

## South Florida Avenue Strategic Master Plan

Phase 1 Assessment
May 2022



## Acknowledgments

Ayres would like to thank the Lakeland CRA staff and various department representatives who provided valuable feedback and guidance for the preparation of the South Florida Avenue Strategic Master Plan project.

Name	CED Project Management
Alis Drumgo,	Asst. CED Director
D'Ariel Reed	Community & Economic Dev
Name	Deales O Deales I Deletis Wester Organia
Name	Parks & Rec and Public Works Group
Ryan Lazenby	Engineering
Theresa Schwartz	Traffic Eng.
Richard Baker	Facilities Mgr.
Bob Donahay	Parks & Rec
Pamela Page	Parks & Rec
Bessie Reina	FDOT
Name	Community & Economic Dev Group
Emily Foster	Historic Preservation
Brian Rewis	Director
Teresa Maio	Assistant Director
Charles Barmby	Planning & Transportation
Jonathan Rodriguez	Neighborhoods
Cindy Glover	Community Engagement
Damaris Stull	Planning
Matthew Lyons	Chief Planner
Abbas Jaffer	Business Development
Michael Smith	Housing
Annie Gibson	Housing
Name	Public Safety & Communications Group
Ruben Garcia	Chief of Police
Hans Lehman	Asst. Chief of Police
Douglas Riley	Fire Chief
Kevin Cook	Communications Director

Name	Utilities & Infrastructure Group
Bill Anderson	Water Utilities Director
David Bayhan	Water Utilities Asst. Dir.
Robert Kniss	Water Utilities Engineering Super.
Joey Curry	Lakeland Electric Asst. GM
Tracy Kirkpatrick	GIS Manager
Oscar Torres	IT Director
Toni Panaou	Water Engineering
Richard Hesse	Telecommunications Manager
Neil Cleveland	Fiber Optics Super.
Name	Community/ED Partners Group
Rodriguez Laura	Lakeland Vision
Amy Wiggins	Lakeland Chamber
Sean Malott	CFDC
Julie Townsend	Downtown Dev. Authority
Jason Willey	Manager of Special Projects
Angel Davis	Office of Innovation and Strategy
Matt Lukens	The Apiary
Name	AYRES Work Group
Amanda Arnold	Urban Planner
Aaron O'Keefe	GIS Specialist
Binoy Panicker	Urban Planner/Designer
Chris Silewski	Landscape Architect/Urban Designer
Jeffrey Siewert	Transportation Engineer
Karina Veaudry	Landscape Architect
Matt Ivie	Civil Utilities Engineer
Mike Noesen	Traffic Engineer
Mohamad Gebarin	Transportation Engineer
Paige Bernhardt	Landscape Designer
Shiv Sharma	Transportation Designer

### South Florida Avenue Strategic Master Plan

#### **CONTENTS**

•	Project Background	04
	Introduction	
	Previous Studies	
	Study Area Analysis	
	Where we are today?	
•	Opportunities and Challenges	16
	Enhanced Corridor Experience	
	Safe Transportation for all Users	
	Contextual Public Realm Design	
	Resilient Land Use and Economic Development	
•	Planning Principles	42
	Strategic Master Plan Principles	
	Vision	
	Next Steps	
Appendix		47
	Assessment Maps and Analysis	



The South Florida Avenue District is to be considered in the context of the City as a whole, programmed and designed to serve a purpose and function, and which inclusively meets the community's aspirations.

As urban areas continue to thrive and grow, inclusiveness, urban culture, and experiential living calls for investing in the redevelopment of the core city, and to leverage our existing infrastructure investments. Carefully done, this will result in vibrant communities that have character, and which offer attractive opportunities to invest.

#### Introduction

Ayres was appointed by the City of Lakeland to study the opportunities and challenges and prepare a Strategic Master Plan for the future development of South Florida Ave corridor between Lime St and Ariana St, a 1-mile stretch of SR 37, within the Dixieland CRA.

Lakeland is a desirable destination in Central Florida with a thriving business district, residential neighborhoods and a vibrant Downtown. The overall economy of the City is diversified with a good mix of private industry, distribution centers, healthcare, education, offices and government services. Lakeland, like other communities in central Florida is faced with housing shortages.

Providing, quality, middle-income housing is the current and foreseeable challenge. Enhanced multimodal transportation with trails, buses, and rail with a "complete streets" mindset is also a priority for the City and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The City's vision is to continue to focus on redevelopment to optimize the opportunities of its existing built infrastructure.

The City of Lakeland is experiencing rapid growth and its population is projected to grow by 15% over this decade to approximately 120,000 resident by 2030.

This project is undertaken in the context of the FDOT's road diet test on South Florida Ave initiated in 2020. The strategic plan relates to transportation, urban design and economic development of the corridor as the City makes decisions on its future development. FDOT's road diet test period is scheduled to end in August 2022, following which a desired street configuration will be implemented.

The purpose of this study is to provide planning and design guidance for the long-term redevelopment of this corridor into a vibrant part of the city. This report presents the first Assessment phase of the Strategic Master Plan. It is designed to provide the City's staff and decision makers an overall assessment of the current context, previous studies undertaken, and fresh ideas to make decisions related to the corridor.





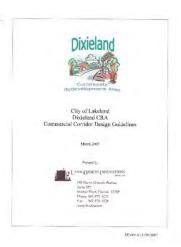
#### **Previous Studies**



2001 RMPK Dixieland Redevelopment Plan



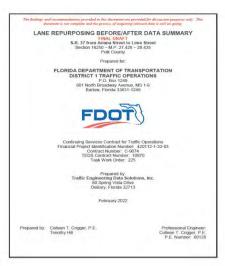
2017 FDOT South Florida Avenue Master Plan Key Findings



2007 LDI Dixieland Commercial Corridor Design Guidelines



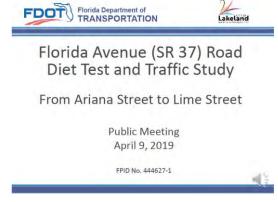
2013 AECOM, Dixieland CRA Planning and Design



2022 FDOT Lane Repurposing Data Summary



2017 Polk TPO Compete Street Corridor Master Plan



2019 FDOT South Florida Avenue/SR 37 Road Diet Test and Traffic Study

## Key Findings/Priorities from Previous Studies

The following summarizes the key themes and aspirations expressed in the previous planning and design studies.

#### Safety

- · Slow traffic and improve safety
- Improve alley access

#### **Quality Urban Environment**

- Wider sidewalks for better pedestrian environment
- · Plant shade trees on the street
- Include bikes along the corridor
- Include decorative streetlights and furnishings

#### **Public Infrastructure**

- Improve transit infrastructure
- Improve parking

#### **Economic Development**

- Promote mixed use redevelopment
- Include public spaces

## 2022 FDOT Lane Repurposing Before/After Data Study

The February 2022, FDOT report of the SR 37 (Florida Avenue) lane repurposing project provides a comprehensive assessment of traffic data including volumes, travel times, travel speeds and crashes for the before, after and updated conditions about the temporary repurposing implementation in October 2020. Consideration of the Covid-19 impacts were included.

The traffic data indicated an approximate 5% reduction in volumes although these volumes remain lower than the pre-Covid pandemic volumes. Similarly, the pedestrian and bicycle activity remain depressed from pre-pandemic/pre-lane reduction levels.

Speed counts indicated average speed decreases at the two locations along the alignment.

Average travel times showed minor increases in the AM, with slightly more significant in the PM especially in the southbound direction.

The most significant impacts occurring in the after condition were the safety and collision data analysis. There was an average of 83.5% reduction in severe crashes. However, rearend crashes increased, but these were likely due to the drivers not being acclimated to the new roadway configuration, as these crashes declined after the first month. Pedestrian/Bicycle crashes were eliminated.

As time passes and the drivers become more acclimated to the roadway changes post repurposing, injuries and overall number of crashes may continue to reduce. Operationally the road works well.





## Study Area Analysis\*

Ayres conducted a detailed GIS mapping, and field assessment of the corridor. Details on block and parcel sizes, vacancy, ownership, land uses, zoning, street network, parking and city-wide connectivity have been analyzed and results included in the maps within the appendix. The highlights are presented in the next pages, and the inferences will be used to outline the Strategic Plan strategies in the next phase. Click thumbnail to see detailed map.





































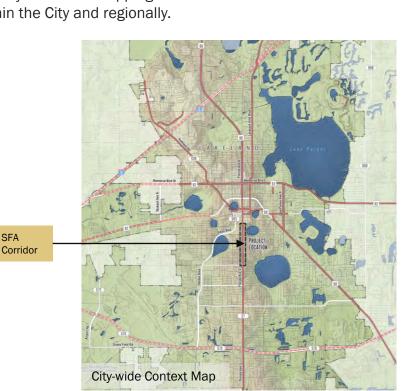


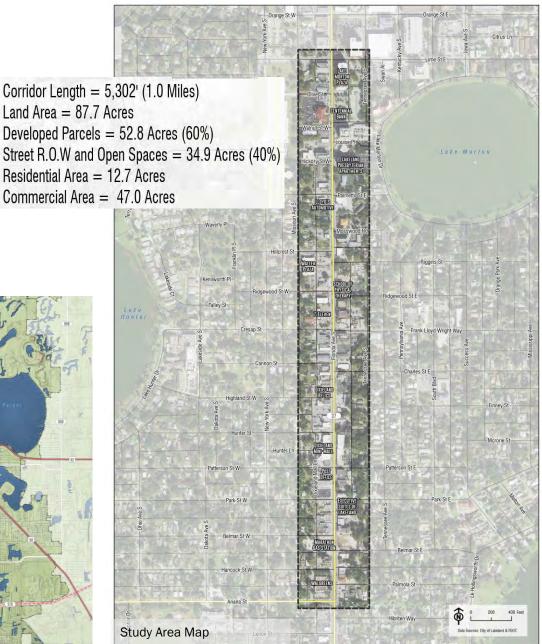
<sup>\*</sup>A detailed assessment of the study area, characteristics and attributes are presented topically in the Appendix on page 47 onwards.

#### **Context and Location**

This section of South Florida Avenue is of historic significance to the City, situated strategically just south of downtown and at the heart of the "Central City" defined in the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Contextually, this section of the corridor remains a primary main north-south route through the City and connects with other employment and shopping destinations within the City and regionally.





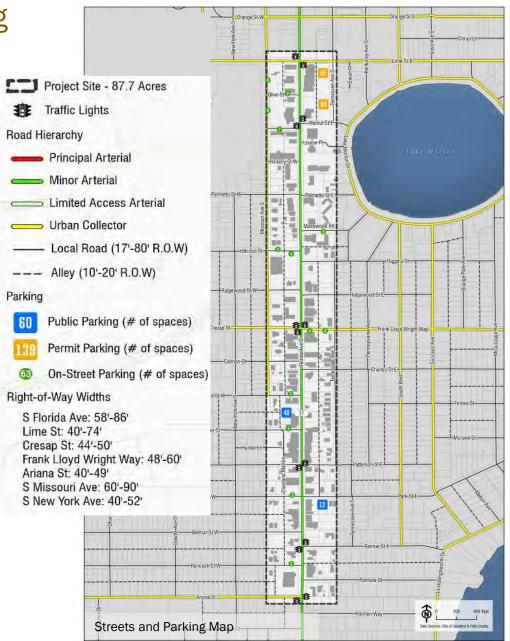
## Street Network and Parking

The area is a traditional 'urban grid" providing straight, easy connections to city destinations and individual properties. Several private parking lots (mostly empty on weekends) face the street. There are three dedicated public surface parking lots and limited on-street parking on side streets.

There are a total of six traffic lights including those on Lime and Ariana streets.

There is limited public transportation service.

Excluding Lime and Ariana, the main nodes are Palmetto, Hillcrest, Cresap and Patterson.



# Street, Sidewalks and Trail Connectivity

There are several underutilized private parking lots facing the street.

There are limited shade trees, pedestrian level lighting and furnishings.

On average, 5ft sidewalks exist on both sides of the street, but there are no bike facilities within the corridor and no existing or planned city-wide trail connections.

The street generally has poor urban design features, no trees, no public plazas, parks or gathering areas weak public realm interface, weak corners, lighting, art, and activity.

Streets and private properties in the district are generally well kept, with no visual sign of blight or disinvestment.

There is a general lack of street activity, except in certain pockets mostly between Cresap St and Patterson St.



### Parcels, Land Use and Zoning

The development along the corridor consists of a mix of the turn-of-last century commercial buildings supported by stable residential neighborhoods.

The land uses are mostly general commercial, banks, healthcare facilities, restaurants and assisted living near Lime Street. There are three gas stations, and two auto repair shops, an unusually high number for this 1-mile stretch between Lime St. and Ariana St. There are 2 vacant parcels, a partially, vacant shopping center, Waller Plaza at Hillcrest St. and smaller commercial and religious properties.

