



Notes on the Miami Lakes Town Center

# MASTER PLAN

Prepared for  
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and  
**Miami Lakes Properties, Inc.**

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# MIAMI LAKES TOWN CENTER

The purpose of planning is to envision a whole that will be greater than the sum of its parts. The overall Plan helps guide smaller, incremental projects, so that each act of new construction (however small or large) will relate properly to what exists now and what will get built later.

## Background

The late designer Lester Collins helped define a vision of Miami Lakes for the Graham family which has been carefully protected and followed over the years. His master plan featured an organic layout, using the symbol and section of a conch as a basic diagram from which the town grew.

The Town Center is now ready to evolve into the social and shopping hub of northwest Dade County, presenting Miami Lakes with a unique opportunity.

In response, Miami Lakes Properties is preparing to continue and complete Main Street; a large tract of land in the eastern half of the Town Center has been reserved for future phases in accordance with Collins' design.

The Master Plan takes a critical look at the existing development in the Town Center and makes recommendations for the best way to continue building on the adjacent land.

## The Charrette

Dover, Kohl & Partners, at the direction of the Graham Companies and Miami Lakes Properties, held a design *charrette*, a three-day intensive work session, with citizens, shopkeepers and company staff. The group, numbering around thirty, divided into separate working tables and produced a series of designs for the expanded Town Center.

By the end of the charrette, a working "consensus" plan was produced which incorporated time-proven urban design principles, a loose development program, and modern retail, transportation and security planning.

This document accompanies the Master Plan for the Miami Lakes Town Center, based upon the original charrette plans and subsequent refinements.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

Main Street Miami Lakes is a work in progress. It is the center of town for the surrounding community.

It contains many of the uses that have traditionally been located in downtowns, such as restaurants, retail shops with apartments above, offices, hotels, theatres and civic facilities. Although contemporary suburban zoning laws normally prohibit this mix of uses, Miami Lakes has managed to accomplish this so far. Today's result is an encouraging model— a new Main Street that works, in an age of malls— and what shortcomings it has will be resolved as development is continued.

Significant **positive** physical features which characterize Main Street include:

- Two story buildings (with a combination of barrel tile and parapet roof construction);
- Reasonably good distinction of building fronts and backs;
- On-street parking along Main Street with parking lots behind;
- Colonnaded sidewalks and brick pavers; and
- Cabbage palms and oaks which contribute to a sense of spatial enclosure.

**Less positive** physical aspects of Main Street include:

- A vague feeling of incompleteness, due to the vacant property;
- A lack of architectural diversity;
- Disassociation from main vehicular routes;
- Building setbacks too great at the cross streets;
- Surface parking lots along side streets without visual enclosures; and
- Conflict between lighting and vegetation within parking areas.

# FUNDAMENTALS for NEW DEVELOPMENT

## Urban Design Principles

- Town Centers work as a memorable collection of *public spaces*; the placement of each building will create these spaces.
- *Streets and blocks* will form the fabric of the Town Center and are the most adaptable development pattern.
- Together, the buildings will contain a flexible, finely grained *mix of uses*, guaranteeing an inherent sustainability and vitality throughout the day.
- The Town Center will have a *range of commercial establishments*, from small neighborhood service stores to national chains.
- *Special sites are reserved for civic buildings*, functioning as landmarks and symbols of community permanence and pride.
- The *streets will be multipurpose*; they will accommodate not just moving cars but pedestrians and parking; The streets will be the setting for routine errands, festivals, chance meetings and more.
- *Sidewalks will be shaded and generous in width*, to allow for a variety of activities.
- *Parking will occur on streets and behind buildings*.

## Architectural Principles

- *Large storefront windows should be nearly continuous and entrances closely spaced.*
- *Buildings should have clear fronts and backs*, with the service areas screened from street view.
- Buildings should reflect a certain individuality, yet remain a family of forms; *architectural identity should reach from sidewalk to roofline.*
- *Flexible interiors will allow uses to change over time*, insuring long term viability of buildings.

# OVERALL LAYOUT

A logical completion to the spiral street diagram is a central generator of the design.

This is achieved by beginning with Collins' Main Street extension location, extending New Barn Road eastward to the new Main Street, and subdividing the remaining land into streets and blocks with clearly defined building and parking areas.

