

CHARTING THE COURSE

FORT WALTON BEACH

WATERFRONT VISION PLAN

June 2006



Acknowledgements

This project was undertaken by the City of Fort Walton Beach and the Waterfronts Florida Partnership (WFP) Committee. The consultants Herbert - Halback, Inc. (HHI), were hired to facilitate the Charting the Course Visioning Exercise. The project team would like to express their gratitude to all the residents, property owners, and interested parties who participated in the public workshop. Their opinions are the basis of the findings in this Summary Report.

City Council

Mike Anderson, Mayor
Bob Campbell
Jim Hartwell
Mike Holmes
Mike Minich
Bill Patterson
Wayne Pullen
Jim Tucker

Waterfronts Florida Partnership Committee

Karen Gercak, Chariman
Maureen Taylor, Vice-chairman
Will Corbin
Charlene Greenwald
Mark Hillman
Bill Kuhn

Staff

Joyce Shanahan, City Manager
Helen A. Spencer, City Clerk
Toni Craig, City Attorney
Missy McKim, CDS Director
Becki Pence, Waterfronts Florida Program Manager
Peggy Fowler, Principal Planner
Sam Wilson, Environmental Specialist

Logo

Jamal Holly

Photograph on Page 2 – Downtown Fort Walton Beach

Photo by Arturo's Studio

This report funded in part, through a grant agreement from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Coastal Management Program, by a grant provided by the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NAO5NOS4191074. The views, statements, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the State of Florida, NOAA or any of its subagencies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Mission Statement	1
II.	Introduction	2
III.	History and Background	4
IV.	Waterfronts Florida	4
V.	Development of the Waterfront Vision	6
	A. Organizing for Action Workshop	6
	B. Public Visioning Workshop	7
	C. Public Workshop to Review the Draft Vision Plan	11
VI.	Guiding Principles of the Vision Plan	12
VII.	Public Access Goal	12
VIII.	Environmental and Cultural Goal.....	14
IX.	Hazard Mitigation Goal	15
X.	Enhancement of the Waterfront Economy Goal	15
XI.	Education Goal	16
XII.	Recreational and Community Events Goal	16
XIII.	Conclusion	18
XIV.	Conceptual Drawings	19

MISSION STATEMENT

The Waterfronts Florida Partnership Committee seeks to make Fort Walton Beach a world-class waterfront community by protecting, preserving and enhancing its waterways and waterfronts.

INTRODUCTION

“Charting the Course” outlines the vision of the Fort Walton Beach Waterfronts Florida Partnership Committee: to make Fort Walton Beach a world-class waterfront community.

The city’s waterfront has historically been dominated by single-family homes, sporadic water-related businesses, and a few non-water-dependent businesses whose property simply happened to be on the waterfront. It is now becoming a shoreline filled with condominiums, punctuated by commerce that uses or strongly benefits from its waterfront location.

Fort Walton Beach has made progress in dealing with that change, demanding high standards of building along the water and ensuring, through acquisition and enhancement of public waterfront, that the city’s residents and visitors can enjoy Santa Rosa Sound. The City has developed The Landing Park, once home to a bowling alley, in the city’s old downtown area, Liza Jackson Park on the city’s western edge and The Sound Park on a narrow strip of waterfront across from City Hall.

Part of the “Charting the Course” vision is a boardwalk that would connect those parks and run virtually all of the two-mile length of the city’s Santa Rosa Sound waterfront. That boardwalk, to be built on connecting easements granted by waterfront property owners, is an



Jamal Holly, a fifth grader at Shalimar Elementary School, won a student contest to come up with a logo for the Fort Walton Beach waterfront. His artwork depicts public access and preservation of a beautiful shore environment, two key elements in planning for the future of the city’s waterfront.

idea developed through several different planning committees, one that will require many years to complete. In exchange for granting the easement, property owners receive a density bonus. The boardwalk

will give Fort Walton Beach residents and visitors extraordinary access to the city's most precious asset.

Access is really at the heart of this vision, making our waterfront available to more and more people. The boardwalk is but a small part of our vision. Its many elements cover a broad spectrum, from a possible marina for transient boaters to stencils on storm drains that remind people that what goes down the drain ends up in our waterways; from pedestrian-friendly crossings of busy U.S. 98 to hurricane preparedness plans; from protection of historic sites to preventing sewage spills. Every aspect of this plan is important to an integrated vision of the future of our waterfront.

Our vision is a vibrant waterfront area that will be a regular haunt for all of our citizens and our many visitors, to fish, to walk or jog the boardwalk, to enjoy a cold drink at a Sound-side restaurant, to sit on a bench by the water and enjoy a sunset. We see a waterfront that will be a magnet for boaters traveling the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, a not-to-be-missed stopover or a delightful destination. We see a waterfront that can serve as a model for other Florida communities attempting to balance the rights of individual property owners with the needs of the general public in an environment of intense development pressure.



This was U.S. 98, then Main Street, through the Fort Walton Beach of the 1950s. It was a bustling downtown business district typical of small towns in the South.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

From its prehistoric beginnings the area now known as Fort Walton Beach has been linked to and dependent on its waterfront location and resources. Settlement here dates back to 600 CE. Between 600 and 1650 CE there were numerous Native American tribes in the area, including the Pensacola, Chatot, Hitchiti, Koasati,

Choctaw, Yuchi, and Yamasee. These early residents lived off shellfish and game.

The earliest permanent white settlers began arriving not long after Florida became a territory in 1821. Many were outcasts: abolitionists and, later, draft dodgers avoiding conscription during the Civil War. Roads into the area were nearly impassable until an improved trail was developed in 1850. Before that, settlers had to depend on the water for transportation.

In early 1861 the Walton Guards established an encampment in the area, named Camp Walton after Colonel George Walton, the acting governor of Florida. Their mission was to challenge Union gunboats. After a skirmish with Union troops the Guards settled on what we now know as the Indian Temple Mound, a high point that enabled them to watch the waterways.

In 1868 John Thomas Brooks purchased 111 acres in what is now downtown Fort Walton Beach and named the area Brooks Landing. He lived here with his family and built a sawmill. Other local industries included farming, timber, and naval stores.

Tourism dates back as far as 1880, built on the area's reputation for game and fish. The first hotel here, Brooks House, was built in 1902, followed by the Gulfview Hotel in 1906. The first schoolhouse was built in 1912 to accommodate the growing number of students in the area. The Florida Legislature formed Okaloosa County in

1915 by combining sections of Walton and Santa Rosa counties.

When a Civil War cannon was found in 1932, the area's name was changed to Fort Walton. The area was chartered as a municipality in 1937. When locals wanted the area to be identified as a coastal city, "Beach" was added to the name in 1953.

In 1935 Eglin Air Force Base was established nearby. The base is the largest Air Force Base in the free world, encompassing 464,316 acres in Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton counties. Employing approximately 44,000 personnel with a payroll of \$728 million, it is the engine that drives the Fort Walton Beach area economy.

Tourism is the area economy's second largest component. Crystal-white beaches, abundant sunshine, and relatively warm year-round weather attract many visitors, part-time residents and retirees.

The interconnected system of bays, sounds, and bayous within and surrounding the city provide the backdrop for its unique character. The waterfront is the primary reason it remains a popular location for a permanent or seasonal home as well as a vacation spot.

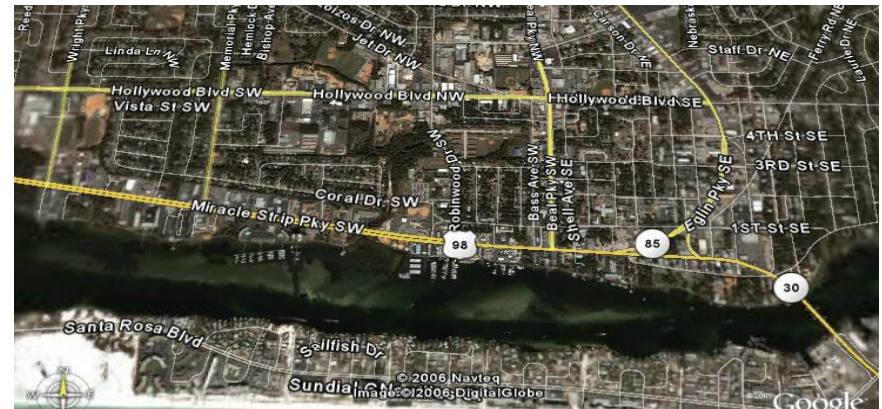
Over the years the increasing amount of residential and commercial development that has occurred close to or directly on the Santa Rosa Sound waterfront has resulted in less access to this resource, both physically and

visually. The increasing number of residents and visitors driving to and through the city along U.S. 98, locally known as Miracle Strip Parkway, has resulted in the construction of a high-volume roadway that is oriented more to efficient vehicle movement than to use by pedestrians. Crossing that highway has become more and more difficult for pedestrians and bicyclists, creating a barrier to the waterfront.