Commercial - 49.4 Acres (56%) Single Family - 10.4 Acres (12%) Two Family - 0.3 Acres (<1%) Multiple Family - 13.1 Acres (15%) Office - 9.7 Acres (11%) PUD Commercial - 3.8 Acres (4%) PUD Multiple Family - 1.0 Acres (1%) Mcrone-St ancock-St-W-Zoning Map

Building Footprint - 16.2 Acres (18%)

Publicly Owned Property - 2.7 Acres (3%)

Privately Owned Property - 58.6 Acres (67%)

Vacant Property - Publicly Owned - 2.7 Acres (3%)

Vacant Property - Privately Owned - 5.8 Acres (7%)

Parcels: 235 Parcels, Average Area = 0.26 Acres, Average Frontage = 100.5 ft, Average Depth = 114.7 ft

Census Blocks: 39 Blocks, Average Area = 3.1 Acres, Average Frontage = 374.0 ft, Average Depth = 388.1 ft

### Visual Assessment



**Urban Corridor** 



**Older Institutions** 



Auto-oriented uses



Vacant Parking



Residential



Offices



Commercial frontage

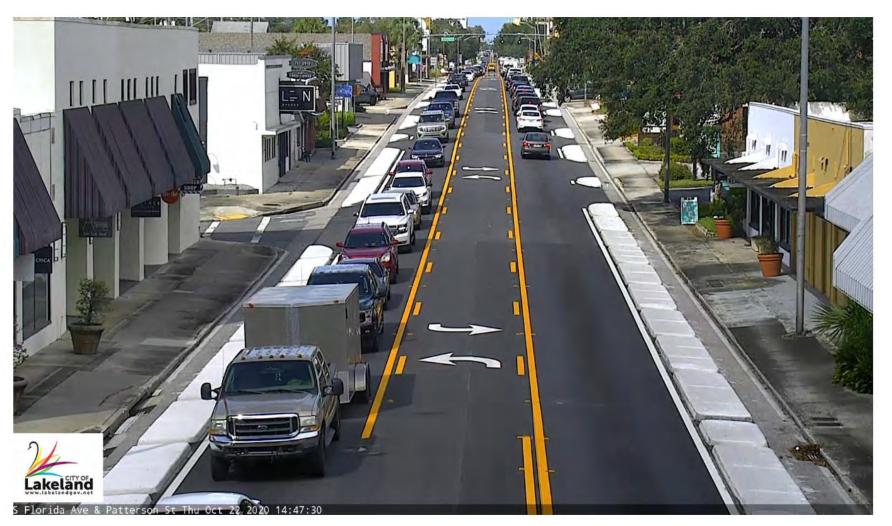


Public Transportation

## Where are we today?

- Negative perceptions of the road diet test, specifically delays and congestion
- Inadequate parking

- Property access concerns
- · Lack of an urban experience
- Lack of economic development





## Opportunities and Challenges

## Safe Transportation For all Users

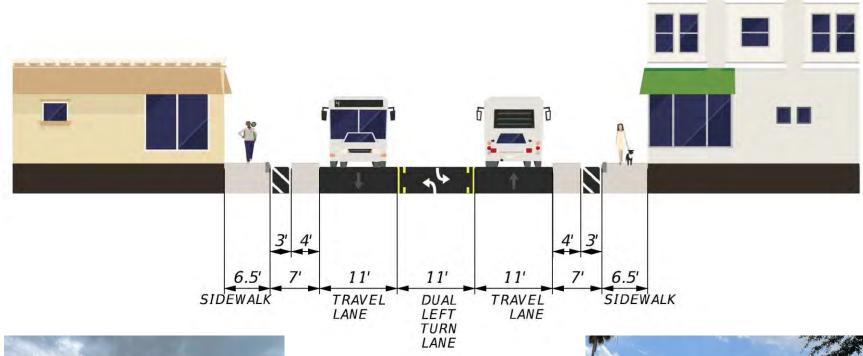
#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Build a street (cross-section) for everyone, cars, bikes, pedestrians and transit for both residents and visitors.
- Maintain a reduced and safe speed limit 30mph or lower.
- Design for pedestrian priority mid block crossings, safe refuge islands where possible.
- Sidewalks and crosswalks to be ADA compliant.
- Improve public transportation and facilities, bus bays.
- Design to make SFA "Transit Ready", Pan for future TODs.
   C4-GENERAL URBAN contextual classification.
- Increase public parking provisions.
- Consider bike lanes and facilities to enable city-wide trail connectivity.
- · Improve property access from alleys where possible.

#### **CHALLENGES**

- · Constrained ROW to balance multiple users.
- Property access management.
- Slightly increased travel times by ~ 40s as per 2022 FDOT Study.
- Higher cost for high quality urban street with amenities.

**Existing Typical Street Cross-section** 





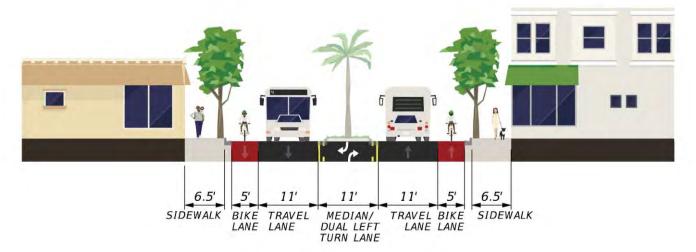
Concept options for the street redesign are presented in the following section,



Street Cross-section Options - 1 & 2

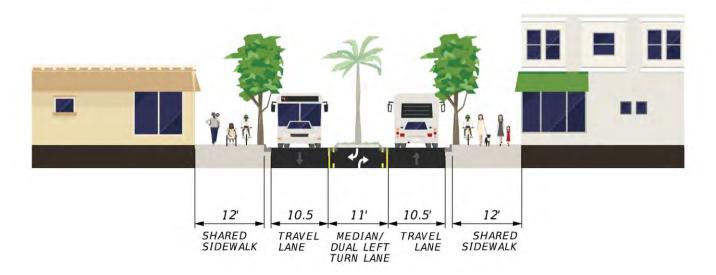
1

2 LANE DIVIDED WITH BIKE LANES



2

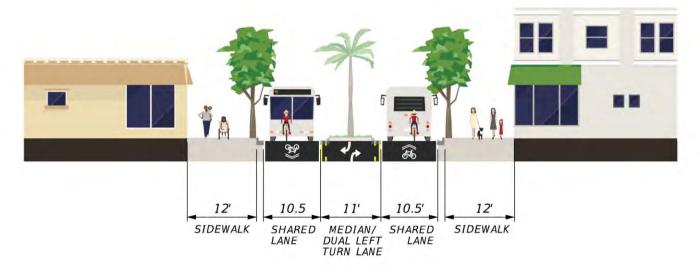
2 LANE DIVIDED WITH 12' SHARED SIDEWALKS



Street Cross-section Options - 3 & 4

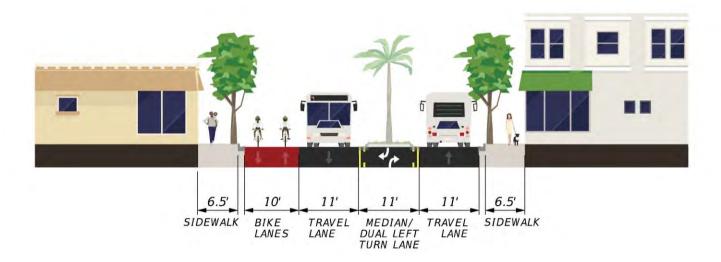
3

2 SHARED LANE DIVIDED WITH 12' SHARED SIDEWALKS



4

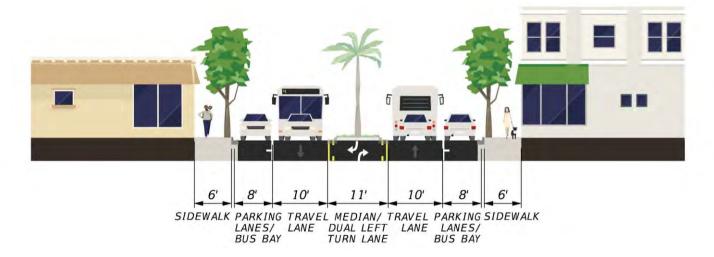
2 LANE DIVIDED WITH 10' DUAL BIKE LANES



Street Cross-section Options – 5 & 6

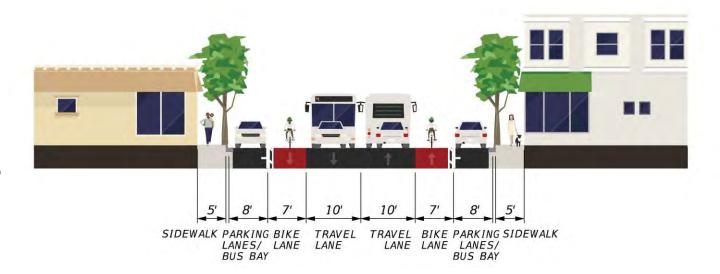
5

2 LANE DIVIDED WITH 8' PARKING LANES/BUS BAY



6

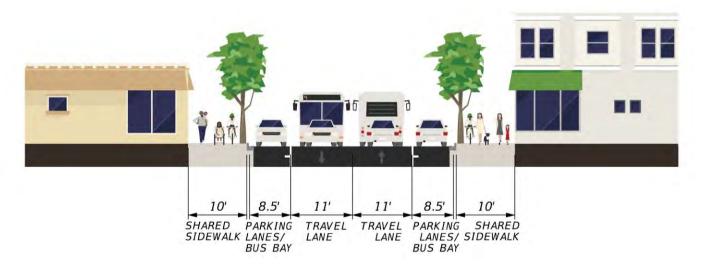
2 LANE UNDIVIDED WITH 8' PARKING LANES/BUS BAY AND 7' BUFFERED BIKE LANES



Street Cross-section Options - 7 & 8

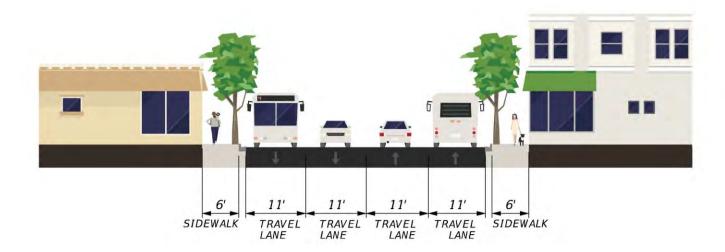
7

2 LANE UNDIVIDED WITH 8.5' PARKING LANES/BUS BAY AND 10' SHARED SIDEWALKS



8

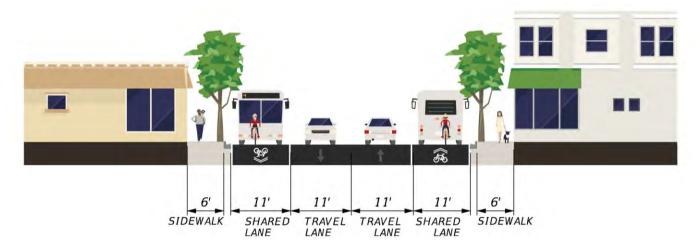
4 LANE UNDIVIDED



Street Cross-section Options - 9 & 10

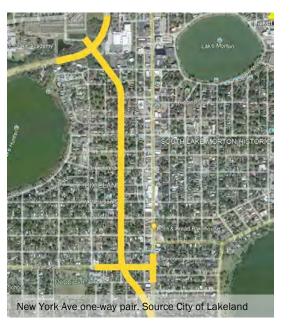
9

4 LANE UNDIVIDED WITH SHARED OUTSIDE LANES



10

**ONE-WAY PAIRS** 



S New York Ave is currently a 2 lane (22ft wide) residential collector road that lies approximately 600ft west of S Florida Ave. A proposed one-way pair system for S Florida Ave (southbound traffic) and S New York Ave (northbound traffic) is not ideal due to the existing context classification of New York Ave as a residential local road. Also, the separation distance between New York Ave and S Florida Ave of 600ft does not allow easy northbound access to the existing commercial areas on S Florida Ave so drive-by capture trips will decrease for the existing businesses. Zoning changes from residential to more commercial or multi-family units will likely occur with the one-way system. Dixieland Elementary School is near the south end of New York Ave and would disrupt the daily commuting patterns of the students and teachers. The residents along New York Ave will have a bit of a learning curve adapting to the one-way traffic direction that would likely result in some crashes.