## General elements

of the plan *east* of Ludlam Road include:

- Locating a Plaza at the intersection of Main Street and New Barn Road East which effectively terminates the conch shell plan with a public gathering space;
- Subdividing the remainder of land with more regular blocks for efficiency and orientation;
- Spreading a variety of public spaces to the north, south and east to offer visual and recreational alternatives;
- Mixing residential uses with commercial uses throughout the Town Center in order to secure a continually active environment;
- Lining the block faces with buildings whose primary entrances are from the streets;
- Providing parking in the center of the blocks, accessed via alleys and pedestrian walks;
- Improving the existing surface parking lots with landscape elements and small civic structures;
- Transitioning from the solely residential area east of Cow Pen Road to the Town Center with higher density, multi-family buildings; and
- Infilling vacant lots adjacent to the Town Center with uses and buildings which reinforce the principles of the plan.

## General elements

of the plan *west* of Ludlam Road include:

- Rehabilitating the existing blocks by lining the edges with additional commercial buildings which provide a visual screen to the parking lots and complete the street space;
- Updating the appearance of the existing Main Street to reinforce a seamlessness with its eastern extension;
- Redeveloping the existing Cobb Theatres;
- Placing future structured parking in the center of blocks (rather than along streets) to maintain visual quality of the streets; and
- Reducing the gaps at the side street intersections by adding buildings, vegetation and sidewalk furniture.

# RETAIL

The intersection of Ludlam and Main Street will become the geographic center of the expanded downtown. It will also be the prime intersection of the two most important routes— what retailers covet as a "main and main" location.

The general approach to leasing should therefore follow 3 basic guidelines:

- 1) Phase One and the west section of Phase Two of Main Street should retain and enhance its neighborhood retail identity.
- 2) The rest of Phase Two, from Cobb Theatres to Ludlam Road, and the extended Main Street should then evolve into the main regional shopping area. An appropriate length of 1000' would provide a comfortable walking distance from end to end; and
- 3) The side streets east of Ludlam become desirable locations for more neighborhood-oriented commercial establishments, as demand warrants.

More specific recommendations for the expanded Town Center include:

- Updating the design review process for new buildings and renovations;
- Designing the extended street compatibly with the existing Main Street but without duplication;
- Using a variety of architects for buildings;
- Renovating storefronts every 5 to 7 years;
- Attracting national retailers to the four corners of Ludlam and Main Street;
- Locating a department store (such as Jacobson's), or specialty store (such as Barnes and Noble), at the far eastern end of the extended Main Street or at the northeast corner of Ludlam and Main;
- Increasing the presence of gourmet food stores, with the possibility of creating a special district of about 50,000sf. Locate this district along the side streets; a good candidate is the area near north Eagle Nest Lane and Ludlam Road;
- Renovating the existing Cobb Theatres building into 12 modern cinemas that reflect current design practices for cinemas;
- Leasing space (to Cobb or, even better, another theatre company such as AMC or Cinemax) for 12 additional cinemas at the eastern end of the Main Street; and
- Announcing a "grand reopening" in the late fall.



**Specific recommendations** for updating the *existing* Main Street include:

- Adding variety to the color and style of awnings;
- Replacing the street lamp luminaires every 7 to 10 years;
- Uplighting merchandise in the shop windows and pathways adjacent to Main Street;
- Replacing the tinted windows with ultraviolet-protected clear glass;
- Rehabilitating the directory containers and updating the graphics;
- Repositioning the urban furniture (trash cans, bike racks, etc.) to ease pedestrian flow;
- Restriping the parking lots so shoppers perceive an easier access to the street;
- Redesigning the entrances to the hotel;
- Relocating Gardner's Market to the new gourmet district;
- Renovating the columns along the colonnade to correspond to the tenant spaces;
- Continuing the pavers to the base of the columns;
- Introducing (and experimenting with) parking meters to solve current parking problems;
- Updating the facades of the residential units above the retail stores; and
- Redesigning the building facades along Ludlam Road.

# TRANSPORTATION and TRAFFIC CALMING

Three focus areas are highlighted with regard to transportation:

- 1) The character of Ludlam Road and its Main Street crossing;
- 2) Parking policies; and
- 3) Street details.

