



CITY OF HIGH SPRINGS COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY (CRA) ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021 FISCAL YEAR

This report provides an overview of our 2020-2021 achievements and introduces projects either in the conceptual stages or currently underway for 2021-2022. Included is a glimpse into the future by sharing common goals established over the past year by the creation of a strategic plan.

INTRODUCTION

A Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is an organization that guides redevelopment activities to eliminate slum and blight, improve the economic vitality of the district, and enhance the tax base through redevelopment activities and the establishment of public/private partnerships. Community Redevelopment Agencies are authorized by Florida Statute (Chapter 163, Part III) and created at the local level by cities and counties for the purpose of carrying out redevelopment activities that include revitalizing dilapidated buildings and neighborhoods, improving public infrastructure and amenities, creating jobs, and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The City of High Springs has one CRA district comprised of the downtown business district and surrounding area. The five (5) City Council Members serve as the CRA Board and make decisions concerning the City's CRA district.

MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I began my duties as CRA Executive Director, I am excited to begin several exciting projects we have planned for the CRA. From our planned expansion to new lighting downtown and more, this is an exciting time for our community.

CRA BOARD



From Left to Right: Board Member Gloria James, Board member Byran Williams, Board Member Linda Jones, Board Member Ross Ambrose, Chair Katherine Weitz

