



Community Planning & Form Based Codes:

Greater Seminole Heights – A Livable and Sustainable Urban Village



by: Catherine Coyle

The City of Tampa, in an effort to invest in neighborhoods and enhance the future of its communities, established a proactive community planning program, titled Community Planning through Form-Based Codes (CP-FBC) in late 2007. Key to this program is the involvement and direction that the citizenry provides to the City planning staff during the process. By directly engaging and collaborating with the residents and business owners of a community to help shape the look and feel of their area, the City will be able to provide a more holistic and effective Community Plan for each area, as well as a form-based land development code.

In early 2008, the City of Tampa initiated the CP-FBC Program and began the vision planning phase for the Greater Seminole Heights area. This community-wide planning effort involved numerous meetings with area property owners, including residents, business owners, and other interested stakeholders, in developing a future vision for Seminole Heights. A consensus on the Vision for Seminole Heights was reached in 2009 and is presented in the report, entitled, "The Greater Seminole Heights Vision Plan".

The Greater Seminole Heights area is comprised of three (3) neighborhood associations and one (1) business guild, all of which are well organized and engaged with City government. The area offers cultural and historical references, one (1) locally-designated and two (2) nationally-designated historic districts, a diverse population, a defined and well-traveled street grid, multiple bus transit lines (including the planned Bus Rapid Transit), stable/traditional residential areas, a complete public school system (including one of the most notable buildings in Tampa – historic Hillsborough High School), eclectic architecture, an integrated parks system, significant natural resources, and linear commercial corridors.

The built environment of Greater Seminole Heights has a long history with structures being built between 1883 and the present. The majority of buildings (67%) were constructed between 1900 and 1950. Thirteen percent (13%) of this majority were built in 1925 alone. The residential architecture is eclectic throughout the area

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with high concentrations of craftsman in the central and south, minimal traditional in the northwest, and ranch and contemporary modern in the northeast.

Its proximity to the City center, coupled with limited commercial business diversity along the corridors, creates excellent redevelopment opportunity for neighborhood serving uses and the evolution of improved activity nodes. The nodes identified in the Vision Plan form a "ladder", which over time will serve to bridge the physical and social divide caused by the interstate system, and ultimately reconnect the community.

Neighborhood Nodes maintain a radius of 1/4 mile for potential increased development intensities and densities. The influence of these nodes could reach up to 1/2 mile by providing a mixture of services and daily goods for residents in the immediate area.

Community Nodes maintain a radius of 1/2 mile for potential increased development intensities and densities. The influence of these nodes could reach up to 2 miles by providing a mixture of services and goods for residents in the immediate area, as well as typical pass-through traffic via bicycle, transit, and passenger vehicle from the larger community.

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VISION & PRINCIPALS

The vision and principles for this community were drawn from a series of interactive charrettes and working sessions with area residents, property owners, and industry experts. These ideas translated into the following Vision Statements:

1. Create a neighborhood with an integration of land uses, serving both the immediate residents and surrounding City, which focuses on pedestrian connectivity and instills 'walkability' throughout design.
2. Create attractive, multi-use destinations that attract people and keep them there.
3. Protect/Capitalize on existing character of single family residential portions of the area (seen as the area needing the least amount of change, one of their greatest assets)
4. Develop mixed use corridors with centralized structured parking to move away from the approach that all zoning lots have to be self-contained and provide all parking on site; adopt creative parking strategies to serve the area.

This community has strong potential to continue its evolution as a livable community within the City of Tampa. The diversity in its human and built environment gives it a unique and sustaining character. The City is committed to the CP-FBC Program and the results are assured to benefit many generations to come.

