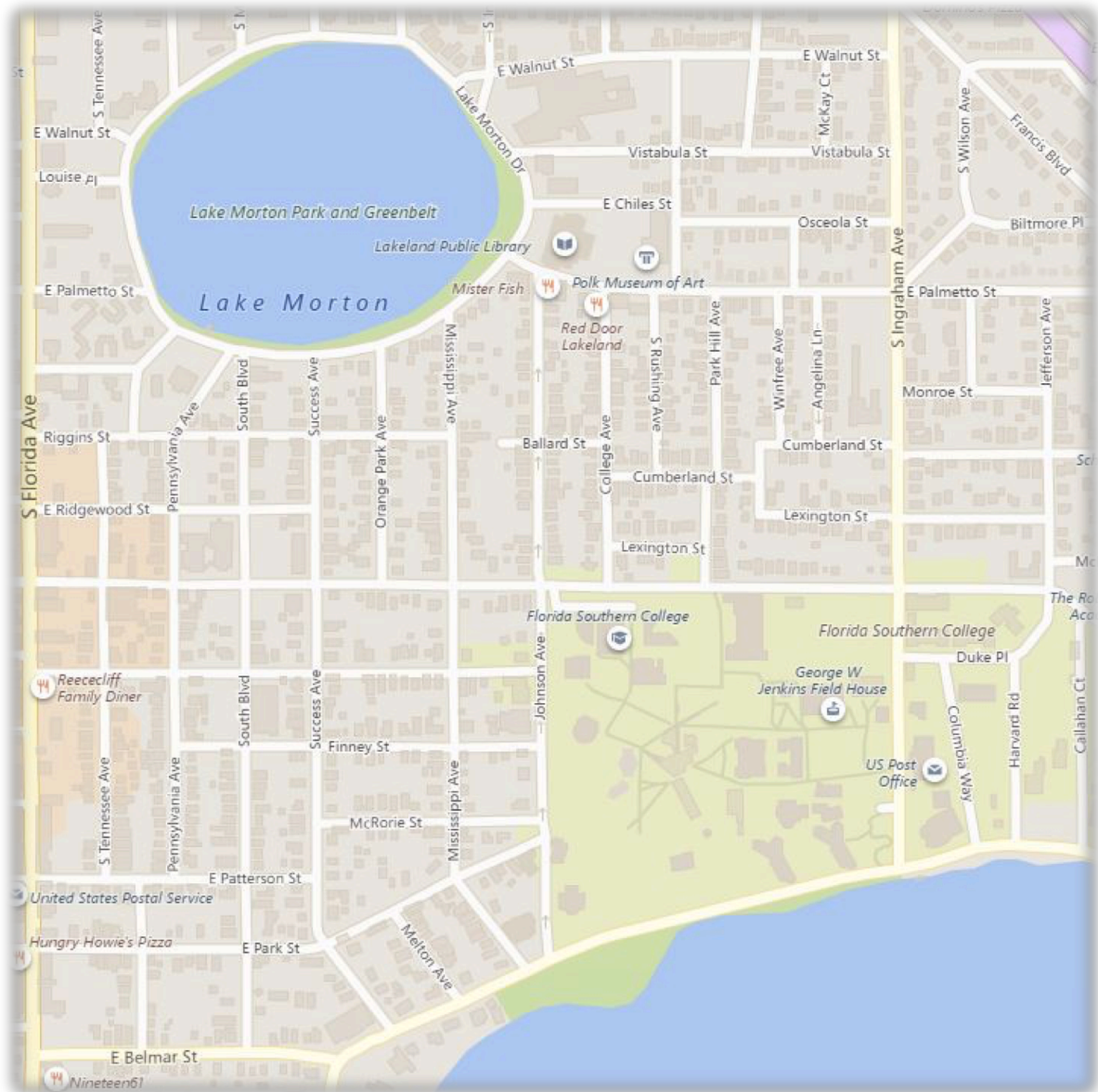


# Lake Morton Neighborhood Plan



**The Lake Morton Neighborhood Association**  
**April 2019**

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## **Introduction**

In 1987, the City of Lakeland commissioned the development of a strategy plan for encouraging the improvement of the South Lake Morton Historic District, then recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The plan addressed the existing barriers to reinvestment and increased owner-occupancy. Through proactive implementation, most of the plan's recommendations were put into action by the City, resulting in improved market conditions. The dramatic increase in owner-occupancy and real estate values is now apparent even to the casual observer.

