

DOWNTOWN DELRAY BEACH MASTER PLAN

City of Delray Beach, Florida



A CITIZENS' MASTER PLAN FOR THE GROWTH AND UNIFICATION OF DELRAY BEACH

Adopted by the City Commission on March 19, 2002

T R E A S U R E C O A S T R E G I O N A L P L A N N I N G C O U N C I L
I N D I A N R I V E R - S T . L U C I E - M A R T I N - P A L M B E A C H

C I T Y O F D E L R A Y B E A C H
A C I T I Z E N S ' M A S T E R P L A N

prepared by

TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

With and for the Citizens of Delray Beach

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master plan

T R E A S U R E C O A S T R E G I O N A L P L A N N I N G C O U N C I L
I N D I A N R I V E R - S T . L U C I E - M A R T I N - P A L M B E A C H

The Downtown Delray Beach Master Plan is the citizens' vision for the growth and unification of Delray Beach. It represents the ultimate growth and form of their community and the creation of a recognizable and seamless center for their city.

The main ideas were developed during a design charrette held from April 27th through May 4th, 2001. The Charrette was held at Pompey Park and was well attended by over 200 residents representing a good cross section of the community. Work continued in the weeks that followed the initial public workshop.

The citizens, with the assistance of a professional team, studied the many challenges faced by the community and proposed specific solutions. A final presentation by Council Staff was held on August 17th, 2001. It was a time to take into account further citizen and professional input.

The overall Master Plan and specific project plans and sketches included in this Master Plan are conceptual in nature, provided to graphically illustrate one possible solution to an identified problem or opportunity. They are not meant to represent the only solution, but to provide a starting point for additional discussion and detailed design.

A Summary Of The Citizen's Requests:

- *Accomplish a general sense of unity:* This was the citizens' most important request. Walking or driving along the Avenue should reflect continuity. The character of the Avenue does not have to be the same throughout its entire length, but it all has to be physically seamless.
- *Promote local ownership:* Development along the Avenue (specially West of Swinton Avenue) should be such that the retail and businesses that it attracts serve the community. More service oriented retail, restaurants and shops geared to all the different ethnic groups in the city, at more affordable rents or purchase prices are needed.
- *Preserve the character of the City:* The City of Delray Beach is a good place to live, shop, work and relax. It possesses small town attributes, great physical structure and charm. It is important to preserve these qualities with the understanding that the City of Delray Beach has grown beyond being a Village. It is a City with several districts and neighborhoods.
- *Build a dignified entrance to the City:* Start West, continue East, and eventually development will meet somewhere in the middle.
- *Calm traffic:* Human scale should prevail over the automobile. Traffic calming is one of the essential tools that should be used to accomplish this. Changes to the physical structure of the Avenue to promote slower speeds and a pedestrian friendly atmosphere were requested.
- *A Square at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue and SW 5th Avenue (Historic Main Street):* A square surrounded by mixed-use buildings announces a vibrant neighborhood center along 5th Avenue. This location was proposed as ideal for neighborhood services, grocery stores, ethnic restaurants as well as offices, residences, civic and public buildings. This village square is seen as a new center, half-way between Swinton Avenue and I-95.
- *Protect the integrity of the neighborhoods, improve all neighborhood streets (including alleys):* Establish a street and alley improvement and preservation program.
- *Build mixed-use buildings along the Avenue with parking in rear:* Commercial uses along the majority of West Atlantic Avenue should be limited to 300' North and South of Atlantic Avenue.
- *Erase the "dividing line" created by Swinton Avenue:* Swinton Avenue can be reconfigured to make pedestrian and vehicular crossings easier, eliminating the physical barrier between the East and the West.
- *Incorporate Public Art along the Avenue as well as in the neighborhoods:* Bus stop signs, plazas and pocket parks were all identified as potential locations for public art.
- *Encourage development without displacement at an appropriate scale:* Encourage development fronting along the Avenue, with three stories as ideal height and four stories being the maximum desired height.
- *Neighborhood pocket parks:* Small pocket parks are effective gestures that serve the needs of the neighborhood and at the same time contribute to one's sense of orientation within the City. Several neighborhood parks have been proposed throughout the City.
- *Secondary circulation system:* Create a secondary circulation system along the 2nd Streets. Improve and landscape these two corridors.
- *Convert the one-way pair (SE 1st Street & NE 1st Street) into two-way streets:* Both one-way "bypass" streets should be converted to two-way arteries with on-street parking on both sides of the road.
- *Calm traffic and narrow the two Federals:* Both Federal Highways (NE/SE 5th Avenue and NE/SE 6th Avenue) should be narrowed down to two-lanes of traffic with wider sidewalks and on-street parking on both sides of the road.

