



# WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

## WHITE PAPER



Hillsborough  
County Florida



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# ACCOMODATION STATEMENT

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                      |          |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Accommodation Statement .....</i> | <i>1</i> |
| <i>Table of Contents .....</i>       | <i>3</i> |

## BACKGROUND

|                                                                             |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Making the Case for Walkable Communities in Hillsborough County.....</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Project Benefits and Outcomes .....</i>                                  | <i>5</i> |

## COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

|                                           |          |
|-------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Defining the Standard.....</i>         | <i>6</i> |
| <i>Adding in Real-World Context .....</i> | <i>9</i> |

## PILOT AREA SELECTION

|                                              |           |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Balancing Ideal Characteristics .....</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Mapping Key Destinations.....</i>         | <i>15</i> |

## MOVING FORWARD

|                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Short-Term Objectives.....</i> | <i>16</i> |
| <i>Project Expansion .....</i>    | <i>20</i> |

# 1 BACKGROUND

## Making the Case for Walkable Communities in Hillsborough County

The population in unincorporated Hillsborough County is over 1 million people, larger than all but 11 cities in the country. By 2045, that population is expected to reach 1.3 million. Most of the growth over the next 20 years will be inside the Urban Service Area. To best accommodate that development, the county will need to prioritize certain growth management strategies, including redevelopment and infill. Centers identified in community plans must be leveraged to accommodate that growth. The well-researched concept known as 20-Minute Neighborhoods, which has recently become a popular urban design strategy throughout the United States as shown in **Figure 1**, could be a solution to providing basic goods and services and improving the quality of life for county residents.

According to multiple surveys of Hillsborough County residents, citizens are interested in living in places with access to different kinds of activities (recreational, creative, artistic, etc.), with a strong sense of community and is a good place to raise children. They want to reinvest in established neighborhoods instead of growing outwards, and they want to strengthen downtowns and provide alternatives to driving. All of these can be accomplished through the 20-Minute Neighborhood design strategy, where residents can not only walk or bike a reasonable distance to pick up groceries or go to a restaurant for dinner, but also borrow a book from the library, or spend time at a park. 20-Minute Neighborhoods typically include residences, businesses, and recreational opportunities that allow residents to access locations where they can work, shop, and play within walking distance of their home. **Figure 2** shows the types of destinations that are typical of a 20-Minute Neighborhood. The following sections will detail how this concept applies in Hillsborough County.



**Figure 1:** Locations of 20-Minute Neighborhoods or similar programs throughout the United States

## Project Benefits and Outcomes

The advantages of a 20-Minute Neighborhood span a range of impacts, including social, economic, and environmental. Encouraging walking and biking and other active modes of transportation helps people to transition to a healthier lifestyle. Reducing the number of cars on the road results in cleaner air, which not only helps the environment, but also benefits residents with asthma and other health conditions. Communities with high levels of pedestrian activity have stronger communal bonds where citizens feel more connected

and safe. There are also economic impacts: people that are spending less money on maintaining a vehicle have more money to spend at local businesses. These businesses also tend to have increased customer bases because more people are passing by and are willing to stop in to purchase something. Homes and other properties located in walkable communities retain higher property values, as more and more people are willing to relocate to an area that has a complete pedestrian network.