Today, rather than a drag on the local economy and tax base, this historic district is contributing to the community not only in terms of taxable value, but in the talent and involvement of the residents who have been attracted to this traditional, walkable neighborhood.

Not surprisingly, the district now has an active association – the Lake Morton Neighborhood Association (LMNA). Many residents volunteer to serve and be involved. The board of the association decided it was time to revisit the earlier plan, carry that plan forward to the next step, and address current neighborhood issues.

## **Surveying the Community**

The first step in addressing current local issues is to survey the residents to determine their priorities. A survey form was developed, and it asked several questions designed to solicit meaningful input instead of simple “yes” and “no” responses. For example, the residents were asked an open-ended question as to what they thought were assets and what were problems in the neighborhood.

In addition, the survey asked more specific questions about property maintenance, code enforcement, traffic, parking, alleys, sidewalks, overhead utilities, institutional uses, retail uses, and infill residential. Multiple choice answers were provided. The results were tabulated, and the results presented to residents during a neighborhood meeting.

A summary of the survey and its results is contained in the Appendix.

## **Zoning & Land Development Regulations**

Basic to continuing the increase in owner-occupancy is the protection of value by proper zoning. As a result of the first plan thirty years ago, most of the neighborhood was rezoned from duplex to single-family. But, significant areas along the neighborhood's edges remained multi-family. There are also “islands” of multi-family zoned parcels that really are not justified by current conditions. The following are recommended.

Rezone the southwest corner of Success Avenue and Frank Lloyd Wright Way from the current MF-12 to RA-4. This will recognize the actual existing use as a single-family residence and help protect this iconic historic property from alteration or demolition.

Address the zoning of the northwest corner of Success Avenue and Frank Lloyd Wright Way. This will allow greater control of the future use/development/design of this site which is currently non-contributing and well out of character with its surroundings. Future development of this property need not be limited to single-family, but the next project's design and site plan is of upmost importance to its compatibility with the surrounding historic neighborhood.



*Existing Zoning*

Consideration should also be given to either rezoning the Park Street/South Boulevard area from the current MF-12 to RA-4 and allowing multi-family only as a Conditional Use, as this area is predominately historic single-family homes. Similarly, both sides of Tennessee Avenue from Patterson north to Riggins should recognize the existing

predominant use of single-family and rezoned from MF-12 to RA-4 (except for the commercial section along FLW Way), allowing multi-family only as a Conditional Use. Density is needed on infill sites, but the historic homes deserve protection.