- *Widen sidewalks along A1A:* Widen the Western sidewalk along A1A between Atlantic Avenue and Miramar Street. Protect pedestrians from vehicular traffic.
- *Density:* The density proposed by the actual zoning code is generally accepted. The code should be complimented with Architectural Design Guidelines.
- *Parking* Parking along the entire corridor needs to be addressed. Some locations need imminent solutions, other areas need to plan for future parking needs.
- *Infill housing* The large amount of vacant land within the neighborhoods adjacent to the Avenue is a great opportunity to define their character. Infill housing should represent some of the best examples of architecture within the City.
- *Infill development in the beach area:* The beach area has a very unique atmosphere and the community put great emphasis on preserving it. The Plan proposes infill development in some areas in order to achieve a more pedestrian oriented scale and continuity.

Special Projects Reviewed During The Charrette

- *Atlantic Grove:* This project will have great impact on the Avenue and plays a major role in the definition of a center for the Atlantic Avenue/West Settlers Neighborhood.
- *Expansion of Old School Square:* This is a positive expansion for the City that should contemplate the impact to the urban environment and the grid: one of the City's most valuable assets to ensure healthy growth .
- *New library:* Improve the pedestrian access to the proposed library. Do not close-off SW 2nd Avenue.
- *Worthing Place:* The design team reviewed this project. General recommendations and design alternatives with a more human-oriented scale are proposed in this report.
- *Infill along the Tennis Center:* Improve the character of the street and create an uninterrupted pedestrian transition between the East and the West.
- *Other proposals:* Senior center, Youth center, Clean & Safe program, Welcome Center, Hotel (smaller, more affordable than the Marriott, closer to I-95), Grocery Stores, Public Pool, General Building Improvements.



Images of the community designing their city

Choose Your Future

During the process of creating this report, many local participants expressed the need for immediate action. They wanted to raise their community's ambition for the downtown to a higher level.

The Master Plan is the tool for an Historic turnaround, if City officials and citizens work together as a united group. Coherent ideas for enhancing the current situation have emerged from working together on this project. These are attainable visions, not just pretty pictures.

The physical place that could grow during the next generation would be a national model of inspiration, practicality and wonder.



**The Mission Statement
Downtown Delray Design Charrette**

The mission of the Downtown Delray Design Charrette is to engage the entire community in creating a unified vision for the residential and commercial renaissance of Downtown. The vision aims for Delray to recognize and embrace the merging trends that will shape the Downtown, to remain competitive in the marketplace, and to prepare the area to receive future growth gracefully and creatively.

With community involvement, the Charrette will identify infrastructure needs and resources necessary to achieve this vision by promoting employment opportunities and economic growth with emphasis on a greater degree of parity and equity as well as a clean, safe, attractive environment for residents, business, and tourists.

This vision will be the guiding force for all actions taken to redevelop Downtown Delray.

