



America's Seaplane City<sup>SM</sup>

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE  
SEPTEMBER, 2016

The Economic Development Strategy is both geographical (see attached map) and component specific with an emphasis on growing existing businesses and cultivating entrepreneurship. As our existing businesses are the cornerstone and foundation of our City's economy, providing the fertile ground for these business to flourish and for new ones to emerge is the cornerstone and foundation of a sound economic development strategy. Continued focus and emphasis on fair, reasonable and transparent regulatory policy and practices which eliminate or minimize barriers to entry and growth are the most essential elements to this effort. The tag line "Open for Business" is more than a catchy phrase. The City of Tavares is known for being a municipality where business is embraced, City Departments are "user friendly" and the regulatory climate and permitting processes are fair, reasonable and easily navigated. Maintaining these priorities as guiding principles will continue to make Tavares "a great place to land".

The components are in no particular order of priority as follows:

### **1. Florida Waterman Hospital Campus**

Focus components in this area includes the Florida Hospital Waterman campus located on the North side of SR441 at the City's Northeast gateway. Plans are in the final stages of development for substantial growth within the approximately 150 acre hospital campus including expansion of existing medical and medical related support facilities and construction of new ones. This campus and its growth and development are key to the enhancement of a vibrant and growing medical village in this sector.

### **2. Medical Village**

The Medical Village Area is centered on the Florida Hospital Waterman campus and the development of medical related facilities in this area. As our population ages with the continued onslaught of the "Baby Boomers" generation, the need for quality health care services is essential and the Florida Hospital Waterman area is the natural place for the concentration of health related facilities and services. The Medical Village continues to grow and expand with new physicians' offices, surgical, radiology and imaging centers as well as a new VA clinic which opened in March of this year. The growth and expansion of the medical industry within this area will also provide opportunities for the development of casual & quick service dining and retail within this quadrant.

### **3. Freight/Rail Village**

The development of a Freight Village in the CR 448 area south of Lake Dora in the vicinity of the current business/commerce park. The Freight Village will provide for 1) warehousing/distribution businesses that are serviced by rail; 2) a site to service, maintain, store and refurbish commuter railroad cars 3) a dual track area to accommodate both commuter and freight passing operations, and 4) a Private Rail Car Park (camp ground for private rail car yachts – see American Association of Private Railroad Car Owners web page: [www.aaprco.com](http://www.aaprco.com)). With the ever increasing price of gasoline and diesel fuels, the use of railroads for the movement and distribution of goods is seeing a re-birth.

#### **4. Downtown Professional Services**

Tavares is the County Seat of Lake County and serves as the seat of the 5<sup>th</sup> judicial circuit. The County Government campus build out has been completed along with the expansion of the Judicial Center, the construction of a new office building for Constitutional Officers, and the building of a 1,200 space parking garage. With the presence of these institutions along with City Hall on the East end of Main Street, the professional services sector such as legal, engineering & architectural firms, counselling practices etc. is strong and continues to grow. The City has prudently expanded mixed use zoning 2 blocks North from the commercial downtown district along Main Street to Caroline Street and slightly Eastward from Ruby street to the West Side of Disston Avenue which will allow for the continued growth and expansion of this vital economic component of our community.

#### **5. Downtown Retail & Entertainment District**

The creation of a downtown entertainment district has led to the emergence of a growing population of restaurants and bars offering a variety of dining, music and entertainment options. Additionally the development of a 3 building boutique hotel resort complex with restaurant and retail space along with the City's development of the Pavilion on the Lake have helped to make downtown Tavares a destination. The final remaining component of the County Government seat remaining in the East Main Street section of downtown was removed with the City Purchase and demolition of the former Clerk of Courts Records Center in 2015. The property, dubbed Tavares Square, has been temporarily improved and is serving as a "town square" while being marketed and promoted for re-development consistent with the 2009 downtown Master Plan. With all of these improvements, the ground is now fertile for the pursuit and development of retail businesses in the downtown.

#### **6. Commerce Park**

The "industrial park" area located in the vicinity of the CR 561 / CR 448 intersection is an active hub of commerce populated with a wide range of manufacturing related companies from metal fabricators to food processors & distributors. The existing buildings facilities are near full occupancy with several land parcels available for development on and in the vicinity of the park. Working with existing business, property owners and the Lake County Economic Growth Department to fill remaining vacancies, attract additional companies to develop facilities on vacant land and re-image/promote the "industrial park" as a more contemporary and appealing "commerce park" should be the emphasis. Development of infrastructure, landscape & aesthetic improvements and a robust marketing program will maximize the potential of this area to attract new companies providing high skill, high wage jobs in the manufacturing sector and to grow existing ones. The City's Seaplane manufacturing impact fee waiver program adopted in June of 2015 will also be a valuable tool and asset in attracting new development in this area.

## **7. Marina/Ecotourism/Sports Tourism**

Ecotourism and sports tourism are substantial and growing components of the tourism industry within the US and particularly within the State of Florida. With the abundance of lakes, wetlands and waterways accessible directly from Marina facilities at Wooton Park, Hickory Point Park and Tavares Recreation Park this market is ripe for growth and expansion within our community. The Wooton Park West enhancement project is underway with recent construction of two new sand volleyball courts and will be completed in the fall of 2017 with additional amenities to include a new boat ramp/parking area, Restrooms, Tav-Lee Trail extension and an abundance of public open space with enhanced/cleared shoreline. These improvements will support and enhance boating, fishing kayak/canoe launching and other activities on the Lake Dora waterfront in our downtown.