In 2004, concerned with future access to the waterfront and declining surface water quality, the City Council recognized the need to address the uses of land adjacent to the waterfront. The Council's goal was to create opportunities for shoreline development to be designed with waterfront access, water views, and water quality in mind. The City Council authorized the creation of the Water's Edge Ad-Hoc Committee, to be made up of boaters and non-boaters, business owners and residents. This committee was asked to create a Water's Edge Master Plan that would focus on water quality and land uses adjacent to the waterfront in Fort Walton Beach. The Water's Edge Master Plan was adopted by the City Council in February 2005.

WATERFRONTS FLORIDA

On May 26, 2005, in order to further the implementation of the Water's Edge Master Plan, the City applied for acceptance by the Waterfronts Florida Partnership



The program area, shown in this aerial photograph, is the north shore of Santa Rosa Sound from Liza Jackson Park, at the left of the photo, to the Brooks Bridge.

Program. The program was established by the Florida Department of Community Affairs in 1997 to assist communities in revitalization and promotion of their waterfronts. The property included in the waterfronts program area for the City encompasses the properties on both sides of Miracle Strip Parkway (US 98) from just west of the Brooks Bridge to the city's western boundary, including all land adjacent to Santa Rosa Sound. This area includes the City's commercial and mixed-use districts and is located within the City's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) area.

Fort Walton Beach was accepted as a Waterfronts Florida Partnership Community on August 12, 2005, for the period of 2005-2007. Being a partner offers the City technical and financial assistance from the State of

Florida for the grant period. The City hired a program manager and appointed a Waterfronts Florida Partnership (WFP) Committee to oversee waterfront revitalization efforts. Since the Water's Edge Ad Hoc Committee was familiar with the needs of the city's waterfronts, the City Council assigned its members to function as the WFP Committee.

Historically, Florida waterfronts have been assets to their communities, with a host of commercial activities such as shipping and commercial and sport fishing. However, because of societal changes and advancements in technology, commercial waterfronts have experienced economic decline, deterioration, and neglect. In order to address these issues, the WFP program requires each community accepted into the partnership to work toward four major goals: environmental and cultural resource protection, public access, retention of viable traditional waterfront economies, and hazard mitigation.

The WFP program requires each partnership community to focus on three types of waterfront uses: water-dependent, water-related, and water-enhanced.

- ◆ **Water-dependent uses are activities that can be carried out only on, in, or adjacent to water areas, such as waterborne transportation and recreation.**
- ◆ **Water-related uses are activities not directly dependent on access to a water body but that provide goods and services directly associated**



WFP Committee member Mark Hillman presents his group's ideas at a public forum/workshop on plans for the waterfront.

- ◆ **with water-dependent or waterway uses, such as marine hardware.**
- ◆ **Water-enhanced uses are activities enriched by their proximity to the waterfront, such as restaurants and cultural facilities.**

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WATERFRONT VISION

With the WFP Committee appointed and the program manager hired, the City moved forward with development of a waterfront vision, actively engaging the public in each step of the process. This visioning process, which the committee titled "Charting the Course," began with an organizing workshop for the WFP Committee and potential partner organizations to define guiding principles. Next, an initial public workshop allowed citizens to weigh in on the ideas the committee was considering and to offer their own visions of the Fort Walton Beach waterfront.

Organizing for Action Workshop

On Jan. 12, 2006, the WFP Committee held an "Organizing for Action Workshop" and defined the following guiding principles:

- ◆ **Clarify the purpose and scope of the program.**
- ◆ **Identify key partners and their roles.**
- ◆ **Develop a working plan.**
- ◆ **Establish communication protocols and coordinating activities.**
- ◆ **Review guidelines for effective partnerships.**
- ◆ **Outline objectives for the WFP waterfront plan.**



The public workshop broke out into small groups, each of which independently developed its own plans and priorities.

In addition, the WFP Committee felt it was important for the visioning process to achieve the following:

- ◆ **Identify what people treasure and want to maintain in the community.**
- ◆ **Develop focused, feasible strategies and action plans.**
- ◆ **Seek agreement on common desired outcomes.**

- ◆ **Build broad commitment needed for plan adoption and implementation.**
- ◆ **Identify differing desires and how to balance them.**
- ◆ **Establish needed organizational structures and coordination mechanisms.**
- ◆ **Create a sense of identity for the area.**

A full report on the organizing meeting is attached to this report as **Appendix A**.

Public Visioning Workshop

On March 7, 2006, the first public workshop was initiated by the WFP Committee as a community-based forum to gather ideas. The workshop began with a “Charting the Course” presentation, giving an overview of the Waterfronts Florida Program. Next, each individual was provided a list of objectives drafted by the WFP Committee and asked to prioritize, refine, or recommend new objectives.

The participants were divided into three groups to complete a mapping exercise that displayed each group’s top priorities on an aerial map.

Based on the input received during the March 7 workshop, several key findings were developed to address the four major WFP program goals. The report that resulted from the public workshop, including those



WFP Committee Chairman Karen Gercak presents the findings of her group to the entire audience at the March 7 public workshop.

projects the public considered most important, is attached to this report as **Appendix B**.

Public Access to the Waterfront

Public access is imperative to any successful waterfront. It is the foundation and the main feature of waterfront revitalization. The primary challenge is to balance the need to provide residents and visitors with access to the waterfront, the rights of adjacent property owners, and protection of the natural environment.

Here are the objectives for public access as developed by the WFP Committee with help from the public:

- ◆ **Develop a waterfront boardwalk between Liza Jackson Park and Brooks Bridge, including access to Miracle Strip Parkway.**
- ◆ **Complete Sound Park.**
- ◆ **Ensure that new condos and other buildings and businesses provide access to the boardwalk and the water.**
- ◆ **Ensure public views of water with a public plaza, etc.**
- ◆ **Establish mooring fields.**
- ◆ **Establish short-term docking (not overnight).**
- ◆ **Restore the docks/piers at Fort Walton Landing.**
- ◆ **Pursue the development of a public marina at Fort Walton Landing.**
- ◆ **Provide more boat ramps and parking for the community.**
- ◆ **Increase the number of public marina slips in public and private marinas.**



Breakout groups marked their action plans on an aerial map of the Fort Walton Beach waterfront.



Hazard Mitigation

Hazard mitigation is action taken to reduce risk to people, property, and the environment. Natural hazards include floods, hurricanes, storm surges, and erosion. Among man-made hazards are toxic waste, oil spills, and chemical run-off. Waterfronts are extremely vulnerable to natural and man-made hazards. Therefore, the planning process must incorporate hazard mitigation.

Here are the WFP Committee's objectives for Hazard Mitigation, also developed with public input:

- ◆ **Limit public expenditures in flood prone areas to recreational uses or to increase the public's access to the shoreline.**
- ◆ **Require marinas to have hurricane preparedness plans.**
- ◆ **Develop a mitigation plan and the political will to implement it.**
- ◆ **Enforce zoning regulations.**
- ◆ **Replace wooden boardwalk and dock material with concrete and design them to withstand storms.**
- ◆ **Support the establishment of no wake zones**

Environmental and Cultural Protection

Waterfront communities grow in part because of their coastal and environmental resources. The distinctive



Hurricane Ivan caused extensive damage along the Santa Rosa Sound waterfront in October 2004. Here, the remains of sheet-metal roofing from a marina rest on the shallow bottom.

union between natural resources, human influence, and land makes waterfront communities a unique space. That very relationship that makes the waterfront special is a fragile balance that must be preserved, with respect for delicate shoreline ecosystems and the historic character of the waterfront.

