



MINUTES
PUBLIC WORKSHOP
of THE MARY ESTHER CITY COUNCIL
April 7, 2025 - 5:30 PM

195 Christobal Road – North, Mary Esther, FL 32569

CITY COUNCIL PRESENT

Chris Stein, Mayor
Bernard Oder, Councilmember
Susan Coxwell, Councilmember

April Sutton, Mayor Pro Tem
Larry Carter, Councilmember (Virtual)
Richard Lawson, Councilmember

CITY STAFF PRESENT

Jared Cobb, City Manager
Hayward Dykes, City Attorney
Dillon Morris, City Clerk

Kelvin Cherry, Code Compliance Officer
Tyler Reed, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Stein called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Stein led the pledge of allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

The City Clerk called the roll as reflected above.

4. INTRODUCTIONS

Community Development Director Reed introduced the workshop, introducing Presenter Eric Christianson and how he will gather council feedback for the comprehensive plan update.

5. SPECIAL PRESENTATION

5.1. City of Mary Esther Comprehensive Plan Update

Eric Christianson, Emerald Coast Regional Council, introduced the PowerPoint he would be discussing that day. He provided a recap from the previous public workshop, introduced what a comprehensive plan is, comprehensive plans versus zoning ordinances, the required updates, the timeline, general changes, the future land use element, concurrency management, the current future land use map and the future land use map, land use category definition updates, adding a historic duplex cottage district. The mayor, council, and Community Development Director Reed discussed the cottages currently in the city, how they could not be rebuilt in the current code, potential teardowns after the amendment, and supporting the idea of a historic district. Eric Christianson continued discussing the creation of overlay districts, the town center overlay, and where it would be. Community Development Director Reed stated the town center designation could include more, with the council supporting extending it to include the other businesses. Eric Christianson continued discussing the soundside overlay, land use updates, community redevelopment area, CRA alternatives, transportation element updates, transportation policy changes, housing element updates, infrastructure element updates, coastal management and conservation element updates, florida friendly landscaping, recreation and open space element updates, town center park definition, intergovernmental coordination element updates, capital improvement element updates, annual goal setting meeting, public schools facility element updates, population projections, property right element updates, notice requirements, and the final steps for approval of the comprehensive plan.

6. GROUP DISCUSSION

Councilmember Oder asked for clarification on initial versus ongoing costs on the capital improvements plan. Eric Christianson discussed that the plan is more about looking ahead than a strict guide.

Councilmember Oder discussed that the money should be properly budgeted for repairs and maintenance when the next storm comes.

7. **CLOSING REMARKS**

Community Development Director Reed thanked the mayor and council for their feedback. He said they would take it back to work on and soon present it for adoption.

8. **OTHER COMMENTS**

Councilmember Oder added the potential for changes from the state legislature and the need for a city plan. He also added that future councils will have a guide on what is envisioned.

Councilmember Carter discussed thinking about more historic districts and developing more on that idea.

No one else had additional comments.

9. **ADJOURN**

The council meeting adjourned at 6:21 p.m.

Minutes approved at the 6/2/2025 meeting.

Dillon Morris
Dillon Morris, City Clerk





Mary Esther Comp Plan Public Forum

April 7, 2025

Eric Christianson, Planner

Agenda

- Comprehensive Planning Overview
- Policy Changes
- Plan Implementation
- Adoption



CITY OF MARY ESTHER

Comprehensive Plan: 2020

Ordinance No. 99-02
(As Amended)

March 9, 2010

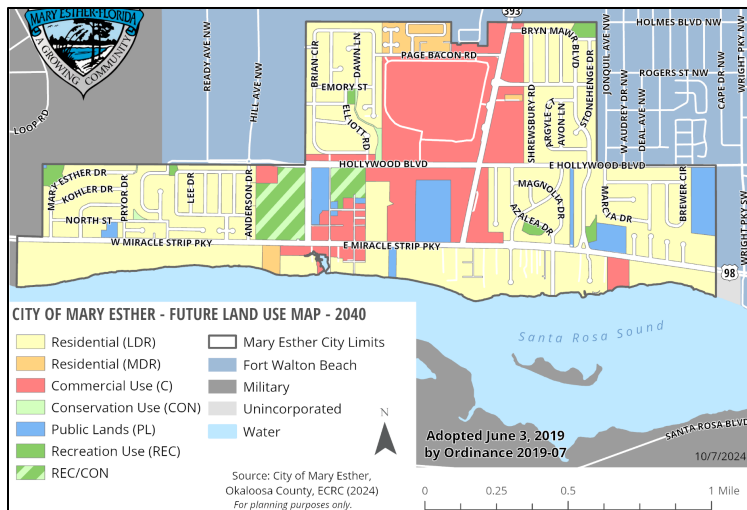
What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Your Comprehensive Plan serves as a long-term blueprint for guiding growth and development. It ensures that land use, housing, transportation, and public facilities are planned in a way that meets current needs while accommodating future changes.

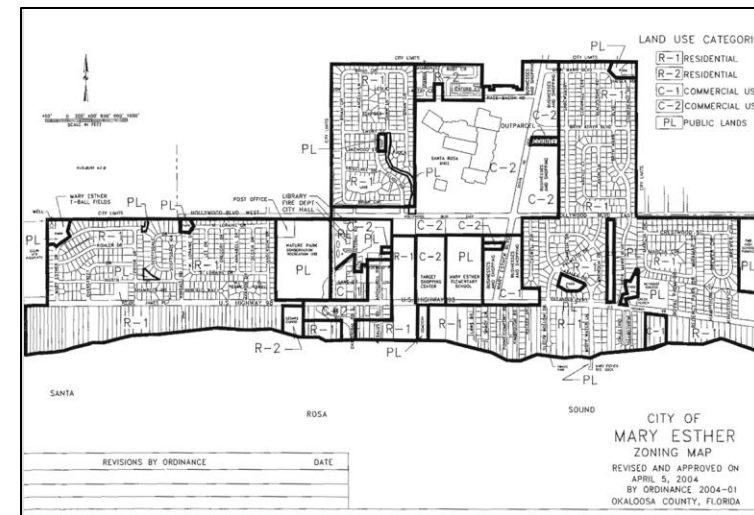
A well written plan simplifies the task of approving individual development requests and ordinance changes.