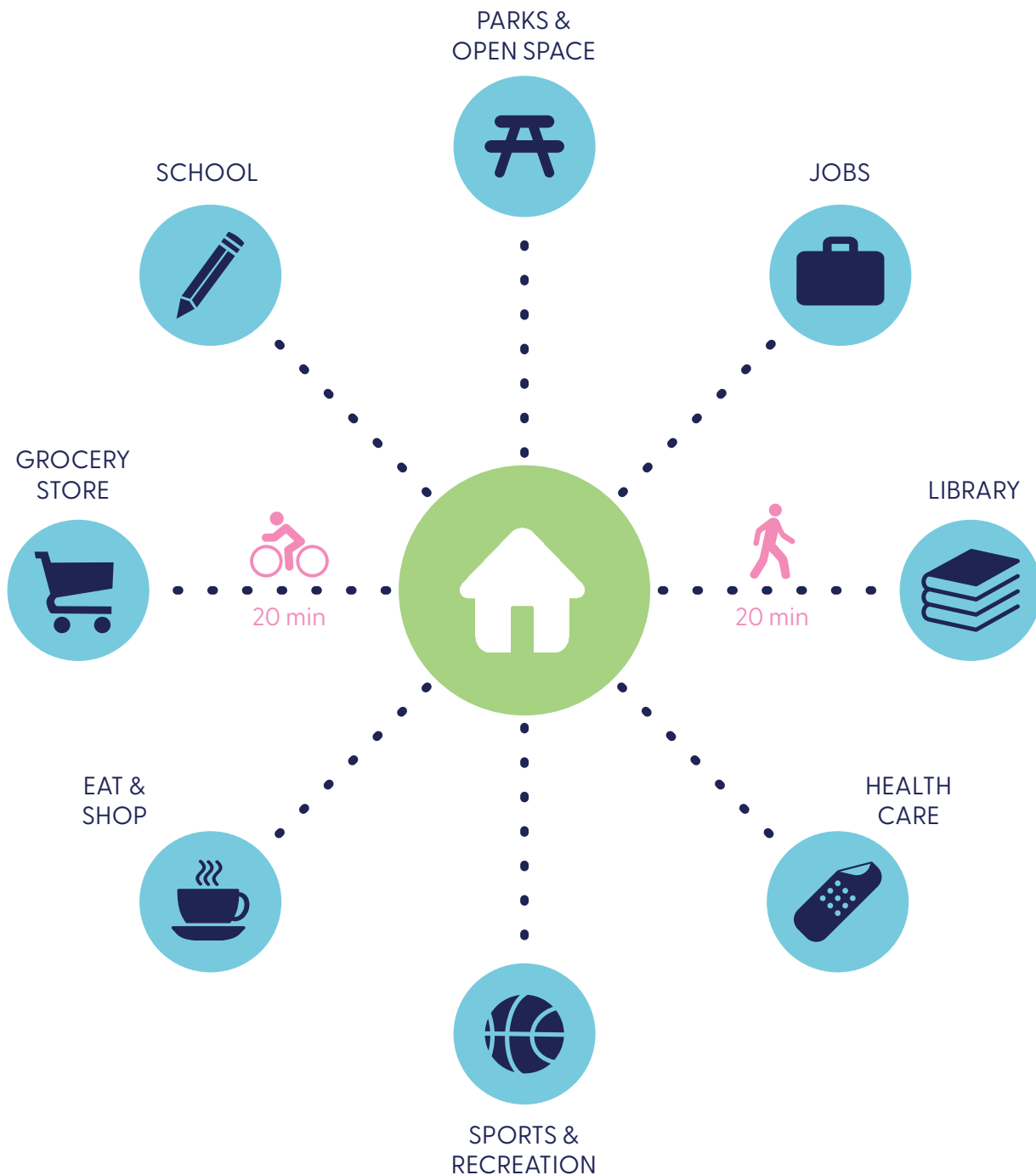


**Figure 2:** Elements of a 20-Minute Neighborhood

# 2 COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

## Defining the Standard

In Hillsborough County, defining walkable communities starts with the county's overall vision for its built environment. During the development of the Livable Communities section by the Planning Commission, the Community Planning Areas throughout Hillsborough County specified where residents in those communities wanted the focus and center of their community to be. Each community had a vision for what they wanted their community to look like, which informed an assessment on the type of development desired for each center. After reviewing each plan, these centers were mapped, and entrances to them were identified. Each entrance was given a buffer of one mile, the maximum that would be considered a comfortable and reasonable distance a person is willing to travel without a car for goods and services. This distance does vary based on mode, which is taken into account in the geospatial analysis, as discussed in the next section.