Here are the WFP Committee's and public's objectives for Environmental and Cultural Protection:

- ◆ **Ensure shoreline protection and reestablishment of natural vegetation and habitats.**
- ◆ **Address water quality improvement, including sewage spills and red tide.**
- ◆ **Restore/protect historical and archeological sites.**
- ◆ **Educate residents on wetland protection and storm water run off.**
- ◆ **Establish and enforce no-wake zones.**
- ◆ **Control garbage and litter.**
- ◆ **Pursue the Clean Marina Program.**
- ◆ **Provide pump out stations.**
- ◆ **Regulate aesthetics and urban character of redevelopment without increasing the burdens on owners of the development and permitting process.**
- ◆ **Create and enforce noise regulations for boats.**
- ◆ **Regulate jet skis.**



Native sea grasses and shore vegetation line the undeveloped portions of the Santa Rosa Sound waterfront. Much of the vegetation pictured here is now gone as a result of condominium construction.

Enhancement of the Waterfront Economy

Fort Walton Beach's Santa Rosa Sound waterfront is tightly linked to its old downtown area, the stretch of U.S. 98 on the eastern end of the program area once known as Main Street. Those businesses – now mostly the victims of suburban shopping malls – oriented themselves toward the road rather than the Sound, a block to their south. The transformation of Fort Walton

Beach's shoreline from single-family residences to condominiums presents a new opportunity for a rebirth of the downtown area. A few important water-dependent businesses remain, including marinas and a boatyard. Those services will prove critical to continued waterfront activity.

Here are the WFP Committee's and public's objectives for enhancing the waterfront economy:

- ◆ **Promote the waterfront**
- ◆ **Reorient downtown to the waterfront.**
- ◆ **Encourage the return of waterfront businesses.**
- ◆ **Provide incentives for mixed use on the water; not just condos.**
- ◆ **Provide incentives for dock sharing.**
- ◆ **Create a pedestrian walk along Coral Creek and a Sound Park crossover.**
- ◆ **Develop a plan for what needs to happen on the north side of U.S. 98 and provide a way to get people from one side to the other.**
- ◆ **Find a way to speed up the DEP permitting process.**
- ◆ **Develop a map and brochure showing water access points and businesses.**

Public Review Forum

A public review of the draft vision plan was held on June 6, 2006. Committee members and members of the public listed these additions or concerns about the plan:

- ◆ **Specific mention of “streetscaping” to beautify the U.S. 98 corridor through the program area.**
- ◆ **More emphasis on waterfront cultural activities.**



Rick's Crab Trap, at the northern base of Brooks Bridge, provides an example of a water-enhanced business taking advantage of its physical setting on the Sound.

- ◆ **Need to underground utilities throughout the program area.**
- ◆ **Development of a “children’s waterfront park.”**
- ◆ **Re-establishment of the old city channel along the Santa Rosa Sound waterfront north of the Intracoastal Waterway.**
- ◆ **Restoration of the sand islands that once dotted the center of the sound.**
- ◆ **Establishment of a maritime museum on the City’s waterfront.**
- ◆ **Increasing the program area to include more of the city’s waterfront.**
- ◆ **Homelessness/safety Issues.**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE VISION PLAN

The following principles were identified at the WFP Committee's "Organizing for Action Workshop" to use as a basis for the Vision Plan. These principles reiterate the purpose of the Waterfronts Florida Program in Fort Walton Beach and the role of the community in the program's development and implementation.

- ◆ **Identify what people treasure in Fort Walton Beach.**
- ◆ **Develop focused and feasible action plans with the commitment needed to implement them.**
- ◆ **Create a sense of identity for the area.**

The committee has applied these principles to the four Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program categories. The four major categories that Fort Walton Beach focused on are Public Access, Environmental and Cultural Protection, Hazard Mitigation, and Enhancement of the Waterfront Economy. In addition to those four major goals, the Committee also identified Education and Recreational and Community events as key targets.

Public Access Goal: Increase the public's access the waterfront.

***Objective:** Ensure public views of water.*

- ◆ **Create a public plaza with an interactive fountain.**



The dock at Liza Jackson Park offers great views of the sunset – and a pretty good fishing hole.

- ◆ **Limit heights of buildings on waterfront.**
- ◆ **Increase short-term docking facilities for visiting boats, like those docking for dinner or entertainment along the waterfront. Some portions of the boardwalk could be used for short-term docking.**

***Objective:** Develop the waterfront boardwalk between Liza Jackson Park and Fort Walton Landing, including access from Miracle Strip Parkway to the waterfront.*

- ◆ **Identify easements from existing and planned developments. The City will work**

with property owners to ensure that their concerns of liability, safety, lighting, etc., are laid to rest.

- ◆ **Allow public access to the waterfront along the boardwalk. The city will work with property owners to gain easements running not only east to west but also north to south. Provide as many entry points as possible to gain access to the boardwalk in addition to Fort Walton Landing, Liza Jackson Park, and Sound Park.**
- ◆ **Obtain funding for the boardwalk from a variety of sources.**

Objective: *Create a pedestrian-friendly area by increasing crosswalks from the neighborhoods north of US 98 to the waterfront area.*

- ◆ **Receive public input on what type of crosswalk is desired and the location(s).**
- ◆ **Work with state and local agencies on permitting and funding.**

Objective: *Allow for more access for boats and recreational craft.*

- ◆ **Pursue locations for additional boat launch facilities.**
- ◆ **Pursue locations for kayak, paddleboat, and canoe launch facilities.**



Fort Walton Landing, in the heart of the downtown waterfront, is a popular location for concerts, weddings and just walking the quiet paths.

Objective: *Link the waterfront to other parts of the city, including city parks and facilities.*

- ◆ **Connect neighborhoods on the north side of U.S. 98 with the waterfront on the south side of the highway by adding pedestrian-friendly intersections and crosswalks, allowing individuals in the neighboring areas access to the waterfront.**

- ◆ Install streetscaping along U.S. 98, including wider sidewalks, plantings, and decorative lighting. Pursue development of a trail along the Coral Creek from U.S. 98 to Robinwood Drive and Hollywood Boulevard.

Environmental and Cultural Protection Goal: Repair, restore, enhance, and maintain the area’s cultural and natural environment.

Objective: *Water quality improvement, including eliminating sewage spills and red tide.*

- ◆ **Bay savers/screens for outfalls:** Purchase and install the products to help filter out debris before stormwater enters the Sound. The City of Fort Walton Beach will be responsible for the upkeep of this equipment.
- ◆ **“Drains to Bay” stencils:** The City has purchased 100 stencils that state “Drains to Bay” for installation on stormwater inlets to educate residents and visitors. To date, some of these stencils have been installed as a joint effort between the City and the Waterfronts Florida Partnership Committee.



Environmental specialist Sam Wilson and WFP Committee Chairman Karen Gercak install a stencil on a storm drain. The stencil reminds residents that stormwater “Drains to Bay.”

Objective: *Shoreline protection and re-establishment of natural vegetation and habitats.*

- ◆ Utilize native vegetation at Sound Park and other City property.
- ◆ Require new construction to preserve native vegetation.

Hazard Mitigation Goal: Ensure preparedness for hazards and their aftermaths.

***Objective:** Limit public expenditures in flood-prone areas to recreational uses and public access.*

- ◆ **Build structures in flood zones that are easily rebuilt or not needed in case of destruction.**
- ◆ **Use grant money for construction and repair if necessary.**

***Objective:** Waterfront property owners should be required to develop a disaster mitigation plan for their property.*

- ◆ **The City Council should utilize the services of technical experts as well as solicit public input to devise a plan to mitigate losses on waterfront properties.**
- ◆ **Require marinas to register hurricane preparedness and mitigation plans with the City. Hurricanes not only cause damage to boats but also to the marinas at which the boats are docked. The plans should explore anchoring restrictions during hurricanes.**

Enhancement of the Waterfront Economy Goal: Restore, enhance, and promote water dependant and related economies.

***Objective:** Reorient downtown to the waterfront.*

- ◆ **Include the historic downtown area and the waterfront area in activities such as festivals, sidewalk sales, etc.**
- ◆ **Have storefronts in the historic downtown area face the waterfront.**

***Objective:** Promote the return of waterfront businesses.*

- ◆ **Make maps available to waterfront visitors at the visitors' center, hotels, military bases, etc.**
- ◆ **Create brochures that advertise the businesses and trades in the downtown area. Have these brochures available in hard copy and online.**
- ◆ **Encourage the waterfront and businesses to work together and develop activities. Such businesses as restaurants on the water can offer activities in conjunction with parks.**
- ◆ **Create a city marina. The City would build a marina for transient boaters only, located near the downtown area. Shore facilities**

such as showers and laundry services may also be considered. This would give the boaters access to restaurants, groceries, video rentals, the City Library, museums and other attractions within walking distance.

