

Activity Center Report



City of North Port

2007 Comprehensive Plan Update
Future Land Use Element Supplement

Executive Summary

The City of North Port is one of the fastest growing cities in the State of Florida. This large community in southern Sarasota County encompasses a land area of approximately 104 square miles and has an estimated population of over 50,000 permanent residents. North Port is one of Florida's "platted lands" communities wherein vast tracts of land were designated and platted for primarily residential development. As noted, North Port's population has surpassed 50,000 residents according to the latest Census data, with most of that growth occurring between 1995 and 2006. Because of the numerous residential lots in the City, and the overall lower cost of housing and property in the City, it was inevitable that this growth would eventually occur. Today's North Port sees commercial development starting to catch up to the residential rooftops that have been going up steadily. This commercial development is providing new areas for shopping, medical services, and restaurants and is helping North Port become a more sustainable community. However, the City has yet to see a great influx in professional and industrial facilities to complement the large and growing workforce population in North Port.

North Port does, however, offer opportunities for large-scale professional and light industrial development. As noted above, North Port was primarily platted as a residential community. Very little land (approximately 5%) was set aside for non-residential uses. These un-platted non-residential areas are termed "Activity Centers" in the North Port Comprehensive Plan. The vernacular of Sarasota County would call these areas "Major Employment Centers". North Port's 1997 Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map identified five activity centers and one potential area for another. The five Activity Centers were primarily concentrated at the major intersections of North Port's arterial roadways, at the two I-75 interchanges, and along the U.S. 41 corridor as it traverses the City's southern City limits.

Although the City is fortunate to have these Activity Center areas available, in 1997 the City determined that it needed more land area for non-residential development as it strives to create the appropriate balance of residential versus non-residential development. Professional planning studies have shown that sustainable communities need approximately 15-17% of its total land area devoted to non-residential uses. Since land in the Activity Centers only comprised approximately 5% of the City's land area, the City undertook a series of voluntary annexations that would not only provide land for non-residential lands for tax base diversification, but would also serve to allow for different types of residential development that North Port's existing platted lots would not allow. With the annexations of the Thomas (formerly Taylor) Ranch, Kelce Ranch, and land within Warm Mineral Springs area, the City has greatly expanded its economic development opportunities.

As shown in the Table 1 below, the City is at the threshold of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan goal, with just short of 15% of land area available for mixed use development other than residential platted lands.

Table 1

Citywide Non-Residential Buildable Acres

Non-Residential Lands	Total Acres
Activity Centers *net acres	4,184.00
Town Center	1,520
Village Centers	350
Neighborhood Commercial	361
Industrial	34
Office	28
Total	6,477.00