Comp Plan v. Zoning



- Regulates Future Land Uses
- High level vision



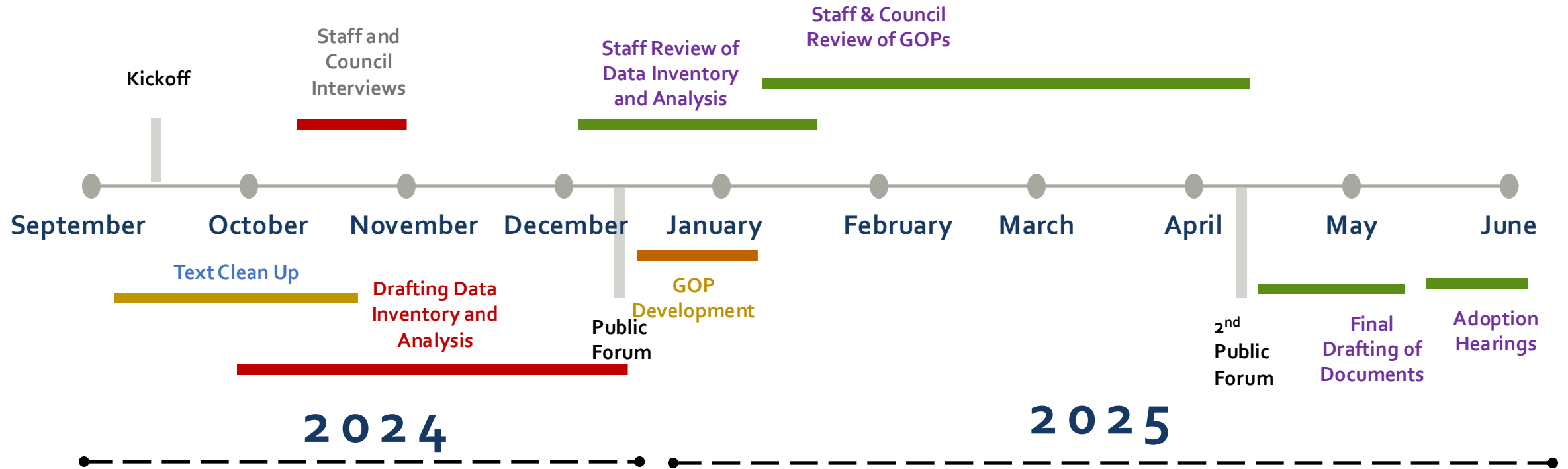
- Regulates the way land is used today
- Specific Application

1. Update Planning Horizon
At least 10-year and 20-year planning horizons
2. Add in the required 2021 Property Rights Element
3. Overall updates to reflect changes in the City since last major update in 2010
4. State Deadline of February 28





Timeline (Updated)



- Grammar and clarity changes
- Restructured and simplified document
- Removed references to outdated City Land Development Code and Florida Statutes
- Updated best practices where appropriate
- Creates new Annual Comprehensive Plan Review and Goal Setting Session

Introduction

Definitions

A – Future Land Use Element

B – Transportation Element

C – Housing Element

D – Infrastructure Element

E – Coastal Management and Conservation Element

F – Recreation and Open Space Element

G – Intergovernmental Coordination Element


H – Capital Improvements Element

I – Public School Facilities Element

J – Property Right Element (new)

Major Updates:

- Clarified descriptions and creation of new Future Land Use Categories
- Creation of **Town Center** and **Soundside Overlay**
- Inclusion of Concurrency Management (previously a separate section)
- Updated Future Land Use Map

FUTURE LAND USE 

ELEMENT A - FUTURE LAND USE GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

Pursuant to Section 163.3177(6)(a), F.S., the following represents the Future Land Use Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the City of Mary Esther. In addition to statutory requirements, the Goals, Objectives, and Policies were developed in keeping with the character, conditions, both environmental and social, and desires of the community. Goals, Objectives, and Policies are intended to address the establishment of a long-term end towards which the land use programs and activities of the community are ultimately directed.

The included Future Land Use Map Series is, by reference, made a part of this Ordinance including all future amendments, revisions, and updates. The Future Land Use Map Series may be amended by following the requirements in Florida Statutes Section 163.3184.

GOAL A1
Manage and regulate land uses, locations, and densities to ensure the promotion, protection, and improvement of public, health safety, and welfare of the residents of the City of Mary Esther.

Objective A1-1 - Coordinate future land growth and development with the appropriate topography, soil conditions, and availability of facilities and services to protect the public health, safety, and welfare through the adoption, implementation, and enforcement of land development regulations.

Policy A1-1a - The City's Land Development Regulations shall be maintained in the City's adopted Land Development Code (LDC).

Policy A1-1b - The LDC shall contain specific and detailed provisions to implement this Ordinance including, as a minimum, the following:

- a. Regulation of the subdivision of land (reference Article 2, Section 13 - Land Development Code);
- b. Regulation of the use of land by zoning districts which implement the land use categories shown on the Future Land Use Map (reference Chapter 21 - City Code);
- c. Ensure compatibility of adjacent land uses (reference Chapter 21 - City Code);
- d. Provide for open space (reference **Element E** of this Ordinance);
- e. Protect potable water wellfields and sources (reference **Policy E2-2a**);

City of Mary Esther Vision 2040 - Volume 1: Goals, Objectives, and Policies
Page 6-1

A system ensuring required public facilities and services are available at adopted service levels simultaneously with the impacts of development.

Key Responsibilities:

- Maintains current inventory of public facilities and capacities.
- Evaluates proposed developments for compliance with concurrency standards.
- Provides concurrency recommendations to City Council.
- Reports annually on infrastructure status and recommends improvements.

Facilities Monitored:

- Potable Water
- Sanitary Sewer
- Solid Waste
- Stormwater Drainage
- Recreation and Open Space



Future Land Use Map (Current)



CITY OF MARY ESTHER - FUTURE LAND USE MAP - 2040

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Residential (LDR) | Mary Esther City Limits |
| Residential (MDR) | Fort Walton Beach |
| Commercial Use (C) | Military |
| Conservation Use (CON) | Unincorporated |
| Public Lands (PL) | Water |
| Recreation Use (REC) | |
| REC/CON | |

Source: City of Mary Esther, Okaloosa County, ECRC (2024)
For planning purposes only.



Adopted June 3, 2019
by Ordinance 2019-07



Future Land Use Map (Proposed)



CITY OF MARY ESTHER - FUTURE LAND USE MAP - 2040

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Residential (LDR) | Town Center District |
| Residential (MDR) | Soundside Overlay District |
| Commercial Use (C) | Mary Esther City Limits |
| Conservation Use (CON) | Fort Walton Beach |
| Public Lands (PL) | Military |
| Recreation Use (REC) | Unincorporated |
| REC/CON | |
| Historic Duplex Cottage District (HDCD) | |

Source: City of Mary Esther, Okaloosa County, ECRC (2024)
For planning purposes only.



Updated through Ord. 2024-05

4/4/2025



Previous:

Low density residential development allows up to 5.51 dwelling units per gross acres.

Updated:

Low Density Residential

Description: This category accommodates predominantly single-family detached residential uses on individual lots. Typical uses include homes with accessory structures (e.g., garages), limited home-based occupations subject to the LDC, and neighborhood-scale amenities including churches and daycares.

Density: Up to 5.51 dwelling units per gross acre.