Objective: Provide incentives for mixed use on the water, not just condominiums.

- ◆ Provide incentives to new and existing developments for having a mixture of uses on the property.
- ◆ Provide an incentive to property owners for providing public dock space.

Objective: Allow for recreational craft rentals.

- ◆ Allow space for kayak, paddleboat, and canoe rentals and encourage bicycle rentals.
- ◆ Allow for water taxis from Okaloosa Island and surrounding land to Fort Walton Landing and historic downtown Fort Walton Beach and its businesses.

Education Goal: Educate the public on waterfront issues.

Objective: Provide educational resources to the community.

- ◆ Make the City of Fort Walton Beach's Emergency Management Plan available on the City's website.
- ◆ Partner with the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance to present public educational forums or develop written information for public distribution.
- ◆ Provide information about zoning regulations and enforcement on the City's website.
- ◆ Provide information on the Clean Marina Program to local marinas and encourage them to participate.
- ◆ Use existing educational materials from organizations that have already developed such programs.

Recreational and Community Events Goal: Enhance recreational activities and opportunities for community gatherings.

Objective: Enhance existing recreational facilities on the waterfront and purchase additional recreational land if feasible.

- ◆ **Liza Jackson Park:** Add parking, boat ramps, volleyball nets, etc.

- ◆ **Sound Park: Develop a walking trail, interpretive markers, picnic areas, etc.**
- ◆ **The Landing Park: Water feature, performance stage, marina, docks, etc.**

Objective: *Provide for activities collaboratively sponsored by the City and other local groups at parks or businesses, allowing opportunities for the public to come together on the waterfront.*

The following are examples of collaborative sponsored activities.

- ◆ **Billy Bowlegs.**
- ◆ **Arbor Day/Earth Day.**
- ◆ **Kids Day.**
- ◆ **Activities targeted at teenagers.**
- ◆ **Friday Night Flicks.**
- ◆ **Coastal Beach Clean-up.**



Students from Kenwood Elementary School make pine-cone bird feeders as part of an Earth Day celebration at The Landing Park.

CONCLUSION

Waterfront revitalization is not an easy mission. The process is incremental and time-consuming. As a result, “Charting the Course” requires endurance and dedication. The success of the City of Fort Walton Beach waterfront vision depends on commitment and support from the Waterfronts Florida Partnership Committee, local residents and local and state government.

Waterfronts are generally the most scenic and valuable area of a city. The residents of Fort Walton Beach and its City officials recognize their waterfront as an extraordinary asset. More importantly, this community has risen and positioned itself to take measures that will guarantee the waterfront’s health and vitality for all residents and visitors, now and in the future.

As “Charting” implies, there are many steps to take before the waterfront vision can be realized. Visioning exercises are effective only when matched with a workable implementation plan. To remain on course the WFP Committee must follow its many projects and programs to completion. This includes involvement in the City budgeting process to schedule projects, pursuing funding sources, and periodic evaluation and updates of this Vision Plan.

As the plan is implemented, a continued effort to involve the community is critical in order to maintain public support and excitement.

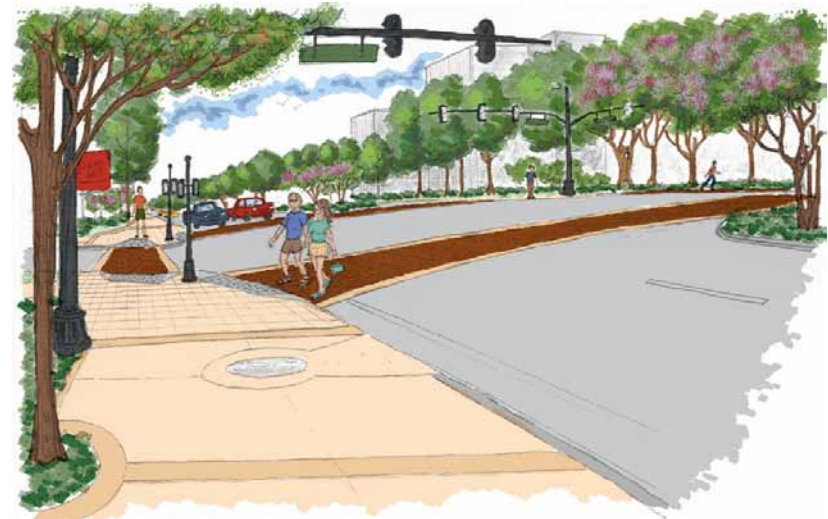
Our vision is to put Fort Walton Beach back on the waterfront map as a place where residents and visitors, boaters and landlubbers, will be inexorably drawn – in short, a world-class waterfront.

Vision: Cedar Avenue and U.S. 98



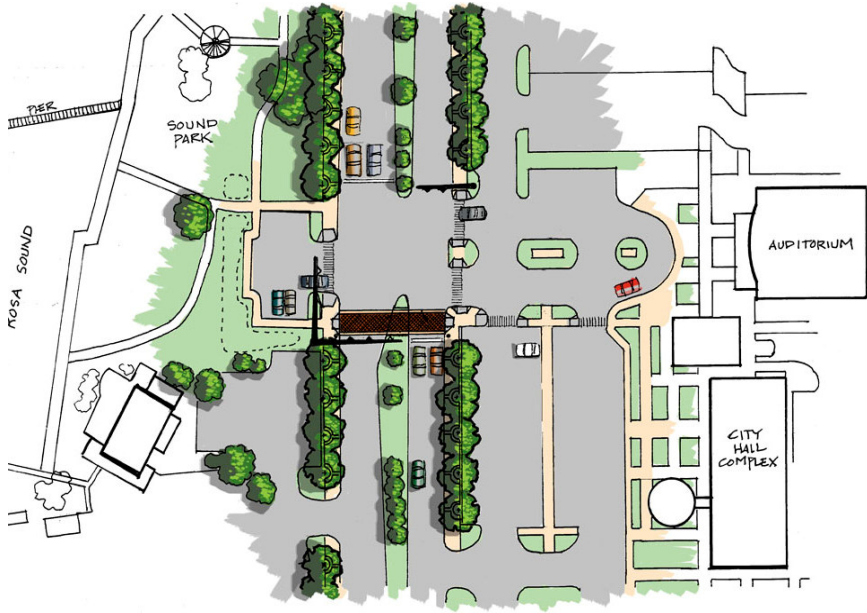
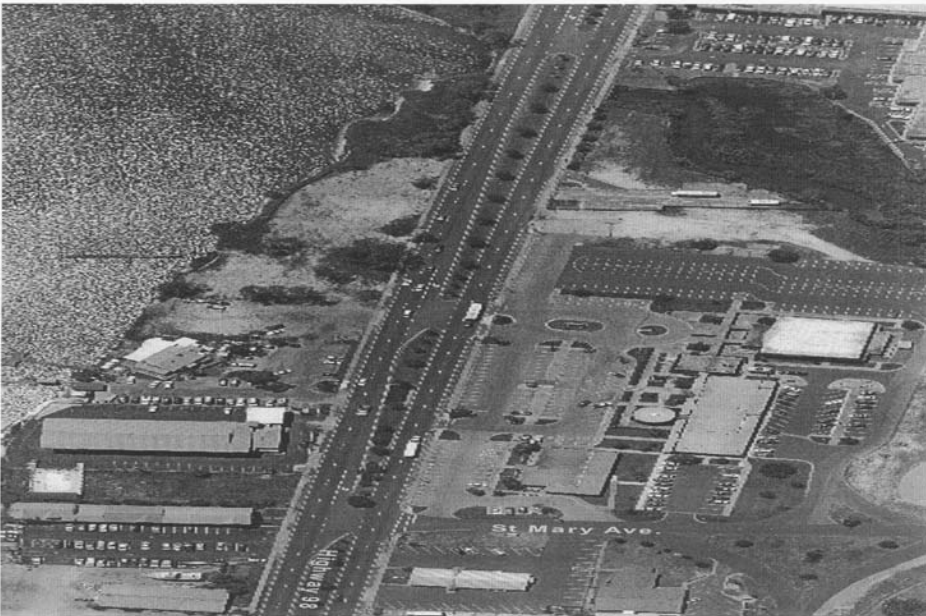
This aerial view shows the layout of the Cedar Avenue pedestrian crosswalk. A signaled crossing at that point would allow residents of nearby housing areas easy access to the south side of U.S. 98, including Sound Park and all the other amenities Fort Walton Beach's waterfront offers.