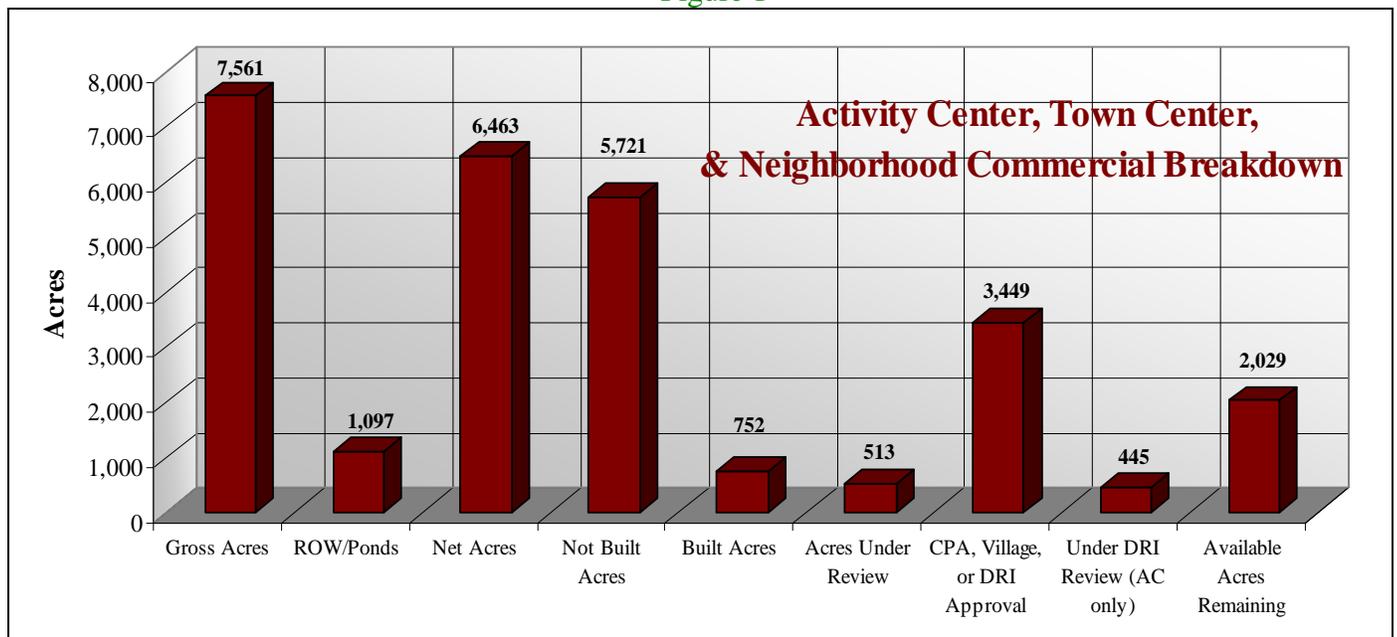
14.80% of Citywide Net Buildable Acres

Total Citywide Gross Acres	66,606
Conservation/Parks/RecOpen/ROW/UTI	22,791
Net Acres	43,815

(includes built & vacant land)

Activity Centers 1 thru 8, the Town Center, and Neighborhood Commercial land encompass 7,561 gross acres as shown below in Figure 1, with ±5,283 of those acres devoted to Activity Centers, which now includes the addition of the proposed Activity Center 6. As will be shown in this report, the City has also expressed an interest in the annexation of properties along U.S. 41 between Thomas Ranch and the City limits at Ortiz Boulevard and Warm Mineral Springs, which would increase the size of Activity Center 1 by 20%.

Figure 1



2007 Sarasota County Property Appraiser, Development Review Applications, DRI documentation, & GIS

The following are brief highlights of each Activity Center found within this report:

Activity Center 1 is the oldest and most developed of all Activity Centers. If all current development plans continue to completion, only 18% of land area will remain for development. Although current regulations

have improved the overall appearance and function of structures and site design, many buildings are 20-30 years old. This area would benefit from redevelopment initiatives, not only in terms of buildings but streetscape but connectivity and pedestrian amenities as well. Future annexations would aid in linking AC 1 to the Thomas Ranch area.

Activity Center 2, which is part of the Heron Creek DRI, is an encouraging example of mixed use development, with housing, shopping, recreation, government services, and schools linked together.

Activity Center 3, which encompasses the 4 quadrants of I-75 and Sumter Boulevard, remains vacant with no development plans thus far, although Sarasota Memorial Hospital Board has recently purchased the southeast quadrant, for a much anticipated future hospital site. This purchase has prompted staff to identify land uses that will complement not only a hospital, but future employees, citizens, and interstate travelers as well.

Activity Center 4 is the largest of all Activity Centers, which includes a portion of the Kelce Ranch annexation area called for in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. This annexation allowed the City to control all four quadrants of the intersection of Toledo Blade Boulevard and I-75, with the northeast quadrant offering a great opportunity for development of highway commercial and light industrial uses. This Activity Center is also a potential example of successful diversity in mixed used development that incorporates housing of all price points, commercial, office, and industrial uses, and if approved, a regional mall that will generate a potential \$12 million in ad valorem tax revenue by 2016.

Activity Center 5 includes 670 acres at the intersections of Price Boulevard and Toledo Blade Boulevard. This Activity Center is anticipated to have a mix of industrial (Kings Plastics), commercial, office, institutional, and workforce housing. Connectivity to surrounding platted neighborhoods, attention to pedestrian amenities, site design, and availability of transit will be important features for the success of this Activity Center.

Activity Center 6 is a proposed area that was first considered in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. The need for more industrial land uses was a major issue illustrated in the 2005 Evaluation and Appraisal Report, which was a driving factor in moving forward to establish this Activity Center. The chosen location of this Activity Center will necessitate the funding and construction of an interchange at Yorkshire Street and I-75. Funding for this and other capital improvements such as bridges and road widening in this area will be a major issue. Impact Fees, Grants, Tax Increment Financing, and Bonds are all funding possibilities that must be explored. This Activity Center also has the potential to have a diversity of multi-family residential along with industrial, office, and interstate commercial uses. Connectivity to surrounding platted neighborhoods, pedestrian amenities, site design and transit availability will also be important features for the success of this Activity Center.