### **Enhanced Public Transportation**

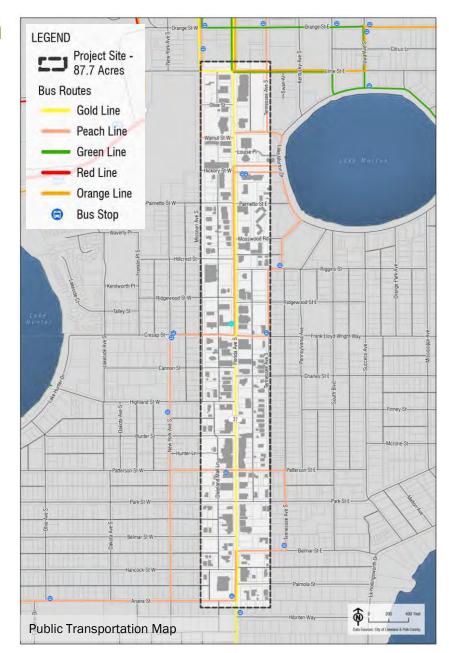
The corridor currently has limited bus service with the Gold Line and Peach Line.

Considering the opportunity to connect directly to the major employers in Downtown, the Hospital District to the north, regional shopping center to the north and south, and industrial areas to the south, a more robust public transportation operations with a minimum of 4 stops could be considered and tested for this section of the corridor. This will support a denser and more economically viable district.

South Florida Avenue is a designated Transit Corridor in the City's future Plans, and the future designs should match this aspiration.







### Alleys and Parking Access

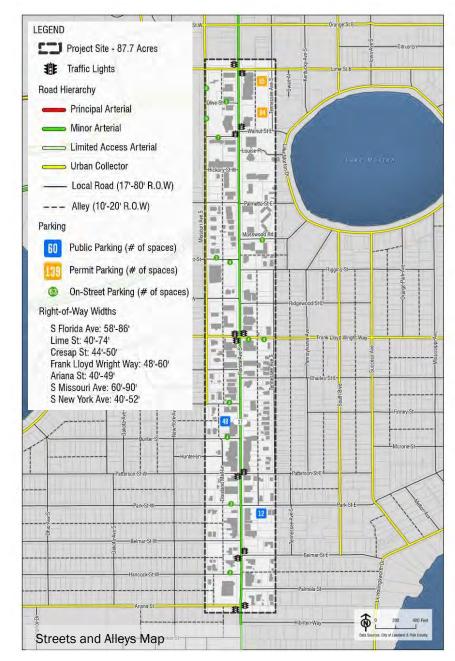
The alleys on the west side between Hickory St W and Hancock St W (Dixieland Mall Ln.) could be used improve business and parking access. On the east side, the alley between Riggins St and Park St can serve a similar function to improve access to commercial properties.

Alley and access improvements could be planned and designed in conjunction with the planned roadway redesign improvements for South Florida Ave by FDOT as one integrated project.

There are two city-owned public surface parking lots and one permit parking lot along Lime St. These could be part of a public-private discussions for a parking garage.







## Bike-Ped Facilities and Citywide Connectivity

Apart from the new opportunity for bike-ped facilities along SFA, there are opportunities to connect the SFA corridor with the City's existing and proposed facilities. These include:

- East-west connections along Palmetto St. linking to Lake Morton
- East-west connection along Hilcrest St, connecting to Drane Park
- East-west connection along Cresap St/ FL Wright Way linking Lake Hunter to Florida Southern College







# Enhanced Corridor Experience

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Opportunity to have a walkable street with wider sidewalks and shade trees.
- Reduce street clutter and signage.
- Complimentary, activities (land uses) that benefit the community.
- Design for multimodal mobility choices, in addition to meeting standard road design and operational requirements.
- Contextual urban design for aesthetically pleasing environment.
- · Safe and welcoming environment.

#### **CHALLENGES**

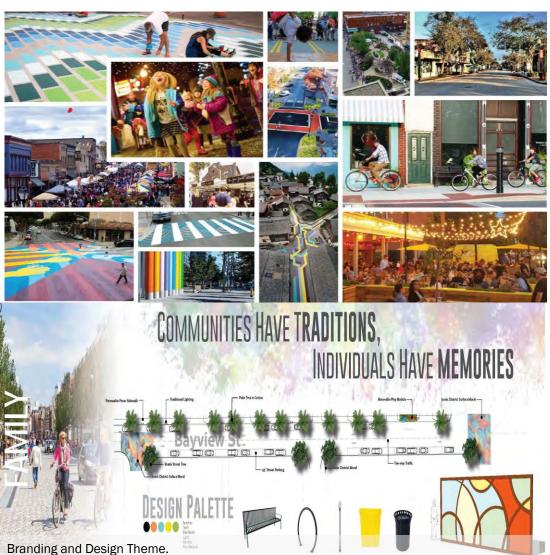
- ROW space limitations and balancing various user group aspirations.
- · Vacant and unused parking areas facing the street.
- Lack of ROW and public spaces along the corridor.
- · Lack of street and business activity.
- Public and private partner alignment.

### **Urban Design**

In conjunction with the land use programming there is an opportunity to incorporate good urban design enhancing street activity with plazas, themes street amenities, and markers at the major nodes such as Lime, Hilcrest, Cresap, Patterson and Ariana.







# Complimentary Activities (Land Uses)



Explore opportunity for public plazas/gathering spaces, possibly on publicly or privately owned properties such as the City parking lot.







Design standards that require facades which contribute to the street

### Safe and Walkable Street







# Contextual Public Realm Design

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Opportunity for a contextual and themed urban landscape design with the street redesign.
- Gateway features and murals to create a sense of place.
- Integrate shade trees and public plazas where possible.
- Unique paving material and streetscape details for SFA identify.
- Integrated street furnishing palette lighting, banner arms, furnishings, transit stop and eco-friendly tree wells, (silva Cells that take up stormwater).
- Extend public art program and trail, murals, musical objects or sculptures to key plazas.

#### **CHALLENGES**

- Limited ROW space.
- Constraints with balancing various interests sidewalk, bikes, cars.
- · Cost of additional public features.

#### **Shaded Streets and Plazas**

Street trees could be designed and planted to create a walkable experience along the corridor, complimenting its activities.

Areas or sites within parking lots, preferably facing the street or ROW areas at key intersections such as Ariana, Cresap and Hilcrest could be identified and designed for pocket parks and outdoor seating/use.







### Street Furnishings

There is an opportunity to integrate street furnishing palette, lighting, banner arms, furnishings, transit stop and eco-friendly tree wells, (silva cells that take up stormwater) into a cohesive design theme. The streetscape elements and furnishings could enhance the district branding reflecting the culture and design pedigree – reflecting a minimalist, retro theme with the FL Wright history.

Eco-friendly streetlights, and electric charging stations could be viably considered.







#### **Public Art Trail and Murals**

District branding could be enhanced by extending the public art trail program in conjunction with the streetscape elements and furnishings currently focused on Lemon Street within Downtown.

Facades at key intersections such as Lime Street and walls facing parking lots could use murals and art to convey a positive image of the SFA district.









## Resilient Land Use and Economic Development

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Opportunity for tactical urbanism seasonal or year-round activities to add value to residents and create interest.
- Promote interim use Food Truck Park(s) and other vendors on underutilized parking lots and public parks.
- Pursue redevelopment connecting small developers, investors, and large institutions such as the Regional Hospital and Publix to focus on mixed-use, middle-income housing on specific parcels in corridor.
- Initial policy changes test removal of minimum parking requirements in this district.
- Pursue district branding and promotion as the new place to be – UPTOWN, MIDTOWN, FLO-SO. Consider a Virtual Presence for the SFA District.
- Market the Culture/Design Story play up the minimalist, retro theme with FL Wright history and association.
- Collaborate with the Arts and Education communities Florida Southern College, Polk Center for events and
  longer-term usage including housing, education/workforce
  training and exhibition space.
- Parking garage on City or Private parcels through PPP.
   Consider purchasing lots of parking.
- Prioritize approvals, connectivity and infra upgrade for redevelopment projects.

#### **CHALLENGES**

- · Land banking no incentive to redevelop.
- Strong existing uses not conducive to mixed use.
- · Lack of private partnership.
- · Only few vacant sites.
- · Lack of residential density for TOD.
- · Lack of parking in critical locations.
- Fragmented lots.
- Aligning key partners and funding mechanisms to make development feasible.

#### Tactical Urbanism

Tactical urbanism such as design features at key intersections to promote seasonal or year-round activities and complimented by online marketing.

Interim use of underutilized parking areas or public parks such Drane Park or Waller Plaza parking for corridor events and festivals with Food Truck Park(s) and vendors.









## Potential Redevelopment Sites\*













\* Initial redevelopment potential parcels based on GIS mapping data, field study and assessment and community aspirations in previous plan. Redevelopment on privately owned parcels and would require discussions and agreements to initiate redevelopment.

## Potential Redevelopment Sites\*













\* Initial redevelopment potential parcels based on GIS mapping data, field study and assessment and community aspirations in previous plan. Redevelopment on privately owned parcels and would require discussions and agreements to initiate redevelopment.

## **Infill Housing Examples**

Images of successful smaller scale multifamily residential redevelopment in similar contexts to the SFA District.











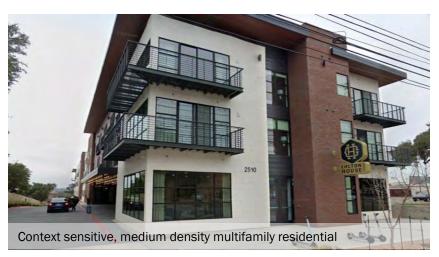


<sup>\*</sup>Examples from similar successful corridor planning in Tampa, Orlando, Charlotte, Raleigh, Austin and Minneapolis.

### Zoning and LDC Changes

The City plans and polices promote mixed use along the corridor with most properties zoned C-2 or O-1. There are properties zoned MF and SF just outside of the corridor. C-2 zone permits residential above commercial up to 70 ft with a density of 22 DU/acre in Transit Oriented Corridors. O-1 permits multifamily for the elderly. The main challenge is parking requirements. Relaxation or elimination of the minimum parking requirement will make residential development more feasible.

Additionally, policy changes to enable housing typologies for student housing, workforce training and continuing education could be pursued. Modifications to the current overlay design standards could strengthen the design intent.







## District Branding and Promotion

Leverage the SFA District location and context, to brand and promote this corridor as the new place to live, work and play in Lakeland – UPTOWN, MIDTOWN, FLO-SO, NewTOWN.

Consider physical branding opportunities through gateways, banner arms, and streetscape treatment.

Explore virtual branding opportunity through social media, graphics, and dedicated website. Find a place for the SFA District in the metaverse!

Appoint brand ambassadors to facilitate property owner and business operator coordination.

Consider Main Street designation and leverage branding and promotion through their national network.







## Planning Principles

## City's Vision



#### **Our City Vision**

Lakeland--a vibrant, innovative, culturally, inclusive world-class community!

#### **Our Community Vision**

Lakeland—a vibrant community of opportunity for a lifetime!

#### **Our City Mission**

Lakeland--A community working together to achieve an exceptional quality of life.

# Strategic Master Plan Guiding Principles

1 Enhanced Urban Experience

Realize an enhanced urban experience through the proposed street redesign to promote safety, walkability and good urban design as stated in all the previous plans.

Tactical Urbanism

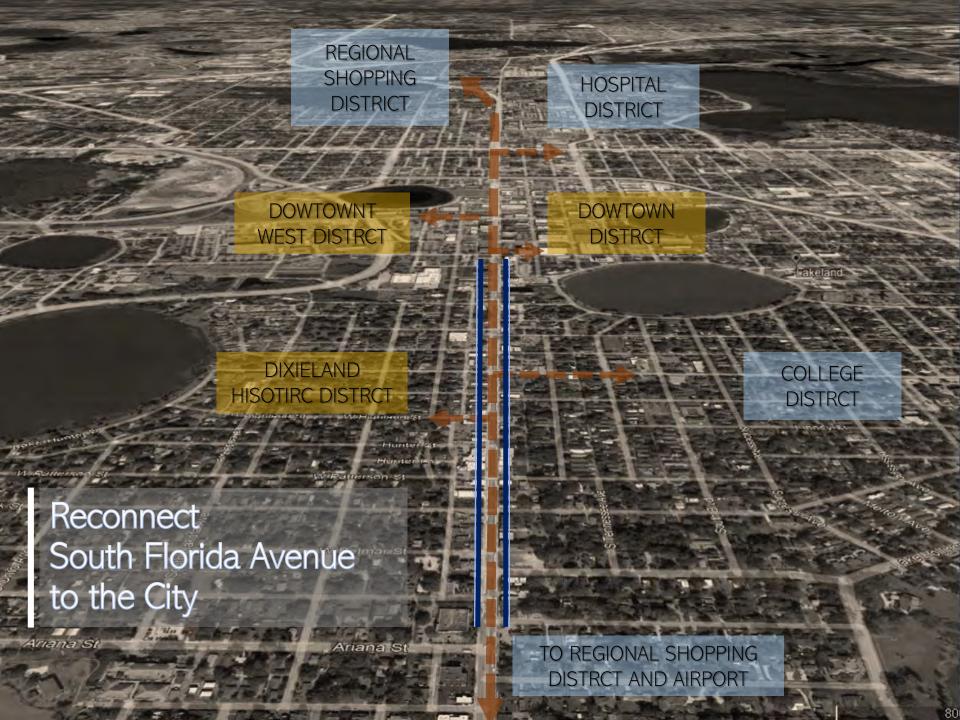
Promote activities to secure quick wins and gain regional exposure through SFA District branding and promotion. Potential themes include, UPTOWN, Design District, SO-FLO, NewTOWN.