New:

Historic Duplex Cottage District

Description: This category reflects the historic use of these properties as predominantly historic single-family detached, cottage, or duplex residential uses. Limited home-based occupations subject to the LDC may be appropriate.

Density: Up to ten (10.0) dwelling units per gross acre.



Recommendations from Vision Plan:

The zoning districts will need a review and update as there are some standards within them that would not allow the implementation of the development scenarios illustrated in this plan, that allow for a town center style redevelopment of the mall

- New mixed-use zoning district with bulk regulations and design guidelines that support vertically mixed-use town center building forms and additional residential density within them.
- Amend the existing C-1 and C-2 zoning districts to revise internal buffer requirements for multifamily structures on the interior of mixed-use developments, [...] ensure that exterior setbacks and buffering to existing single family neighborhoods are effective in creating a transition between development characters.

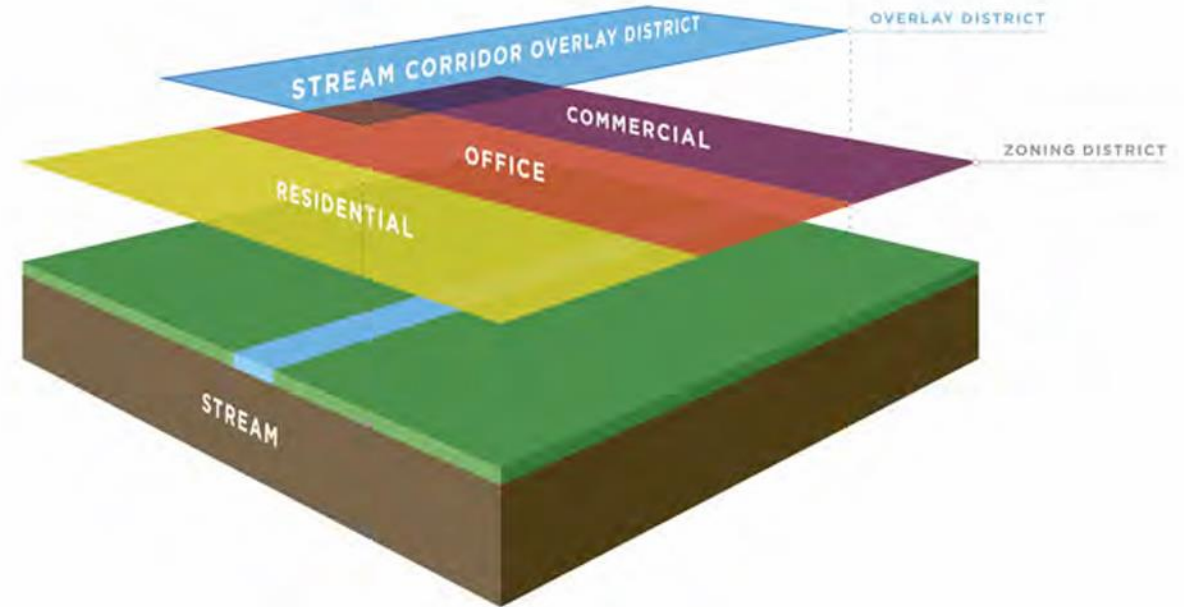


Creation of Overlay Districts:

An overlay district is a special planning designation applied over existing future land use categories to implement specific policies, guide development patterns, or protect resources, without changing the underlying future land use classification.

The proposed plan document creates two:

- Soundside
- Town Center



Town Center Overlay

Purpose: Guide the redevelopment of large commercial properties, such as the Santa Rosa Mall site, into a mixed-use town center with a coordinated mix of commercial, residential, office, and civic uses.

Density and Intensity: May allow higher residential densities and Floor Area Ratios (FARs) than base zoning, as specified in the LDC, with the development of an appropriate master plan which responds to community goals. These goals include pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, gathering spaces for public use, landscaping, and buffering where the district abuts lower-intensity uses.



Future Land Use Map (Current)



Soundside Overlay

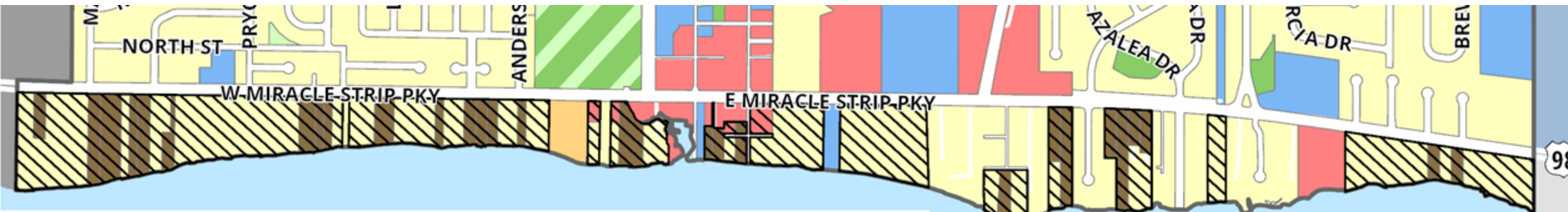
Purpose: Provide flexible renovation and redevelopment options for a historic residential neighborhood with a high concentration of nonconforming lots and structures while preserving the historic nature of the area including the mature tree canopy.

Flexibility Provisions: The LDC will be modified to provide specific solutions which may include blanket relaxation of dimensional requirements, accessory structure siting, and fencing regulations, an administrative process to grant relief of up to 50% of dimensional requirements, and the creation of a Special Use permit process for modifications greater than 50%, while continuing to rely on variances only when appropriate.

Administrative approvals will be used for only minor renovations or expansions that maintain both life-safety standards and neighborhood character. Special Use permits will be used for substantial changes that satisfy compatibility requirements.



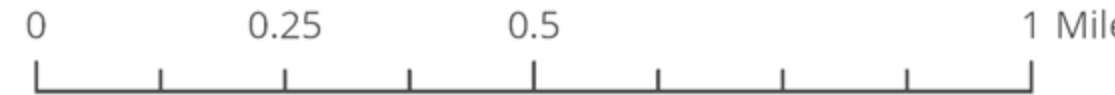
Future Land Use Map (Current)