Activity Center 7 came about through the annexation of Warm Mineral Springs which allowed the City the opportunity to not only have an internationally known spa and archeological site within its limits, but also allows an area for a unique form of economic development that allows for preservation of the springs, maintenance of a spa, and future health-care related development that is focused on the springs.

Activity Center 8 is adjacent to the Thomas Ranch, on River Road. This area was annexed into the City and is proposed to be the site of a corporate headquarters facility, housing for employees, recreational opportunities, and some commercial activities.

Town Center is part of the Thomas Ranch annexation which will develop primarily as a designated “village” with interior requirements for neighborhood and village centers. In terms of economic development opportunities, the 1,520 acre site of a “Town Center” will encompass a wide mix of uses, and which will greatly expand job opportunities in North Port, Sarasota County, and the region.

With North Port's easy access to I-75, its large supply of affordable land and homes, and a large working-age population, development of these Activity Centers will not only benefit the City of North Port, but will also have a great economic benefit to Sarasota County and the region. The following are key findings based on data and analysis throughout the Activity Center Report, other findings and recommendations are found within the discussion of each Activity Center.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The City now has 14.8 % of land uses dedicated to Activity Centers, the Town Center, and other non-residential land uses. This nearly accomplishes the goal of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, to provide 15-17% land area to diversify the City's tax base.

RECOMMENDATION: Since the City has nearly reached this goal, annexations should only be for economic development and tax base diversification purposes only. This is consistent with the CAC/EAR recommendations. It is not recommended to reduce the size of any Activity Center or the Town Center in order to ensure that this percentage mix is maintained with the overall balance of residential and non-residential land. This is especially important in a platted lands community such as North Port.

2. A fiscal analysis was prepared for AC 3 due to the recent purchase of land by the Sarasota Memorial Hospital Board. If constructed, the future hospital will not pay taxes, which produces more expenses than revenue, with an overall deficit within the Activity Center. However, a hospital will provide a needed service to City residents and provide employment opportunities among other benefits.

RECOMMENDATION: Although quality job creation would be locally and regionally beneficial, it is also important to ensure that the mix of land uses reduce or eliminate the potential fiscal deficit. Figure 1 of the Comprehensive Plan should reflect changes in land uses for AC 3 under the assumption of a future hospital. The land use mix should include compatible uses such as offices and a large scale hotel, which are high revenue producers

3. AC 6 as proposed, is a newly created Activity Center and is located in an area first identified in the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. A fiscal analysis using NP FAM was completed to ensure overall fiscal sustainability. Visioning software, Community Viz, was also utilized to examine potential impacts of land uses. This proposal could eliminate over 1,000 platted residential lots, and convert them to non-residential and higher density residential uses. Due to the volume of acres in all proposed land uses within this Activity Center, approximately 12,000 to 19,000 employment opportunities may be created.

RECOMMENDATION: The City, as part of the Comprehensive Plan update, should designate the proposed area around Yorkshire and I-75 as Activity Center 6. If formally designated, it is important that land use mix proposed in AC 6 remain as shown. This is primarily due to the flow of land uses from lower to higher intensities, the protection of surrounding residential neighborhoods, and the fact that this area will potentially be the last Activity Center to be developed. Strong language should be included in the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code to ensure that the land uses remain as proposed into the future, in order to inhibit market trends from impacting the overall vision of the City at build out, and to retain fiscal sustainability. This could be accomplished with stronger regulations.

4. Two major funding challenges must be addressed for AC 6. First is financing the future interchange at Yorkshire Street, which is critical to the success of this Activity Center. Second, the assembly and development of parcels within the newly defined land uses will be a major task, raising the question of

whether this assembly should be a private or public venture. This task has a greater level of difficulty due to the approximately 1,000 existing residential platted lots that comprise the area for this Activity Center.

RECOMMENDATION: The City must identify funding options to fund a future interchange at Yorkshire and I-75. A Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district is an option, although current ‘home rule’ requirements in CRA legislation will inhibit the City’s ability to utilize this funding mechanism. Due to the regional benefits of AC 6, the City should be proactive in discussions with Sarasota County during Joint Planning Agreement discussions to allow for a TIF to construct the interchange. Without County support, the City should lobby the State legislators to revise CRA laws to allow city’s in ‘home rule’ counties the ability to form a City-only TIF. Grant funding, although limited or unlikely, is another option to be explored.