Prepared by the Downtown Delray Charrette Subcommittee December 12, 2000



Delray's structure is that of a real City formed by districts and neighborhoods. Each neighborhood and district is different in character, but integrates all the daily functions of urban life (dwelling, working, leisure). Each neighborhood and district has streets and special features that present a familiar character. The dimensions and proportions of the streets, blocks, buildings and urban spaces in Delray Beach are comparable to some of the best and most beautiful cities in America. The city is articulated into public and domestic spaces, monuments and urban fabric, classical architecture and vernacular buildings, squares and streets.

But like many other American cities, while some areas are thriving, others have lost their quality to urban blight and segregation. Atlantic Avenue, the City's major East-West corridor, is a clear depiction of this condition. For a few blocks, it houses some of the most valuable real estate in the region. The rest of the corridor is today the kind of road that most visitors, investors and even residents prefer to avoid.

Atlantic Avenue, east of I-95, needs to become a corridor that attracts businesses and people throughout its entire length. The public space along the Avenue and the buildings that surround it should be designed to promote a sense of unity and better ties, and to prevent urban isolation that is so detrimental for the life of the community.

The residents of Delray Beach clearly expressed importance of achieving an overall *Sense of Unity*. It is with their input and direct participation that this Master Plan was created. This Citizen's Master Plan for the Growth and Unification of the City incorporates the proposals of the recently adopted West Atlantic Avenue Redevelopment Plan, as well as the results of the City's 2010 Vision. This Master Plan will serve as a guide for the future development of Delray Beach. It addresses the *goals and objectives* necessary to achieve growth on the citizens' terms.

Project Goal and Objectives:

The goal of the Downtown Delray Beach Master Plan is to create a framework that will facilitate development and investment in private land as well as in public infrastructure, preserve the city's heritage, enhance its livability and sense of unity and maintain its design quality, both architectural and urban, in a manner

that achieves the following objectives:

- To implement a plan that promotes unity and a sense of continuity throughout the downtown area and the entire City.
- To encourage local ownership of properties, businesses and development.
- To create building forms of a character and scale that reinforce the Citizens' vision of a "City of urban amenities with a small town feeling".
- To facilitate economic development and ensure that Atlantic Avenue and its immediate surroundings remain the economic, cultural and governmental center of the City.
- To improve and include vehicular circulation, city-wide parking and mass transit in a manner that is functional, economically feasible, and supportive of a pedestrian environment.
- To create attractive public plazas, neighborhood pocket-parks and pedestrian friendly streets complemented by adjacent building forms and enhanced by public art that act as a strong links between the different neighborhoods.
- To increase the range and affordability of housing types.
- To promote diversity and areas of special character and preserve heritage in the development process.
- To improve street furniture and signage wherever necessary and to identify these as opportunities to express the City's history through public art whenever possible.



Beginning



Middle



End



The Study Area is the urban fabric between SW 4th Street to the South, NW 4th Street to the North, I-95 to the West and the Atlantic Ocean to the East.



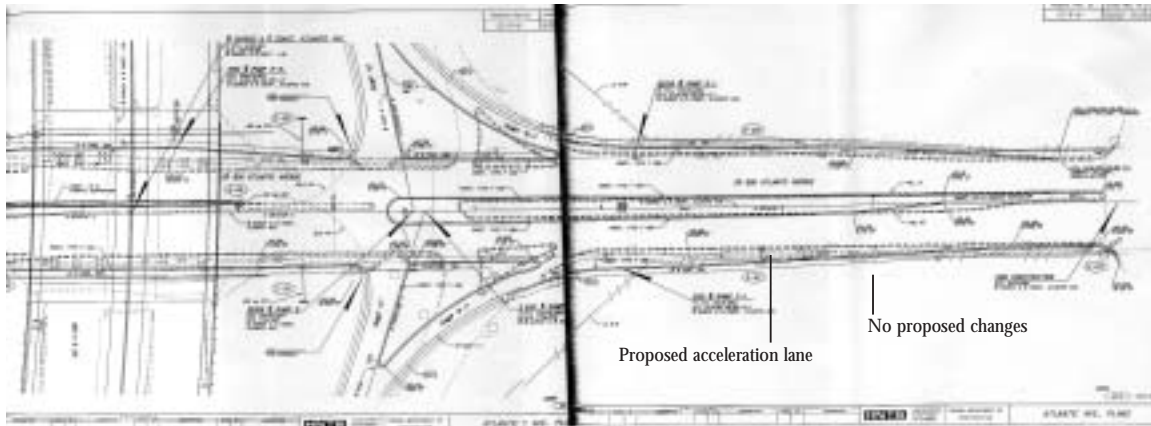
Above: Historic map of Delray Beach. The area contained within the dashed line is the object of the Downtown Delray Beach Master Plan Study.

