

EATONVILLE TOWN CENTER DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT NARRATIVE EATONVILLE, FLORIDA

I. HISTORIC AND STATISTICAL BACKGROUND:

The Town of Eatonville, Florida is located north of Orlando and immediately west of Maitland, Florida in the center of the state.

On August 18, 1887, ten years after Reconstruction (1863-1877), a group of twenty-seven Negro men (led by Joseph Clark) convened for the purpose of founding, what would turn out to be, the first incorporated African American settlement in the United States. Eatonville was named for Mr. Josiah Eaton, who had served as mayor of the adjoining town of Maitland. The majority of Eatonville's initial residents had previously been residents of Maitland.

- Eatonville has a total land area of 1.1 square miles and a current population of 2,159 residents contained within 674 households. The population is further defined as:
 - 36% female single adult households
 - 29% married couples living together
 - 8% over the age of 65 living alone
 - 27% all others

- The racial makeup of the town is:
 - 85% African American
 - 13% white
 - 2% other

- Median income in the town is \$29,331. Median home/dwelling value is \$119,300. Approximately 27% of the town population (18% of the family population) has earnings below the poverty line.

Currently the town sits in the middle of a vibrant and economically active sub market of the Central Florida area. Nonetheless, economic conditions have held the town from experiencing growth and meaningful progress over the years since its creation. This small, close knit town has been bypassed by the rapid growth of the area, but fortunately has avoided the decline of many minority communities formed in southern metropolitan areas during the same period. As a result, it retains the peaceful, intimate, family centered character characterized by its late nineteenth century rural identity.

A significant stabilizing factor in the town's sustainability in the early years was the creation of the Hungerford Vocational High School, founded by Professor and Mrs.

Russell C. Calhoun in 1897. Both the professor and his wife attended the Tuskegee Institute. In the spring of 1898, along with the help of friends and relatives, Mr. E C. Hungerford donated to the school 160 acres (0.65 km²) of land in memory of his late doctor son, Robert, who died of yellow fever after caring for others within his community.

The groundwork for the school was possible thanks to donors not only from Florida, but throughout the country. By 1927, the school had expanded significantly, with over 100 boarding pupils, a number of day students, and night classes for adults. As a private school, Hungerford required each citizen to make personal arrangements in order to attend the institution.

By 1938, Orange County began making arrangements for African American High School students of the area to attend Hungerford as part of an area segregation program. The institution was equipped with a dining hall, chapel, library, manual training shops, laundry, home economics laboratory, barn, farm land and facilities for teaching business subjects. Only the chapel remains.

It embraced both college preparatory and vocational training, including subjects such as English, Latin, history, general science, biology, algebra, geometry, manual training (industrial arts), home economics, typing, bookkeeping, agriculture and physical education.

In 1950, the Hungerford School became a public school administered by Orange County (Florida) School Board. In 2007, in spite of a consistent graduation rate of 98%, the Board voted to close the school, making the 115 acre site available for redevelopment. The Town of Eatonville assumed the obligation of defining and advancing a future vision for the site with homage to the town history and the community desires to present a strong new positive image to Central Florida.

A number of notable residents have come from Eatonville, including the author Zora Neal Hurston and professional football player Deacon Jones. The Zora Neale Festival of Arts and Humanities, an internationally recognized event, is held in Eatonville in late January of each year. The Festival celebrates contributions by people of African descent, featuring lectures, workshops, concerts and fine arts demonstrations.

II. DEVELOPMENT STORY

Prior to an agreement between The Town of Eatonville and the Orange County School Board for the acquisition and transfer of title for the residual site formerly known as Hungerford School, the Town set out to advance a community based vision for the use of the land in support of its needs, identity, and lifestyle benefits. A number of visioning exercises were undertaken and a verbal narrative unfolded that focused on facilities and employment that would:

- Honor the history of Eatonville,
- Provide for educational and vocational training for its city residents,
- Provide for housing of higher quality that historically found in the community,
- Create employment that combined with education would offer career paths of promise,
- Attract retail venues to serve resident needs, and
- Create recreational facilities for resident and area populations to enjoy.