RECOMMENDATION: The City must identify methods for the assembly of land in AC 6. Due to the existing platted lots now within AC 6, funding for land development must also be addressed. One option may include allowing an independent developer to assemble property. Another option is for the City to assemble the property, or a public/private partnership. The utilization of bonds for this concept should be researched.

5. All Activity Centers, the Town Center, and neighborhood commercial, have the potential to produce over 11,000 affordable housing units and over 12,000 workforce housing units.

RECOMMENDATION: The City should consider incentives for developers to provide affordable housing units within each Activity Center where the jobs are created. As stated in the Housing Report, the ability to live, work, and engage in recreation within close proximity not only aids in affordability, but increases the quality of life for residents. Beyond incentives, the City should consider requiring a percentage of development within Activity Centers and the Town Center to be committed to the provision of affordable housing units to meet the projected demand at build-out. The City should also work with SCAT to plan for future transit stops within Activity Centers, as population increases.

6. Activity Center 6 as proposed, will generate traffic at levels that could significantly impact certain arterials and collectors, as well as I-75.

RECOMMENDATION: The City must include language in its Comprehensive Plan update requiring the preparation of a Traffic Impact Study/Master Plan for this Activity Center in order to identify details for road systems for widening, multi-modal and transit transportation, connectivity, and adequate linkages to surrounding transportation networks.

7. Although North Port is one of Florida’s largest City’s in terms of land mass, there are few remaining areas designated for non-residential development that could be used for the creation of quality jobs and to ensure a balance of uses that would maintain fiscal sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION: Existing Activity Centers, the Town Center, designated commercial, neighborhood commercial, office, and industrial areas should not be reduced in size or be converted to residential development or non-tax generating uses.

The Big Picture

The linkage between Future Land Use, Economic Development, and Housing in North Port

The spatial dynamics of urban and regional development, meeting the demands of projected population growth, and a diverse housing stock are all linked together to preserve our quality of life. A full range of amenities, streetscape improvements, and pedestrian safety enhancements, along with the availability of transit can ease affordability. In many communities the rigid separation of land uses in neighborhoods runs counter to jobs-housing balance objectives. The establishment of employment areas in appropriate locations to meet the jobs-housing balance illustrates the importance of a hierarchy of Activity Centers down to the neighborhood commercial areas. Within the residentially platted areas and villages, neighborhood or village centers can offer employment opportunities for nearby residents, shorten vehicle trips, or eliminate trips altogether given pedestrian connectivity. If an Activity Center or even a DRI is job-poor, its residents will likely overburden the transportation system with commuting. However, when an Activity Center, Village, or DRI, creates non-residential uses (e.g., office, commercial, industrial) it creates employment opportunities for residents within and near the area, but only if they types of jobs available match the types of housing available. If workers cannot find appropriate and affordable housing within the area, they will have to travel longer distances between Activity Centers, Villages, or as many are currently experience, traveling to Sarasota from their residences. As a result, regional vehicle miles traveled will increase. So too, commuting times and costs will increase across the region. The following data illustrates the balance of jobs and housing to land use, and the significance of annexations such as Thomas Ranch and the Kelse Rance on this balance.

Annexations, whether recent or past, have expanded land area that will be devoted to tax base and housing stock diversification. As shown in Table 2 below, without the annexations of the areas *highlighted in blue in addition to the newly proposed Activity Center 6*, the City would lack the commercial and office square footage to serve just the platted areas, not including housing units within Activity Centers, and would lack any regional square footage.

Table 2

Large Scale Developments Approved and Proposed
Commercial, Office, & Industrial Breakdowns