Right: Different views of the Avenue and its various elements.





Above: Aerial photograph of existing condition
 Below: FDOT's current proposal

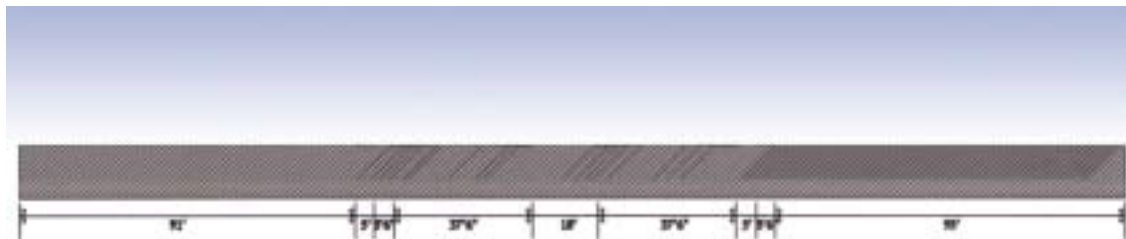


Delray Beach has a great history in its neighborhoods and housing stock, but it has neglected to give enough attention to the entrances to the City, particularly along Atlantic Avenue.

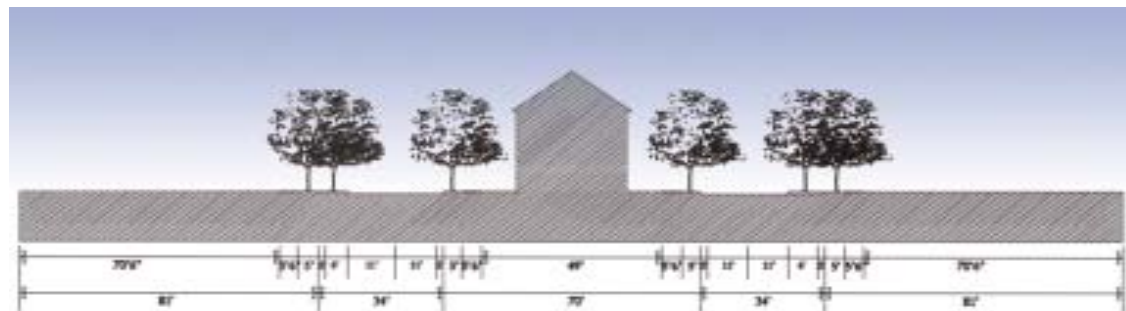
Downtown Delray's western edge begins at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue and I-95. Nothing here signals the importance of the City that lies ahead. A recent plan by the Florida Department of Transportation adds an "acceleration" lane to the existing four lanes of traffic to facilitate quick access for traffic getting off the interstate heading east. Existing trees have been raised in order to allow for this street widening. Vacant land with no landscaping or improvements (belonging to the Department of Transportation) flanks the intersection.

This general appearance of the entrance was not acceptable to the residents of Delray Beach. They wanted to embrace the tradition of erecting special gateways to announce the entrance to the City by creating an entrance that would commemorate important events and reflect the City's identity and history. Parks embracing the entrance and traffic calming features were included in all of the citizen's designs. The wide existing right-of way and the presence of the vacant land north and south of this intersection provides the perfect stage for a unique entrance to the heart of the City that combines all of the citizens' requests.