**Figure 3** shows each community's associated buffer areas at a countywide scale and lists these communities in alphabetical order. The only communities researched were those that had a community plan at the time of the analysis, for a total of 19 communities. Most of these community plans were completed and approved in 2008. For analysis purposes, larger communities were split into smaller nodes based on the different focus areas described by the community plans, which could either be an intersection or a portion of a corridor. Some of these nodes overlapped, but each were evaluated individually.

### MAPPING CRUCIAL DATA POINTS

A map for each community was prepared with various data layers to evaluate the current conditions to identify the best fit for a pilot project. GIS tools and geoprocessing were used to compare the total mileage of existing sidewalks and bike lanes, to the total road mileage. This determined the gaps in the system, where the goal is to have suitable facilities on both sides of the road. Sidewalks were measured on a half-mile network, while bicycle facilities were measured on a one-mile network, as that was what was determined to be a comfortable distance for each mode, based on average walking and biking speeds from national sources.

Intersection density is also crucial to walkable communities, as it reflects the number of crossing opportunities a pedestrian or bicyclist has, and how accessible an area is, which would increase the probability of someone using an alternative mode of transportation. Intersection density was measured as the number of intersections per half-mile.

The current population density would also impact the success of a walkable community. More people in the area means more people that will actually be available to use these facilities to travel to their destinations. These people will also help contribute to the local economy by going to destinations closer to their homes instead of journeying elsewhere to complete their daily errands.

Analyzing the destinations for each buffer area included identifying how many of each type of land use that is vital to a walkable community. Grocery stores, commercial properties, parks, schools, and transit were all included in this analysis, as shown in Figure 2 on the previous page. Commercial properties were further divided into two separate categories – Type 1 Commercial included convenience stores, pharmacies, and drug stores; Type 2 Commercial included restaurants, and other specialty stores. These destinations were mapped in GIS and each community was given a score based on the number of properties and the proximity of those properties to the center of the buffer area.

### ANALYSIS RESULTS

**Table 1** on page 8 shows the results for the Top 25 Communities based on the desktop analysis using GIS. For larger areas that were split into smaller nodes, each node was assigned a number to better differentiate. Nodes were given points based on how they compared to the other areas. The data points were weighted according to their presence's impact on the possible success of creating a walkable and well-connected community. Existing Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure was multiplied by 1, Intersection Density was multiplied by 1.5, Population Density was multiplied by 2, and Land Use was multiplied by 3. All weighted scores were summed together for the total. A complete matrix is included at the end of the document.