CRA STAFF

Bruce Gillingham
Executive Director

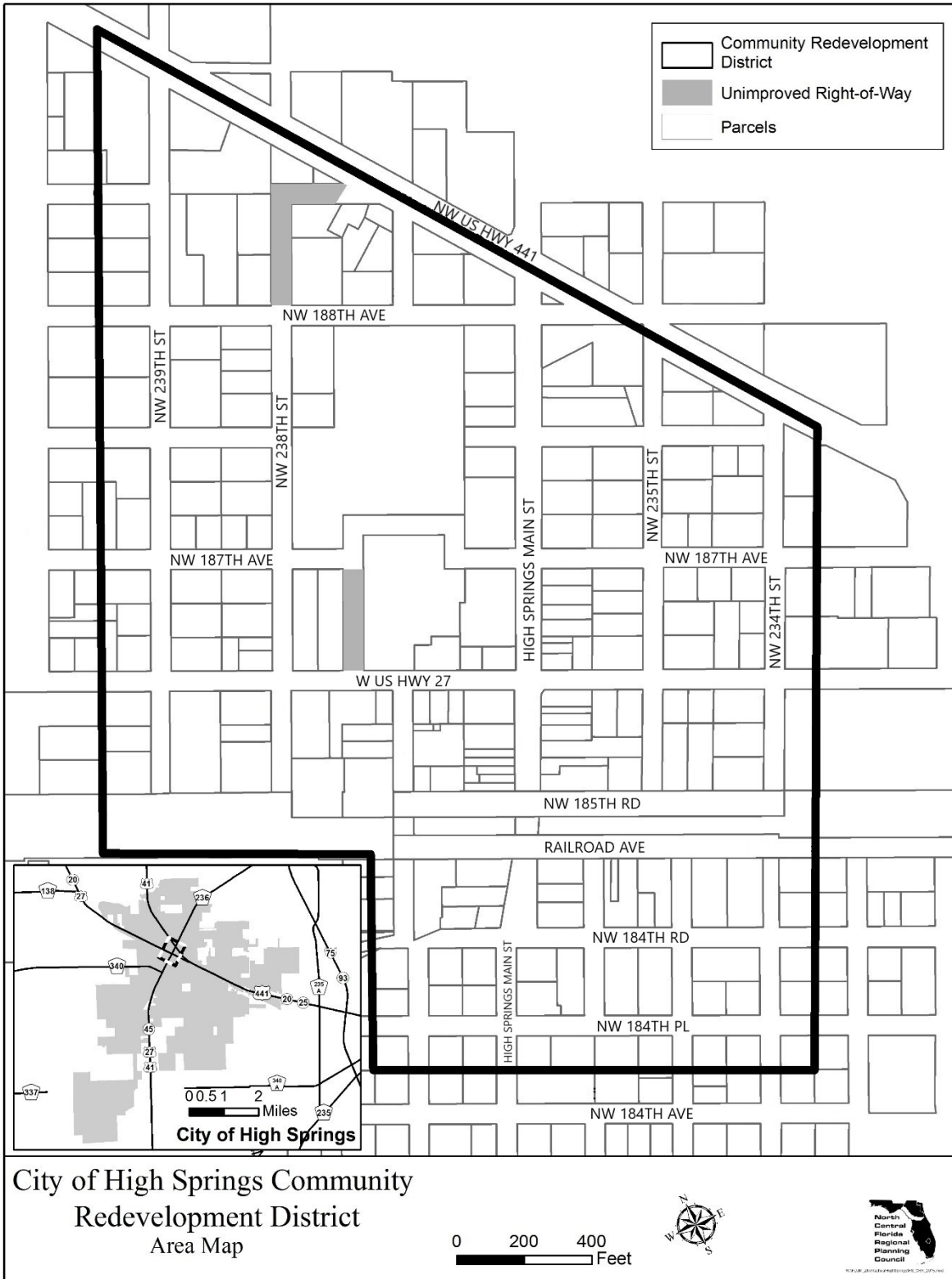
R. David Sutton
CRA Coordinator

BACKGROUND

The City of High Springs is home to the area's largest springs, and it is the gateway to the crystal-clear springs that draw visitors for swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving, canoeing, and exploring. High Springs had an estimated 2020 population of 6,633 and a median household income of \$63, 895 (Source: ESRI)

The High Springs Community Redevelopment Agency is a public entity created by the City of High Springs in December 1986 to implement the community redevelopment activities outlined under Chapter 163, Florida Statutes. Since its creation the CRA, which encompasses approximately 109 acres, has been served by the Redevelopment Plan. The Redevelopment Plan serves as the primary guide for all CRA activities. The Redevelopment Plan was adopted in 1986 following creatin of the CRA.

The CRA was scheduled to expire in December 2016, however per the Interlocal Agreement between Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, the City of High Springs, and the High Springs CRA dated July 5, 2016, the CRA was extended by 15-years with an option for an additional 15-year extension with approval of the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners. Following the extension of the CRA, a new Redevelopment Plan was adopted in 2018 to replace the 1986 Redevelopment Plan. As stipulated by the Interlocal Agreement described above, the 2018 Redevelopment Plan will remain in effect through Fiscal Year 2030/2031.





GRANT PROGRAM

FACADE GRANT PROGRAM

The High Springs CRA Façade Grant Program provides businesses within the CRA district the opportunity to renovate the exterior of their building. Its purpose is to enhance the aesthetics, character, and vitality of the CRA district. This grant allows for up to \$5000 for projects such as painting, siding, windows and doors, awnings, and other exterior improvements.

Business	Amount
Clubhouse Athletics	\$2,350
Two Finger Properties	\$30,000*

*Project approved during FY 2020-21 and completed during FY 2021-22



Two Finger Properties Façade Grant

Before



After



Before



After



Before



After



PROJECTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

STRATEGIC PLAN

As High Springs continues the steady growth it has been experiencing, the High Springs CRA spent most of the year focused on addressing the need to develop a strategic plan to assist in implementing the original goals of the 1986 plan within the context of our 21st century environment. This effort was undertaken during the months of March through June 2021, as an update to the existing CRA plan originally adopted in 1986. The result of the work includes an organizing set of Strategic Plan Themes responding to the many pieces of community input, providing an organizational structure for the ideas, concerns, aspirations, and desired implementation actions.

These Strategic Plan Themes are identified as follows:

- Economic Development- Foster a successful, attractive, pedestrian oriented downtown focused on leveraging proximity to extraordinary environmental assets to encourage and broaden market appeal in support of existing businesses and encouraging new investments.
- Sense of Place & Appearance- Enhance existing small-town charm, reinforcing scale and details of buildings, upgrading gateways, graphics, landscaped parking areas, streetscapes and screening service areas that contribute to a quality urban environment.
- Transportation Access & Mobility- Reclaim pedestrian realm on Main Street and adjacent streets by redirecting truck traffic, widening sidewalks, expanding, and improving organization of parking, and developing trail facilities along abandoned CSX right-of-way.
- Civic & Open Spaces- Maximize the use of available open space for community enjoyment, expanding the role in support of arts and culture, reinforcing a sense of pride in civic assets

around City Hall for social interaction for residents and visitors alike, whether it be for daily or special events.

- Environmental Sustainability- Recognize that the community's proximity to the unique environmental assets found in the Santa Fe River and the numerous springs should foster an environmentally conscious stewardship that respects and maintains these one-of-a-kind natural resources.
 - Standards & Regulations- Create a regulatory and governmental structure that enables quality investment and flexible accommodation of multi-uses for a thriving downtown development environment.
- Keepers of the Vision- Commit to a strategy of action organized around a public/private partnership that focuses on projects, accountability, and champions to get results.