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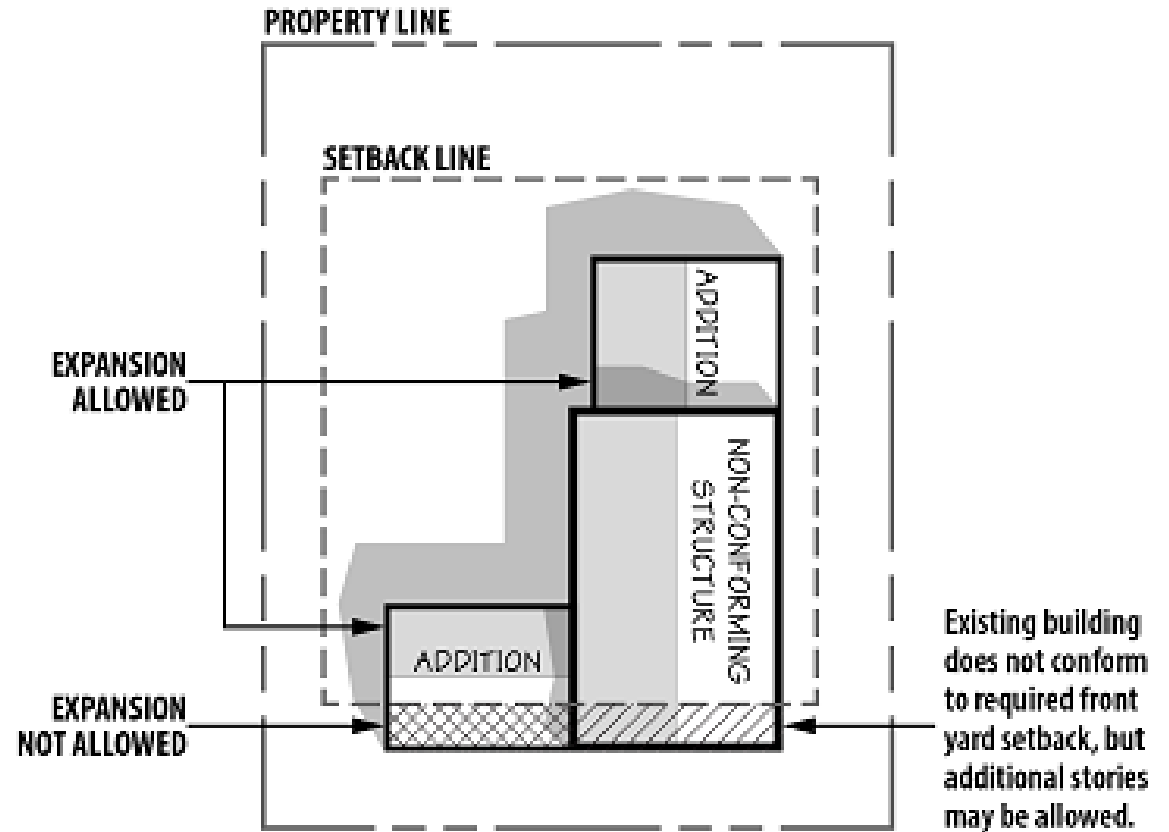
Updated through
Ord. 2024-05

4/4/2025

Existing nonconforming uses can lead to complications for homeowners as well as administrative burden on city staff and council.

Some potential solutions:

1. Blanket relaxation of dimensional requirements for a specific neighborhood
2. Administrative process for relaxation of dimensional requirements
3. Creation of a Special Use permit process
4. Reliance on Variances only when appropriate



A CRA is a public entity established by a Florida city or county to address blighted conditions and encourage economic redevelopment.

- Uses Tax-Increment Financing (TIF):
 - Captures the increase in property tax revenue generated within a designated redevelopment area.
 - Reinvests revenue into public infrastructure, improvements, housing, and business incentives.
- Governed by a separate CRA Board or City Council.
- Currently subject to legislative uncertainty (HB 991, 2025) regarding future viability



Potential Town Center CRA

- Could help organize and support efforts to develop Town Center
- Would create a detailed plan with goals, objective, and projects
- Could subsidize public improvements and potentially engage staff
 - Infrastructure improvements (streets, sidewalks, utilities)
 - Public amenities (parks, transit hubs)
 - Incentives for private investment (façade grants, development assistance)
 - Staff for event coordination or business recruitment





- **Special Assessment Districts (Ch. 170, F.S.)**
 - Directly assesses benefiting properties for infrastructure costs.
 - Can finance roads, sidewalks, lighting, and drainage improvements.
- **Community Development District (Ch. 190, F.S.)**
 - Independent special district can issue bonds for public infrastructure.
 - Suitable for mixed-use redevelopment on large sites.
 - Must be petitioned for and managed by landowners.
- **Municipal Capital Projects and Bonds**
 - General obligation or revenue bonds to finance site improvements directly.
 - City investments in infrastructure and public amenities to attract developers.
- **Land Use and Zoning Incentives**
 - Create mixed-use redevelopment overlays or Planned Unit Developments (PUD).
 - Regulatory flexibility to encourage private-sector redevelopment.

Major Updates:

- Clarified and strengthened references to nonmotorized transportation.
- New Policy on working with FDOT and the OCSD to alleviate queuing on US 98.
- Inclusion of new transportation technologies
- References to an encouragement of bike and pedestrian infrastructure in the new Town Center overlay.



“become a walking and biking city, with a connected network of sidewalks, greenways and multi-use trails.”

- Vision Plan

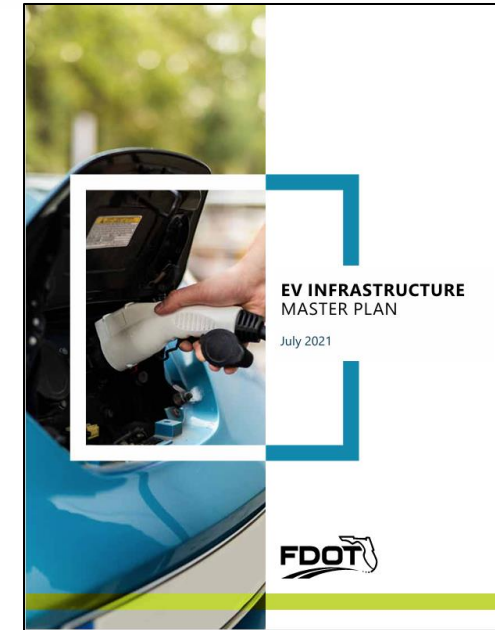
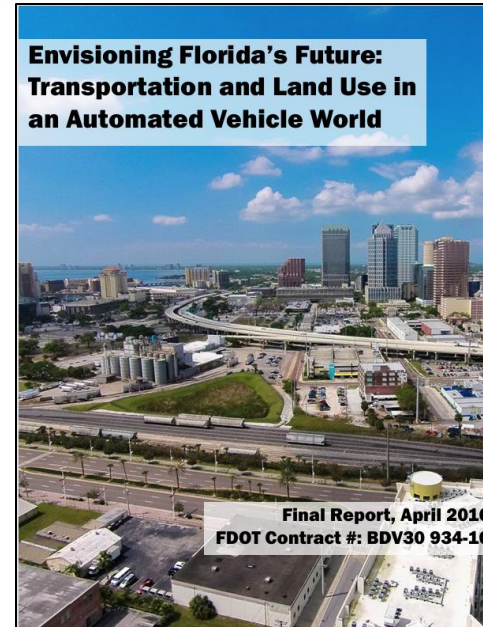
Policy All new road construction projects within the City shall accommodate **labor-intensive active transportation**. Such accommodation may include the installation of signage, striping of roadways, widening of shoulders, installation of bike racks, installation of sidewalks [...]