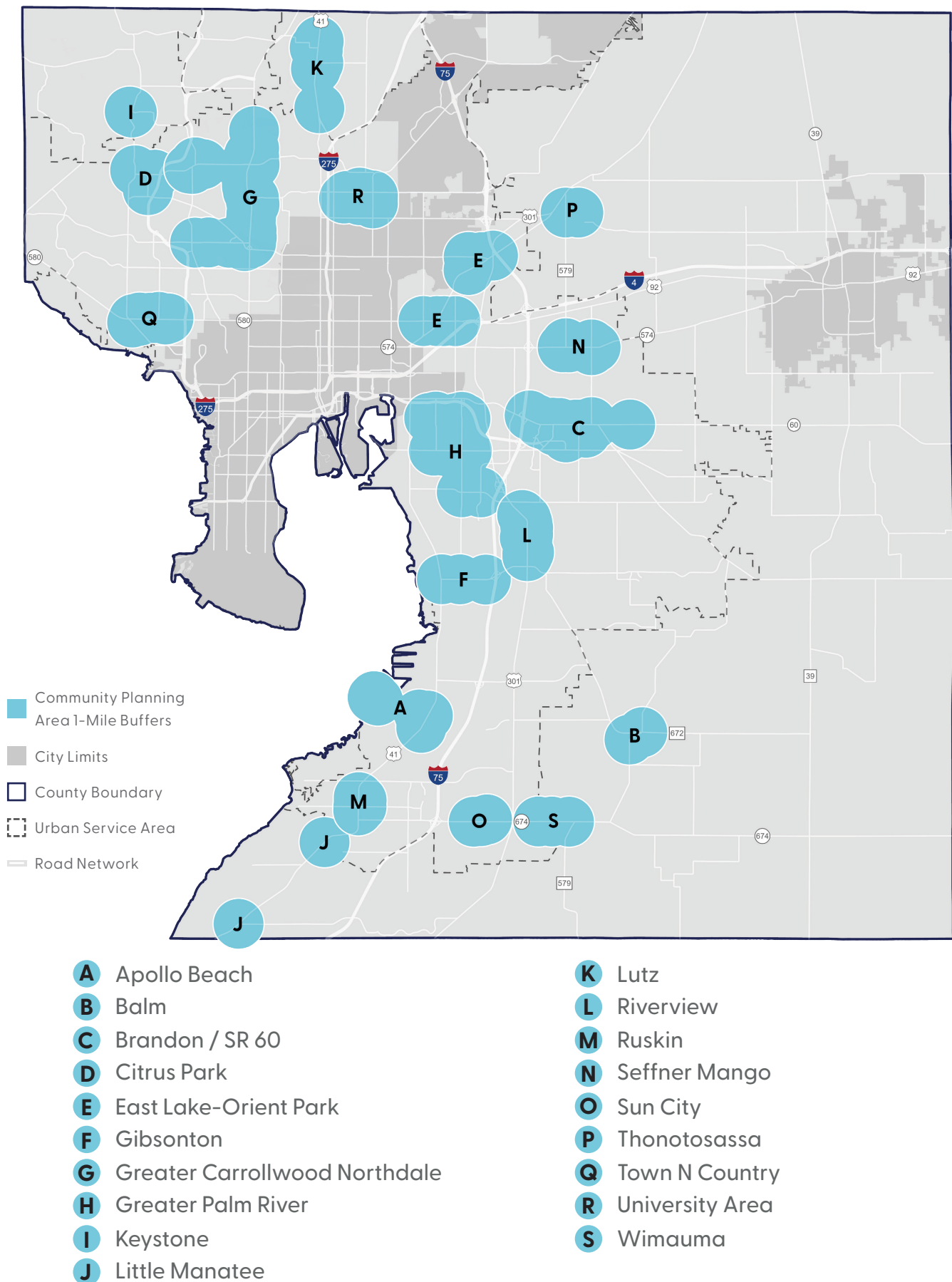


**Figure 3:** Community Planning Areas with identified buffer areas used for analysis

Pedestrian  
NetworkBicycle  
NetworkIntersection  
DensityPopulation  
DensityLand Use  
Mix

