



PLANNING FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES: CASE VIGNETTE

LINKING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE RESEARCH PROJECT

CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

DEPT. OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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City of Miramar, Florida

*The March 2009 issue of **Planning** magazine labels the city of Miramar in south Florida as one of the country's emerging 'Boomburg's: incorporated places with a population of at least 100,000 that have seen growth of at least 10% each decade since 1970 (yet are not the largest city in their MSA). According to the American Community Survey, Miramar is an ethnically diverse community with a large percentage of Whites, Latinos and West Indians, and 42% of residents being foreign-born. The city's median income is \$65,179 (2007). Miramar also boasts 16,928 families with children under the age of 18, most of those in families with married parents. It is in this context that Miramar planners are re-visioning their community as a family-friendly, full-service city promoting density and sustainability in the midst of south Florida sprawl.*

THE TOWN CENTER

Miramar's Comprehensive Plan requires that, "By 2010 [the city will] create a true town center, which will serve as the focal point of activity for the City." (Obj. 7D) The new 54-acre town center was conceived as a public-private partnership between the city and developers in the New Urbanist style, emphasizing a combination of dense, mixed-use residential, civic and commercial development as well as open space features such as meandering pathways, lakes, canals, botanical gardens and plazas.

This design of the city's downtown area allots 14 acres to public services including the new City Hall, Cultural Center/ArtsPark and a library, while the remaining 40 acres belong to private developers for residential and commercial development. The old City Hall, located in the historic section of the city, was converted into a Multi-Service Center to serve local families by providing services ranging from early childhood programs to senior services. The center conveniently concentrates other essential services for families such as job-search and tax assistance programs, refugee services, drive-thru bill pay, and a primary healthcare clinic.

The town center also provides the infrastructure necessary to support alternative forms of transportation, primarily a transit hub complete with covered waiting areas, bike racks, lockers, and shower

facilities. The design offers connectivity of residential areas, schools, utilities, shopping, restaurants and other basic services and amenities enjoyed by families.

HOUSING

Currently, Miramar's housing stock consists primarily of single-family homes (77%), multiple-family units (21%) and mobile homes (2%). The median home price is \$337,800 and the median rent is \$1260/month. Future phases of the aforementioned town center development provides for a mix of 1-4 bedrooms townhouses and condos, a portion of these are slated to be 'affordable.'

In fact, affordable housing forms an essential component of Miramar's future development. City regulations include provisions to encourage a variety of housing opportunities in varying price ranges, including housing for low and moderate income families in large scale residential developments. (Obj. 10) In May 2008, the Miramar Town Center was awarded a \$5 million grant by the Community Workforce Housing Innovation Pilot Program to aid police, firefighters, teachers and other essential personnel in purchasing one of 50 condominium units in the development. The city also supports expedited review and fee waivers for developments aimed at providing affordable housing.

Compiled by Kathleen Hoover

This Issue Brief is part of a larger initiative on Planners' Role in Creating Family-Friendly Communities, directed by Professor Mildred Warner. This research is funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Additional issue briefs and case studies can be found on our website. <http://economicdevelopment.cce.cornell.edu>

PARKS AND RECREATION

Miramar's Comprehensive Plan requires four acres of local level parks for every 1,000 city residents (Policy 5A.6). The city owns 265 acres of developed or developable parkland. The city has also co-located 19 acres of recreation facilities with local schools in accordance with a policy to "look for opportunities to place park land adjacent to school sites and utilize lease agreements with the Broward County School Board to make maximum use of public school sites for recreational purposes."

The Department of Community Services operates recreational programs for all city residents, and is responsible for the maintenance and improvement of municipal recreational lands and facilities. Miramar coordinates extensive early childhood, senior and intergenerational programming, maintains over 35 parks and athletic complexes, and organizes numerous programs for children ages 5-18.

TRANSPORTATION

Miramar is a highly linear city with a land use pattern designed to provide high-density uses, employment centers near major travel corridors, and trip-generating residential uses located between these corridors.

Its transportation system was originally designed for auto and truck traffic; however, in recent years, the importance of mass transit and alternative modes of transportation has come to the fore. Thus, all new residential redevelopment areas must be served by mass transit facilities. (Obj. 9B.6)

The community's public transit system consists of Broward County Transit (BCt) services and the City's shuttle bus services. Shuttle service is provided to supplement the county's transit system by increasing the number of destinations within the city limits. All routes operate from the early morning commute hours until the late evening hours. The principal demand segments, however, are students and retirees. During the school year, there is high utilization of bus services by students, while the shuttle bus service addresses the elderly population's restricted mobility year-round by providing service to various facilities such as the community center and the senior center.

Miramar's larger recreational transportation network includes equestrian trails, bikeways, pedestrian

networks and greenways, which are primarily provided along state and county maintained roadways, blueways, canals and lakes.

Greenways customarily provide connections between hubs, such as parks, cultural and historic sites, and developed areas, providing the opportunity for storm water filtration and wildlife habitat as well as recreational uses. Miramar has several important existing park and open space elements that can be considered greenways, including the 1.5-mile long Linear Park, which is essentially a pedestrian pathway with shaded benches, exercise trails and landscaped open water view areas. These spaces not only provide travel-oriented outdoor recreational opportunities, but also attract residents of nearby communities.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED



PEDAL PAST THE PUMP... FAMILY BIKE RALLY

One important lesson this community has learned is the importance of early communication with community stakeholders. With the town center project, planners were initially challenged to convince elected officials, staff and residents of a New Urbanist development. They responded by re-framing the concept of New Urbanism to meet the community's needs. They developed a flexible initial design

and pattern book that was made available to the public via the town website and newspaper articles; they also held numerous public meetings. These initiatives greatly assisted the initial promotion and public relations efforts to "sell" the project to residents.

Miramar planners also suggested the following funding strategies: Use direct economic development incentives; Participate in land acquisition efforts; Provide fast-track development review or permitting (time is money); Establish Special Assessment Districts to fund infrastructure; and Explore grants.

FURTHER RESOURCES:

City of Miramar Comprehensive Plan, 2000:
<http://www.ci.miramar.fl.us/development/planning/complan.html>

Miramar Town Center: <http://miramartc.com/>

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