In order to create the stage for this unique entrance, the Master Plan proposes the construction of a 70' median between NW 12th and NW 14th Avenues. It also proposes the construction of a two-story building or other substantial feature in this median. This building becomes a civic monument. Traffic is slowed by the change of direction in the travel lanes and by the fact that the driver's attention is caught by the presence of the building. The marking of these crossroads is controlled by this special architectural feature. The aesthetic urge proposed by the citizens is complemented by ornamental additions to the street space and the plaza fronting the building.



Atlantic Avenue, and I-95 Existing Condition



Atlantic Avenue and I-95 Proposed Changes



Post Charrette Update: During the weeks that followed the Charrette, TCRPC and City staff met with engineers from the FDOT to present and evaluate the citizens' proposal.

From those meetings it was concluded that the additional "acceleration" lane should be eliminated and that the proposal of a wide median and flanking parks was feasible. FDOT still needs to determine whether a building or other substantial feature proposed in the median conflicts with what is known as the "sight triangle", an area in which no construction or encroachment is allowed.

TCRPC's consultants maintain that the proposed site (moving the building further east, closer to NW 12th Avenue) is feasible and does not impact the sight triangle. In the event that the FDOT did not allow construction in the median, the building could be replaced by two major structures (including buildings) on both sides of the road.

START WEST, MOVE EAST, AND MEET SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN



A wide median housing a civic building and flanked by two parks announces the City that lies ahead: The construction of this entrance and the building in the median will trigger development on the western edge of the downtown area.

Belonging to a city like Delray Beach is a privilege. Preserving its urban quality is everybody's responsibility.

The City has lasting urban qualities. Its ability to grow while preserving narrow, pedestrian oriented streets is based upon the existing system of streets and alleys. The lack of clear regulations regarding conservation in urban plans often causes great difficulties in day-to-day work. An indiscriminate closure of public streets and alleys will lead to irreparable damage. One has to be very clear in what needs to be preserved, while maintaining a clear grid capable of incorporating new buildings. Urban planning and urban conservation should be viewed as symbiotic. When this outlook is adopted, new buildings will not only infuse the area with life, but also maintain the existing urban structure.

The Importance of Alleys

Alleys are public spaces, service streets. As such, they service buildings, both residential and commercial. They must be wide enough to accommodate trucks, dumpsters and utilities. Alleys need to be easily accessible both for vehicles and pedestrians, but they have no sidewalks, setbacks or landscaping. The service and separation provided by alleys improves the overall aspect of the general streets, enhances the privacy of rear yards and the back of buildings.

All zoning district boundaries should be along the alleys. A perfect example of alleys as the place to change uses is represented on the three images above right. A beautiful church on the Beach District appears to be set in a peaceful neighborhood, across the street from a park, almost a countryside setting. The park in this setting is an elegantly designed parking lot. In the rear, an alley separates this church from an auto repair shop. Two opposite uses that share the same block without interfering with each other due to the presence of the alley.

When building projects use up an entire city block, alleys and their uses should be preserved and incorporated into the design. In these cases, as well as throughout the entire grid, the city should explore the possibility of using revocable permits instead of abandoning rights-of-way. This allows for the current needs of developers and residents, without permanently losing the easements.

Nobody knows what the future will bring as far as development. What is certain is that the presence of alleys will always encourage the right type of development. The city needs to make sure that it doesn't permanently give up on land that will make development for future generations very hard or even impossible.

The City is in the process of abandoning unimproved alleys which are unneeded to service adjacent uses. Those alleys which are not slated for abandonment should be maintained and improved.