Of primary concern is the **taming of Ludlam Road** in order to create a seamless Main Street crossing. This can be accomplished by changing the perceived nature of the existing Ludlam Road from a country drive to an urban boulevard; this will slow traffic and create more opportunities for retailers. **Specific recommendations include:**

- Decreasing the excess travel lane width by widening the median along Ludlam Road from 5' to 11';
- Extending the medians towards the intersections and installing textured pavers at intersections along Ludlam Road from Bull Run/Cow Pen Road to Miami Lakes Drive to "announce" the Town Center;
- Replacing the mountable curb section along the median with a vertical curb section;
- Decreasing the curb radii to 15' with a mountable Clear Zone section to 25';
- Landscaping the new median with trees;
- Siting future buildings along Ludlam with minimum setbacks to create an urban street feel; and
- Installing traffic signals with pedestrian push buttons at the intersection of Main Street and

Ludlam Road. If permitted, install additional signals at the intersections north and south along Ludlam Road.

The second focus is the **parking requirements** for the expanded Town Center plus specific concerns with regard to the existing theatre. Traditional mixed-use town centers have an inherent capacity for capturing car trips and making efficient use of parking; *the expanded Town Center should not be subject to suburban parking ratios.*

Also, county officials have in the past objected to relocating parking for the theatre to a nearby deck. To revisit that option, a comparison was made during the charrette between a conventional theatre located in a strip mall and the existing Main Street area. This comparison revealed that the average walking distances are equivalent in length and that the parking profiles are virtually identical. *The creation of an overlay zoning district, which will deal with such specific parking issues, is recommended.*

The final focus area involves **street detailing**, such as right-of-way widths and the relative positioning of sidewalks, trees, arcades or colonnades within these widths. **Specific recommendations include:**

- Establishing a maximum travel lane width of 10' on all two-way streets;
- Providing parallel parking along every new street;
- Modifying a select few existing streets to provide for parallel parking within the existing planting strips;
- Allowing a maximum of 7' for the parallel parking lane width;
- Placing either parallel parking or planting strips between the travel lanes and the sidewalks on new and existing streets;
- Designing 15' curb radii (maximum) at all intersecting new streets. Decreasing the radii at existing intersecting streets to 15'; and
- Permitting colonnades and arcades to encroach above the sidewalks in the expanded Town Center.

## SECURITY

The extended Main Street, as shown in the Master Plan, meets current standards of crime prevention and security by defining territory, encouraging high activity levels, orienting people and cars along clearly marked paths, and establishing a variety of spaces for a range of people and activities.

**General suggestions** for the *overall* area include:

- Mixing commercial, office and residential uses to promote activity along Main Street at varied times;
- Defining territory and establishing informal "ownership" of streets, parking lots and open spaces by using buildings which have clear fronts and backs;
- Increasing the number of well-watched, "official" routes to and from parking lots with narrow streets; and
- Building wayfinding elements to orient pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