Vision: U.S. 98 and Cedar Avenue



At left is the intersection of Cedar Avenue and U.S. 98, about a half mile west of downtown Fort Walton Beach and near Sound Park, as it appears today. At right is an artist's conception of how that intersection might look with a pedestrian crosswalk, undergrounded utilities and walker-friendly streetscaping.

Vision: Crosswalk at Sound Park



The aerial photograph shows U.S. 98 as it passes the future Sound Park, the clear area on the left, and Fort Walton Beach City Hall, the complex on the right. The rendering shows how a crosswalk area might lay out to provide access across the busy highway.

Vision: Streetscaping



Streetscaping along U.S. 98 would make the roadway and the nearby Santa Rosa Sound waterfront significantly more inviting and accessible to pedestrians.

APPENDIX A

Fort Walton Beach Waterfronts Florida Program Organizing for Action Workshop Report

Overview

The Waterfronts Florida Program, WFP, provides a framework for constructive, cooperative action needed to plan and implement desired changes in selected communities. The current cities in the program are Bagdad, Bradenton, Fernandina Beach, Fort Walton Beach and Port St. Joe. Thirteen other cities have completed and continue to participate in the WFP.

The Fort Walton Beach WFP Committee has leadership responsibilities along with the City and others. Participation is flexible and voluntary. The partners contribute because they are committed to the common partnership goals and because the partnership benefits them individually. The partners recognize that everyone's time is valuable, and they utilize team-building techniques and technology to minimize effort and maximize results. A directory will be developed to serve as a clearinghouse for information on what each partner is doing.

This is a report of the meeting/workshop held on Jan. 12, 2006. It combines workshop materials with a record of input from the members and is intended to provide a basis that partners can build upon to realize their aspirations. The report does not capture everything or exactly what was said. The agenda is in Appendix A. The stated objectives of the workshop were:

- To clarify the purpose/scope for the Ft. Walton Beach Waterfronts Florida Program.
- To identify key partners and their roles in the WFP.
- To shape a feasible, productive work plan for the WFP.
- To establish communication protocols for coordinating activities.
- To agree on objectives for the WFP community visioning.
- To review guidelines for an effective partnership action.

Opening

Karen Gercak, Chair of the Ft. Walton Beach Waterfronts Program and the Waters Edge Ad Hoc Committee, called meetings of both groups to order and then opened the workshop portion of the meeting. Tom Taylor, a facilitator with the Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium, went over the meeting objectives, agenda (Appendix A) and guidelines (Appendix B). Next everyone introduced themselves and shared what they hoped to get out of the workshop.

Workshop Expectations

- I hope we can focus our efforts, make progress on projects, find ways to better involve the public, and strengthen our networks.
- Address water quality and the environment.
- Progress – get something to physically happen.
- Minutes!
- We need to do something.
- Time to do something.
- I want to see how I can contribute to efforts.
- I hope we can reach consensus of all involved.
- We need to focus on attainable short-term products.
- Fulfill our potential.
- Learn how to involve the public in a serious way.
- Coordinate with the CRA.
- Learn from other communities.
- Shape responsible projects that are in the best interest of the City.
- Establish a vision.
- Energize and revitalize the business district.

Waterfronts Florida Objectives and Community Needs

The group refined a draft list of objectives and needs. The goal was to create a shared list of needs that address the concerns of all partners. This list will be developed further through the visioning process.

(WEMP = Water's Edge Master Plan, CRA = Community Redevelopment Agency)

1. Public Access to the Waterfront
 - a. Develop a waterfront boardwalk between Liza Jackson Park and Brooks Bridge, including access to Miracle Strip Parkway (CRA).

- b. Restore the docks/piers at Fort Walton Beach Landing (WEMP).
 - c. Pursue the development of a public marina at Fort Walton Beach Landing (WEMP).
 - d. Complete Sound Park.
 - e. Ensure that new condos and other buildings and businesses provide access to the boardwalk and the water.
 - f. Provide more boat ramps and parking for the community.
 - g. Increase the number of public marina slips in public and private marinas.
 - h. Ensure public views of the water with a public plaza, etc.
 - i. Establish mooring fields.
2. Hazard Mitigation
- a. Limit public expenditures in flood prone areas to recreational uses or to increase the public's access to the shoreline (Comprehensive Plan).
 - b. Require marinas to have hurricane preparedness plans (WEMP).
 - c. Replace wooden boardwalk and dock materials with concrete and designs that will withstand storms.
 - d. Develop a mitigation plan and the political will to implement it.
 - e. Enforce zoning regulations.
3. Environmental and Cultural Protections
- a. Shoreline protection and reestablishment of natural vegetation and habitats (Comprehensive Plan).
 - b. Water quality improvement, including sewage spills and red tide (WEMP).
 - c. Restoration/protection of historical and archeological sites (CRA).
 - d. Pursue the Clean Marina Program (WEMP).
 - e. Educate residents on wetland protection and stormwater runoff (WEMP).
 - f. Provide pump out stations (WEMP).
 - g. Regulate the aesthetics and urban character of redevelopment without increasing the burdens on owners of the development and permitting process (WEMP).
 - h. Create and enforce noise regulations for boats.
 - i. Regulate jet skis.
 - j. Establish and enforce no-wake zones.
 - k. Control garbage and litter.
4. Enhancement of the Viable Traditional Economy (and the general economy)
- a. Promotion of the waterfront as well as return of waterfront businesses (CRA).
 - b. Reorient downtown to the waterfront (WEMP).
 - c. Find a way to speed up the DEP permitting process.
 - d. Provide incentives for mixed use on the water, not just condos.

- e. Ensure water access to businesses with docks and water taxis.
- f. Provide incentives for dock sharing.
- g. Develop a map and brochure showing water access points and businesses.
- h. Create a pedestrian walk along Coral Creek or Sound Park crossover.
- i. Work with DOT to utilize the outflow near the Brooks Bridge.
- j. Develop a plan for what needs to happen the other side of 98 and provide a way to get people from one side to the other.

Organization for Action

The facilitators suggested that there are four components of a successful partnership: a shared vision, clear roles, coordination mechanisms and procedures for decision-making and conflict resolution. The objectives and needs provide an initial vision for what the partnership wants to achieve. Next, the group refined a set of principles for how they want to work together and a table listing partners, their mission, boundaries for activities and the name of a liaison; some information was added after the workshop.

1. Shape a Shared Vision

The Waterfronts Community Plan will provide the basis for a shared vision. It may also be helpful to define a set of measurable objectives. Each partner's efforts should contribute to the attainment of one or more of the objectives.

A Vision for Working Together: Partnership Principles

The group reviewed the draft list and added items 7 and 8.

1. Inform and include all interested parties (public involvement).
2. Encourage and support success of each partner (in their terms).
3. Maximize the productivity of partner resources.
4. Avoid duplication of efforts.
5. Build consensus, resolve conflicts, and mitigate negative impacts.
6. Promote the value and benefits of variety/diversity.
7. Don't say, "No, we tried it before and it didn't work," or "Been there and done that" without really considering the possibilities.
8. Recognize that anyone can have a good idea.

It is important to recognize that partners will have some aspects of their missions that are different and may even be conflicting. It is critical that contradictions are identified early on and dealt with appropriately to the mutual satisfaction of all parties involved. A partnership directory will be created and used to help identify potential obstacles, as well as contribute to a shared understanding of

the commonalities and differences of each organization. The better the parties understand each other's similarities and differences, the more likely they will be willing to assist each other in achieving their visions and in finding constructive ways to resolve conflicting desires.

2. Clarifying Partners' Roles and Responsibilities

Having a clear understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities, and resources is key to successful partnership building. To be effective it is helpful to know what all partners do and what resources they have. The partnership directory will be one vehicle for making this information available. It will be sorted by role/service and groups served. Meetings, newsletters, and just working together will build the understanding that will allow partners to reduce costs, maximize their effectiveness and minimize duplication of efforts.

