated residents. The museum offers exhibits and programs of local history. Both facilities have enjoyed improvements recently; the library is now the County center for books by mail, and like

many City buildings, it now has hurricane protection for the windows. The museum has had hardwood floors installed and has been repainted.

The City cemetery was one of four focus areas in the current year. With new seasonal positions, maintenance has improved. A new irrigation system for Willow Lawn cemetery has been completed. A new cemetery is proposed on 40 + acres that have been purchased for additional wastewater re-use land on Scenic Highway near Hunt Brothers Road. This property is located east of new soccer-multi-purpose complex.

Support for the arts is provided through activities such as the display of artwork at the Municipal Administration Building. Education support is evidenced by the School Resource Program, the installation and maintenance of the irrigation system at McLaughlin Middle School athletic field, and the police and fire cadet programs. The City Commission has also directed staff to establish a Citizens' Academy, and attendance at this program is growing.

➤ **Our Commitment**

We will strive to provide excellent recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities for all our citizens.

➤ **Strategies for Action**

The strategies for action focus on six areas: the provision of parks and recreation opportunities; library services, the Depot Museum, the city cemetery; and support for the arts and education.

- ✓ Move the parks and streets yard from the Hardman Recreation Complex to the area north of the Market Street water plant
- ✓ Continue to improve Parks maintenance
- ✓ Exceed State library standards
- ✓ Expand educational programs
- ✓ Expand Black History exhibits
- ✓ Continue to require neighborhood parks and pedestrian/bike paths connections for new developments
- ✓ Expand community parks in developing areas of the City
- ✓ Implement fees for use of parks and recreational facilities to help offset operational costs
- ✓ Work with school officials in both the Charter System and the County System to ensure that the City is in compliance with school concurrency regulations and the inter-local agreement
- ✓ Work with school officials to encourage improved scores in the basic occupational skill sets of writing, math, science, and communications

➤ **Key Indicators of Our Progress**

- ❖ Assessment of conditions in parks, cemeteries
- ❖ Participation in recreation programs

We will promote a strong sense of community.

➤ The Challenge

In the last six years, there have been several defining moments for the Lake Wales community. Two of these moments came with the sale of the Lake Wales Regional Medical Center by Winter Haven Hospital, and the formation of the Lake Wales Charter School System. In both cases, a small group of residents identified a community problem and mobilized to take corrective steps. Their efforts were successful, indicative of a community with strong community pride. There are other indicators of this community pride, such as the organizations serving the area. These include the Care Center, the B St. Center, the Green and Gold Foundation, the Historical Society, the Nature Conservancy, Green Horizon Land Trust, Lake Wales Little League (organized in 1954 with four team sponsors, three of whom have continued as team sponsors every year since then) and other youth leagues, and several civic clubs.

As we approach our community's 100th birthday celebration, it is fitting to reflect on our sense of community. With the successes noted above, there are also challenges: some residents do not feel connected to the community, the effects of growth, and the deterioration of historic neighborhoods.

➤ Our Commitment

We will promote a strong sense of Community, to recognize and celebrate that Lake Wales is a very special place.

➤ Strategies for Action

The strategies for action focus on seven areas: communicating with and seeking input from citizens, celebrating our diversity, providing planning and redevelopment (including code enforcement) services, support for community events, preservation activities, and neighborhood organizations

- ✓ Continue to seek input and dialogue with residents, including through monthly City Manager and Police Chief forums
- ✓ Maintain the City's website as an important information source
- ✓ Begin a monthly City newsletter, in both English and Spanish
- ✓ Continue efforts to enable the City workforce to be reflective of the diversity of our City population
- ✓ Provide planning, redevelopment, and code enforcement services that are reflective of the values of Lake Wales
- ✓ Continue to support community events
- ✓ Finalize a historic preservation ordinance
- ✓ Facilitate the organization of neighborhood groups

➤ Key Indicators of Our Progress

- ❖ The number of community meetings held by city staff
- ❖ The diversity of the city workforce
- ❖ The quality of development plans recommended for approval
- ❖ The number of buildings needing code enforcement action
- ❖ The number of neighborhood organizations and participation

We will promote a vibrant economy.

➤ The Challenge

Historically the economic base for Lake Wales and Polk County has been agriculture. In the future, it is anticipated that agriculture will not have the same priority position. Development opportunities and canker concerns are encouraging many growers to re-locate their operations elsewhere. As noted in the Polk Vision document, this could lead to Polk County becoming a “bedroom” community and a service economy with workers living here but working elsewhere, and job growth focused on services rather than a healthy balance with other sectors whose jobs tend to pay higher wages. With a balanced and vibrant economy, today’s children will have a number of attractive career options here at home when they are ready to enter the workforce.

An important step was taken years ago when the City Commission approved the funding of the Economic Development Director position. The results have been very encouraging. The Longleaf Business Park has two new buildings one of which is nearly 50% leased through marketing as a “flex-space” building. The other building remains for sale. The park’s original spec building is almost completely leased and another spec building sold to a manufacturing company. A Harley-Davidson distribution and sales center has opened, giving us a national brand.

In addition, there has been some effort in re-energizing commercial efforts in downtown and on Lincoln Ave as noted above. There is an opportunity being explored with the recent acquisition of the Grand Hotel. Working in partnership with three groups to promote downtown and renewed staff efforts to spruce up have been successful. The FDOT work at the corner of US 27 and Central is expected to help bring visitors. The CRA approved a proposal to make low interest loans available through the CRA to bring neighborhood commercial back to the Lincoln Ave. area. The program has not been utilized to date, but the new redevelopment consultant, Kimbrough and Associates, is working on a modification of the program. The recent foreclosure of the Walker property on Lincoln Ave. is another opportunity being explored, as well as the opening of a police sub-station.