The Hickory Point Beach Sand Volleyball Complex is the Florida's largest permanent sand volleyball complex with 21 professional sand volleyball courts located at the Lake County Water Authority 68-acre Hickory Point Recreational Complex on Lake Harris in Tavares. Sand volleyball is the fastest growing NCAA sport in the Nation and the sport is growing in popularity and participation and all levels. This facility hosts major State, Regional, National and International events and its continued growth and development will have a continued strong, positive impact on or local economy with the thousands of competitors and their families that it brings into our community staying at our hotels, dining at our restaurants and supporting our businesses on an annual basis.

The Big House is a very large, state of the art sports training and community center located in the SR 19/561 corridor of the City. This facility developed, owned and operated by former Major League Baseball player Chet Lemon and his wife Gigi Lemon features 16 indoor volleyball courts, 9 basketball courts and a host of other amenities and planned improvements to include an indoor major league baseball infield. This facility not only provides sports training opportunities for athletes from the local area and beyond, but hosts numerous athletic tournaments and events throughout the year bringing in thousands of athletes and their families who stay at local hotels, dine at restaurants and patronize our communities businesses. The growth, development and marketing of this facility are and additional key component of our sports tourism marketing efforts.

## **8. Seaplane Base**

The City completed the first phase of construction of the Marina/Seaplane Basin and Marina facilities at Wooton Park in 2010 and has staffed the facility with professionals to manage, operate and maintain the facilities there. The City has also branded Tavares as America's Seaplane City. The success of the T Seaplane base and brand has been well documented with over 15,000 seaplane arrivals/departures since opening in 2010 and its economic impact is evident with the arrival of new hotels, restaurants and vibrant entertainment district. The based commercial air service provider, Jones Brothers Inc. has grown from a small air tour and flight training operation to include commercial air charter passenger service

receiving FAA Part 135 on demand air taxi certification in July, 2015. Passengers can now from the Tavares Seaplane Bases to destinations such as the Bahamas, Florida Keys and beyond.

The City has undertaken and is near completion of the process of completing an Airport Master Plan for the Tavares Seaplane Base. This will be one of only a handful of Master Plans completed in the US for an entirely water based Seaplane Base. The plan will include a long range capital improvement program which will identify short term, mid-term and long-term needs and identify potential funding sources. The goal of the Master Plan process is to have the Seaplane Base included in the Florida Aviation System Plan (FASP) as an airport eligible for State of Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Aviation grant funding.

Continued enhancement of the Seaplane Base services, facilities and experience are an essential component to the continued economic growth and vibrancy of America's Seaplane City.

## **9. Special Events**

The City has distinguished itself as the waterfront event venue capital of Central Florida hosting an average of over 20 annual events at the Wooton Park waterfront, which have a very significant and positive economic impact on the downtown business. Efforts to enhance and grow existing events and develop and attract new ones is a vital part of the continued economic development strategy for the downtown/waterfront sector.

## **10. Arts, Culture & History**

Building on the City's historical ties to the railroad industry, enhancement of railroad infrastructure and construction of a replica of the Historic Train Depot have been completed and the arrival of a growing, vibrant and popular tourist train operation has enhanced the downtown experience as well. The construction of another historic replica of the original Pavilion on the Lake as the areas premiere boutique wedding and private function venue has infused and continues to boost the economic vibrancy of the downtown area as well. The creation of the "step into the limelight" project within the Tavares Square property is a first step initiative in the development of an arts and cultural element which will enhance economic opportunities for the downtown area.

## **11. Highway Commercial/Retail**

The City's 5 "gateway" entrance roadways (SR19, SR441, Old 441, and CR561 & 448) are centers of commerce and commercial development. The development of a new Publix anchored shopping center on SR 19 is complete and 10 to 15 additional new retail and restaurant business will be added in addition to the Publix grocery store within the complex and on adjacent property. The growth and development of additional housing units, including a 1,200 unit planned development of the Shanti Nikettan Phases IV through V1 villages (SR19) a large residential/mixed village at Lake Hermossa (441 near Waterman Hospital) will

increase the demand and opportunities for additional retail and related highway commercial growth in these corridors. As the natural progression of growth/development and re-development occurs in the direction of the ISBA boundary to the Southeast along the 448/561 corridor and East along the old 441 corridor will increase the potential for additional small strip mall and related commercial/retail development in these sectors.

## **12. Quick Service & Casual Dining**

This component is a key element to maintaining and fostering an attitude, perception and feeling of growth and vibrancy. It is the strongest and fastest growing sector of the restaurant industry and one area in which our City is lacking business growth. With the dynamic, mobile and fast paced nature of our modern culture and the variety of options, specialties and healthy choices available it is the strongest and fastest growing sector of the restaurant industry and one area in which our City is lacking business growth Areas of focus for this development of this component are:

- The SR 441 corridor frontage of the Medical Village across from Waterman Hospital.
- The SR 441 corridor in the Vicinity of the current Winn Dixie/Joanna Fabric Shopping Centers.
- The SR 19 Corridor in the vicinity of the New Tavares Crossing (Publix) retail center.

## **13. Light Industrial Manufacturing Center**

The newly adopted ISBA have defined the City's future boundaries in all quadrants. The City's growth along the old 441 corridor to the East, will include industrial properties which are currently located outside City boundaries and currently serving as centers of light industrial and manufacturing activity. Additional transportation and utility infrastructure improvements (roadway, water, waste water and storm water) will enhance the attractiveness of these properties to new businesses and will allow existing businesses in this area to improve and expand and flourish.

Key to the success of the components is to continue fostering of an attitude that the City and its staff are committed to facilitating our existing and new businesses to grow and prosper.