Church



Church Parking Lot



Church with Alley



Unpaved Alley



Paved Alley

Street Closures: Interrupting The Natural Flow

Streets have been closed to allow for the tennis center to occupy two City blocks, to provide privacy to the police station, to link the court house parking lot with the court house building. Other street closures have been approved or are in the process of being approved in order to expand and allow for private use of Old School Square, and to further expand the Court House parking lot.

Closing off streets is comparable to blocking arteries in the human body. Each one of these streets has been or will be closed to fulfill an individual need. None of these closures is benefiting the community as a whole. These poorly formulated plans are destroying the existing urban fabric, without conceiving a new one.

- Re-connect SW 1st Street between SW 3rd Avenue and SW 2nd Avenue
- Re-connect NW 3rd Avenue between Atlantic Avenue and SW 1st Street
- Consider reopening NE 1st Avenue, between Atlantic Avenue and NE 1st Street, if future phases for expansion of Old School Square do not go forward. If reopened, the street's redesign should allow it to be closed off during special public events.
- If the tennis center ever gets replaced by more urban and community oriented uses, reopen NW 1st Street and NW 2nd Avenue.



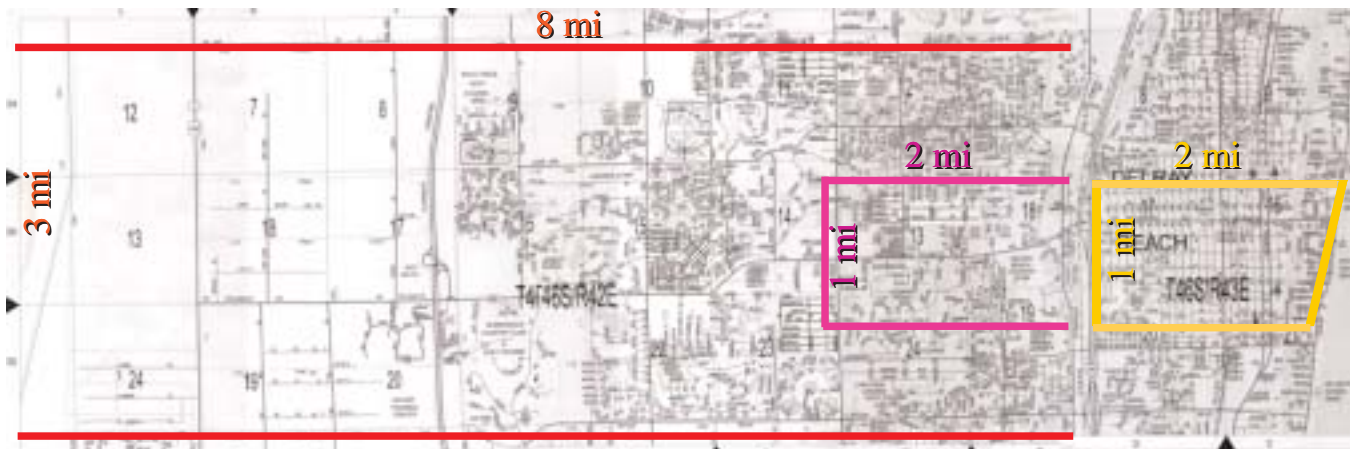
*Above: Aerial of Tennis Center
Below: Aerial of Old School Square
Left: Aerial of Courthouse*



A Healthy Network Of Streets: Why Traffic In East Delray Works

The City of Delray is a perfect example of the importance of having a good network of streets and alleys. A recent Transportation Concurrency Exception Area (TCEA) study has determined, among other things, that development within the City is possible without the need of widening streets or major arteries. As a matter of fact, as much as 3,000,000 additional square feet could be built without any modifications to the existing streets. This is an incredible condition, and it is the result of the good grid.

The image above graphically demonstrates the importance of this grid, and why this TCEA allows for additional development within the downtown and its surroundings.