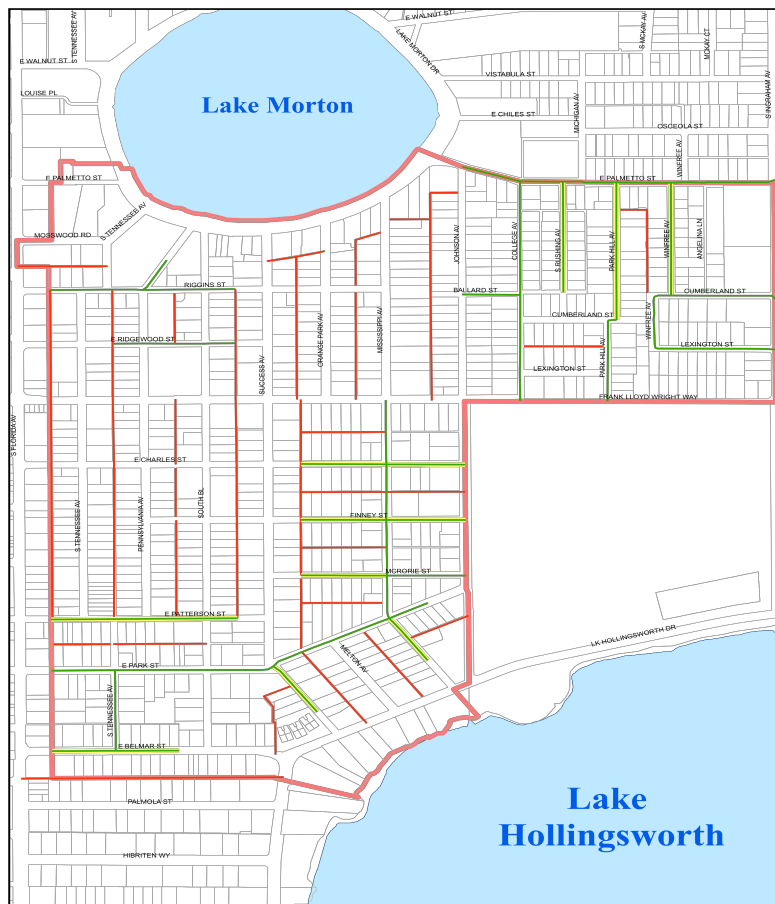
### Electric Utilities

Where alleys exist to the rear or side of properties that currently have overhead electric at the front side (street side) of the lot, relocate those overhead lines to the alley (yellow/green areas in the following illustration) and plant street trees where the overhead lines have been removed. Provide alley lighting (mounted on the utility poles) where relocated lines are installed. Ideally, lighting will be motion activated or other efficient technology.

If no alleys exist in which to relocate the front side utilities, an easement to the rear of properties can provide the needed space, just as is done in other residential areas of Lakeland.



*A Front Porch View*



*Relocation of Electric Utilities to Alleys*



## Sidewalks

Focus on installing sidewalk segments where there are currently gaps (missing sections) in existing sidewalks. There should be an emphasis on completing and building walks leading to, and within one block of, S. Florida Avenue and the Florida Southern College main campus.

Other areas without sidewalks often have long-established trees, hedges, fences, and other improvements that make sidewalk installation expensive and very disruptive to existing yards. Sidewalk construction in these areas internal to the neighborhood is not likely to be well received by adjacent residents. However, these residents can be polled to determine if there is support for sidewalk construction despite the loss or movement of trees, hedges, fences and the like.

## Neighborhood Commercial

Today there are two areas where commercial uses are located and have been since the establishment of the neighborhood. This does not include the linear commercial development along S. Florida Avenue.

The west end of Frank Lloyd Wright Way (formerly McDonald Street) between Pennsylvania and S. Florida Avenue and that part of E. Palmetto Street between Michigan and Lake Morton are well established commercial districts that once had a primarily neighborhood-serving purpose. They have evolved over time to serve the greater community with both commercial and institutional uses. Both have improved in recent years and now are also home to trendy local restaurants.



*Palmetto Street Commercial/Institutional Area*

It is recommended that these areas receive physical public realm improvements to enhance the pedestrian experience. This includes sidewalk widening, street trees and more on-street parking where feasible. It is also recommended that these areas not be

allowed to expand outward but, instead, allowed to infill with additional commercial and higher-density residential uses. Mixed-use is ideal, with residences above commercial. Consider applications for rezoning to C-2 to allow more retail area.

### Florida Southern College

The campus of Florida Southern College is an amenity for the residential historic district. The campus has improved dramatically over the years and brings value to the area. It also brings events within walking distance of much of the neighborhood.

The challenge brought by any large institution is its tendency to expand into the surrounding neighborhood. Historic homes have been lost to academic buildings and surface parking lots. Those remaining homes owned by the college have suffered from insufficient maintenance and repair.

The City and the college have worked jointly over the years to plan for expansion using a Special Public Interest (SPI) overlay district in those areas immediately adjacent to the main campus. Taking that approach to greater detail, it is recommended that the college be allowed to use the lots facing the main campus along FLW Way and Johnson Avenue – but only the first two lots if parallel to those streets, and only the first lot depth if that lot is perpendicular to those streets.