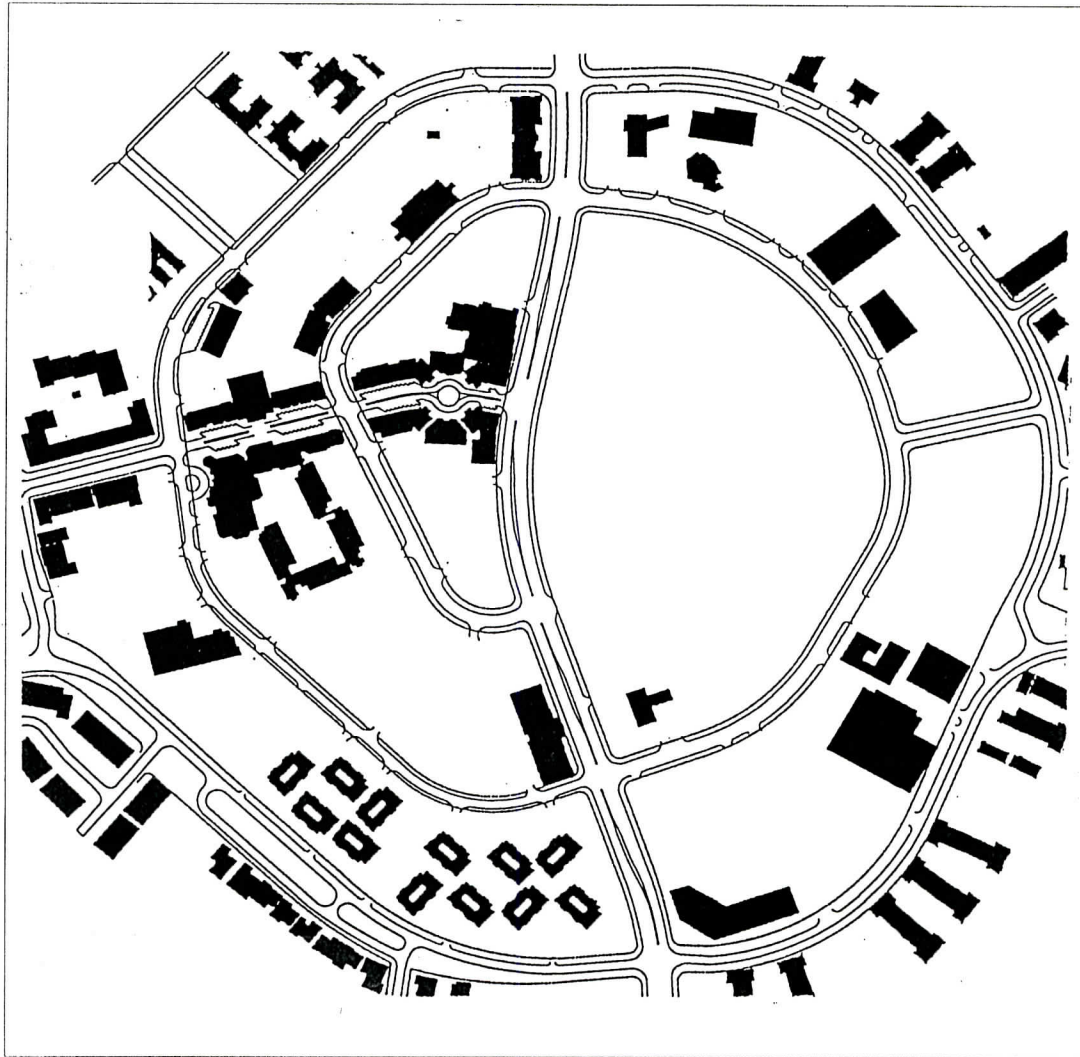
**Specific security features** of the new *Plaza* include:

- Multiple views to and from the plaza help keep eyes on the space;
- Public events can be easily handled with the size of the plaza yet the relationship with the adjacent buildings establishes formal "ownership" of the space; and
- Hiding places and hangout nooks are eliminated by design.

With regard to existing security issues within the Main Street area, some very real concerns were revealed during the charrette. Some are obviously traceable to architectural flaws, such as hangout nooks in stairwells; these errors should not be repeated in new buildings. Others are traceable to ineffective lighting in the parking lots and a lack of natural surveillance, which can be corrected.

The severity of crimes does not warrant gates with guards to protect the Main Street area, in the opinion of security consultant Diane Zahm. However, less extreme measures (such as lowering the luminaires to a height below the tree canopies within the parking areas along Ludlam Road) would not only increase the efficiency of the existing lighting plan but heighten the level of security overall. Other security recommendations made by Dr. Zahm are included in her report.