2 Robust Trails and Public Transportation

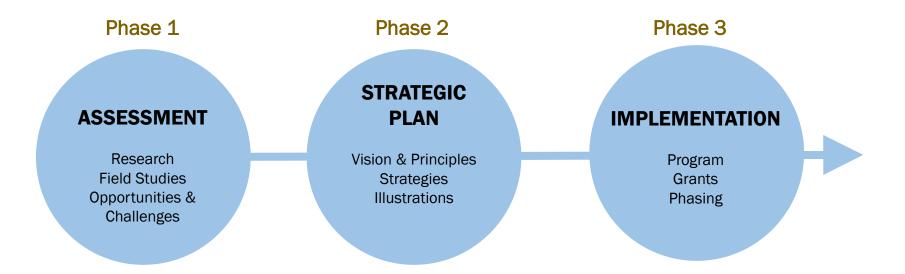
Link the SFA District to major destinations, downtown, hospitals, shopping centers and regional transportation hubs by public transportation and trails.

Resilient Redevelopment

Leverage public investment and private partnerships to promote redevelopment on key sites, focusing on transit oriented, mixed-use development to mitigate the City's foreseeable housing challenges.



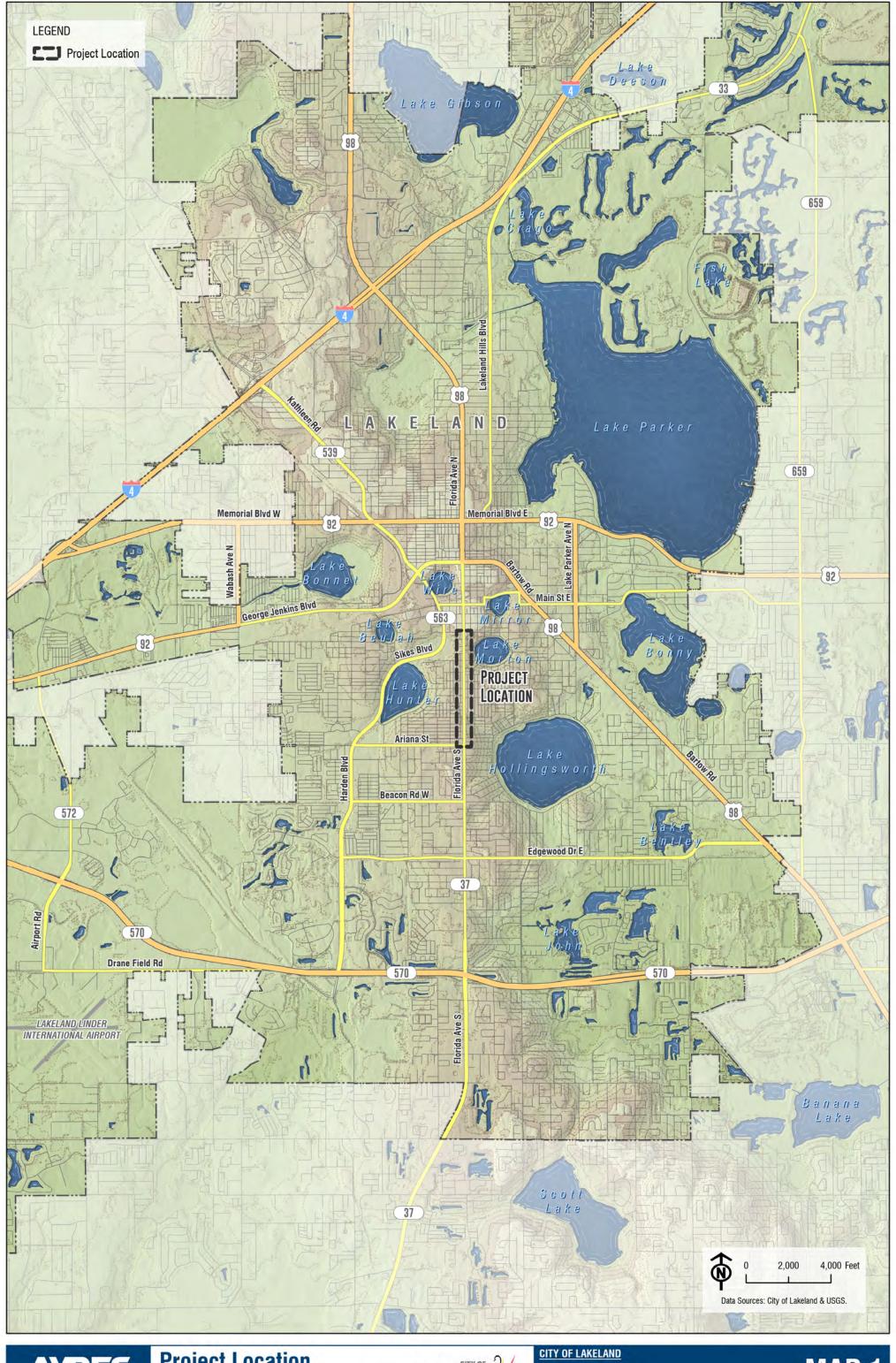
## Planning Process - Next Steps

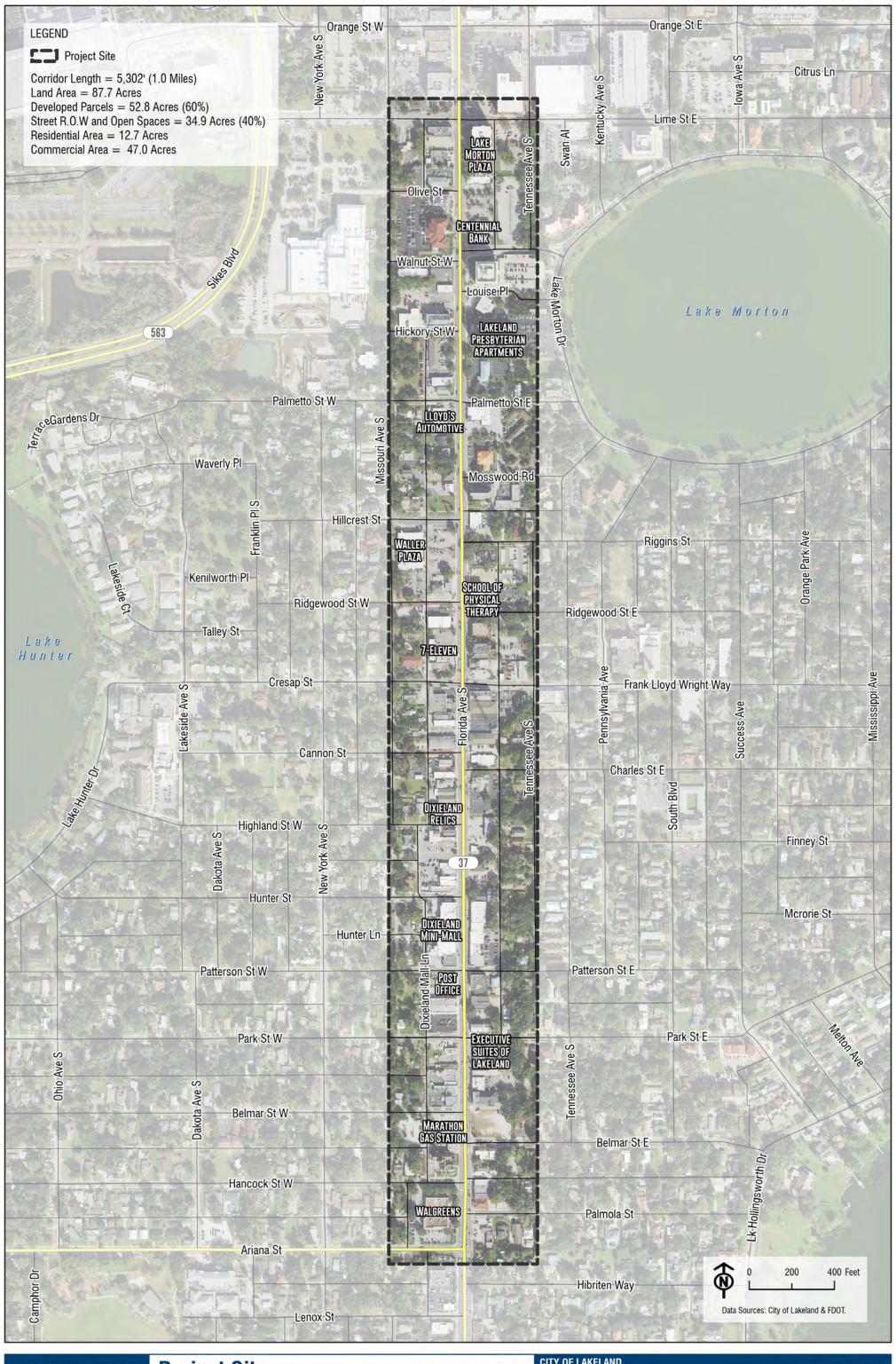


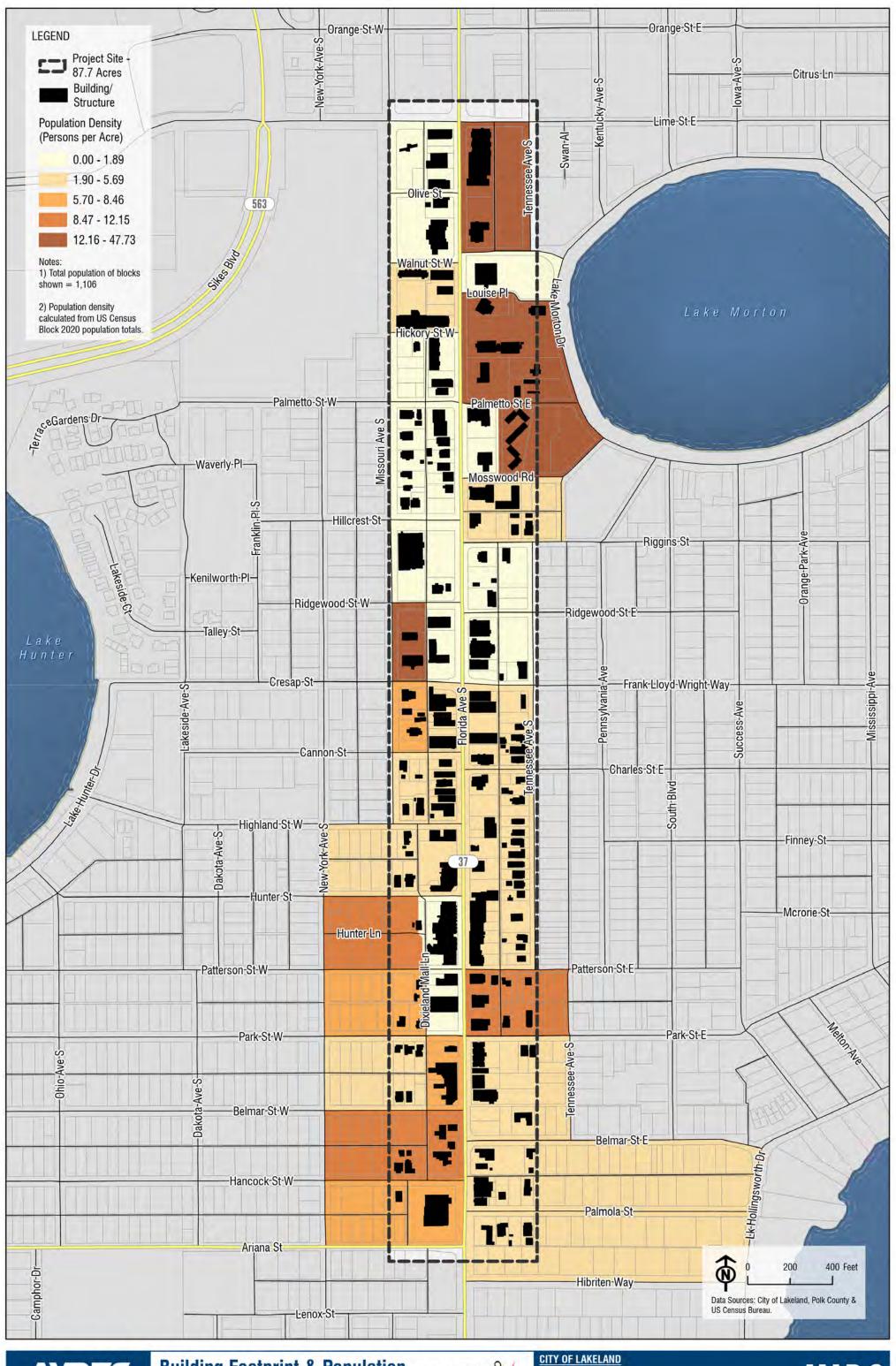
Towards a safe and resilient South Florida Avenue Corridor