## TOTAL

|    |                                   |    |    |      |     |     |       |
|----|-----------------------------------|----|----|------|-----|-----|-------|
| 1  | University Area (2)               | 32 | 48 | 58.5 | 98  | 138 | 374.5 |
| 2  | Town N Country (2)                | 46 | 17 | 66   | 94  | 138 | 361   |
| 3  | Town N Country (1)                | 35 | 24 | 64.5 | 90  | 144 | 357.5 |
| 4  | University Area (3)               | 49 | 50 | 28.5 | 96  | 117 | 340.5 |
| 5  | University Area (1)               | 21 | 43 | 45   | 100 | 129 | 338   |
| 6  | Town N Country (3)                | 41 | 21 | 55.5 | 92  | 117 | 326.5 |
| 7  | Greater Carrollwood Northdale (5) | 42 | 16 | 36   | 88  | 141 | 323   |
| 8  | SR 60 (4)                         | 24 | 19 | 54   | 62  | 150 | 309   |
| 9  | Greater Carrollwood Northdale (4) | 50 | 25 | 34.5 | 78  | 117 | 304.5 |
| 10 | SR 60 (5)                         | 22 | 10 | 72   | 50  | 147 | 301   |
| 11 | Seffner Mango (1)                 | 26 | 26 | 63   | 68  | 117 | 300   |
| 12 | SR 60 (3)                         | 28 | 32 | 39   | 60  | 138 | 297   |
| 13 | SR 60 (6)                         | 36 | 28 | 57   | 84  | 84  | 289   |
| 14 | Citrus Park Village               | 29 | 39 | 42   | 48  | 129 | 287   |
| 15 | Riverview (2)                     | 37 | 18 | 60   | 46  | 117 | 278   |
| 16 | Greater Carrollwood Northdale (1) | 48 | 23 | 61.5 | 70  | 75  | 277.5 |
| 17 | Brandon (1)                       | 17 | 31 | 24   | 74  | 129 | 275   |
| 18 | Greater Carrollwood Northdale (3) | 44 | 14 | 43.5 | 72  | 96  | 269.5 |
| 19 | Riverview (1)                     | 45 | 22 | 46.5 | 80  | 75  | 268.5 |
| 20 | Greater Palm River (4)            | 30 | 49 | 70.5 | 52  | 60  | 261.5 |
| 21 | SR 60 (2)                         | 23 | 36 | 13.5 | 56  | 129 | 257.5 |
| 22 | Seffner Mango (2)                 | 38 | 13 | 67.5 | 54  | 84  | 256.5 |
| 23 | Greater Carrollwood Northdale (2) | 34 | 9  | 30   | 86  | 96  | 255   |
| 24 | Greater Palm River (2)            | 43 | 11 | 73.5 | 42  | 75  | 244.5 |
| 25 | Ruskin                            | 7  | 29 | 69   | 28  | 102 | 235   |

Table 1: Top 25 Communities from Desktop Analysis

\*numbers listed are the weighted amounts

## Adding in Real-World Context

While this list is a good initial starting point for finding the best location for a pilot project, some further inspection into the real-world context is needed as these numbers only tell us so much about the experience of walking and biking in these areas. The following sections will detail some of the additional evaluation completed, which ultimately led to the selection of the pilot project area.

### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE BARRIERS

The Top 25 Communities list included neighborhoods in the University Area, Town N Country, Greater Carrollwood Northdale, and SR 60. Aside from University, all these communities are centered around major six to eight lane roads that would be extremely difficult and uncomfortable for a pedestrian or bicyclist to cross, as shown in **Figures 4** and **5**. Turning the existing pedestrian crossings in these neighborhoods into something safer and more comfortable would require an extensive amount of work and design and may not be economically efficient for a pilot program. The University Area already has some existing plans and projects that are currently ongoing that will help to address the pedestrian and bicycle network, so an additional plan or work there could be redundant. As such, it was determined that none of these neighborhoods would be adequate for a pilot program.

### LAND USE AND POLICY BARRIERS

Looking at some of the remaining nodes listed in the Top 25 list (and beyond), there are some areas that may not have as many physical barriers, but the existing land use is not currently conducive to developing a walkable community with desirable destinations. These nodes could be walkable and connected, but it would take time and Comprehensive Plan Amendments to allow and encourage the type of uses that people need as part of their daily destinations. To find a suitable neighborhood for a pilot program, we need to find a location that has a balance between having sufficient existing infrastructure and population and appropriate land uses, and is not centered on a major, multi-lane roadway that would be a barrier to pedestrians and cyclists.