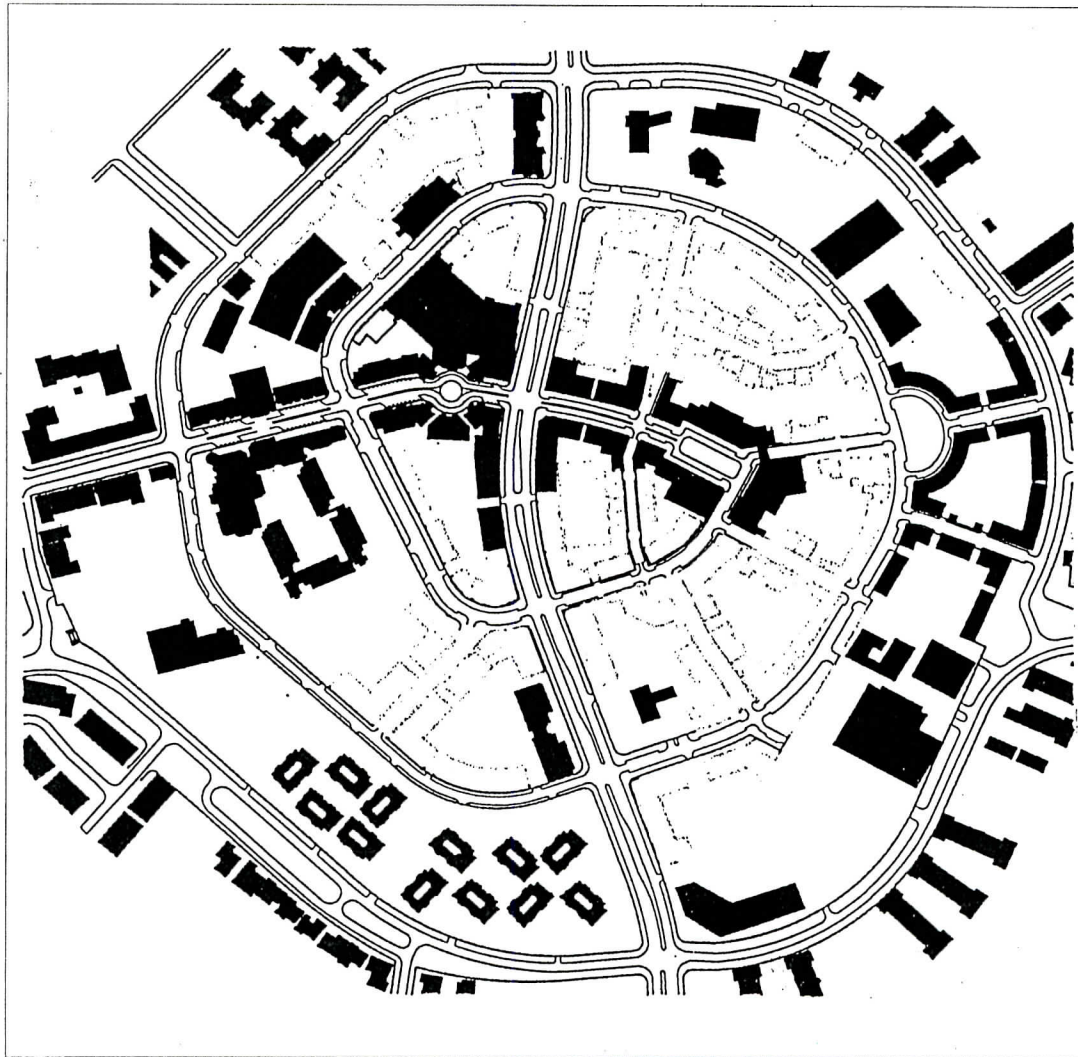
## PHASING CONCEPT



### Existing Conditions

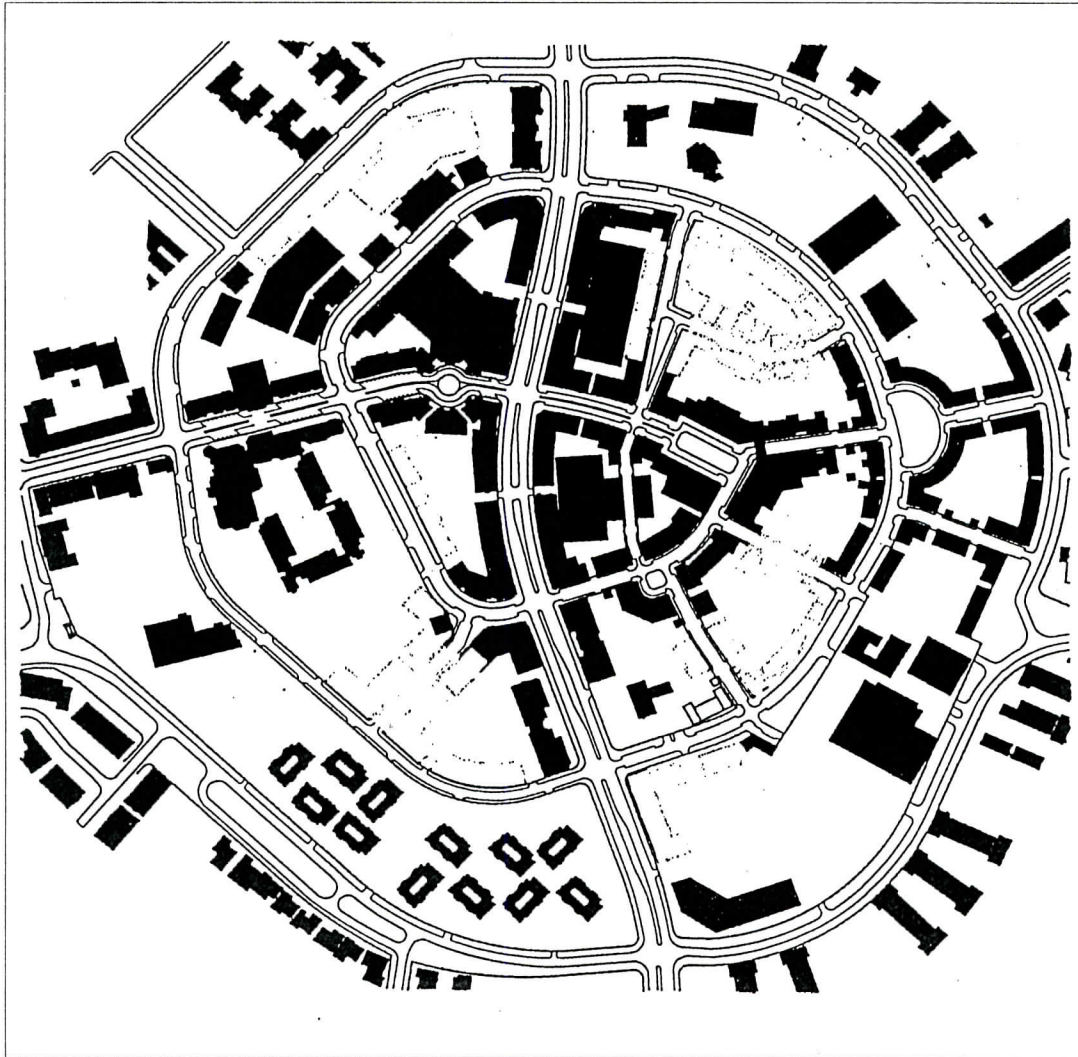
The Town Center Master Plan depicts in its entirety a very long-term view of a future buildout scenario. Also proposed are two interim plans of "Near Term" and "In Our Generation" phases, designed to create high quality urban experiences from the beginning, long before a total buildout is achieved.

One ideal method is to always *build both sides of a street*, creating an "outdoor room" of public space. The watchword is to be sensitive to *containing spaces*, whether with deflected views or by shielding unbuilt areas (such as surface parking lots) from view.