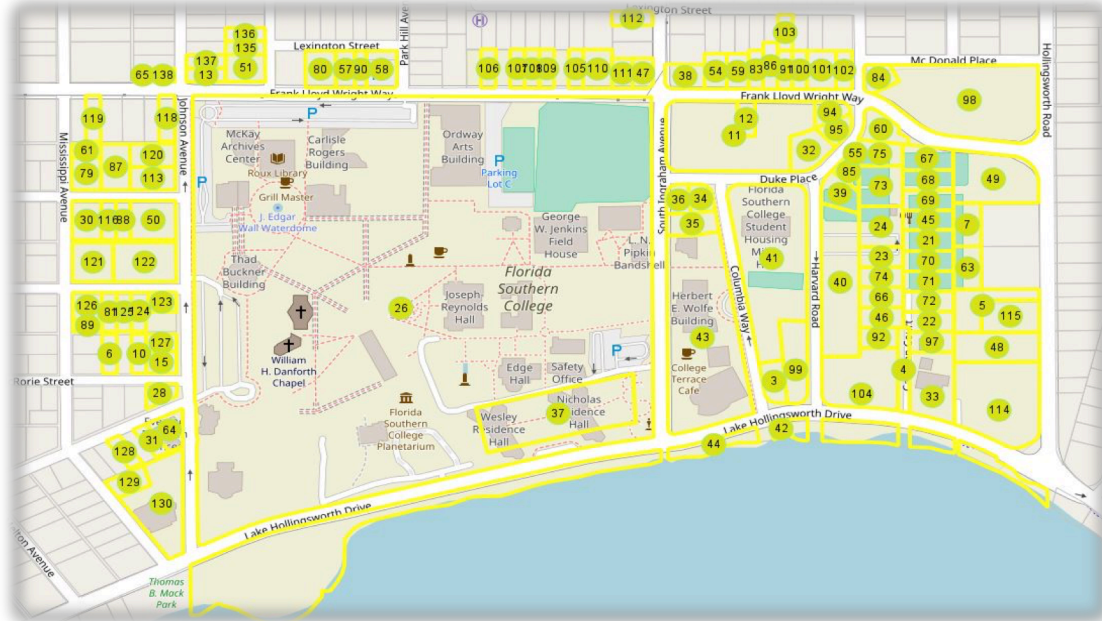
An excellent example of this can be seen at the Sharp Family Tourism & Education Center at Johnson and FLW Way. This site is two parallel lots deep (totaling 100') off FLW Way and is separated from the adjacent homes by an attractive masonry wall.



*Existing Example of Appropriate College/Neighborhood Interface*

Using this model, the lots immediately adjacent to the main campus can develop over time in a way that meets the college's needs while protecting the remaining neighborhood from further intrusion.

Importantly, Florida Southern College should re-evaluate its ownership of freestanding homes interior to the neighborhood. Unless these properties can be maintained to a high standard, they should be sold to owner-occupants who will enhance and maintain them. The College should focus its development only on the first lots across the streets from the main campus. See the extent of college property ownership below.



*College-Owned Parcels Near Campus*

Finally, when those historic homes facing the campus along FLW and Johnson must make way for college use, the homes should be relocated elsewhere in the neighborhood and not demolished.

### **Parking for Churches & Schools**

Like Florida Southern College, neighborhood churches and schools have parking and expansion needs that sometimes come into conflict with the historic residential district. For churches, their peak need for parking is only 2 to 4 hours per week, yet large areas are dedicated to parking all day, every day, sitting empty most of the time. This tends to reduce the character and walkability of the historic neighborhood and can be considered an “intrusion” in an historic residential district.





*Surface Parking Lots*

The key to minimizing the impact of parking lots is: *shared parking; landscaping; and ideally, liner development.*

### **Shared Parking**

Allow the joint (shared) use of parking lots between churches and nearby businesses or schools to reduce the total amount of surface parking. This way, parking is available to one user Monday through Friday and then for church use on Sundays and evenings. Also, the City can reduce the minimum parking requirements (especially for Sunday-only parking demand) and allow Sunday only on-street parking.