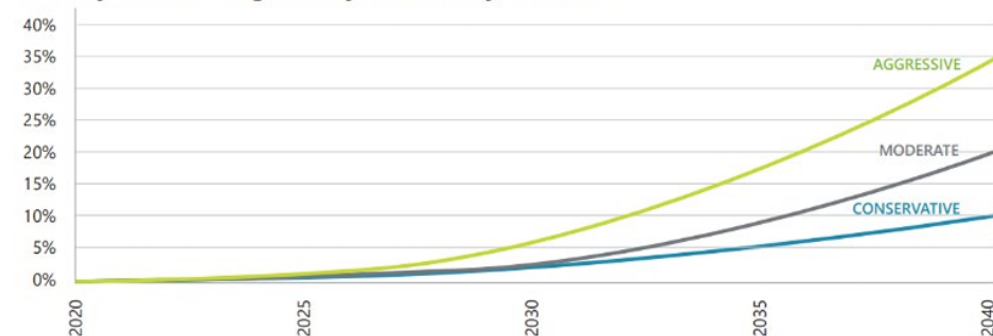
- Added in support for traffic-calming measures where hazardous conditions exist.
- Endorsed seeking a solution to alleviate congestion on US 98 near the Mary Esther Elementary School.
- Recommends that the City conduct a waterfront-access feasibility study including potential Blueway routes.



- Added support for incorporating advances technologies in coordination with state and regional partners.
- Continue collaborating with Okaloosa County and its Traffic Management Center (TMC)
- Align local regulations and infrastructure planning with Florida's ongoing efforts to accommodate autonomous and connected vehicles.
- Encourage and support the installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations



EV Projections of Light-Duty Vehicles by Scenario



- Create a vibrant, multimodal town center around the Santa Rosa Mall and adjacent corridors by integrating Complete Streets concepts, pedestrian-friendly design, and improved transit service.
- The City shall encourage sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes [...] Connectivity to existing transit routes or future transit services.
- Consider fee reductions or credits for developments in the town center area that include enhanced public amenities such as transit shelters, bike racks, and publicly accessible green spaces or plazas.



Major Updates:

- Promotion of a wide variety of housing types including “missing middle” housing, mixed-use development, and adaptive reuse.
- Dedication to reviewing and improving the city’s regulatory and permitting program.



have a variety of housing opportunities, to serve the broad needs of the community across their lifetimes and household configurations

Additional housing opportunities can be provided in the form of small lot single family, manor houses, townhouses, stacked flat apartment buildings and within mixed use buildings.

- Vision Plan



Specific policy changes:

- Creation of checklists for quicker development review of “missing middle” and infill housing.
- Partnering with private and non-profit housing developers to encourage adaptive reuse.
- Infrastructural development to support more housing types.
- Promotion of expanded housing choice in the Town Center Overlay
- Encourage rehabilitation to conserve existing housing stock.
- Direction to staff to explore allowing Accessory Dwelling Units in the LDC

Changes in other Elements:

- Creation of High-Density Residential district.

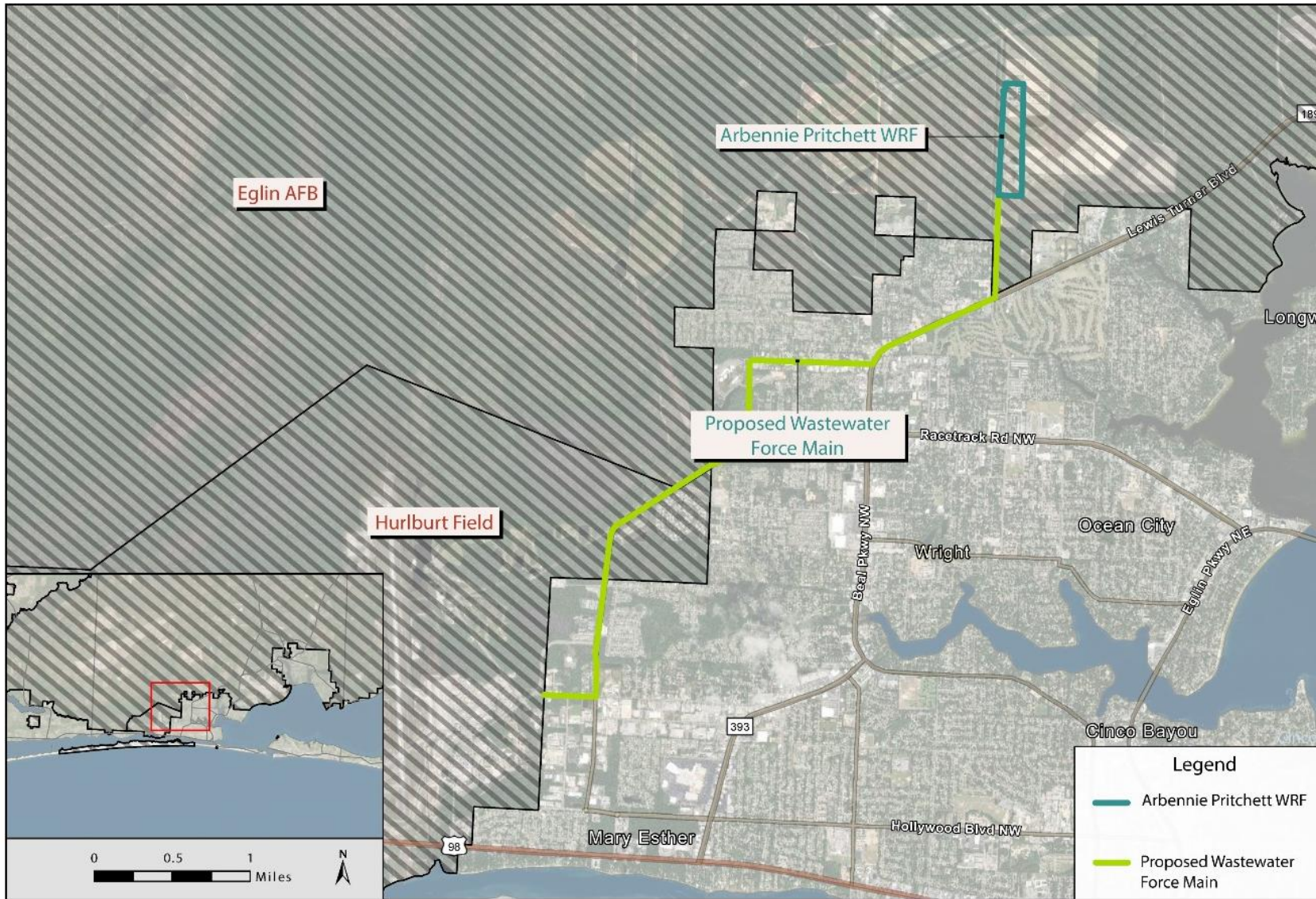


Major Updates:

- Updated goals surrounding wastewater disposal to allow for flexibility in exploring future solutions.
- Clarified current solid waste management practices.
- Removed specific recycling goals.
- Removed water saving device ordinance reference previously required by state statute.