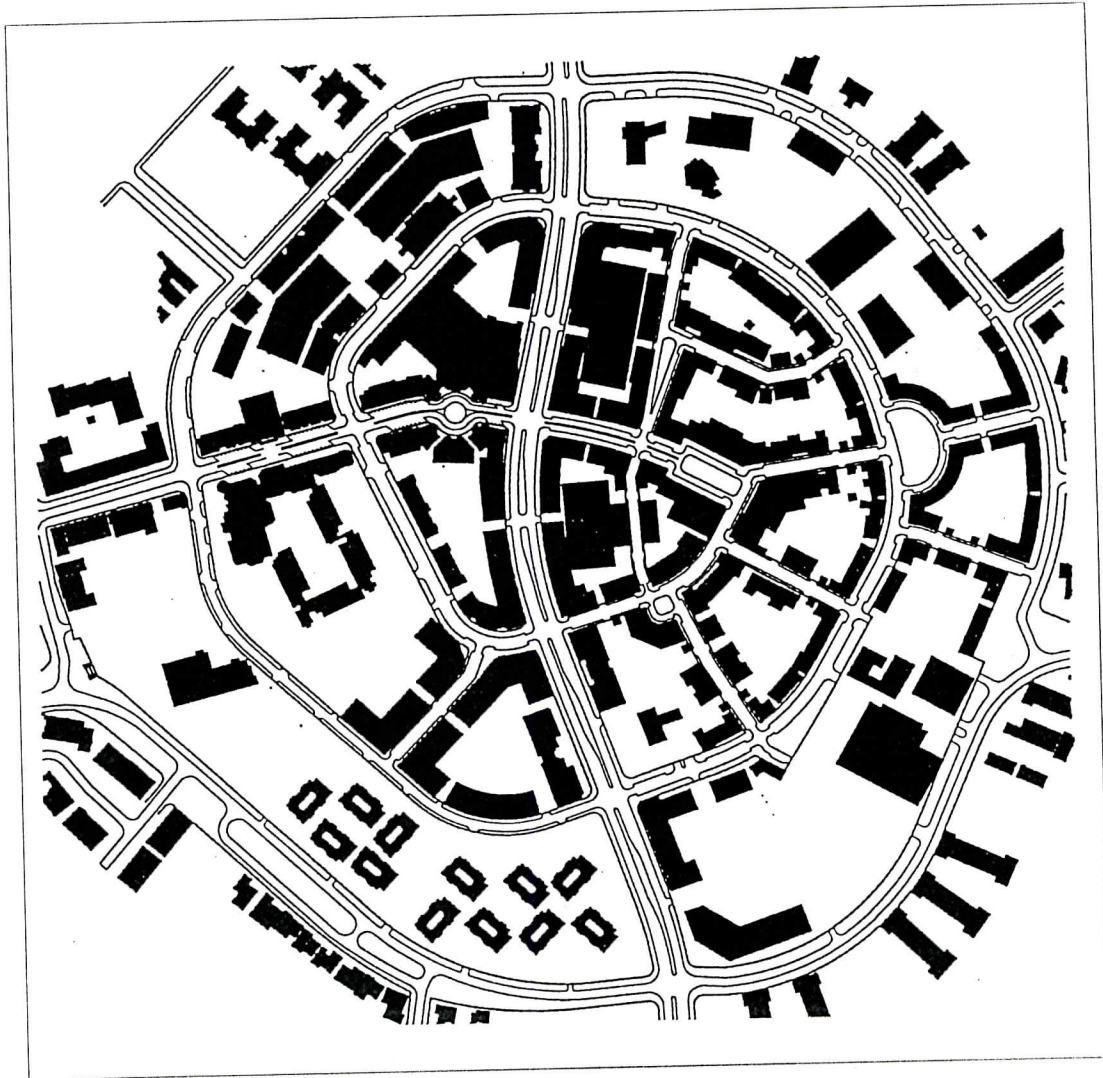
### Near Term

- Continue renovating Phase One and Two of the existing Main Street;
- Expanding and upgrading the Cobb Theatres at its present location;
- Completing the four corners of Ludlam Road and Main Street with buildings;
- Developing the twin office buildings south and west of the Main Street/ Ludlam Road intersection to terminate the views into and out of the Town Center;
- Extending Main Street to the east and terminating the view with a new Plaza and civic/retail anchor building;
- Resolving parking issues through the use of an overlay district; and
- Providing a new apartment building complex designed around the Crescent Park, which acts as a landscaped cousin to the new Plaza. The Crescent also realizes Collins' notion of an eastern counterpart to the existing Graham Park on the northwest side of the Town Center.



### **In Our Generation**

- Completing construction along Ludlam Road primarily with office buildings;
- Extending New Barn Road across Ludlam Road and terminating the spiral conch shell street plan at the Plaza;
- Constructing parking garages north and south of the Main Street extension when wrapping the block edges with additional buildings;
- Linking Main Street extension to the New Barn Road extension with an incubator / workshop zone;
- Lining the extended New Barn Road with buildings which screen new surface parking lots behind;
- Linking the extended Main Street and Plaza to the Crescent with mixed-use buildings on both sides of the street; and
- Enclosing the west side of the Crescent with more residential units.



### Long Range

- Completing construction at the block frontages along Eagle Nest Lane; and
- Linking Eagle Nest Lane to the existing phases with minor streets lined with buildings.



## MORE SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

### Fountain House Two:

- Modifying plans to provide front door entrances from the sidewalks to the living rooms; and
- Placing a small food shop or newspaper kiosk on the corner across from the entrance to the Hotel.

*Benefits* include creating continuity in the most successful aspects of Main Street, reinforcing the pedestrian experience by closing up "leaky" spaces and activating the street.

### Cobb Theatres:

- Renovating the original theatre building to meet current market requirements;
- Demolishing the addition and redeveloping the site adjacent into additional screening rooms; and
- Lining the rear elevation of the addition on New Barn Road with other commercial uses in order to activate the street.

