

Ocoee proceeds with Special Development Plan for CRA

By Kathy Aber, West Orange Times, July 8, 2010 edition

The Ocoee Commission was expected to approve an ordinance Tuesday, July 6, after presstime that would advance the Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) process.

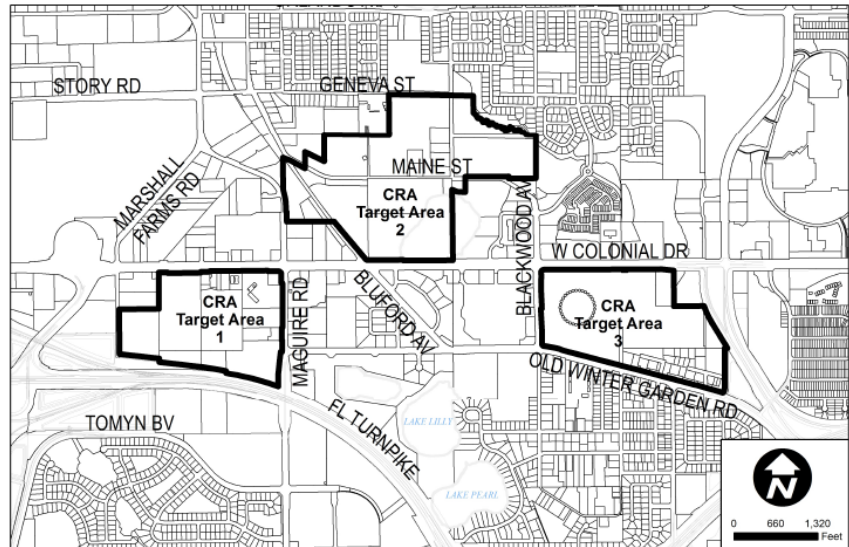
Russ Wagner, CRA director for Ocoee, discussed details of the ordinance during a first reading at the June 15 Ocoee Commission meeting, saying, "It establishes the vision for the whole CRA."

A CRA is a public entity created by a city or county to revitalize blighted areas and enhance the CRA district. It provides access to financial and planning mechanisms to rehabilitate and redevelop the area.

"This is one piece of a big pie of what we're doing with CRA. It's a big piece that gets us rolling," Wagner said.

If approved, the ordinance would amend the Ocoee Land Development Code and create a Special Development Plan with land uses for three different target areas. The CRA target areas are located along West Colonial Drive and adjacent to the CRA boundaries.

Target area 1 is on the corner of Maguire Road and West Colonial Drive going south to the Florida Turnpike. It includes the old Colony Plaza site. Target area 2 extends from the corner of Bluford Avenue and West Colonial Drive into the Minorville and Lake Bennet activity centers. Target area 3 includes Health Central hospital and its surrounding campus and property along Old Winter Garden Road. (See map)



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The Special Development Plan was created after many months of work with landowners, developers, Health Central hospital staff, city officials and local businesses.

Wagner told the commission there have been hundreds of meetings with property owners and this will all lead to "very predictable development in the area."

He said the result is a planning guide for new growth based on a collective vision.

The city took the lead in this effort by hiring a consultant to assist in the development of an overlay plan. The city paid for the background planning that usually is the developers' responsibility.

Ocoee Commissioner Rusty Johnson praised the city staff for having the foresight to do this.

"I don't know any cities nowadays or any time that have gone out a step ahead to bring development to developers and asked them instead of waiting for them to come to the table. This makes for a whole lot simpler way to do things," Johnson told the commission audience. "This is the best way to do it."

A year ago, the city hired Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, which is now a part of AECOM, to begin the visioning process. The final step will be a regulating plan to guide growth within the CRA and certain adjacent areas not in the CRA. In the ensuing meetings, the three target areas were identified because they offered the greatest potential to meet the overall CRA objectives for future development. Eventually, a form-based code will emerge for the whole CRA area, but the process provides a way for quality development to occur in the target areas in the interim.

The next step will be to create a long-term capital plan, which Wagner said would require millions in public investment. A multi-mobility transportation plan is part of the capital plan, which will also evaluate and consider rapid bus and commuter train service, as well as light rail, a trolley system and possibly special event trains going to the arena or downtown area. Ocoee is working with Winter Garden on regional transportation.