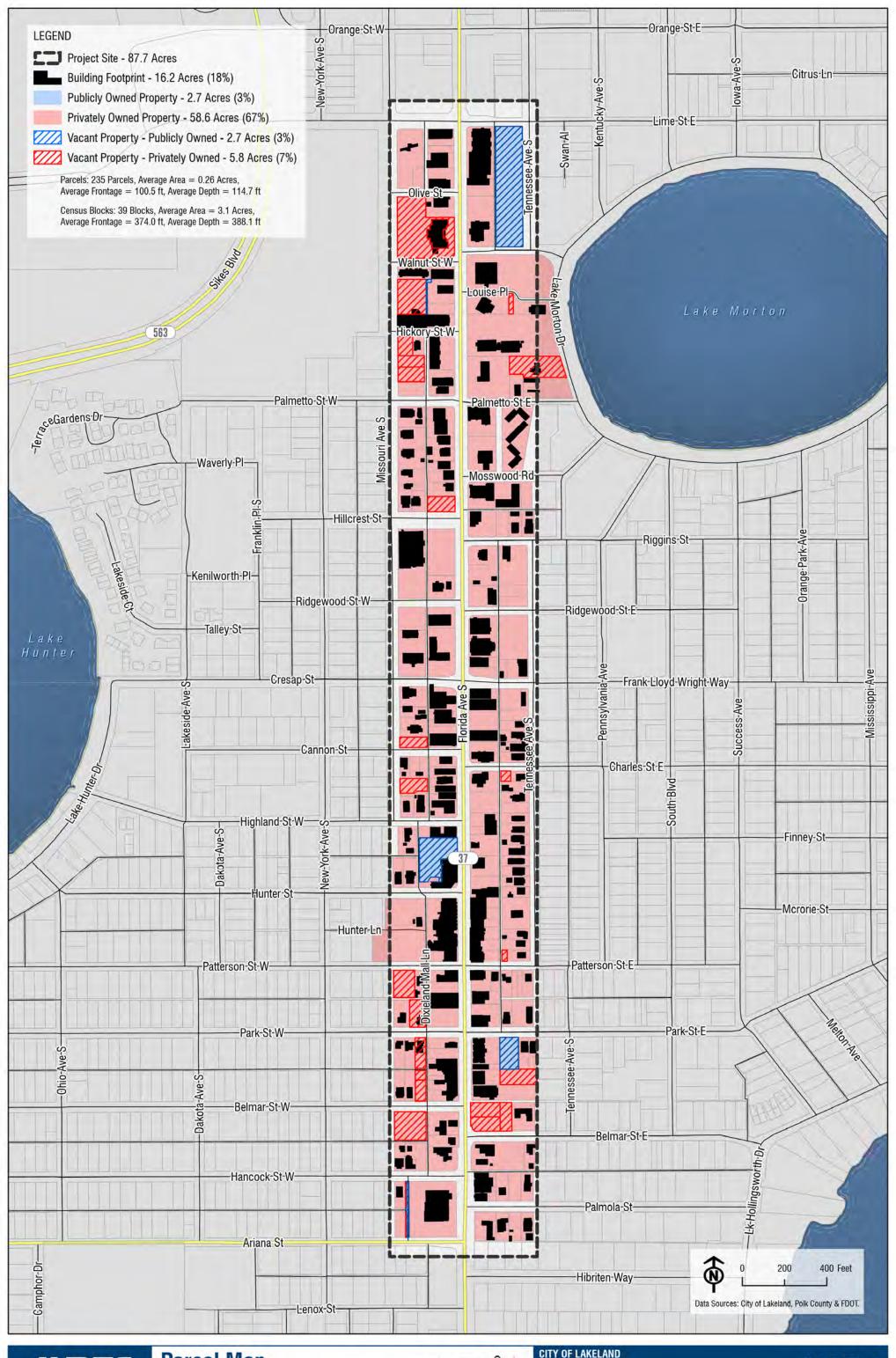


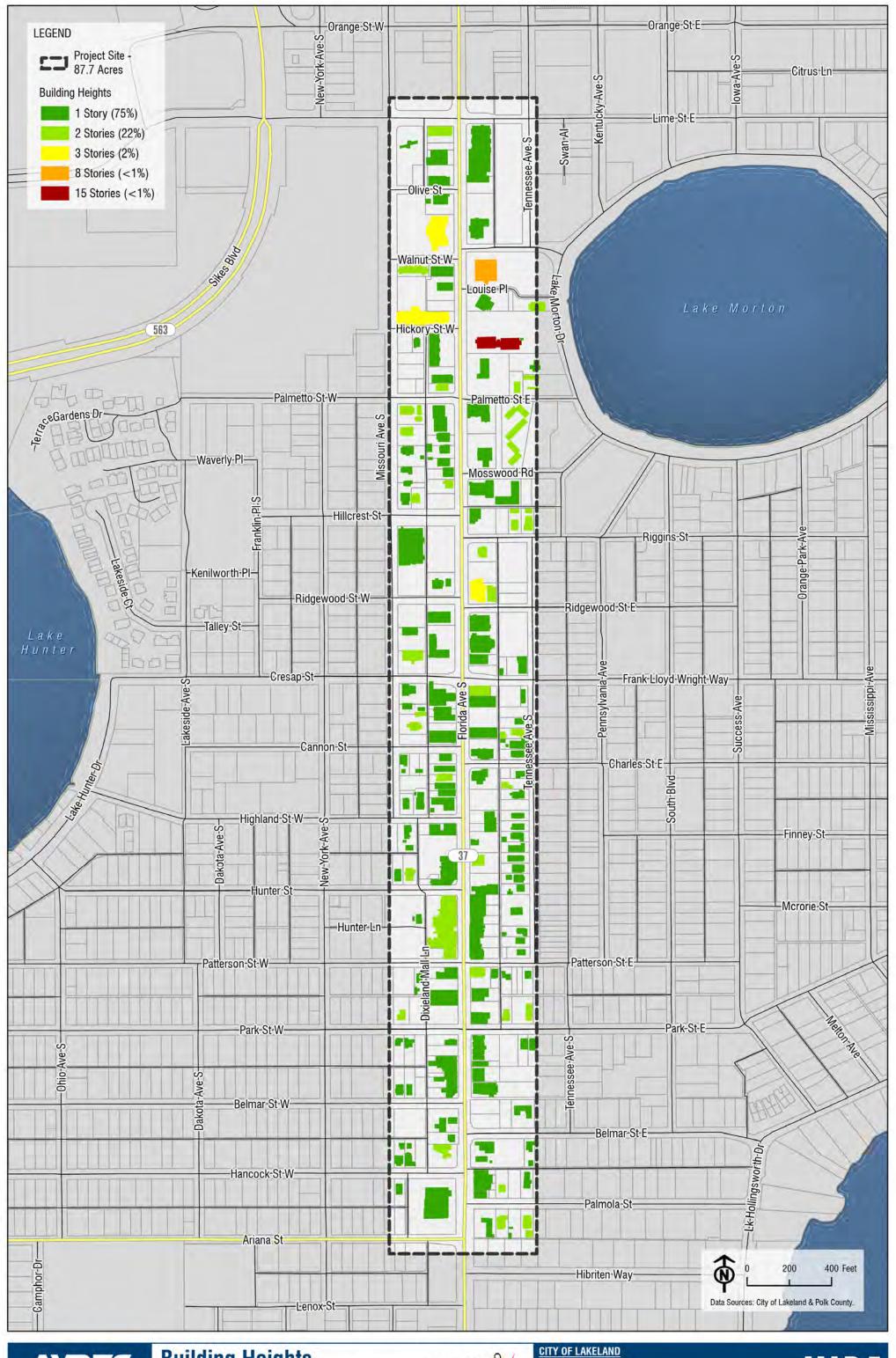
Appendix - Maps

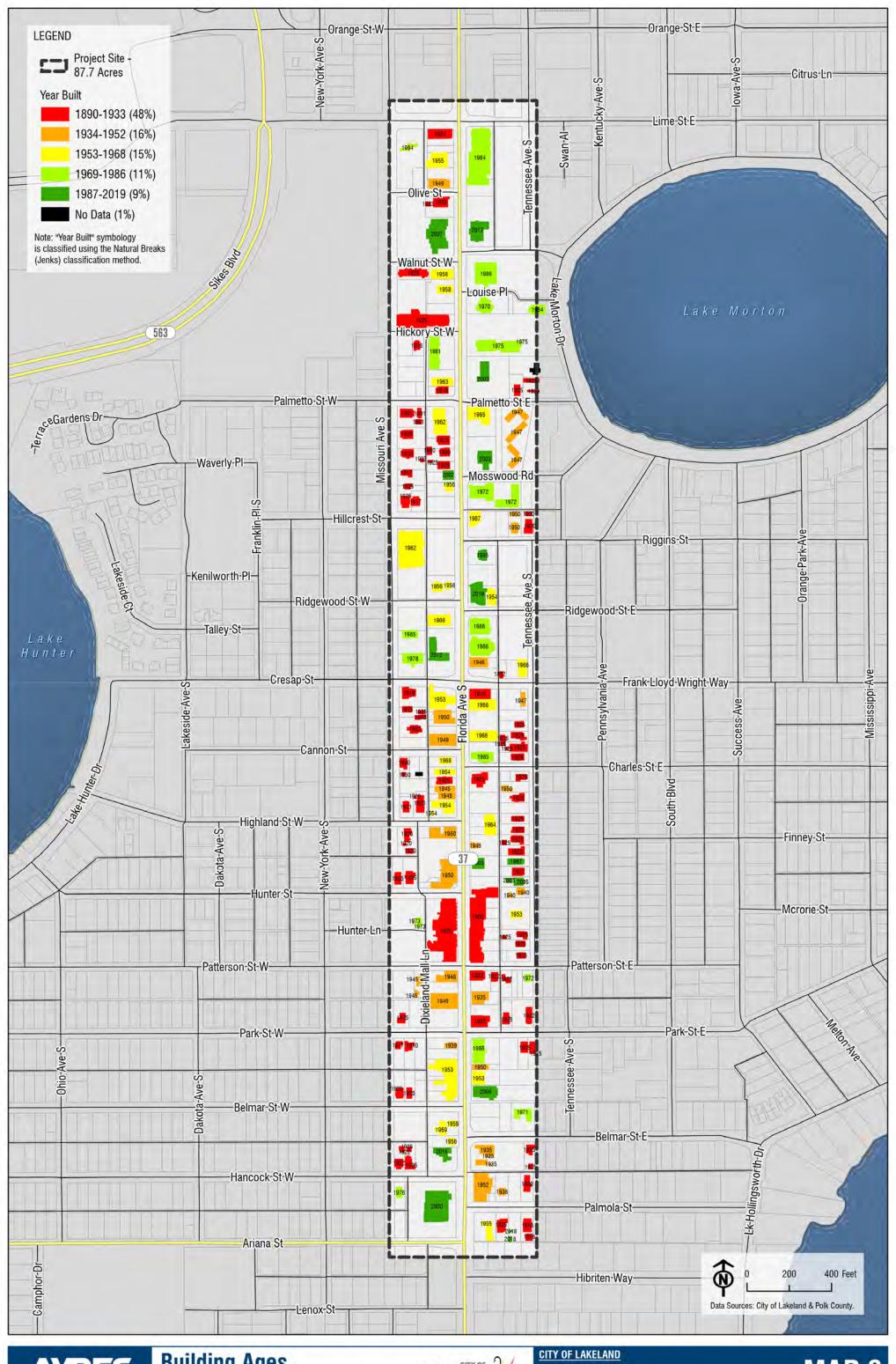