Possible Waterfront Program Partners

Partner	Mission	Boundary	Liaison
Waterfronts FL Program	Coordinate historic, cultural and economic revitalization	WFP area	Becki Pence
Waters Edge Committee		Citywide	
Community Redevelopment Agency	Downtown redevelopment	CRA area	
Community Development Services	Planning & Dev. Reg.	Citywide	
Downtown Businesses	Business development and promotion	Business area	
Chamber of Commerce	Increase commerce	Citywide	Ted Corcoran
Sport Fishing Association		Citywide	
Neighborhood Association		By Neighborhood	
Dept. of Transportation	Transportation	Right-of-way	
Okaloosa County			
Civic organizations			
Condo associations			
Emerald Coast Marine Inst.			
Waterfront and other sister communities			

Partner - Participation Chart and Schedule

This table makes it clear that the WFP visioning and action planning builds on past plans and must be done in coordination with other current activities. Each partner needs to be clear on who has the lead and who supports and participates. Understanding how the timeframes interface allows decisions in one process to consider and coordinate with decisions in others.

Examples of Waterfront Related Activities	Lead	Support	Participate	Time-frame
Community Involvement	WFP	CRA CDS	All	On-going
Community Visioning	WFP	CDS	All	Feb-May
CRA Work plan	CRA	CDS	All	Jan-Sep
Neighborhood Plans (4)	CDS	WFP		Jan-on
Waters Edge Implementation	CDS	WFP		ongoing
Land Development Code update	CDS			Mar-Sep
Comprehensive Plan amendments	CDS			Jan-July
Infrastructure improvements	CRA	Pub. Wk	Bus.	Jul-Jun
Community Events	CofC	WFP	All	Jul-Jun
Streetscape Improvements	CRA	Owners		Jul-Jun
Park improvements	Parks	WFP	Volunteers	May-Aug
Boardwalk easements and development	CRA	WFP		May-?
Business renovations	Owners	WFP	Owners	Apr-Jun

3. Establishing Mechanisms for Coordination

Coordination takes time and money and is best done with some centralization. Concentration of power can cause problems. A set of core values of respect, equality, and fairness should be established to minimize conflict. Mechanisms can be built to assure that these values are maintained. The stakeholder meeting in February 2003 developed these guidelines for coordination:

- Identify and contact property owners, businesses and renters and involve them in planning and coordinating improvements to public and private properties.
- Get everyone involved in visioning and other community activities.
- Involve business in supporting the community activities and making property improvements that will help their businesses grow.

The following mechanisms can be used for communications and coordination:

- E-mail and regular mail.
- Community workshops.
- Action teams.
- Neighborhood meetings.
- Phone calls (possibly using a “phone tree”).
- Real estate-type signs announcing meetings.
- Newsletters: Fort Walton Beach Quarterly letter.
- Bill stuffers.
- Promote and use the project web site.
- Partner liaisons share information and gather input.
- Speakers who present to area groups.

These communication guidelines were developed at a special meeting:

- Listen for understanding and consider all views.
- State our impressions or perceptions tentatively, subject to clarification, not as absolute facts.
- Avoid absolute statements such as “never” or “always.”
- Take responsibility for our own opinions: “I think or feel...” not “you are...”
- Ask questions to clarify assumptions and conclusions.
- Deal with burrs under the saddle respectfully in person and in meetings, be specific, and speak for ourselves.
- Respect each other even when we disagree.

4. Decision Making and Conflict Resolution

As indicated in the chart below, stakeholders, staff, the WFP committee, and associations have some decisions they make on their own and others that need to be made jointly. Wherever possible, decisions will be made by consensus. When consensus is not possible, decisions will be made by the WFP Committee and/or the group(s) providing resources. For example, recommendations in the WFP Work plan will be reviewed and approved by the CRA, City, County or others.

Partners (see matrix)	WFP Staff	WFP Committee
Make decisions on activities only affecting their property or program and reports efforts that improve the community to Staff so they and the project can get credit. Participate in workshops and neighborhood meetings	Make routine and logistical program decisions. Work with stakeholders and others when coordination is needed. Bring decisions on special activities (esp. those needing money or time) to the Waterfronts Florida committee for approval	The WFP Committee reports to City Council on planning progress. The WFP Committee will recommend a proposed plan to City Council. The Council will adopt the plan and transmit it to the other partners.

Conflict Resolution Procedure

Despite good intentions, there will inevitably be conflicts between partners. Too often these lead to costly battles that undermine the effectiveness of all groups involved, cause supporters and staff to leave, and are inconsistent with the values the partners espouse. These problems can be addressed by having partners commit to a conflict resolution process where:

- Parties agree to meet and seek an acceptable resolution.
- If they can't agree they bring in a mediator/facilitator to assist them.
- If they still can't agree, they request a recommendation from an arbitrator or neutral body (an expert, a commissioner, the court, etc.).
- If they still can't agree, they decide how they can most respectfully disagree and possibly compete.

Community Visioning Preparation

The second step in the WFP process is to develop a vision and work plan. The participants discussed a set of visioning preparation questions. Their direction is noted below:

What are the objectives of the visioning process?

The group discussed these possible objectives, and then each person was given an opportunity to vote for the three objectives they felt/thought are the most important to focus on. The objectives are listed in order, with the number of votes on the right.

Objectives	Votes
1. To identify what people treasure and want to maintain in the community.	11
2. To develop focused, feasible strategies and action plans.	9
3. To seek agreement on common desired outcomes.	7
4. To build broad commitment needed for plan adoption and implementation.	4
5. To identify differing desires and how to balance them.	2
6. To establish needed organizational structures and coordination mechanisms.	2
7. To create a sense of identity for the area.	1

What are the geographic boundaries for the visioning process?

It was acknowledged that different activities and partners work within different boundaries, e.g. the Community Redevelopment Area, Mainstreet, etc. It was agreed that the focus will be on the current WFP boundaries and that work on some issues may extend beyond these boundaries.

What is included in the scope of issues?

Participants made the following changes in the initial scope of issues to be addressed in the visioning process.

1. Land use and zoning.
2. Urban design and landscaping, including public docks.
3. ~~Building design.~~
4. Infrastructure: stormwater, streets, Internet.
5. Environmental protection.
6. Economic development.
7. Cultural and recreational activities.
8. ~~Education.~~
9. ~~Housing rehabilitation and development.~~
10. Governance.
11. Hazard mitigation.
12. Water access.

Comments on the scope

- There has been a lot of planning done already. We need to build on the Water's Edge and other visioning efforts.
- The focus should be more on the implementation of existing plans and expanding the involvement of more partners than before.

Who should be involved?

It was agreed that these general categories of participants be involved and that the Partners Matrix done earlier will provide a more detailed list.

- Waterfronts Florida Partnership Committee and Waterfronts Florida Partnership Partners.
- Area businesses and owners.
- Area residents and owners.
- Citizens from outside the area.

How long should the visioning process take?

It is hoped that the visioning process can be completed between February and May.

How should stakeholders be involved?

These involvement options were discussed:

- Open public workshops.
- A designated visioning taskforce or work group.
- Topic groups or subcommittees.
- Mail, phone and/or on-line surveys.
- Formal public hearings for input on prepared plans.

The general approach they agreed to was to have an initial vision clarification workshop and then form subcommittees to develop draft action plans that will be developed and refined in a final community consensus workshop. The WFP Steering Committee will guide the process, but the final decisions will be made by the community in the consensus workshop.

Who has the lead in managing the visioning process?

Rebecca Pence, WFP Manager, will have the lead on the visioning process. She will work closely with the WFP Steering Committee to plan and implement a successful process.

Who provides what technical support?

A successful visioning process requires a combination of community input and expert legal, engineering, planning and other advise. This will be provided by the WFP staff from the Florida Department of Community Affairs, City staff, planning consultants, organizations, civic and community groups, and others.

Who will provide ongoing monitoring and management?

It is good to think about how vision/plan implementation will be managed over the long run. This could be done by the City, an existing community group, or a new non-profit.

Who is going to contribute to the costs and effort of the visioning process?

It was made clear that the Waterfronts Florida Program can be used to fund the visioning but that there will not be additional money from the Department of Community Affairs in this fiscal year. Funds could come from the CRA, City government, community partners, and/or others, but no commitments were made at this time.

Next Steps

The WFP Steering Committee will meet to work out the details of the visioning/action planning process and determine responsibilities and funding.

Closing

The facilitator reviewed the meeting activities, products, and next steps and reinforced the key concepts using the guidelines in Appendix B. Then each participant was given the opportunity to offer a concluding comment on what was accomplished in the workshop and what to consider as the process moves forward.

