

# Lake Wales May Grow Better, Not Just Bigger, Residents Told at Envision Presentation

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Lake Wales Envisioned Presentation Showed Process, Goals

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Citizens and community leaders were treated to a detailed presentation of the developing Lake Wales Envisioned recommendations which will be finalized and presented to city commissioners in September.

A vision of [Lake Wales](#) as a city that embraces new neighborhoods built to traditional standards while preserving vast swaths of open space was presented to an eager audience Tuesday evening by city planners who painted a clear picture of that potential.

City planners Victor Dover and Eric Pate of Dover, Kohl & Partners shared the status of the several reports included in the broad [Lake Wales Envisioned](#) plan. The process was initiated by the [City of Lake Wales](#) late last year after a prior "land use plan" was poorly received.

A group of about 70 residents and community leaders viewed the detailed eight-foot-wide maps, preliminary task lists, and Powerpoint presentation at the James P. Austin Center. Many offered positive responses in discussions that followed.

Among the proposals included in [Lake Wales Envisioned](#) are calls for the requirement of "Traditional Neighborhood Design" that relegates garages to the rear of new homes to create leafy, attractive residential streets. Those "Complete Streets" would offer sidewalks and [Bicycle trails](#) to encourage healthier lifestyles and reduce dependency on motor vehicles.

The presentation was introduced by President Skip Alford of the [Lake Wales Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development](#), one of fifteen businesses, universities, and civic organizations that are supporting the [Envisioned](#) program. Alford quickly connected the effort to public health, a topic highlighted in the plan.

"Research shows us that the quality of the neighborhood in which people live has a direct impact on both their physical and psychological health and well-being as well as how they develop relationships with other people," Alford told the audience. "These effects can be dramatic especially for children and young people, in large part because they develop their sense of trust and societal norms in the neighborhoods where they grow up."

The plan also calls for small neighborhood centers within short walks of homes, the creation of more parks, and the preservation of a "Big Green Network" of environmental lands, trails, and wildlife habitat that Dover described as a "multi-decadal effort" to be conducted in cooperation with county, state, water management district and federal partners.

That network may also include a web of waterways for canoes and kayaks along Peace Creek, described as "the jewel" at the end of Winter Haven's planned "Sapphire Necklace" of waterways and storage basins that will ring that city.

The planning process has been guided by a series of eight "aspirations" adopted by the city commission in January.

Dr. Joanna Lombard, who holds dual roles in architecture and health at the University of Miami, [described in a short video how neighborhood environments help shape our lives and maintain physical and mental health](#), citing Lake Wales' first city planner, Frederick Law [Olmsted Jr.](#), creator of [Bok Tower Gardens](#).

"Parks start at your door," Lombard said. "[Olmsted](#) believed that too...it's certainly woven into these aspirations." Lombard cited the importance of porches, calling them a place for the "interweaving" of the community, where kids can interact with seniors.

"We need vibrant, functional neighborhoods that promote mutual respect, security, and belonging for all residents," Alford told the audience. "Victor Dover has presented some great ideas concerning strong, thoughtful community development which will help us make [Lake Wales](#) attractive to people with a wide variety of skills and income levels. Robust neighborhoods are a "win-win" for us, for our children, and for our city."

Other elements of TND include a mix of housing types instead of cookie-cutter "3/2 home with garage." That could include neighborhoods that set aside space for institutional buildings such as churches, as well as small "mansion apartments" and "granny cottages" such as are found in older neighborhoods around [Lake Wales](#) and other cities.



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In a blunt warning of the potential for destroying the charm of the Lake Wales area, Victor Dover shared a pair of slides asking "How bad can Lake Wales get?" and "How good can Lake Wales get?" Images of Burns Avenue with before-and-after photos of the wall-enclosed county road becoming a redesigned, tree-lined boulevard with bike tracks and a green median replacing a continuous "suicide lane" were attention-grabbing for many in the audience. Under the "Complete Streets" plan new development would face outward rather than being stacked behind walls.

A final presentation is expected in September, when commissioners will be provided with a list of tasks required to implement the plan. Those recommendations will likely include changes to city codes, development regulations, and the overarching comprehensive plan.

Some developers engaged in planning for future projects in [Lake Wales](#) are already adopting changes to implement the aspirations. More than 14,000 new residential units are listed between conceptual and final plat stages within the city limits. Much of the wave of proposals is being driven by the collapse of the citrus industry, a fact highlighted by Dover in the presentation.

Area residents still have opportunity to [offer their opinions through the Envisioned website](#).