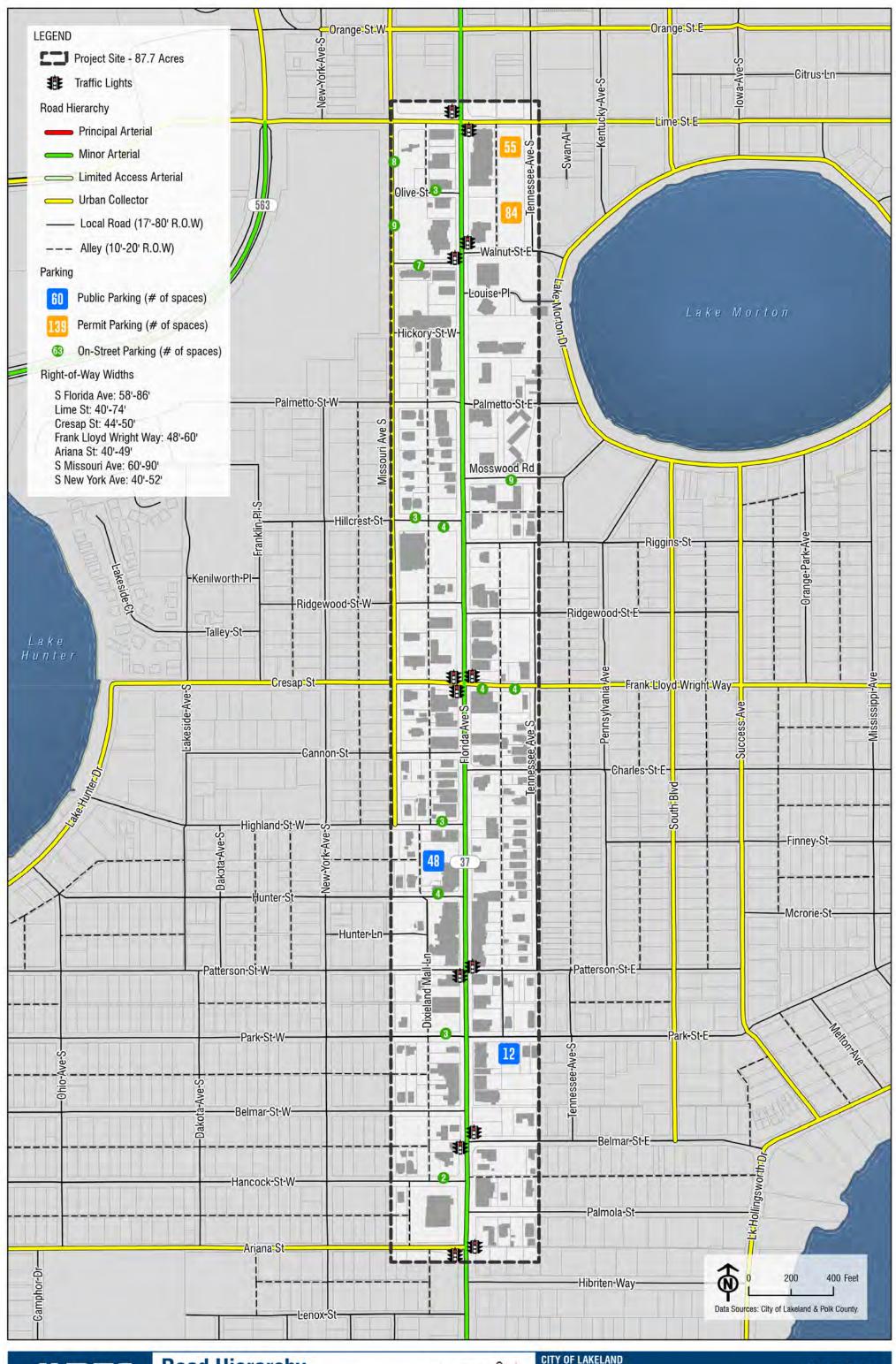




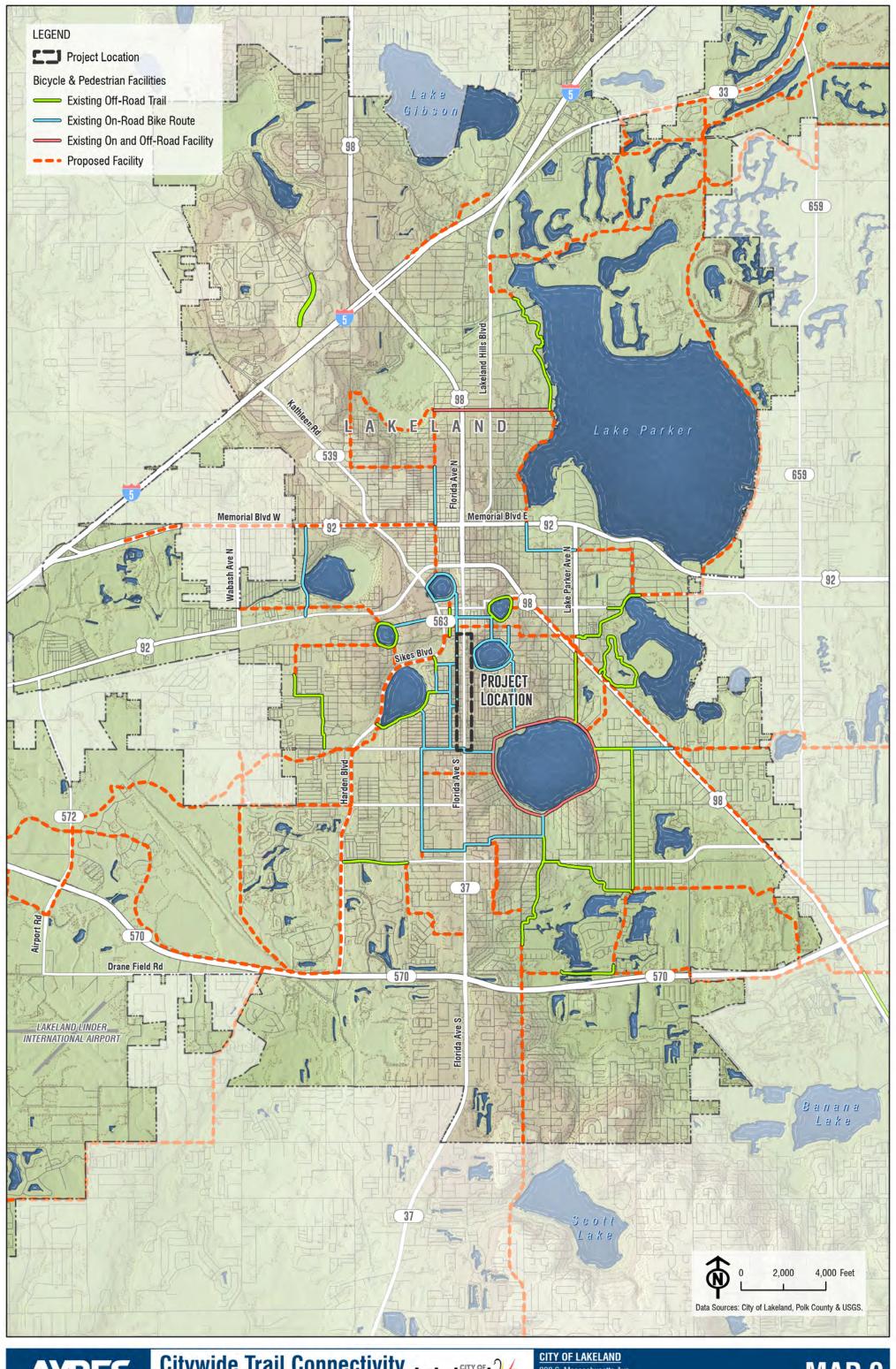


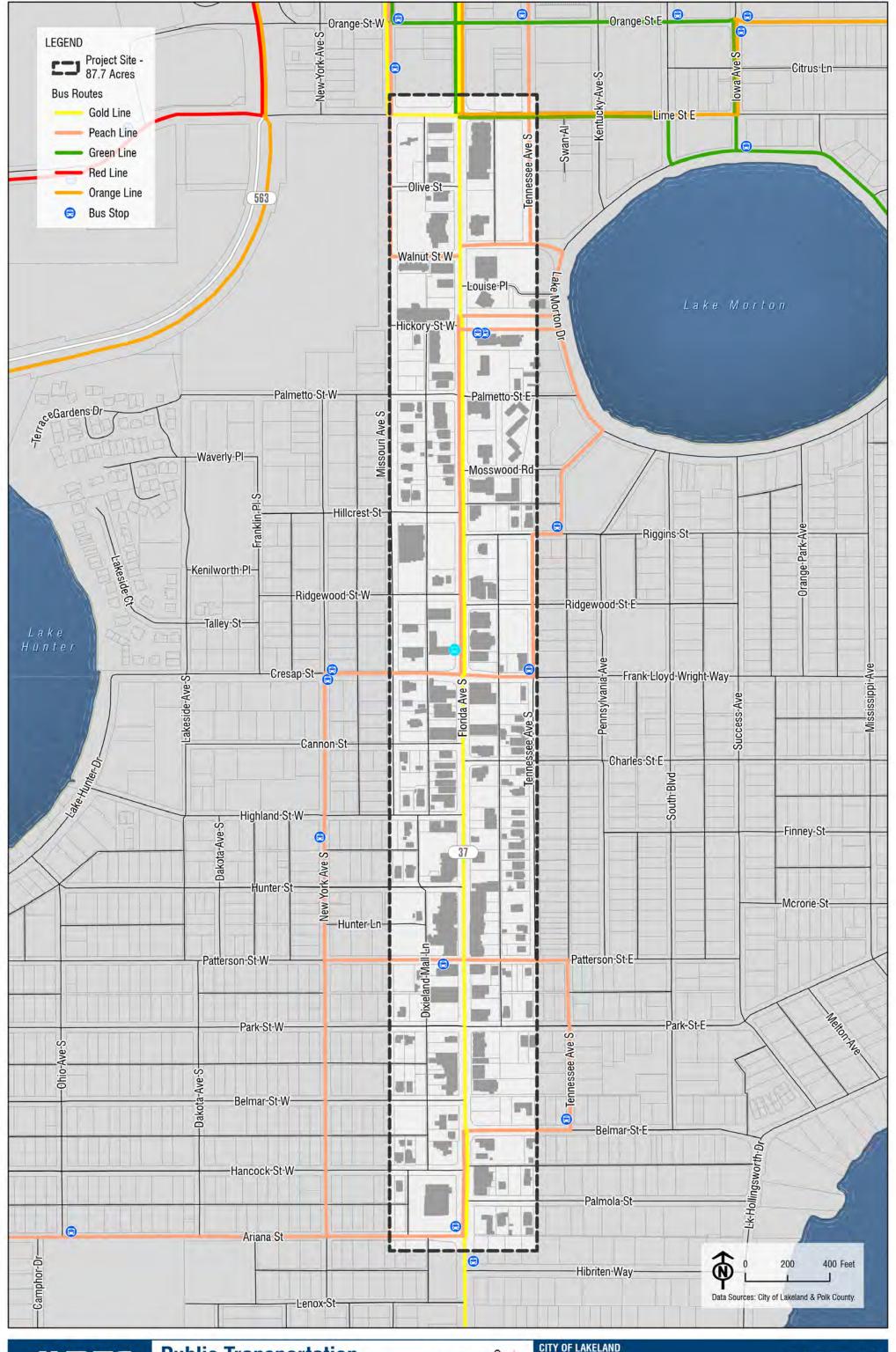


