

Will Lake Wales be Overrun by Growth? Envisioned Effort Offers an Alternative, But it Needs Your Input

By [News Editorial Board](#)

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Development is forever changing the Lake Wales area, stripping away the forests and open countryside. How will we react as a community? Can we help direct this inevitable process toward a better outcome? That's the challenge being faced by Lake Wales Connected.

Change is coming to [Lake Wales](#). Are you worried? If so, your concerns are shared by thousands of your friends and neighbors.

Ours is a growing community. This special place has been "discovered" by ever-larger numbers of people who would like to share in the unique qualities the city offers.

As the agricultural basis of our economy is changing, so is the land use. Unproductive citrus groves decimated by disease are being offered for sale.

Savvy developers are snapping up lands to seek approvals. Many will flip the tracts or sell the lots to individual builders.

Scores of new residential developments have been proposed, both inside and outside the city limits.

The impending change is a cause of great angst and even hostile reactions from many residents who fear the impacts that they are sure will follow: traffic congestion, ugly suburban sprawl, loss of open countryside, and the pains of an urban lifestyle.

While some advocate for a halt to development, the reality is that private property owners have rights that cannot be legally denied.

City fathers have no control over the where or when development proposals will be brought forward. Their only power, and ours as a community, is over the how of the future development. That's where planning comes into play.

The current effort to shape the future, known as [Lake Wales Envisioned](#), is expected to propose substantial changes to the city's development codes and regulations based upon best planning practices.

Across central Florida, hundreds of subdivisions have been built, but they largely consist of the same product: houses dominated by garages, streets dominated by driveways and parked cars. Sprawling single-family properties consume thousands of acres of former green space.

The [Envisioned](#) idea of our future is quite different.

Using the concepts of "[Traditional Neighborhood Design](#)," planners are calling for homes that reflect the more-beautiful era of our own city's history: architectural facades unblemished by enormous garages, which will be relegated to the rear of homes and accessed by alleyways.

New neighborhoods may be more akin to the historic residential area surrounding Crystal Lake, stretching down to Bullard Avenue, than the "garage-i-ecture" common in other cities.

"Complete Streets," featuring sidewalks, street trees, bike paths, and nearby access to services will make residents less dependent upon cars.

Parallel planning efforts are addressing the "Big Green Network" of new parks, conservation green space and wildlife habitats that will keep our best qualities intact.

[Lake Wales Envisioned](#) is being designed not only for the city limits, but for a much larger surrounding area stretching from Lake Buffum to Lake Pierce to [Crooked Lake](#) that could eventually be brought forward for annexation and city services.

Where will people live? We need to consider whether [in-fill development at higher densities, such as townhomes](#), is preferred to land-gobbling suburban sprawl. Every resident of the [Lake Wales](#) area should be paying attention and participating in the effort to design our own future.

The effort cannot succeed in a vacuum, or without broad community involvement and support.

This isn't the first time the city has gone through gradual transformation. Founded as a resort "[City in a Garden](#)," it was once dominated by tourism. That economy was based on several local attractions and a good winter climate.

It gradually changed to become an agricultural community dominated by citrus. Now it's changing once more.



News file photo

[Traditional Neighborhood Design](#) puts people ahead of vehicles in the development of cities. Garages are relegated to the rear of homes, and attractive architecture makes streets more beautiful for residents. TND is only one of the elements being addressed in the [Envisioned](#) effort.

Our future will likely include serving as the economic hub of southeast Polk County, hosting scores of new restaurants, stores, and services. The challenge will be achieving the "soft landing" that will keep our community a special place. That's the [Lake Wales](#) way.