Concluding Comments

- We need to find a way to get more public involvement.
- We want the group and the public to be excited.
- It was good to see the State people come back. It is a good show of support.
- I see progress and positive vibrations.
- If we use half of what you have given us, we will succeed.

- I feel very positive. I have great hope for the group.
- I enjoyed the workshop. This was a good way to look at the process and standards. It is easy to say "plan" but harder to carry through.
- We have a plan.
- We need training every so often.
- It was helpful to have a forum to talk.
- I want to implement one high-profile project as soon as possible.
- I am excited about Sound Park and the connection along Coral Creek.
- Things are getting clearer, and we have some tools we can use.
- These are great methods and tools. We just have to remember to use them. Waterfronts Florida provides a common denominator and focus for our efforts.
- It is great to meet the people I will be working with.

Appendix A

Fort Walton Beach Waterfronts Florida Program Organizing for Action Workshop

Objectives

To clarify the purpose and scope for the Ft. Walton Beach Waterfronts Florida Program.
To identify key partners and their roles in the WFP.
To shape a feasible, productive work plan for the WFP.
To establish communication protocols for coordinating activities.
To agree on objectives for the WFP community visioning.
To review guidelines for an effective partnership action.

Develop a 1 1/2-year work plan for WFP activities – p 6

Agenda

5:00 Opening

Meeting objectives and agenda
General guidelines – page 2
Introductions and listing of meeting expectations

5:15 Waterfronts Florida Program and Local Objectives and Needs

Refine draft list of community needs by WFP objectives and needs – p 3
Solicit suggestions for other Ft. Walton Beach specific obj., refine as needed
Record comments on needs for each of the additional objectives
Rank objectives and discuss results

6:15 Break

6:30 Organization for Action

Agree on Partnership Principles – p 4
Refine the WFP Partnership Matrix with leaders, scope and roles – p 5

7:45

Review communication, coordination and conflict resolution protocols – 6-7

Community Visioning Preparation

Complete the Visioning worksheet – p 8-9
Determine preparation tasks and responsibilities
Visioning and agenda planning
Invitations and publicity
Obtaining resources: funding and contributions

8:15 Closing

Review meeting activities and accomplishments and next steps
Discuss vision/action, partnership and facilitation concepts
Concluding comments from participants
Meeting evaluation

8:30 Adjourn

Appendix B

Waterfronts Florida Program Guidelines

1. A shared vision.
2. A sense of community.
3. A management group.
4. Committed partners.
5. Community celebrations.
6. Close coordination with planners.
7. Connection with an independent group with access to resources.
8. Proactive tourism development.
9. Political and community support.
10. Strong public involvement.

Steps in the Waterfront Florida Process

1. Form a Waterfronts Florida Partnership committee and a participation plan.
2. Shape a community vision for the waterfront program area.
3. Create a community action plan for the waterfront program area.
4. Implement the action plan priorities ('06-07).

Partnership Guidelines

1. Shape a shared vision.
2. Clarify partners roles and responsibilities.
3. Establish mechanisms for coordination.
4. Agree on how decisions will be made and conflicts resolved.

Basic Steps in Program and Meeting Processes

1. Build the foundation.
 - a. Establish a cooperative climate.
 - b. Explore issues and interests from all perspectives.
 - c. Agree on common challenges.
2. Explore a full range of options.
 - a. Establish a cooperative climate.
 - b. Brainstorm all possible ideas.
 - c. Integrate ideas into clear alternatives.
3. Seek agreement.
 - a. Evaluate the alternatives.
 - b. Seek consensus agreements.
 - c. Assure optimal, feasible and practical plans.

APPENDIX B

Fort Walton Beach Waterfronts Florida Program Charting the Course Visioning Exercise Summary Report

I. Acknowledgements

This project was undertaken by the City of Fort Walton Beach and Waterfront Florida Program (WFP) Committee. The consultants Herbert - Halback, Inc. (HHI), planning consultants was hired to facilitate the Charting the Course Visioning Exercise.

The project team would like to express their gratitude to all the residents, property owners, and interested parties who participated in the public workshop. Their opinions are the basis of the findings in this Summary Report.

II. Overview of the Department of Community Affairs Waterfronts Florida Program

Historically, waterfronts were areas where a host of commercial activities such as shipping or fishing once thrived. However, due to advancements in technology and societal changes, waterfronts have experienced economic decline, deterioration, and neglect.

In 1997, the Department of Community Affairs established the Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program. The program's purpose is to assist communities in revitalization and promoting their waterfront district. The program's four goals include: environmental and cultural resource protection, public access, retention of viable traditional waterfront economies, and hazard mitigation.

The Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program recognizes three types of waterfront uses: water-dependent, water-related, and water-enhanced.

Water-dependent uses are activities that can be carried out only on, in or adjacent to water areas, such as waterborne transportation and recreation.

Water-related uses are activities not directly dependent on access to a water body, but provide goods and services directly associated with water-dependent or waterway uses, such as marine hardware.

Water enhanced uses are activities, due to proximity to the waterfront, are enhanced such as restaurants and cultural facilities.

III. Fort Walton Beach Waterfront Florida Program

During the 2005-2007 Waterfronts Partnership Program Cycle, the City of Fort Walton Beach was one of five communities selected to participate as a Waterfronts Community. As a benefit, the State will provide technical and financial assistance for two years.

In response, the City of Fort Walton Beach instituted its Waterfront Program, hired personnel, and established its Waterfront Program (WFP) Committee.

On January 12, 2006, the WFP Committee had an “Organizing for Action Workshop” to define the following:

- To clarify the purpose and scope
- Identify key partners and roles
- Develop a work plan
- Establish communication protocols and coordinating activities
- Review guidelines for an effective partnership action
- Outline objectives for the WFP Community Visioning

In addition, the WFP Committee felt it was important for the visioning process to achieve the following:

- To identify what people treasure and want to maintain in the community.
- To develop focused, feasible strategies and action plans.
- To seek agreement on common desired outcomes.
- To build broad commitment needed for plan adoption and implementation.
- To identify differing desires and how to balance them.
- To establish needed organizational structures and coordination mechanisms.
- To create a sense of identity for the area.

IV. Purpose of the Charting the Course: Visioning Exercise

The Charting the Course: Visioning Exercise was initiated by the WFP Committee as a community-based initiative. The first step in this three step process was to view the Charting the Course presentation - an overview of Florida's and Fort Walton Beach's Waterfronts Program. Secondly, each individual was provided a list of objectives drafted by the WFP Committee to prioritize, refine, or recommend new objectives. The third step contained a mapping exercise displaying the community's top priorities on an aerial map.

The visioning exercise was held on March 7, 2006. After viewing the Charting Course Presentation, the community was dispersed into three groups. Their responsibility was to determine the top three priorities for each topic area – Public Access to the Waterfront, Hazard Mitigation, Environmental and Cultural Protections, and Enhancement of Traditional and General Economy.

The rationale behind these exercises was to engage the Fort Walton Beach community in developing its vision for the waterfront. The workshop creates a framework for a waterfront strategic plan that is supported by the community and the City's leadership.

V. The WFP Committee Waterfronts Program Goals, Objectives, and Visioning Exercise Results

Based on the input received during the visioning exercise, several key findings were developed.

Public Access to the Waterfront

Public access is imperative to any successful waterfront; and it is the foundation and the main feature of waterfront revitalization.

The primary challenge for public access is finding a balance between the need to provide residents and visitors with access to the waterfront and the rights of adjacent property owners and businesses.

Below is the WFP Committee's Public Access to the Waterfront objectives. Table 1 represents the community prioritization of these objectives.

- a. Develop a waterfront boardwalk between Liza Jackson Park and Brooks Bridge, including access to Miracle Strip Parkway (CRA).
- b. Restore the docks/piers at Fort Walton Beach Landing (WEMP).
- c. Pursue the development of a public marina at Fort Walton Beach Landing.

- d. Complete Sound Park.
- e. Ensure that new condos and other buildings and businesses provide access to the boardwalk and the water.
- f. Provide more boat ramps and parking for the community.
- g. Increase the number of public marina slips in public and private marinas.
- h. Ensure public views of water with a public plaza, etc.
- i. Establish mooring fields.