Infrastructure Element

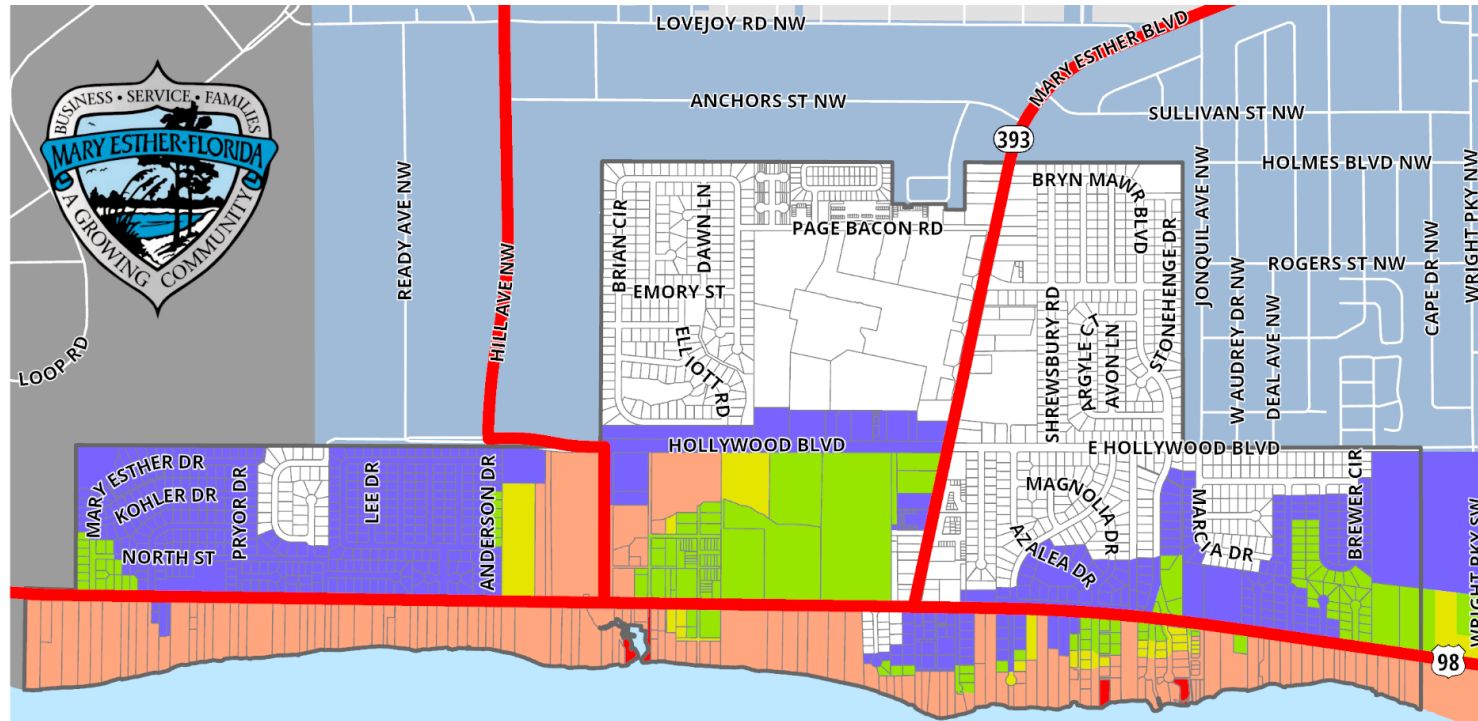


Major Updates:

- Updated goals to reflect the statewide Resilient Florida standards.
- Updated references to the County's Local Mitigation Strategy and regional Hurricane Evacuation Study.
- Added Florida Friendly Landscaping as a potential alternative to current xeriscape requirements



Coastal Management and Conservation

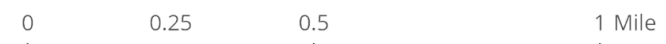


CITY OF MARY ESTHER - EVACUATION ZONES AND ROUTES

- Evacuation Route
- Zone A
- Zone B
- Zone C
- Zone D
- Zone E
- Mary Esther City Limits
- Mary Esther Parcels
- Fort Walton Beach
- Military
- Unincorporated
- Water



Source: City of Mary Esther,
Okaloosa County, ECRC (2024)
For planning purposes only.



10/10/2024

Allows for the adoption of Florida Friendly Landscaping Standards (FS 373.185)

Florida-Friendly Landscaping Principles:

- Planting the right plant in the right place.
- Efficient watering.
- Appropriate fertilization.
- Mulching.
- Attracting wildlife.
- Managing yard pests responsibly.
- Recycling yard waste.
- Reducing stormwater runoff.
- Protecting the waterfront.



Major Updates:

- Creates new category of Park 'Town Center Park'
- Updated references to upcoming Bike, Ped, Trail Plan for Okaloosa-Walton TPO.
- Added references to community gardens and the farmer's market.
- Modified references to tourism development organizations.



Recreation and Open Space Element



Source: City of Mary Esther, Okaloosa County, FDOT, ECRC (2024)
For planning purposes only.