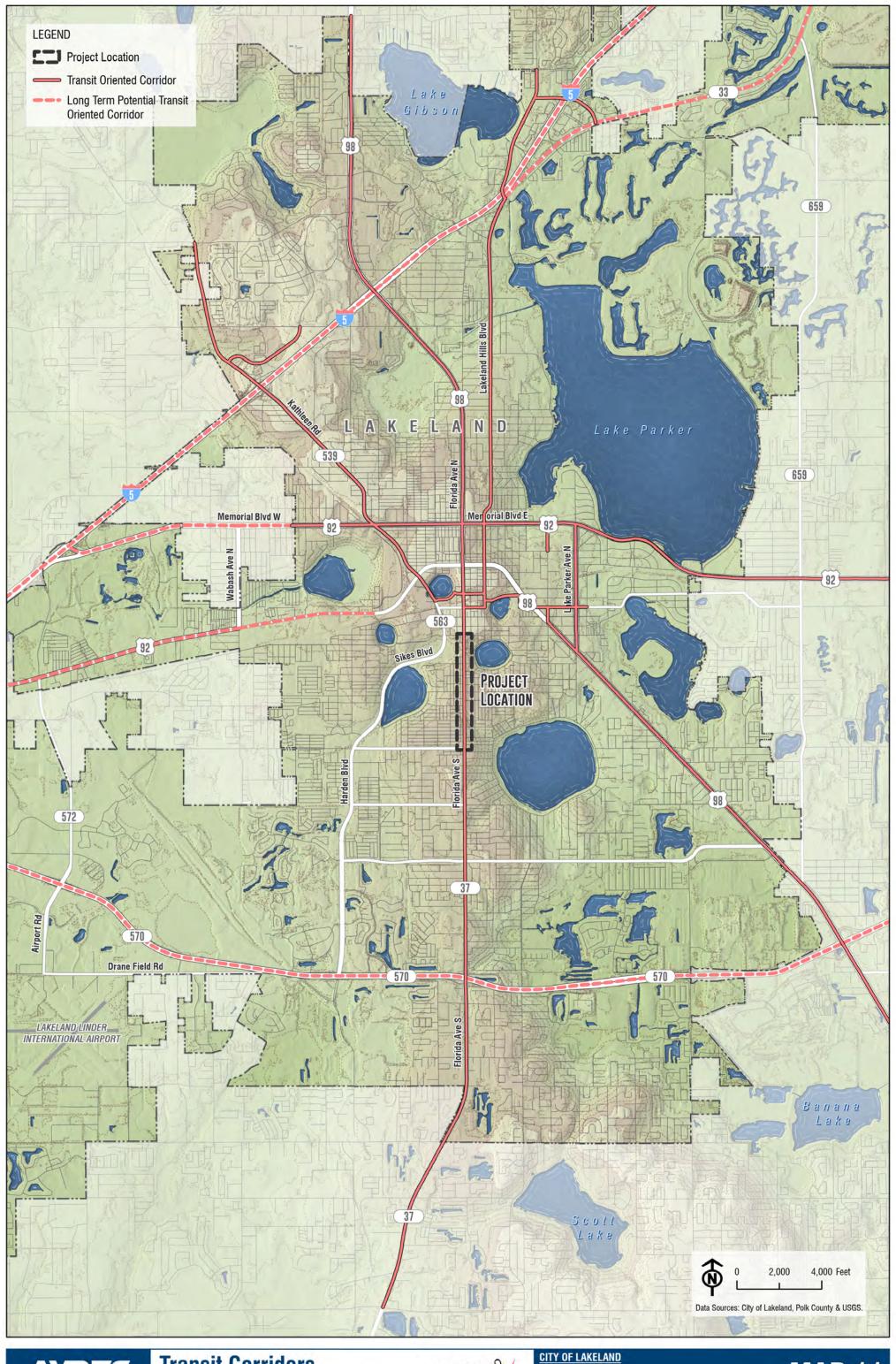


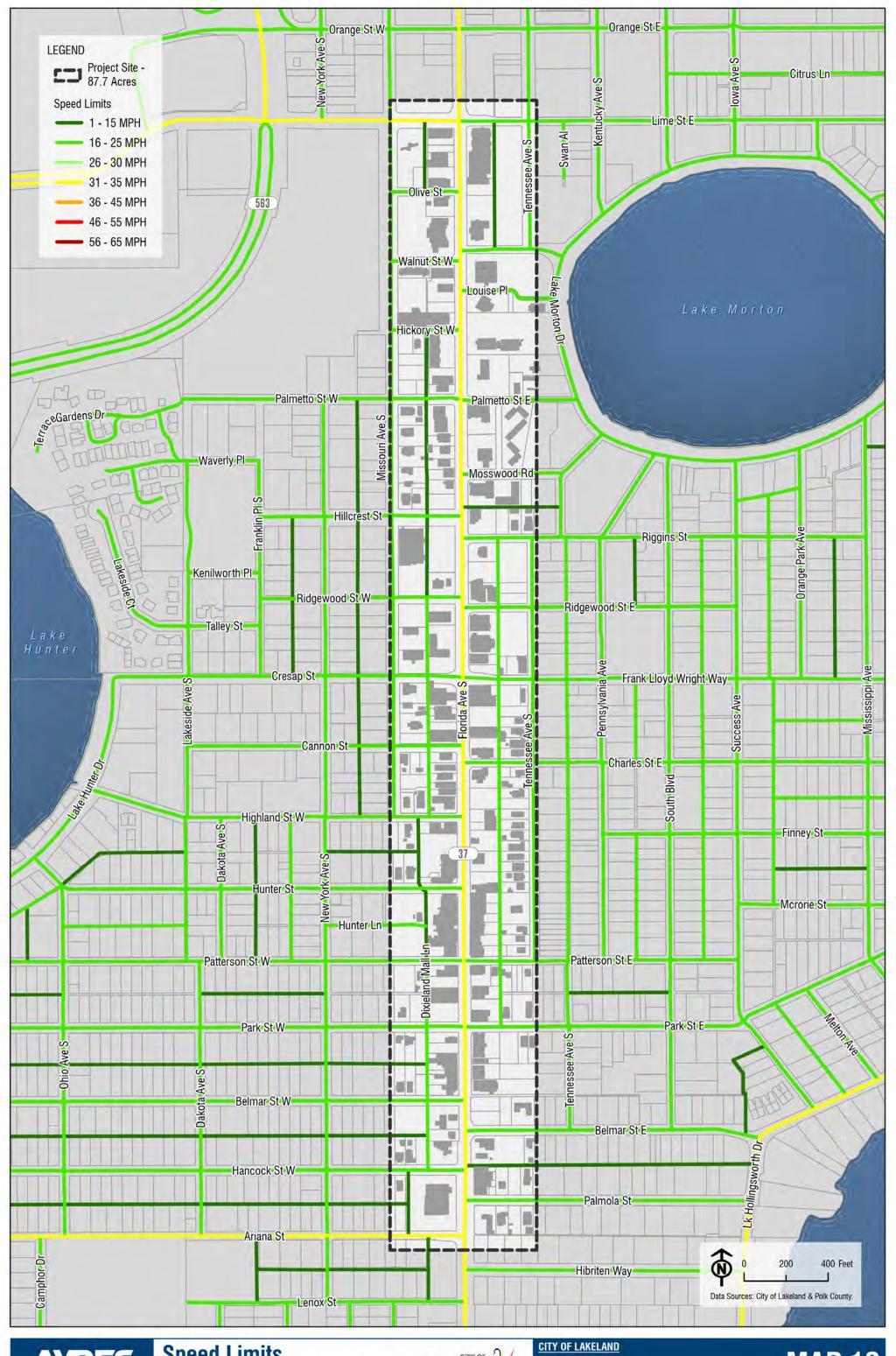


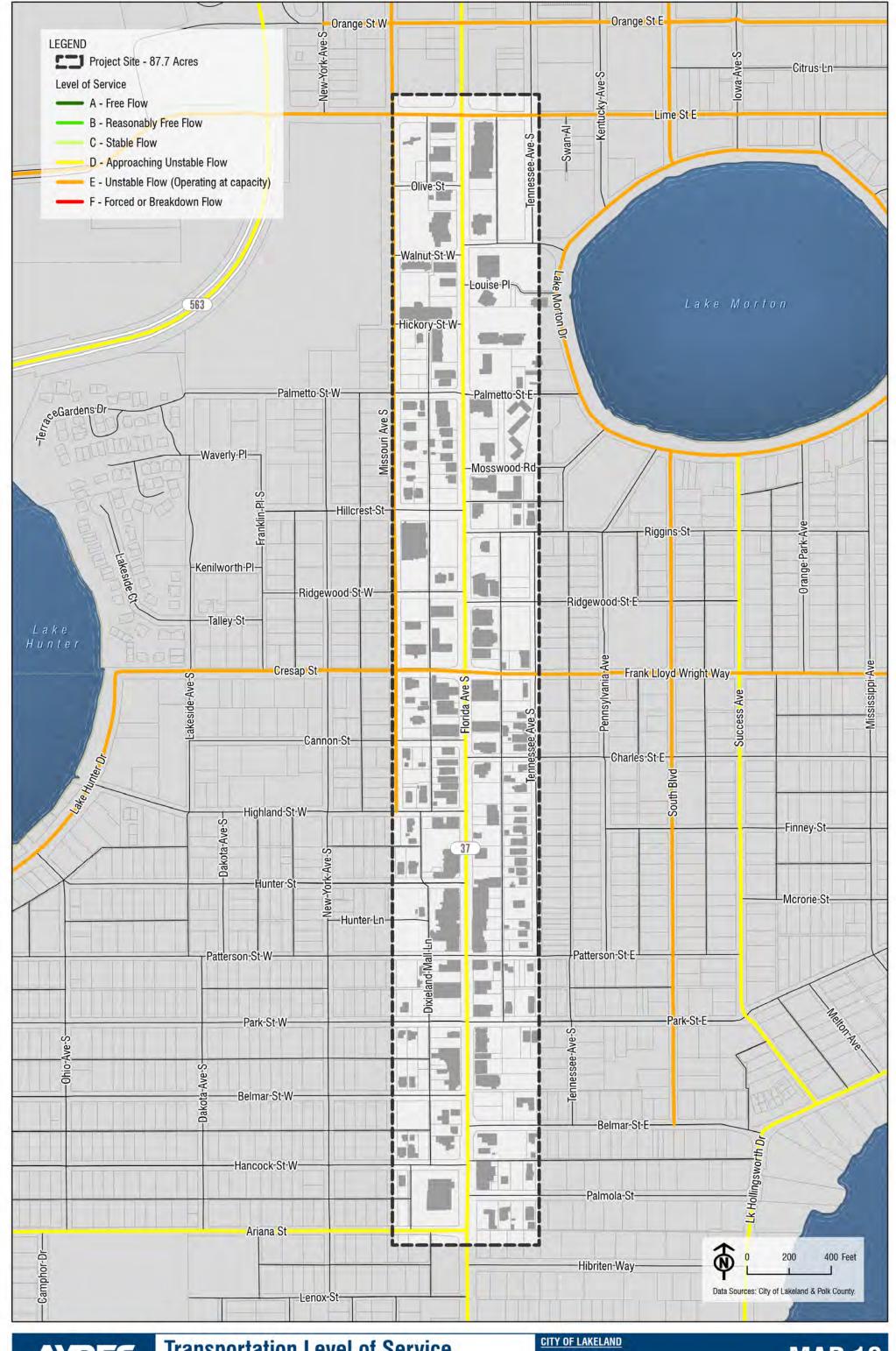


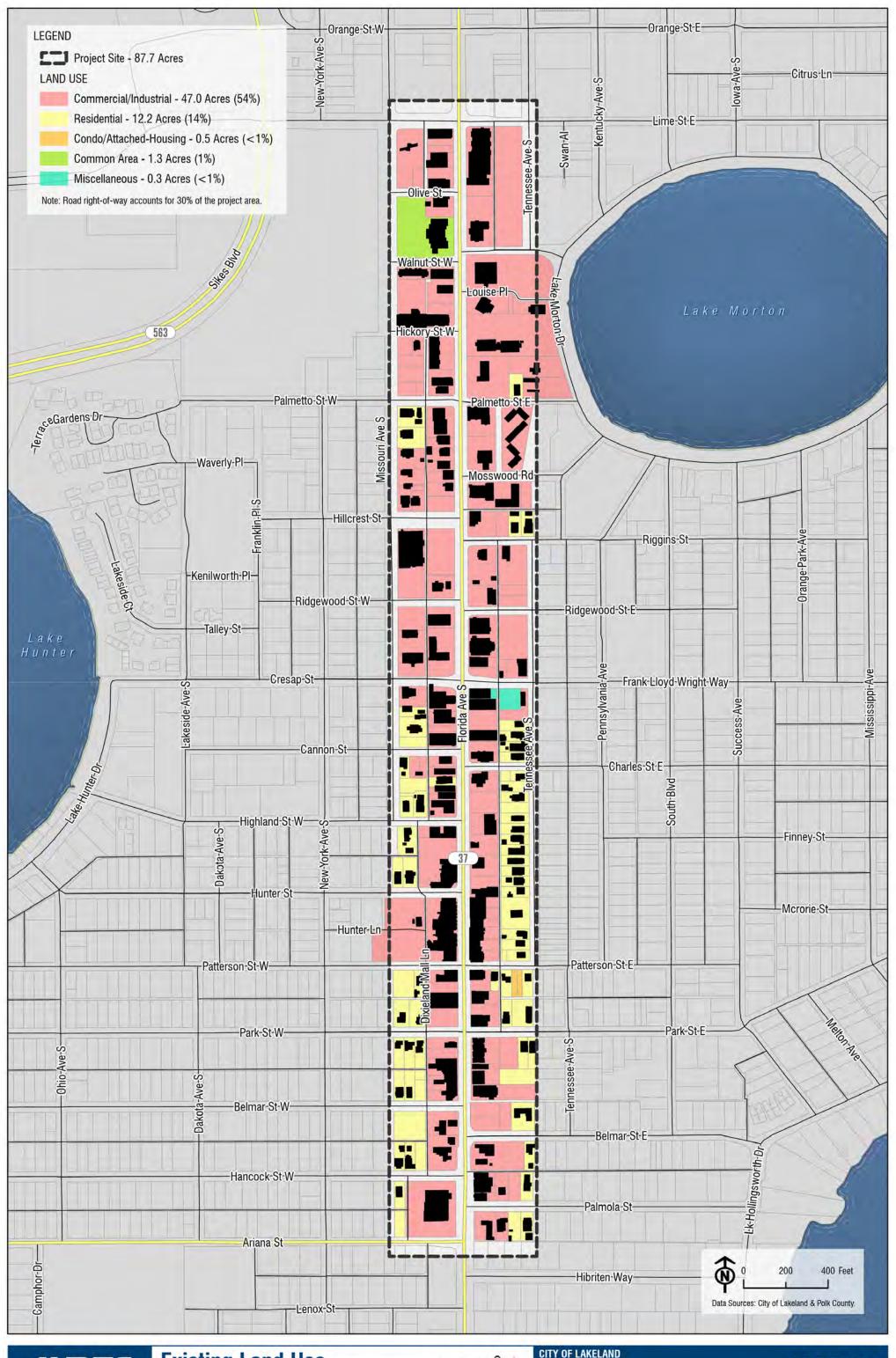