Large Scale Developments	Acres	Residential			Comm'l Acres	Office/Inst SF	Office/Inst Acres	Industrial SF	Industrial Acres	Hospital
		Units	Comm'l SF	Built						
Panacea Approved	2,301	3,500	987,000	0	64	365,000	20	871,200	58	
West Villages Approved	7,805	15,000	3,865,950	0	355	2,570,040	236	0	0	
Toledo Village Approved	1,837	1,999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	11,943	20,499	4,852,950			2,935,040		871,200		
Activity Centers										
AC 1 Vacant SF Potential			1,613,898		247	307,098	47			
AC 2 Heron Creek DRI Approved	831	1970	500,000	119,230	161	250,000	41	0	0	
AC 3 Vacant SF Potential			862,488			156,816				627,264
AC 4 (portion) NP Gardens-Proposed	531	500	2,000,000		154	150,000	15	0	0	
AC 5-Proposed	670	1,273	1,300,000		199	779,300	98	146,421	40	
AC 6 SF Proposed	1,269	2,753	1,646,568		198	1,158,698	140	4,216,608	482	
AC 7 Vacant SF proposed			62,000		10	45,000	5			
AC 8 Vacant SF Proposed			332,500		35	441,750	46.25			
Total	3,301	6,496	8,317,454			3,288,662		4,363,029		
Toledo Place-Proposed	318	1000	215,000	0	17	125,000	10	420,000	42	
IOA -Proposed	5,771	13,000	3,000,000		230	1,200,000	92	0	0	
Total	6089	14000	3,215,000			1,325,000		420,000		
Grand Total	18,032	40,995	16,385,404		1,670	15,097,404	750	11,308,458	622	

*a conservative assumption of .20 FAR for West Villages was used for this analysis. DRI applications, Village documentation, Developer information was utilized for data. Information for AC 6 was generated by Planning Staff with a conservative .2 FAR due to unknown road acres. AC 3 is based on an assumption of use and construction of a hospital.

A comprehensive analysis shown in **Table 3** below, illustrates current and future demand for commercial and office square footage based on population. An assumption of 75 square feet per household for commercial (45 square feet for regional commercial) and 17 square feet per person for office (10% for regional office) was used. Industrial uses typically do not follow population, but rather transportation routes, therefore, there was not enough data available to make an assumption.

Based on existing population, the City has a shortage of commercial and office square footage, per the most recent data available (*development completed with CO by the end of 2006*). Although development activity has increased in North Port, it can typically take up to a year after a project is completed before it is reflected on the tax records. Because the City has reached ‘critical mass’ or 50,000 residents, a great deal of development is currently making its way through review and construction stages and will be reflected in yearly updates. Utilizing NP FAM to estimate future square footage based on available acreage, at build out, the City will have a surplus of office/regional and commercial, but will remain low in regional commercial. Without the annexations of Thomas Ranch, Kelse Ranch, River Road Office Park, and Warm Mineral Springs, citizens of North Port as well as regional populations would be underserved in terms of square footage demands for commercial and office.

Table 3

EXISTING COMMERCIAL, OFFICE, & INDUSTRIAL SQUARE FOOTAGE							
	17 sf per person	10%	75 sf per Household	45 sf per Household			Existing
	Office	Office/Regional	Commercial	Commercial/Regional	Industrial	Households	Population
Square Footage Built	151,752	0	1,051,952	0	683,954	21,653	53,750
Square Footage Demand	913,750	91,375	1,623,975	974,385			
Shortage/Surplus	-761,998	-91,375	-572,023	-974,385			

POTENTIAL COMMERCIAL, OFFICE, & INDUSTRIAL SQUARE FOOTAGE ON REMAINING VACANT ACRES							
	17 SF per person	10%	75 SF per Household	45 SF per Household			Potential Future
	Office	Office/Regional	Commercial	Commercial/Regional	Industrial	Households	Population
Square Footage Potential	6,210,000	689,914	14,102,917	3,525,729	5,091,416	83,613	207,360
Square Footage Demand	3,525,120	252,512	6,270,975	3,762,585			
Shortage/Surplus	2,684,880	437,402	7,831,942	-236,856			

TOTAL COMMERCIAL, OFFICE, & INDUSTRIAL SQUARE FOOTAGE AT BUILD-OUT							
	17 SF per person	10%	75 SF per Household	45 SF per Household			Estimated Build-Out
	Office	Office/Regional	Commercial	Commercial/Regional	Industrial	Households	Population
Total Square Footage	6,361,752	689,914	15,154,869	3,525,729	5,775,370	105,266	261,110
Total Demand	4,438,870	451,674	7,894,950	4,736,970			
Shortage/Surplus	1,922,882	238,240	7,259,919	-1,211,241			

Much of the non-platted acres of the City currently have approved development plans or submitted plans for review, leaving only 2,029 acres (this figure includes Activity Center 5 which has no approved development concept plan at this time). If AC 5 is also taken out of the equation, 1,691 acres remain ‘unplanned’. As shown in **Table 4** below, those acres are comprised of a small amount in AC1, all of AC 3, 123 acres of commercial and industrial remaining in AC 4, all of proposed AC 6, and much of the neighborhood commercial acreage.