### **Landscape Enhancements**

Develop an incentive plan for the landscaping of paved surface parking lots, particularly those of churches and other institutions internal to the neighborhood. A positive incentive such as cost-sharing or the provision of landscape materials to any entity that has large un-landscaped parking lots can lead to more attractive lots that often sit empty most of the time. The incentive should have a simple application process and design review. Emphasize the installation of trees more so than shrubs and turf. Use Figure 4.5-6 of the City's Land Development Code as a guide.

### **Liner Development**

For some surface parking lots, there are opportunities to develop the street edges with townhomes or single-family homes. This is especially important where existing homes look across to a parking lot rather than looking at other residential development. The new units can vary widely in design and character but will “mask” the surface parking lots to the rear.

This will greatly improve the image and value of the neighborhood. The owner





of the parking lot will also benefit from the sale or leasing of the property.

#### *Single-Family Attached*



*Attached Townhomes*

### **Traffic**

Traffic issues were mentioned more often by neighborhood residents than any other subject. Speeding was the most common concern, particularly along the north/south streets and especially on Success Avenue. Efforts were made years ago to address speeding by the installation of small traffic circles on Success. These have been effective, as have the four-way stops that have been created. Also, pavement markings (centerlines) have been kept to a minimum. This has been shown to slow drivers as the environment is perceived more as residential, and not as a commercial corridor.

It is recommended that the four-way stop technique be extended to the Success/Park Street and Mississippi/Park Street intersections. This will slow traffic and make these two intersections much safer as both require slight turns as the driver passes through them. This has proven successful at Pennsylvania/Riggins and South Boulevard/Park. And, it can be done at almost no cost.



Similarly, speeding has been a problem on Johnson Avenue in part due to its one-way operation. A stop sign at its intersection with Ballard Street will help alleviate this problem, just as was done at Johnson and E. Park Street.

Any negatives of additional stop signs are outweighed by the reduction in speed and increase in safety.

### **Bikeways**

Biking has become more popular over time, now appealing to all age groups. Bikers (and runners/walkers) pass through this neighborhood regularly. This is in addition to neighborhood residents and the students at FSC.

Additional on-street bike paths should be created where possible, with emphasis on Frank Lloyd Wright Way. Driving lanes should be no more than 11 feet in width given the low travel speeds. This width is more than adequate for drivers and it helps slow traffic. Where designated paths are not possible, sharrows can be used to allow bikes and cars to mix. A travel speed of 25 MPH on FLW may also be helpful.

## **Alleys**

The existing alleys are real assets as they provide a good place for utilities and trash containers and provide better access to secondary residential units. Fortunately, as recommended in the earlier plan, the alleys have been maintained and enhanced. Most all have been improved, with pavement being maintained. This should continue.

## **Code Enforcement**

Second only to traffic, the condition of some homes in the neighborhood was of most concern to area residents. Both owner-occupied and absentee-owner properties can fall into disrepair, harming both the owner and the neighborhood. Given the age of the housing stock here (most approaching 100 years), constant maintenance is needed.

It is recommended that a proactive code enforcement effort concentrate on this neighborhood for a week or two each year, in addition to responding to complaints as they come in. No one wants to harm their neighbor, but these historic properties cannot withstand the damage caused by poor or limited maintenance. It may be helpful to initiate increasing penalties for repeat offenders so that problem landlords will take code enforcement actions more seriously.

## **Summary**

The past thirty years has seen remarkable progress in the value and appearance of the South Lake Morton Neighborhood. Work does remain however, and the recommendations presented above should be pursued diligently over the next five-year period. The residents participated in the development of this plan and hope the City continues to work as a partner in the neighborhood's revitalization.

