

## City's vision plan coming into focus

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WINTER HAVEN - Winter Haven city commissioners were updated on progress made on the decade-old vision plan during Friday's workshop and now must decide between revising the current document or organizing a new community visioning process.

During Friday's commission workshop, city staff members offered Powerpoint presentations outlining progress made on a variety of issues - from water sustainability and development of the Chain O' Lakes property to a downtown parking garage and the Chain of Lakes trailhead - outlined in "Our Future by Design" visioning document.

Mike Britt, the city's natural resources director, explained the importance of Winter Haven's location at the head of the Peace River Watershed and the need to catch and treat rainwater before it runs south.

"The only water we have to use is the water that falls on the ground here and percolates into the ground," Britt said.

According to City Manager Dale Smith, the Water Resource Sustainability Plan, which will outline how to accomplish this, will be available in early April.

"This plan is going to change Winter Haven's way of thinking when it comes to water resource availability," Smith said.

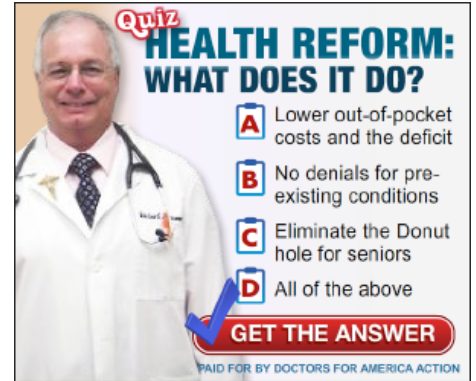
Dave Dickey, the city's community development director, discussed the development of the Chain O' Lakes Complex, which encompasses 200 acres of land along Cypress Gardens Boulevard and U.S. Highway 17.

Smith said the property is ideal for development similar to the Lakeside Village in Lakeland, a concept that drew favorable public opinion several years ago.

The project would involve a private-public partnership with the city developing recreational facilities along Lake Lulu and developers bringing in restaurants, shops and residential units.

Smith and Dickey stressed the importance of having the zoning and land use for the property in place and ready to go when the economy improves and in case the Hometown Democracy initiative is approved by voters. Hometown Democracy, if passed, would lengthen the process for approving zoning and land use changes by requiring voter approval.

Dickey said the planning commission will address rezoning the property in April or May.



**Quiz**  
**HEALTH REFORM:  
WHAT DOES IT DO?**

- A** Lower out-of-pocket costs and the deficit
- B** No denials for pre-existing conditions
- C** Eliminate the Donut hole for seniors
- D** All of the above

**GET THE ANSWER**

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Dickey also presented information about the proposed downtown parking garage, explaining its importance with the renovation of the Ritz Theatre and Ridge Art Association buildings on Central Avenue, the University of South Florida Polytechnic Business Accelerator and the Inland Fiber and Data bringing more traffic downtown.

"That will set the tone for what we want to see," Dickey said.

Plans for the garage include three levels with 511 parking spaces and retail units on the first floor.

Dickey said the next step for the garage is to decide upon financing and a public-private partnership for the lower level retail units.

"I like this because it doesn't look like a parking garage," J.P. Powell said. "The sooner the better."

T. Michael Stavres outlined plans for the proposed Chain of Lakes Trailhead Plan. The trailhead will be located in the vicinity of Third and Fourth streets N.W. It will connect to the Winter Haven Area Transit station and the Chain of Lakes Trail. The project will include 142 parking spaces, restroom and concession facilities, a pavilion and a playground with areas designed for toddlers and elementary school age children.

Stavres described it as "a great gathering space."

Mayor Jeff Potter said the project would be perfect for phasing in elements instead of building and paying for all of it at one time.

"We are funded to move ahead this year," Stavres said.

Construction will take 10 to 12 months, Stavres said.

Executive Services Director Michelle Stayner presented the commission with a 65-page document called, "Our Future by Design: Achieving the Vision 2002 to 2009," which included updates addressed during the workshop in addition to other actions taken on the vision document to date.

"Our Future by Design' was a community-driven effort," Stayner said. "We embraced that vision and made it happen. We utilized that guide for moving forward."

Smith said the city has used the vision plan as a road map for the past nine years and indicated it wasn't completely outdated.

"Is this the time to revisit it or should we wait?" Smith asked commissioners.

But a new or revised plan will have to involve the entire community, he added.

Commissioners agreed it was time to revisit the plan, although they didn't decide whether to initiate a completely new vision process or revise the current document.

"Considering the change of climate, I think it would be worthwhile to revise," City Commissioner Jamie Beckett said. "This is an excellent document but it is outdated. There are areas in this document that it would be worth revisiting."

Potter said he'd like commissioners to take time to read the update and analyze it in relation to new changes in the area, such as the coming of Legoland Florida and the CSX intermodal terminal.

"I think we can use this as a guide for the next time we create a new vision document," Potter said.

Powell indicated a need to update the vision plan but not start a new one.

Bob Gernert Jr., executive director of the Greater Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce, voiced support for creating a new document with community leaders who have become active during the last decade.

"The original document wasn't city-centric or chamber-centric," Gernert said. "It was really up to that group (who compiled it). Obviously, after a decade this document has become mothly. We've got a whole new generation of leaders that should be involved."

Howard King, the chamber's president, agreed.

"You want to bring in leaders for the vision but bring in younger leaders," King said.

Smith asked commissioners to read the vision update and advise staff on how to proceed - with revising or rewriting the vision plan.

"This has been a fantastic document to work with," Smith said.

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