In essence, there are few opportunities remaining for future non-residential development, and it is important to ensure that land uses develop as the City envisioned for the future through the Comprehensive Plan/EAR process, and not allow development trends to change the vision of the community. This is more evident in proposed AC 6 which could be the City’s major opportunity to offer a large amount of quality industrial, office, and interstate commercial land uses. For this fact, strong regulations should be in place to avoid land use changes that are not beneficial to the City at build-out. The balance must be maintained or enhanced.

Table 4

Activity Centers, Town Center, Village Centers, & Neighborhood Commercial Acreage Breakdown	Gross Acres	ROW/Ponds	Net	Not Built	Built	Under Review	CPA, Village or DRI		
							CPA, Village or DRI Approval	Village or DRI under review	Available Acres Remaining for Development
Activity Center 1	716.3	164.98	551.31	337.72	213.59	202	0	0	130.72
Activity Center 2	599	78.24	520.76	194	327	57	599	0	10
Activity Center 3	177.43	58.85	120.5	120.5	0	0	0	0	120.5
Activity Center 4	1,558.34	261.56	1,296.78	1,175.09	121.69	39	637.55	445	123.61
Activity Center 5	670	157.1	512.9	471.63	41.27	133.26	0	0	338
Activity Center 6	1,269.66	275	991.00	991.00	0	0	0	0	991.00
Activity Center 7	81	31.08	49.92	47.6	2.37	0	81	0	0
Activity Center 8	211.56	70.17	141.39	141.39	0	0	211.56	0	0
Neighborhood Commercial	358	0	358	342	16	27	0	0	315
Town Center	1,520	0	1,520	1,520	0	13.95	1,520	0	0
Commercial Village Centers	400	0	400	400	0	50	400	0	0
	7,561	1,097	6,463	5,741	722	522	3,449	445	2,029

An important aspect of the non-residential analysis is the connection of housing needs generated by the new employment opportunities. All Activity Centers and the Town Center, at build out, have the potential to generate over 66,297 employment opportunities. Those employment opportunities could in turn generate 11,897 affordable and 12,315 workforce level households. With over 51,000 remaining platted lots, plus residential units approved within larger developments, the City has ample land available to accommodate the projected ±230,000 citizens at build out. While data compiled within this report encompasses the City at its current size, any future annexations should be considered on an economic and quality employment basis and should not be based on additional residential development.

The North Port Housing Report compared current housing units with an overall balanced housing stock at build out as shown below in Table 5. In addition, data from development applications, DRI documents, along with assumptions regarding the platted residential areas¹ (*low, medium, high, agricultural densities*) were used to project future housing unit price points. As shown, the projected housing units for affordable units are half the desired amount, workforce units are over 13% higher, and market units are on target. The recommendations of the Housing Report, such as mixture of housing types and price points within developments and DRI’s are critical to ensure affordability and diversity of the City’s overall housing stock and to balance employment with housing. With this balance, the present volume of commuters to out-of-town jobs should be reduced. Also, living and working in close proximity improves the quality of life for residents of North Port.

¹ Assuming remaining low density platted lots develop 10% affordable, 50% workforce, and 40% market.

Table 5

EXISTING HOUSEHOLDS	FUTURE HOUSEHOLDS
<p>21,653</p> <p>41% Affordable 44% Workforce 15% Market</p>	<p>83,613</p> <p>10% Affordable 37% Workforce 53% Market</p>
Projected Housing Balance at Build-Out	Desired Housing Balance at Build-Out
<p>105,266</p> <p>16% Affordable 38.5% Workforce 45.5% Market</p>	<p>105,266</p> <p>30% Affordable 25% Workforce 45% Market</p>

Staff presents the following document which evaluates each Activity Center individually, Neighborhood Commercial citywide, and the West Villages Town Center. The addition of NP FAM, which is a yearly operation analysis for either citywide/large geographic areas, or can be used to analyze individual developments for overall fiscal sustainability. Individual findings and recommendations are also included. Data contained in this report includes:

- Acreage breakdowns by land use
- Developed and vacant parcels
- Future development
- Taxes by use
- Creation of jobs and housing units

Innovative land use and urban design aim to create a network of activity centers that are celebrated as vibrant, memorable and identifiable public places².

² Master transportation study, land use element. City of Santa Cruz CA.