**Figure 4:** The intersection of Hillsborough Ave and Ambassador Dr, which Town 'N Country's plan lists as the primary Town Center. Hillsborough Ave is currently a six-lane divided highway with median left-turn lanes. Source: Google Maps



**Figure 5:** The Turner Rd and Ehrlich Rd intersection is listed as a community activity center in the Greater Carrollwood-Northdale Plan. It has multiple destinations (restaurants, a grocery store, a bank), but the current intersection design is not safe. Source: Google Maps



**Figure 6:** Harney Rd in East Lake-Orient Park has benefited from the recently constructed Amazon distribution center, but will need some additional land use destinations in the area for it to become the mixed use activity center as described by their plan. Source: Google Maps

# 3 PILOT AREA SELECTION

## Balancing Ideal Characteristics

As mentioned previously, the ideal location for our pilot project would be one that would already have the desired land uses and not have as many physical barriers. It would also be beneficial if a good portion of the pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure was already in place. The pilot project would analyze what's existing and develop a plan to address any gaps in infrastructure and where infrastructure needs to be improved in order to provide appropriate amenities to encourage people to walk to their daily destinations.

After reviewing the remaining neighborhoods, a pilot area was selected in the Greater Palm River Community, at the intersection of Palm River Road and South 78th Street (listed as the Greater Palm River 2 neighborhood in the matrix). The Greater Palm River Community is strategically located between the City of Tampa's downtown and the larger Brandon suburban area. It is also right off of the Selmon Expressway, one of the major commuting toll roads in Hillsborough County, and in between US Highway 41 and US Highway 301 with access to Interstate-75. The pilot project neighborhood node centered at the aforementioned intersection encompasses the land within a one-mile radius, going west to Maydell Drive, north to SR 60 / Adamo Drive, east to US Highway 301, and south to Causeway Boulevard.

### EXAMINING WHAT'S EXISTING

Palm River is a highly suitable candidate for a pilot program, as it has a good foundation and basis, but requires infrastructure investments to reach its full potential in terms of walkability. The road network is well connected with larger main thoroughfares linked by smaller neighborhood-scale streets. Many of the roads already have sidewalks on both sides of the road; however, it is severely lacking in terms of bicycle infrastructure. While the main intersection of Palm River Road and South 78th Street is not as large as some intersections in other neighborhoods, there are still some concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing multiple lanes of traffic without proper safety features.

The area includes many well-established neighborhoods, with a range of housing types including single family,

mobile homes, and multi-family. Important destinations in the area include Clair Mel Elementary School, Dowdell Middle Magnet School, Winston Park, and the 78th Street Community Library. All of these are very central to the community, both geographically and socially. Commercial properties include smaller grocers and locally owned restaurants, as well as larger commercial establishments such as Walgreens, Save-A-Lot, a laundromat, and a Dollar Tree. However, most of the shopping is centered around strip malls and large plazas, with a large amount of typically unused parking.

The following pages look at the typical destinations for walkable communities previously shown in **Figure 2**, and compares them to the existing land uses in the Palm River pilot area. This analysis allows us to see what's missing from resident's daily destinations and what can be addressed by the plan.

### WHY PALM RIVER?

In addition to the existing conditions being favorable for a walkable community, the Palm River neighborhood includes many communities of concern amongst its population. There is a large proportion of the people living there that fall into the categories of Poverty, Zero-Vehicle Households, Younger Population, Limited Language, Minority, and Disability. All these populations would benefit from having a complete and safe pedestrian and bicycle network, since some of them may not be able to afford a car and need alternative modes to run their daily errands. Additionally, the 78th Street corridor from Causeway Boulevard to Palm River Road is listed as a Vision Zero corridor by the Hillsborough County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO).

However, it must be noted that any development and infrastructure that does go into the community should be context-sensitive and built with the residents in mind. The strength of the community comes from the significance of its history, the diversity of its culture, and spirit of its people, all of which should be honored and celebrated, and not erased by new developments. Enhancing and building upon what is already there is crucial to creating an environment that residents will appreciate and support.

## PARKS & OPEN SPACE



Winston Park located on Destin Drive has a playground, along with an outdoor basketball court, two tennis courts, and an outdoor hockey rink. The Jeff & Penny Vinik Family Boys & Girls Club also provides after-school care for students attending the nearby schools. Source: Fun4BrandonKids.