The area contained within the yellow rectangle, east of I-95, is 2 square miles. In it, there are 44 North/South lanes and 22 East/West lanes, totaling 66 lanes of traffic. As a general rule, the number of lanes is one of the main variables used to calculate the capacity of that area. This means that even though there might be congestion on certain streets at peak hours, there is always a way around it.

44 North/South Lanes + 22 East/West = 66 Total Lanes (2 square miles)
 12 North/South Lanes + 6 East/West = 18 Total Lanes (2 square miles)
 40 North/South Lanes + 12 East/West = 52 Total Lanes (24 square miles)

The area within the purple rectangle compares an identical surface, but West of I-95 is a section of the City where the grid is not as rich. Within this area, there are 12 North/South lanes and 6 East/West lanes, totaling 18 lanes of traffic. This leaves few alternatives, and when congestion exceeds recommended levels, streets get widened and the environment consistently becomes car oriented.

Finally, the red rectangle looks at the entire City and beyond, West of I-95, a 24 square mile area. In this large area, there are still less travel lanes than within the two square miles along Atlantic Avenue, East of I-95. Traffic here is hard to distribute, with the normal condition being four to six-lane roads and the only way to get around is by car.

Barriers: Visible and Invisible

Atlantic Avenue changes character every 10 to 12 blocks. Certain streets and natural features act as physical barriers making existing separation and segregation of the different sections along the Avenue even more apparent.

The landscape of urban divisions in Delray Beach is both physical and social. Although in order to cross from one neighborhood to another there are no walls to breach, a sense of separation is reflected in the physical appearance of the public space and the buildings that delineate it.

On the level ground, the segregative power of transportation lines, like the FEC railroad tracks, is acknowledged in every city. Nevertheless, Delray Beach has managed to overcome this physical barrier like no other city through good urban design, and a smart code. But just a few blocks away, Swinton Avenue effectively creates a physical barrier within the community by separating east from west Atlantic Avenue.

Cultural Separation

Religious and ethnic isolation is based on the fundamental invariables of roots and beliefs. Segregation in these cases is social and can only be eliminated when a community decides to work together. Divisions based on economic disparity are in some ways the newest but also the easiest to resolve.

It was clear during the Charrette that the citizens of Delray Beach have evolved past a separatist mentality. They are willing to work together to achieve an overall sense of unity—Nothing quite as powerful bonds urban populations today. In a society driven by discrepancies in wealth, race and privilege, this will not be an easy task. It is, however, prerequisite to any hope for a lasting resolution of our differences. In the case of cities, to divide is not to conquer.

The Character of The Avenue

The Avenue extends through residential neighborhoods, a bustling downtown and the heart of the City's Beach, while serving as the spine of a very special system of streets. Delray Beach is shaped by streets that are straight, run parallel to one another, and intersect cross streets at right angles. The view down any East-West street extends the length of the City and generally ends against the water. Given the extension of the Avenue, and the physical disparity throughout its length, the citizens proposed to re-structure and organize this corridor by creating three distinct neighborhoods along it.

By emphasizing on the creation of these neighborhoods - each with a center of integrated retail, office, and residential uses; within the fabric, a wide mix of housing types, public spaces, and schools, churches, parks and corner stores - the edges, created by existing streets like Swinton Avenue, will evolve from physical barriers to natural transitions between districts and neighborhoods. This emphasis to unite the three areas is the basis for a healthy community. It is a focus on urban revitalization by reinstating a balance along the entire corridor.

Cities have traditionally set aside districts of specialized use, distinguished spatially and architecturally from their surroundings. The purpose of these districts is not to segregate but rather to preserve balance and vitality throughout the entire City.

Three neighborhoods and districts have been identified along the Avenue:

- The West Atlantic Neighborhood: between NW/SW 12th Avenue and Swinton Avenue
- The Central Core District: between Swinton Avenue and the Intracoastal Waterway
- The Beach District: between the Intracoastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean



West Atlantic Neighborhood

Central Core District

Beach District

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