*Benefits* include securing the interest of national retailers previously attracted to the spaces adjacent to the theatre entrance.

### Main Street and Ludlam Road:

- Build two towers east of Ludlam Road which act as orientation devices and memorable character makers;
- Redesign the facades of the Phase Two buildings which face Ludlam Road to enhance the visual experience of shoppers; and

- Taming car traffic and stimulating pedestrian circulation with a variety of devices as noted in the transportation section.

*Benefits* include creating a "seamlessness" for shopping on Main Street both east and west of Ludlam Road.

### The Plaza:

- Designing a public space large enough to handle certain festivals but flexible enough to be used daily by merchants, shoppers and the community;
- Specifying a continuous hard surface from the plaza to the storefronts to enhance accessibility and a traditional feeling; and
- Developing a specific landscape plan for the Plaza which meets the demands of flexibility, necessity and delight.

*Benefits* include creating a memorable public space, full of activities which continue to attract shoppers to the community.

### The Crescent:

- Removing pavement along a section of Eagle Nest Terrace and creating a park around which housing will be built;
- Preserve the existing trees within the right-of-way and continue running the sidewalks parallel; and
- Designing pedestrian gateways at either end of the Terrace to help mark the entrance to the Town Center.

*Benefits* include providing an alternative (green)

gathering space and easing the transition from a residential area to a mixed-use area.

### **Miami Lakes Drive East and Cow Pen Road:**

- Reinforcing the existing tree plantings along the edges of the rights-of-way with additional plantings;
- Creating a park-like atmosphere by pulling the new multifamily buildings away from the street; and
- Planting the park area in between the rights of ways following a detailed plan which includes benches and pathways.

*Benefits* include marking the entrance to the center of Miami Lakes with a peacefully bucolic landscape design, recalling the original dairy farm.

### **Workshop Area to Triangle Park:**

- Locating neighborhood service retail along the perimeter of Triangle Park, north of Main Street;
- Providing incubator business sites along the narrow street, south of Main Street; and
- Lining the streets and parks with sabal palms as a distinctive element.

*Benefits* include providing space for a range of businesses and activities so that a growing company never needs to move from the community, only relocate to a more desirable space.

### **"Outparcels" along Cow Pen Road/ Eagle Nest Lane:**

- Using design guidelines to guarantee high aesthetic quality of future buildings;
- Connecting the existing parking lots in appropriate locations; and
- Creating incentives for the owners to renovate the exteriors of existing buildings when possible.

*Benefits* include protecting the long term investment in Miami Lakes by thoughtfully controlling the aesthetic environment, ensuring the future desirability of the community and appreciation of real estate.

### **Surface Parking Lots on Eagle Nest Lane:**

- Connecting the existing lots with drive aisles across property lines to ease the access for shoppers; and
- Screening the lots where possible with shade trees and hedges.

*Benefits* include reducing traffic congestion through accessibility, and creating a more friendly environment.

# IMPLEMENTATION

## The Graphic Code

A draft Graphic Code accompanies the Master Plan. That document codifies conventions which are based on traditional town centers and acts as a design guide for architects. The one-page sheet addresses issues such as:

- How to create a street with buildings on either side that relate to each other;
- How to make blocks from a series of streets;
- Where and how different uses and building types work best in a block;
- Where to locate the fronts and backs of buildings;
- How to allow for variety in architectural details;
- Where to park cars; and
- How to design buildings for an active pedestrian life.

## An Overlay District

Two things are profoundly different about this Plan, when compared to the conventional sprawl for which county zoning was devised:

- First, the Town Center is being planned as a *unified, integrated whole*, rather than a collection of random buildings on individual parcels. It should be reviewed by the local government for zoning purposes on a district-wide basis, once, at the outset.
- Second, the Master Plan demands *traditional urban design conventions* (such as narrow streets, urban parking ratios, and mixed uses) which are not permitted under conventional zoning. These design features will further important county goals regarding growth management, environmental protection, traffic, and economic development. A one-time, district-wide approval should be obtained for using these features.

*The developers should not be expected to return through the zoning process for variances every time they seek to build out more of the plan.*

To accomplish this an Overlay District should be established for the Town Center, based on the new Master Plan.

The Graphic Code is designed to be easily modified into a Overlay District Code as discussed above. This work would be undertaken after decisions are made about how and when to proceed with the development.

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