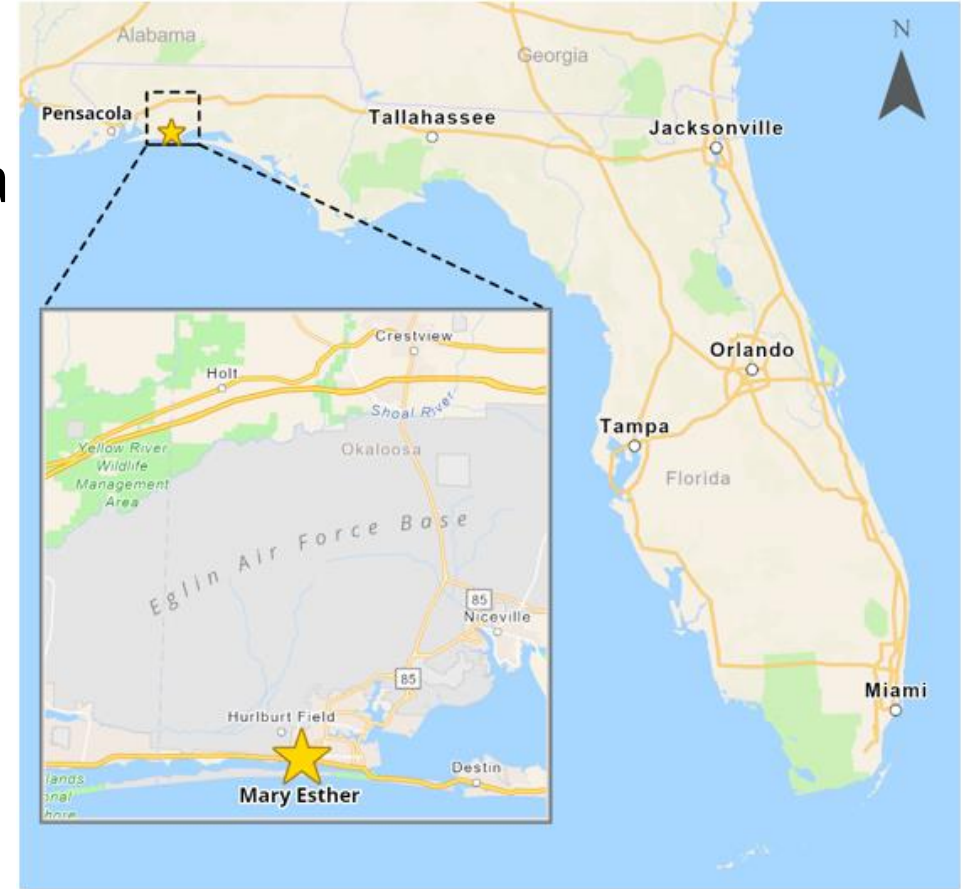
Creates new category “Town Center Park” associated with the Town Center Overlay:

TOWN CENTER PARK: Public amenity associated with mixed-use development located in the Town Center Overlay (reference Policy A1-1d) to improve the area’s appeal. Facilities may include multi-purpose open areas, playgrounds, seating, landscaped features, and other elements designed to draw visitors and residents for recreational or community-focused activities.



Major Updates:

- Clarified importance of intergovernmental coordination and updated references to recent coordination efforts.
- Eliminated or modified references to defunct organizations, plans and agreements.



CITY OF MARY ESTHER - LOCATION MAP

Source: FDEP, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USFWS, FDEP, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA

Major Updates:

- Added in updated inventory of capital improvements
- Included Level of Service standards for Roadways, Sewer, Solid Waste, Drainage, Potable Water, Recreation and Open Space, and Public School Facilities
- Establishes new Annual Goal Setting Process





Capital Improvements Element

- Inclusion of Updated Capital Improvement plan projects
- Removal of outdated state requirements and references
- Incorporation of upcoming Road Maintenance / Park Plans
- Changes to implementation and planning process

Project	Budget Year					Funding Source	Project Total
	FY 2024-2025	FY 2025-2026	FY 2026-2027	FY 2027-2028	FY 2028-2029		
Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI)	\$0	\$650,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	Water Loan	\$650,000
Mary Esther Boulevard Beautification	\$0	\$216,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	General Fund	\$216,000
Public Works Roof Replacement	\$0	\$120,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	General Fund	\$120,000
Oak Tree Nature Park Rehabilitation	\$0	\$180,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	General Fund	\$180,000
Community Facilities Beautification	\$0	\$157,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	General Fund	\$157,000
Highway 98 Water Main Replacement	\$0	\$5,193,983	\$0	\$0	\$0	State Grant	\$5,193,983
Vehicle Replacement	\$0	\$60,000	\$125,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	General Fund	\$285,000
Waterfront Park Development	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$0	\$0	General Fund	\$20,000
Oak Tree Park Neighborhood Infrastructure Improvements	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$5,364,618	\$0	Sales Tax Fund, Water and Sewer Loans	\$5,364,618
Funding Total	\$15,794,291	\$12,191,583	\$609,070	\$6,143,142	\$26,041,525	N/A	\$60,779,611

Data Source: City of Mary Esther
Date Prepared: 11/2024





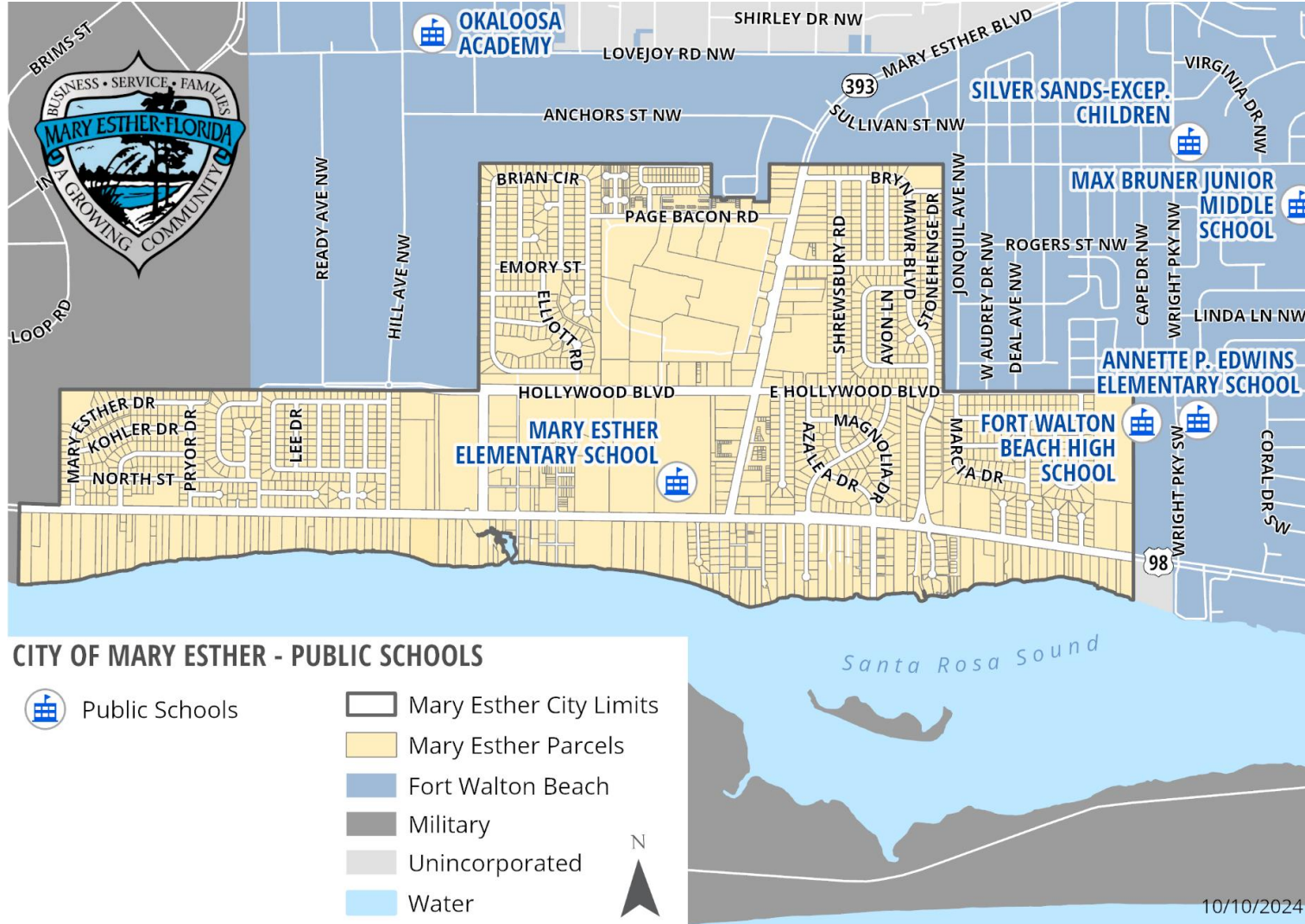
- Annual public meeting with staff and full Council
 - Could be special meeting or agenda item
- Staff will summarize:
 - Progress on implementing Goals, Objectives, and Policies
 - Any changes in state statutes affecting the plan
 - Feedback from the community
 - Recommendations for amendments or updates
- Council will:
 - Direct staff to begin amendment process (if necessary)
 - Set priorities for implementation for the next 12 months