A summary of this plan's recommendations follows below.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
Zoning	Rezone two islands of	Protect the center of	Begin communicating

	multi-family at Success and Frank Lloyd Wright.	the district with appropriate zoning.	with owners of affected properties now.
Zoning	Rezone or amend zoning along E. Park and S. Tennessee.	Protect the single-family historic homes in these areas.	Begin discussion with LMNA and owners now.
Accessory Units	Allow separate electric meters.	Currently allowed in SPI district.	N/A
Electric Utilities	Relocate overhead lines to alleys or easements at rear of lots.	Overhead lines on street continue to detract from the district.	Locate areas with street-side overhead lines and develop cost estimates now.
Sidewalks	Infill missing gaps and connect Florida Avenue and FSC to the neighborhood.	Sections of existing walks are missing and should be completed.	Locate segments needed now and place projects in CIP each year for the next five years.
Neighborhood Commercial	Enhance these areas with pedestrian improvements.	Encourage infill and mixed-use. Wider walks are first priority.	Schedule enhancements during the next five-year CIP.
Florida Southern College	Limit the SPI district to the first 100' (or lot depth) across FLW and Johnson.	Maintenance of college-owned historic homes is poor.	Meet with college now to determine their plans and direction.
Parking for Churches & Schools	Minimize areas of surface parking by amending codes and allowing shared and on-street parking during peaks.	Enhance existing lots with landscaping and liner development.	Create an incentive program now to landscape lots. Amend parking requirements now.
Traffic	Discourage speeding by installing additional four-way stops.	Calming will be improved with new four-way intersections.	Place projects in next year's budget.
Bikeways	Create bike paths on major streets or sharrows.	Narrowed lanes will slow traffic.	Survey streets during next fiscal year.
Alleys	Alleys are a real asset. Continue to maintain.	N/A	N/A
Code Enforcement	Create an annual "blitz" of the neighborhood.	The age of homes is showing and complaints are common.	Schedule a concentrated enforcement effort each year.

## APPENDIX

### Neighborhood Survey

Question	Responses	Notes
<i>What do you like most about this neighborhood?</i>	"character", community, people, close to downtown, brick streets	106 responses
<i>What do you like least about this neighborhood?</i>	speed of traffic, volume of traffic, condition of some properties	104 responses
<i>What changes would most improve this neighborhood?</i>	traffic slowed, codes enforced	97 responses
<i>What about the condition of single-family homes in your immediate area?</i>	90% feel that maintenance is good or that some require maintenance. 10% feel that there are many in need of work.	102 responses
<i>Regarding rental properties in your immediate area, how would you categorize the maintenance?</i>	76% feel that maintenance is good or that some require maintenance. 24% feel that most rental properties need maintenance.	104 responses
<i>What is your experience with code enforcement in the neighborhood?</i>	45% feel that enforcement should be more aggressive. 35% feel it is adequate. 20% do not report code violations.	98 responses
<i>Most streets allow on-street parking. What are your feelings about on-street parking on your street?</i>	Seven options were provided. There seemed to be general agreement that on-street parking is an amenity but only on one side of the street.	109 responses
<i>On your street, how would you characterize the number of cars and speeds?</i>	78% say that a majority of drivers or some drivers speed on their street	107 responses
<i>If you live next to an alley, what is its condition?</i>	92% feel their alley is in good condition and is generally clean. 20% say paving is needed.	83 responses
<i>Sidewalks are provided in only some parts of our neighborhood. On your street and the streets you tend to travel by foot, what are the conditions?</i>	44% have sidewalks on both sides. 37% on only one side. 30% feel some areas need sidewalks.	100 responses
<i>Overhead electric lines are located in alleys and sometimes on the street.</i>	50% are served from the alley. 43% from the street. 42% would pay something to have the lines relocated.	102 responses
<i>We have large institutional neighbors. How do you feel the relationships are working?</i>	58% feel they are good neighbors. 40% believe a strict line needs to be drawn beyond which the college and churches cannot expand.	105 responses
<i>How do you feel about the retail uses in our neighborhood?</i>	66% believe retail is good. 33% believe it is OK but should be limited in amount.	105 responses



<i>New multi-family development is underway. What are your feelings?</i>	18% believe it is good. 50% believe it is OK if its design is compatible. 28% believe such development should be limited. 20% want no more.	107 responses
<i>Do you rent or own?</i>	91% are homeowners.	106 responses