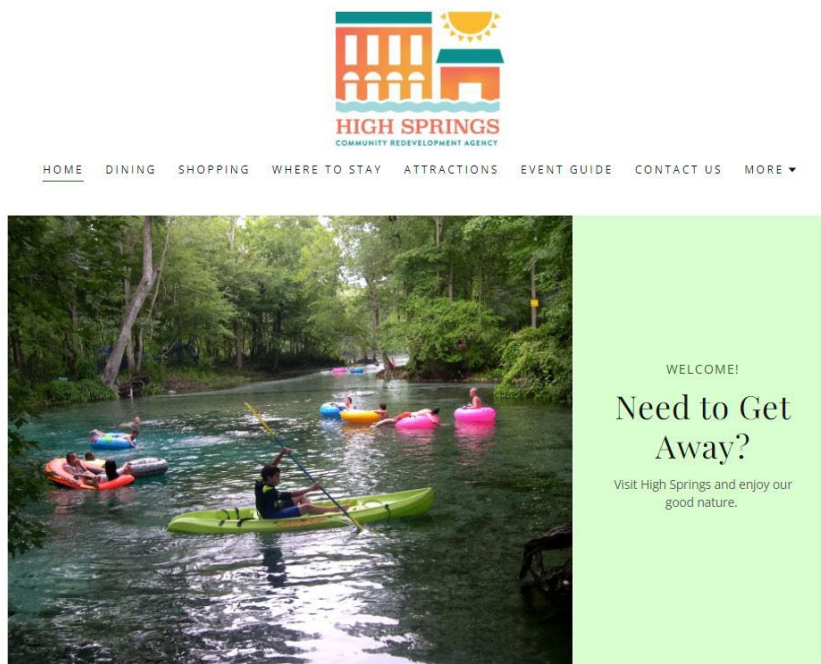
OUTREACH AND PROMOTION

As the "Gateway to the Springs", the High Springs CRA and the City of High Springs strives to "promote the future while preserving the past." Working with local businesses and organizations to promote a thriving High Springs while maintaining our small-town charm, is an important part of our mission. In Fall 2020, and again in Fall 2021, the High Springs CRA and the City of High Springs promoted our area in the Guide to Greater Gainesville. This feature article aided our businesses, restaurants, and other tourist attractions by showcasing our unique small-town charm.

The High Springs CRA expanded on its promotion as the "Gateway to the Springs" with a billboard placed on I-75 Southbound, north of Lake City. This billboard was funded in part by a grant from the Alachua County Tourism Development Council. The billboard was designed to promote the springs.



The High Springs CRA also began construction of a new website to promote tourism in High Springs. This website features places to shop and dine in High Springs along with area attractions to visit. It has since been launched.



The CRA also participated in sponsorship with community events downtown. During Halloween, the CRA in conjunction with primary sponsor Santa Fe Kiwanis hosted a pumpkin carving contest held downtown at the Farmers' Market Pavilion. This event helped promote the downtown area as families came to carve and enter their pumpkins in the contest.

LOOKING AHEAD

As High Springs and the CRA move forward, implementation of the strategic plan will continue to be the primary focus. Projects to achieve the goals within the strategic process currently in progress are as follows:

- The installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations- in partnership with a local business, the CRA is working to install the first EV charging stations in High Springs. As society continues the shift to more environmentally friendly sources of energy, having EV chargers installed will allow High Springs to provide an amenity not currently available to residents and visitors alike.
- New sidewalks and curbing along with new landscaping- current landscaping along Main Street and other areas within the High Springs CRA district are being replaced with Florida friendly plants that are native to North Central Florida, low maintenance, and drought resistant. This improvement, in partnership with IFAS will help to highlight our beautiful Downtown area helping to attract more visitors
 - Ambient lighting for the downtown business district- decorative lighting placed throughout the downtown business district will help provide a greater atmosphere for visitors to enjoy the restaurants and shops after the sun goes down.
- Stormwater and parking study- this study is necessary to determine how to best expand parking for the downtown business district to assist in business growth and retention

- Photometric study for increased safety lighting- along with the addition of the ambient lighting downtown, a photometric study is in the process of being conducted to determine how to best light downtown for pedestrian and vehicle safety.

Summary

2020-2021 was an exciting year as the foundation of the High Springs CRA was strengthened with a new city manager and executive director along with the implementation of a new strategic plan. With new leadership and a strategic plan to guide the High Springs CRA, 2021-2022 is going to be even greater as projects started during the previous year will be completed and new ones beginning.