Major Updates:

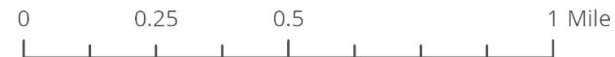
- Added a direct reference to support the development of a new primary access drive for Mary Esther Elementary School.
- Clarified support for Safe Routes to School
- Removed references to outdated schools plans and maps



Public Schools Facilities Element

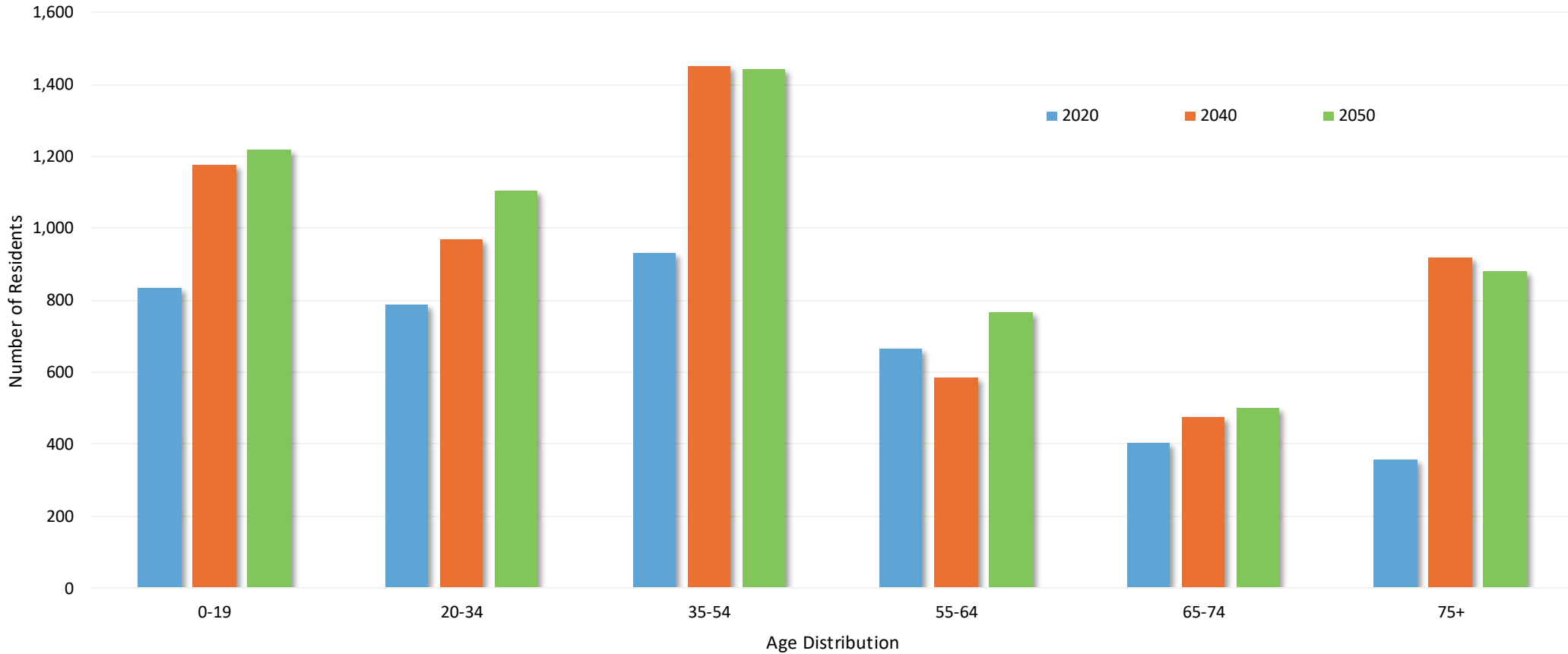


Source: City of Mary Esther, Okaloosa County, ECRC (2024); FGDL (2023)
For planning purposes only.





Public Schools Facilities Element



Major Updates:

- Added in state recommended language to protect property owner's rights.
- Clarified current notice and hearing procedures.



- **Statutory Compliance:** Section 163.3177, Florida Statutes, mandates a property rights element in comprehensive plans.
- **Intent:** Ensure property rights are respected while supporting planning objectives.
- **Purpose:** Balancing Interests
 - Protect individual property rights.
 - Promote broader community goals, such as:
 - Sustainable development.
 - Environmental protection.
 - Public health and safety.



Goal J1 – The City of Mary Esther’s goal is to respect judicially acknowledged and constitutionally protected private property rights.

Objective J1-1 – The City shall consider property rights during local decision-making processes:

- **Policy J1-1a** – The right of a property owner to physically possess and control his or her interest in the property, including easements, leases, or mineral rights.
- **Policy J1-1b** – The right of a property owner to use, maintain, develop, and improve his or her property for personal use or for the use of any other person, subject to state law and local ordinances.
- **Policy J1-1c** – The right of the property owner to privacy and to exclude others from the property to protect the owner’s possessions and property.
- **Policy J1-1d** – The right of a property owner to dispose of his or her property through sale or gift.

Objective J1-2 - People have the right to participate in planning...

- The city will mail notices to property owners within 300'
- At least 14 days and at least 5 days before hearing
- City staff shall regularly evaluate the most cost-efficient methods of providing notice





Formal Adoption

- Final Revisions and Preparation of State Submittal Documents
- LPA Public Hearing and Recommendation
- Council Transmittal Hearing (First Reading)
- Transmittal to State and Agency Review (expedited review)
- Adoption Hearing (Second Reading)
- Final Submittal and Appeal Window

Thank You

Ada Clark, Community and Economic Development Director
Ada.Clark@ECRC.org

Eric Christianson, Planner
Eric.Christianson@ECRC.org