Both Lincoln Ave. and downtown will benefit from studies that will be proposed. The CRA has partnered with a new Chamber redevelopment committee and funding for the first in a series of studies is being provided by a new property owner downtown, Richard Quaid, in the amount of \$25,000. That study is now underway. It is anticipated that several other studies for the downtown area, Lincoln Ave. and the Scenic Highway industrial area north of downtown will be proposed for CRA funding.

State Road 60 West is viewed as a future industrial area, with the planned location of the CSX rail yard. The airport is gaining importance due to its location in that area.

It is important that we continue to pursue a balanced local economy and stimulate activity in the downtown and Lincoln Ave areas.

➤ Our Commitment

We will strive to achieve a vibrant economy.

➤ **Strategies for Action**

The strategies for action focus on six areas: City staff assistance to businesses in the community that wish to expand or to businesses that wish to re-locate to our community; the improvement of downtown, the Northwest area neighborhood commercial area, the expansion of the airport; the expansion and diversification of commercial and industrial activity; and the sale of lots in the Longleaf Business Park.

- ✓ Assist existing businesses with expansion
- ✓ Bring in new business and diversify the economy
- ✓ Sell lots in the Longleaf Business Park
- ✓ Increase business operations in downtown and Lincoln Ave areas
- ✓ Expand the airport facilities and uses
- ✓ Facilitate the rehabilitation of the Grand Hotel
- ✓ Facilitate a competitive business environment within our labor market area

➤ **Key Indicators of Our Progress**

- ❖ The number of businesses that have expanded
- ❖ The number of parcels involved in active negotiations for expanded or new business activity
- ❖ The number of new business locations with emphasis on downtown and the Lincoln Ave. area
- ❖ The number of lots sold in the Longleaf Business Park
- ❖ The improvements completed at the airport
- ❖ The number of new jobs as compared to the number of new dwelling units that are not located in retirement communities

We will be pro-active caretakers of the environment.

➤ The Challenge

One of the features that defines Lake Wales is our natural environment of rolling hills around one of the highest elevations in the state, picturesque lakes, healthy trees, and abundant open space. In the early years of the City, the famous landscape architecture firm of the Olmsted Brothers prepared a landscaping plan for portions of the City. The father of the brothers, Frederick Law Olmsted, is regarded as the founder of landscape architecture. His principles for development, such as saving the best land for public land, using mature plant material, and providing for natural groupings of trees rather than uniformity of spacing, have stood the test of time in places such as Central Park in New York City.

While the current wave of development is an opportunity, it must also be recognized as a potential threat to our natural environment. In another defining moment, the City Commission imposed a “Zoning in Progress” period that stopped the platting of new subdivisions until the City’s Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and Land Development Regulations could be overhauled. In this same period, a new Impact Fee schedule was developed. Except for the Impact Fee schedule, all of this work was done in-house. This assured that the proper perspective was used, and that the persons writing the document – Margaret Swanson and Judy Delmar - will also be implementing it. Due to the scope of such an undertaking, this approach is not a typical scenario... consultants are usually brought in to do this, as was the case here twice before in the last ten years. In both cases, City staff at that time did not think enough of the work to bring it forward for adoption to the City Commission.

The new regulations include the City’s first tree protection ordinance. An ongoing effort is now underway to require and influence developers to leave existing trees for future housing and commercial developments. Two recent examples, already noted above, indicate this ordinance is working: Lowe’s has paid over \$70,000 into the tree fund to pay for trees that will be planted in City parks or right-of-ways; and Ken Allen has paid for the trees planted in the triangle on Scenic at Lincoln.

The Lakes Advisory Committee has a staff liaison, Nancy Furland, who volunteers her time in this position. The initial focus is on Lake Wailes, where the retention ponds were recently cleaned and a new berm was installed by City staff. Ms. Furland will direct additional work to continue the implementation of the lake study done five years ago, including the removal of sediment at the outfall of storm-water drains from SR60 and city streets.

The City is fortunate to have a number of lakes in strategic places, offering beautiful vistas. The health of these lakes needs continual monitoring, and the Lakes Advisory Committee is keeping a spotlight on this issue. The City is participating with SWFWMD in a watershed study that will identify specific drainage objectives.

Another area for protection is the vistas afforded by SR 17, which was recently designated as a State Scenic Highway.

➤ **Our Commitment**

We will strive to maintain a high quality natural environment.

➤ **Strategies for Action**

The strategies for action focus on areas: The quality of our lakes, the quantity of our landscaping and open space, and the effectiveness of our regulations and actions to protect the environment.

- ✓ Monitor the quality of Lake Wailes lake and selected other lakes and strive for improvement
- ✓ Rigorously implement of Land Development Code regulations for landscaping and open space
- ✓ Seek opportunities for open space, with an emphasis on areas along the Scenic Highway
- ✓ By October 30, 2008, present the City Commission with a comprehensive energy policy to include the active encouragement of energy efficient devices and facilities, the conservation of natural resources, and the weatherization of buildings; the use of solar energy or other alternative energy forms (wind or combination systems) will be of particular interest

➤ **Key Indicators of Our Progress**

- ❖ Lake quality data
- ❖ The amount, quality, and location of landscaping
- ❖ The amount and location of open space
- ❖ Completion and implementation of the watershed study
- ❖ Adoption of a wetlands protection ordinance
- ❖ Implementation of the “commercial green program” and the “residential green program” as offered by Progress Energy
- ❖ City Hall sets an example to the development community as a “green friendly” building