In addition to the many amenities at Winston Park, there is also a large amount of open space and a newly constructed walking path. Additional open space improvements including lighting and trees for shade are being evaluated and will be added soon. Source: Google Maps.

## JOBS & EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



Hillsborough County's Central Fleet Maintenance Facility, located on South 78th Street, supports the county by maintaining and managing vehicles and equipment that perform repairs and helps Hillsborough County continue to operate smoothly. Source: Google Maps.



TECO, located in the northeast corner of the Palm River Road and South 78th Street intersection, is a major employment center for people all throughout the county. The TECO facility includes both offices and storage areas for trucks and equipment. Source: Google Maps.



## LIBRARIES & LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



78th Street Community Library offers free Internet access, WiFi connectivity, and a variety of programs and computer training classes for children, teens, and adults. There is also a community meeting room, small study rooms, and lounge seating areas. Source: HCPLC.org



The Jeff & Penny Vinik Family Boys & Girls Club at Winston Park provides after school care and youth development services for children ages 5-18, primarily from nearby Clair-Mel Elementary and Dowdell Middle School. Source: Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay; Design Styles Architecture.



## HEALTH CARE



Suncoast Community Health Centers, Inc. is a full service facility that offers adult and pediatric medical and dental care, lab services, x-ray, pharmacies, and more. Most of the staff is bilingual and they provide care to anyone through appointments and walk-ins. Source: Google Maps.



The Palmas Clinic located on Palm River Road not only provides a variety of medical services, but they also participate in local events and work with organizations to promote health in the surrounding community. Source: Facebook.

## SPORTS & RECREATION



Winston Park has a brand new set of fitness equipment and water fountains in addition to the existing outdoor basketball court and two tennis courts. The park is open to anyone in the surrounding area. Source: Hillsborough County.



The Vinik Family Boys & Girls Club also has street hockey rink where residents can come to hangout and play. There are also sponsored training clinics for youth to come and learn how to play or work on their skills. Source: Tampa Bay Times.

## EAT & SHOP



A large majority of the restaurants and food trucks that are located in the Palm River community cater to the large Hispanic population. These are locally owned businesses that not only serve as places to eat, but also places to gather and interact with neighbors. Source: Google Maps.



In addition to the smaller stores and businesses located in the plazas near the main intersection, there are bargain stores such as Dollar Tree and Dollar General that provide household items, makeup and personal care, toys, and seasonal decor. Source: Google Maps.



## GROCERY STORE



Save-a-lot is centrally located and offers a variety of food stuffs for pickup or delivery. It is a typical grocery store chain that offers fresh produce, meats, snacks, and beverages. While there is parking, there are residents that walk to get their groceries. Source: Google Maps.



Fresco y Más is a popular Hispanic grocery chain that offers products and services desired by local Hispanic and Caribbean communities. There are additional stores in the area, such as the Latin American Supermarket, that also cater to the largely Hispanic population. Source: Google Maps.



## SCHOOL



Clair-Mel Elementary School opened in 1960 for 500 students. Today's total student population is about the same, and more than half of the students are Hispanic. A large portion of the students walk to and from school, or go to after school care close by. Source: HCPS.org.



Dowdell Middle Magnet School has a focus on Environmental Studies and Animal Sciences, the only one in Hillsborough County to do so. It is open to students across the district and provides unique hands-on learning experiences. Source: HCPS.org.

# Mapping Key Destinations

Below is a map showing the location of the aforementioned destinations. The majority of the destinations are centered around the Palm River Road and South 78th Street intersection. Ensuring that there is adequate and comfortable infrastructure for residents that live in the surrounding homes is the main goal of creating a walkable and well-connected community.