Unaware of this published community vision, the Town was approached in 2013 by Mr. Richard Shassian, (founder of Essian Construction, LLC and an avid supporter of youth sports) with a proposal to create a regional indoor sports complex for area youth. Mindful of the pending purchase between Orange County School Board and the Town of Eatonville, Mr. Shassian's plan sought to serve his primarily public purpose on a portion of the land area. Upon recognizing the equally important civic need in Eatonville, he expanded his vision to include a number of synergistic elements expanding his focus to the entire tract.

As a result, Mr. Shassian formed SKL Equities of Eatonville, LLC to serve as a private development enterprise and to enter into an agreement to purchase the entire site under contract by the Town of Eatonville with the Orange County School Board. Upon execution of a Contract to Purchase between SKL Equities and the Town of Eatonville, the SKL team set forth a land plan vision for the entire tract that blended opportunities, needs, and market conditions into a mixed use infill town center. Early land use patterns were reviewed informally by Town officials and image boards characterizing potential size, scale and scope of the SKL concept were enthusiastically received.

While the vision document prepared by SKL is subject to vetting through the Land Use and Zoning procedures of the Town of Eatonville, it remains a basic guiding document that appears to respect and respond to Town and private objectives in positive ways. The current concept plan considers the following elements as its primary ingredients:

- **Indoor Sports Facility (Dome)**

A large air supported enclosed sports field/complex (approximate clear interior dimensions of 250' x 500') supported upon a liner building of one to two stories forms the center piece of the sports complex. The liner buildings are intended to house management, locker, training, classroom, storage, mechanical and other functions directly related to the field activities which change seasonally according to sport priorities.

- **Main Street, Sports Central**

A main gateway into the parcel providing for anchor retail big box tenants as terminal features bookending the enclosed sports field "front door", and street front office/retail/commercial tenant spaces focused on sport related vending including sports medicine, fitness training, diet/nutrition, and boutique sport specialty shops carrying apparel and equipment sales and rentals.

- **Wymore Road Retail Frontage**

High profile retail, restaurant, entertainment, and accommodation components focused on Interstate Highway exposure between two proximate interstate interchange locations.

- **Education Campus**

A candidate location for a charter school or vocational school operation whose campus needs could be complemented by convenience to the Indoor Sports Facility, an existing auditorium/gymnasium preserved from the public school past, and a public library adjoining the proposed location.

- **Civic/Cultural Facilities**

A refreshed auditorium/gymnasium made available to public and private gatherings combined with a reconstruction of the original two-story Hungerford School classroom building and dedicated to area history and civic celebration form this complex. A highly visible site at the intersection of Wymore Road and Kennedy Blvd. is also identified as a place card for the historic chapel, refreshed and made a signature focal point at the Towns major gateway.

- **Multi-Family Community**

A market rate garden apartment development positioned along the shoreline of a man-made lake and independently accessed off Wymore Road while preserving internal access to sport and entertainment conveniences hallmarks the southern approach.

- **Single-Family Neighborhood**

An ownership neighborhood offering quality entry level housing in mid density formulations is included to attract younger workforce residents to the community.

- **Congregate Infrastructure**

Excluding the residential components, parking is envisioned as a shared infrastructure along with a central storm water management system. They are designed to meet operating needs with flexibility, to accommodate use for major event forums (such as the Zora Neale Festival), and to potentially adapt in the future to structured parking as intensity within the village center grows.

- **Public Park Areas**

Selected lands of environmentally important and naturally distinctive character are set aside as public park areas for all Town and area residents to enjoy.

III. STRONG AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

The redevelopment site is strategically surrounded by high income households, and quality corporate employment centers.

The Interstate highway carries significant traffic and resulting exposure, and allows access to the site from two interchanges positioned north and south of the location. Major upgrades in the Interstate at this location are proposed to elevate capacity and visibility for drivers.

The hard rail commuter train (SunRail) scheduled for inaugural use within a calendar years is less than one mile from the site.

Undeveloped or underdeveloped lands of as high a quality of visibility and community importance in the larger general area are not to be found.

The political climate for proactive approval of worthwhile ventures is at its apex.

The best of all venture environments exist.

IV. VISION IMPLEMENTATION

This vision document sought to optimize the infill benefits of the site and the high traffic exposure and access from the Interstate frontage, with sport, retail, civic, and residential presentations whose aggregate identity could become an important refreshed image for the Town of Eatonville; and whose education and business activities could become opportunity events for the Town's residents.