Table 1: Prioritizing Public Access to the Waterfront Objectives

OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
Develop a waterfront boardwalk between Liza Jackson Park and Brooks Bridge, including access to Miracle Strip Parkway (CRA).	Group 1- Priority 1 Group 2- Priority 3 Group 3- Priority 1
Restore the docks/piers at Fort Walton Beach Landing (WEMP).	
Pursue the development of a public marina at Fort Walton Beach Landing.	
Complete Sound Park.	Group 2- Priority 1
Ensure that new condos and other buildings and businesses provide access to the boardwalk and the water.	Group 3- Priority 3
Provide more boat ramps and parking for the community.	
Increase the number of public marina slips in public and private marinas.	
Ensure public views of water with a public plaza, etc.	Group 2- Priority 2 Group 3- Priority 2
Establish mooring fields.	Group 1 – Priority 2
Other Comments: More Short Term Docking (not overnight)	Group 1 – Priority 3

Hazard Mitigation

Hazard mitigation is defined as an action that is taken to reduce permanent risk to people, property, and the environment. Natural hazards include floods, hurricanes, storm surges, and erosion. Man-made hazards consist of toxic waste such as oil spills and chemical run-off.

Waterfronts are extremely vulnerable to natural or man-made hazards. Therefore, it is important that hazard mitigation is incorporated in the planning process.

Below are the WFP Committee's Hazard Mitigation objectives. Table 2 represents the community prioritization of these objectives.

- a. Limit public expenditures in flood prone areas to recreational uses or to increase the public's access to the shoreline (Comprehensive Plan).
- b. Require marinas to have hurricane preparedness plans (WEMP).
- c. Replace wooden boardwalk and dock material with concrete and design that will withstand storms.
- d. Develop a mitigation plan and the political will to implement it.
- e. Enforce zoning regulations.

Table 2: Prioritizing Hazard Mitigation Objectives

OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
Limit public expenditures in flood prone areas to recreational uses or to increase the public's access to the shore line (Comprehensive Plan).	Group 1- Priority 2 Group 2 - Priority 1 Group 3 - Priority 1
Require marinas to have hurricane preparedness plans (WEMP).	Group 3 - Priority 3
Replace wooden boardwalk and dock material with concrete and design that will withstand storms.	
Develop a mitigation plan and the political will to implement it.	Group 1- Priority 1 Group 2 - Priority 3

Environmental and Cultural Protections

Waterfront communities grow in part due to their coastal and environmental resources. The distinctive union between natural resources, human influence, and land makes waterfront communities an unique and viable space for trade, transportation, housing, entertainment, and tourism.

Below are the WFP Committee's Environmental and Cultural Protections objectives. Table 3 represents the community prioritization of these objectives:

- a. Shoreline protection and reestablishment of natural vegetation and habitats (Comprehensive Plan).
- b. Water quality improvement, including sewage spills and redtide (WEMP).
- c. Restoration/protection of historical and archeological sites (CRA).
- d. Pursue the Clean Marina Program (WEMP).
- e. Educate residents on wetland protection and storm water run off (WEMP).
- f. Provide pump out stations (WEMP).
- g. Regulate aesthetics and urban character of redevelopment without increasing the burdens on owners of the development and permitting process (WEMP).
- h. Create and enforce noise regulations for boats.
- i. Regulate jet skis.
- j. Establish and enforce no-wake zones.
- k. Control garbage and litter.

Table 3: Prioritizing Environmental and Cultural Protection

OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
Shoreline protection and reestablishment of natural vegetation and habitats (Comprehensive Plan).	Group 2 - Priority 2 Group 3 - Priority 1
Water quality improvement, including sewage spills and redtide (WEMP).	Group 1- Priority 1 Group 2 - Priority 1 Group 3 - Priority 2
Restoration/protection of historical and archeological sites (CRA).	Group 1- Priority 2
Pursue the Clean Marina Program (WEMP).	
Educate residents on wetland protection and storm water run off (WEMP).	Group 2 - Priority 3
Provide pump out stations (WEMP).	
Regulate aesthetics and urban character of redevelopment without increasing the burdens on owners of the development and permitting process (WEMP).	
Create and enforce noise regulations for boats.	
Regulate jet skis.	
Establish and enforce no-wake zones.	Group 1- Priority 3
Control garbage and litter.	Group 3 - Priority 3

Enhancement of Viable Traditional and General Waterfront Economy

Traditionally, waterfronts are extremely crucial to the economic well-being of a community. Water activities range from local fishing and fish markets to ports for cruise ships and military vessels. Depending on the community, traditional economy may consist of seafood processing, cargo ships, vacation, and winter retreats.

Below is the list of the WFP Committee's Enhancement of the Viable Traditional and General Economy objectives. Table 4 represents the community prioritization of these objectives:

- a. Promotion of the waterfront as well as return of waterfront businesses (CRA).
- b. Reorient downtown to the waterfront (WEMP).
- c. Find a way to speed up the DEP permitting process.
- d. Provide incentives for mixed use on the water; not just condos.
- e. Provide incentives for dock sharing.
- f. Develop a map and brochure showing water access points and businesses.
- g. Create a pedestrian walk along Coral Ditch and Sound Park Crossover.
- h. Develop a plan for what needs to happen on the other side of 98 and provide a way to get people from one side to the other.

Table 4: Prioritizing Enhancement of the Viable Traditional and General Economies Objectives

OBJECTIVES	RESULTS
Promotion of the waterfront as well as return of waterfront businesses (CRA)	Group 1- Priority 2 – to include maps and brochures Table 2 - Priority 3
Reorient downtown to the waterfront (WEMP).	Group 1- Priority 1 Group 3 - Priority 2
Find a way to speed up the DEP permitting process.	
Provide incentives for mixed use on the water; not just condos.	Group 1- Priority 3 Group 2 - Priority 1
Provide incentives for dock sharing.	Group 3 - Priority 3
Develop a map and brochure showing water access points and businesses.	
Create a pedestrian walk along Coral Ditch and Sound Park Crossover.	Group 3 - Priority 1
Develop a plan for what needs to happen on the other side of 98 and provide a way to get people from one side to the other.	Group 2 - Priority 2

Visioning Exercise Results

The residents were divided into three groups. Each group was given the task to prioritize top three objectives in each category – Public Access, Hazard Mitigation, Environmental and Cultural Protections, and Enhancement of the Viable Traditional and General Economy. The objectives are listed in order of priority unless otherwise stated.

Public Access

1. Develop the waterfront boardwalk between Liza Jackson and Brooks Bridge, including access to Miracle Strip by gathering easements from new and existing developments. The boardwalk should allow access to a beach (CRA with additional language).
2. Ensure public views of water with a public plaza, etc.

There was no clear third priority.

Hazard Mitigation

1. Limit public expenditures in flood prone areas to recreational uses or to increase the public's access to the shoreline (Comprehensive Plan).
2. Develop a mitigation plan and the political will to implement it.
3. Enforce zoning regulations.

Environmental and Cultural Protections

1. Water quality improvement, including sewage spills and red tide (WEMP).
2. Shoreline protection and reestablishment of natural vegetation and habitats (Comprehensive Plan).

There was no clear third priority.

Enhancement of the Viable Traditional and General Economy

All of the following objectives were equally ranked amongst participants. There were no first or third priorities.

1. Reorient downtown to the waterfront (WEMP).
2. Promotion of the waterfront as well as return of waterfront businesses to include maps and brochures (CRA/ with additional language).
3. Provide incentives for mixed use on the water; not just condos.

VI. Conclusion

Waterfront revitalization is not an easy mission. The process is incremental, and time-consuming. As a result, *Charting the Course* requires endurance and dedication.

The success of the City of Fort Walton Beach Waterfront Program depends on the local government having a politically influenced, visionary, and fiscally feasible waterfront strategic plan.

Waterfronts are generally the most scenic and most valuable area of a city, and the residents of Fort Walton Beach and its City officials recognize their waterfront as an extraordinary asset. More importantly, this community has risen and positioned itself to take measures that will guarantee the waterfront's health and vitality for all residents and visitors, both existing and future.

VII. Next Steps

Visioning exercises are only effective with a workable plan. HHI recommends that the WFP Committee conduct an assessment of the summary's findings and develop a waterfronts strategic plan. The plan should emphasize the community's prioritization list, a schedule for projects, and a practical budget. However as this plan emerges, a continued effort of community involvement is required in order to maintain public support and attentiveness.

Source: The Fort Walton Beach Waterfronts Florida Program Organizing For Action Report, the State of Florida Department of Community Affairs, and Watermarks Technical Briefs on Coastal Waterfront Revitalization.