# 5 MOVING FORWARD

## Project Outcomes

As we look at the existing facilities in Palm River, and compare them to the standard that we've set for walkable communities, we can see the kinds of infrastructure and land use policies that are necessary for future development. The outcomes detailed below will help guide any future projects, programs, and policy changes that will make this walkable community vision a reality. These are framework ideas that we can relate physical projects and changes back to in order to measure success.

### Streetscape Design

*Re-evaluating roads to provide safe and comfortable walking and biking networks that are more sustainable and foster a strong sense of community. In addition to sufficient facilities, there should be consideration for lighting, shade and protection from motor vehicles, like speed management.*

### Regional Connections

*Providing public transport that not only moves residents within their neighborhood, but to regional destinations such as Downtown Tampa and SR 60 / Brandon. Reducing headways for current transit routes to improve reliability and the option of using transit for commuting.*

### Land Use Changes

*Encouraging various housing opportunities for people of all ages and income levels, and looking into any missing daily destinations that residents mention during outreach. Changes may need to be made to the Land Development Code to help support desired land uses, both in function and form.*

### Redevelopment Potential

*Redeveloping underutilized areas, such as parking lots, into more productive and communal spaces like a community garden or a farmer's market, will bolster the whole neighborhood. Other properties could be transformed to provide more density and intensity closer to the main intersections.*

### SHORT-TERM PROJECTS

In the short-term, there are capital improvement projects to consider that will help jumpstart positive changes for Palm River. These projects are low-cost, but still address the overall safety and comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists. They may be temporary, but could lead to permanent changes in the future based on their performance. Roadway safety features such as bollards, signage, and striping are all improvements that can be made fairly quickly and improve the conditions for people currently walking and biking in the community, and possibly encourage those who may not have walked or biked before, to change their mode of transportation for certain trips.

Other short-term projects to consider are public art installations that build a sense of community for residents. These types of projects can make walking and biking more attractive and fun, and instill pride in people as they are moving about in their community. They also help to define not only a community's physical boundaries, but also their history, culture, and shared values as well.

### MEDIUM-TERM PROJECTS

Looking a little further into the future is where we can address some outcomes that may require more development before improvements can be seen. This includes land use changes that can lead to redevelopment and additional housing stock, and developing regional connections.

One way to address changing land uses is through an overlay district. This would be an amendment to the Land Development Code that would affect portions of the community in order to encourage certain types of redevelopment, both in terms of land use and aesthetics. An overlay district with a form-based code helps to ensure that any development that occurs in a community is in line with what is detailed in the community plan in terms of use, building height, and form. It will provide limits on what can be built so that a community's integrity remains intact even as pieces of it are being redeveloped. It can also look at parking, stormwater, and other development requirements that may prevent an owner from redeveloping.

Additionally, overlay districts can help to encourage other types of housing that are regularly looked over in communities. Housing that is somewhere in between smaller single-family homes and larger multi-family apartment complexes, known as missing middle housing. This can include duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and buildings that allow for a dwelling unit above a non-residential space. Incorporating language into the overlay district that can help encourage these types of housing will provide a diverse array of quality housing options for residents across all income levels and lifestyles. Including missing middle housing types into residential areas can increase density without sacrificing the overall feel and fabric of a residential neighborhood. They can act as a transition between mixed-use areas to single-family areas, help with infill, provide business opportunities, and increase equity.

## Program Expansion

Long term, the goal of this pilot program is to be able to use this opportunity as an example for future plans to develop more areas into walkable communities, and to improve the quality of life for the individuals already living in the Palm River area. As multiple studies and surveys have found, people want to live in areas that have a strong sense of community - having proper infrastructure in place that allows for people to get outside and mingle within their neighborhood will foster that communal feeling. Seeing a shift in mode share to alternative methods like walking and biking inside of driving a car will be a clear indicator of the success of a plan like this. Using Palm River as a pilot will help us to understand the best methods of completing a program like this so that we can work more efficiently for the next neighborhood.



## *Community & Infrastructure Planning Department, 2024*

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**Hillsborough  
County** Florida