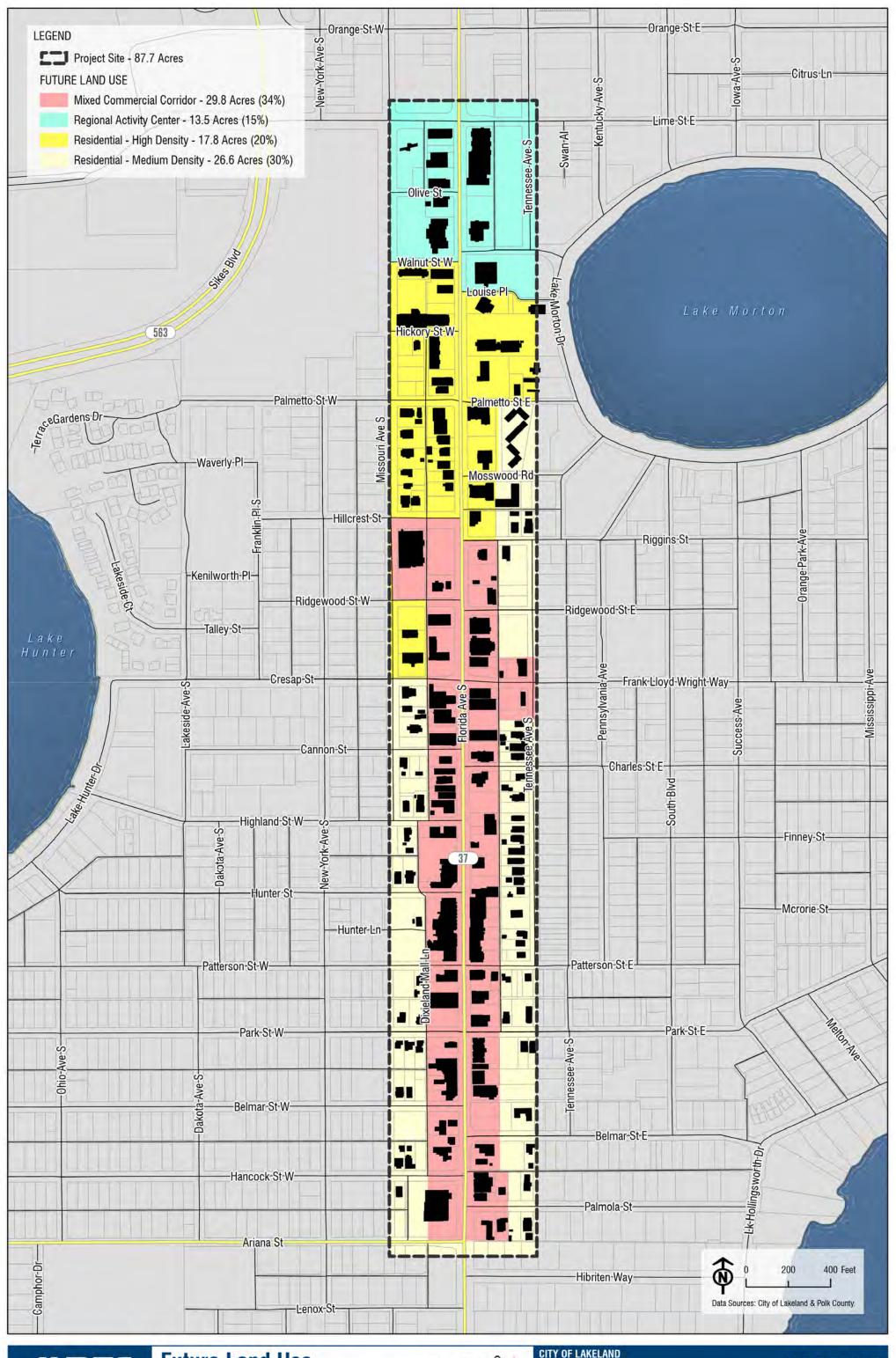


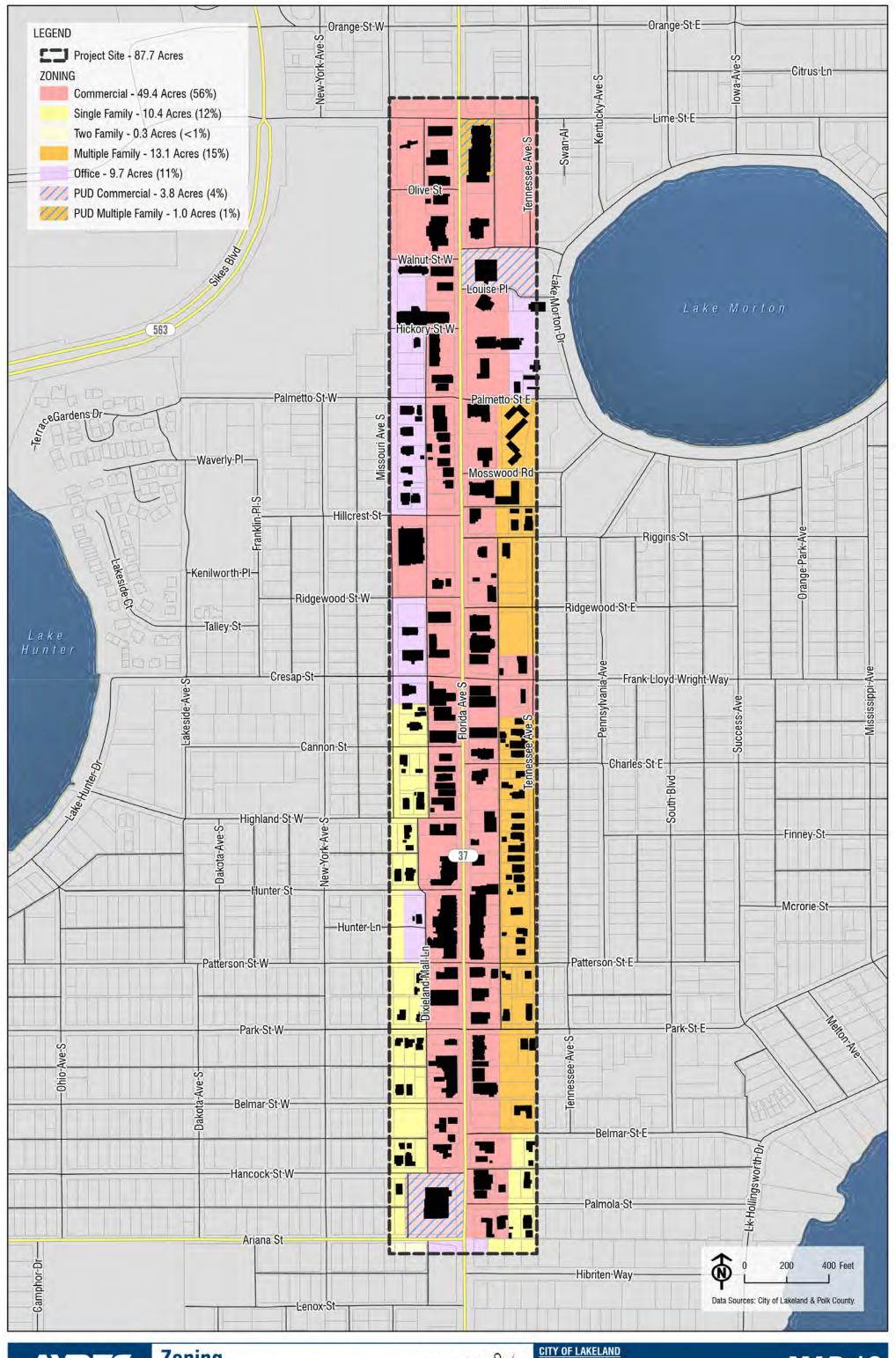


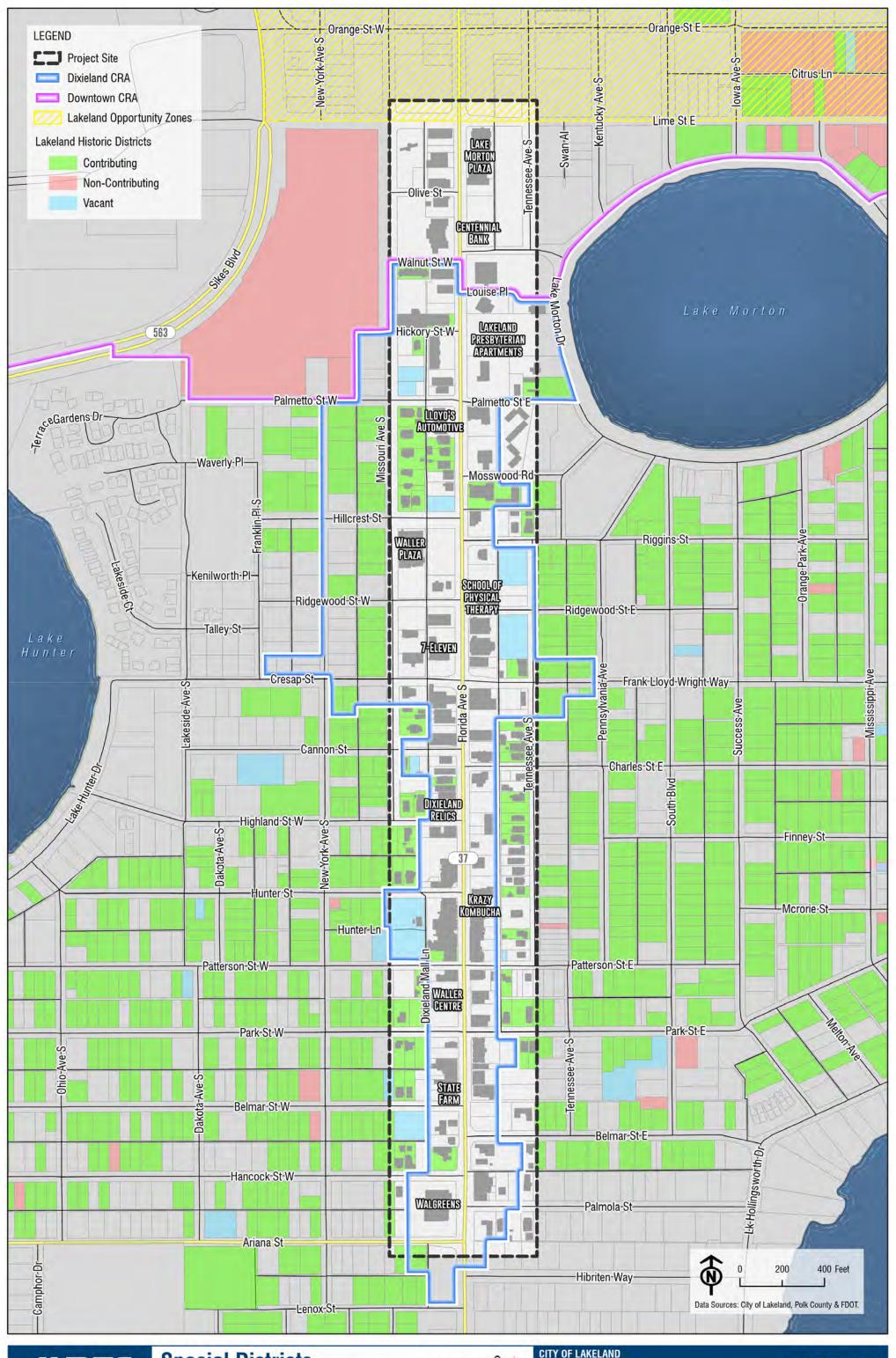


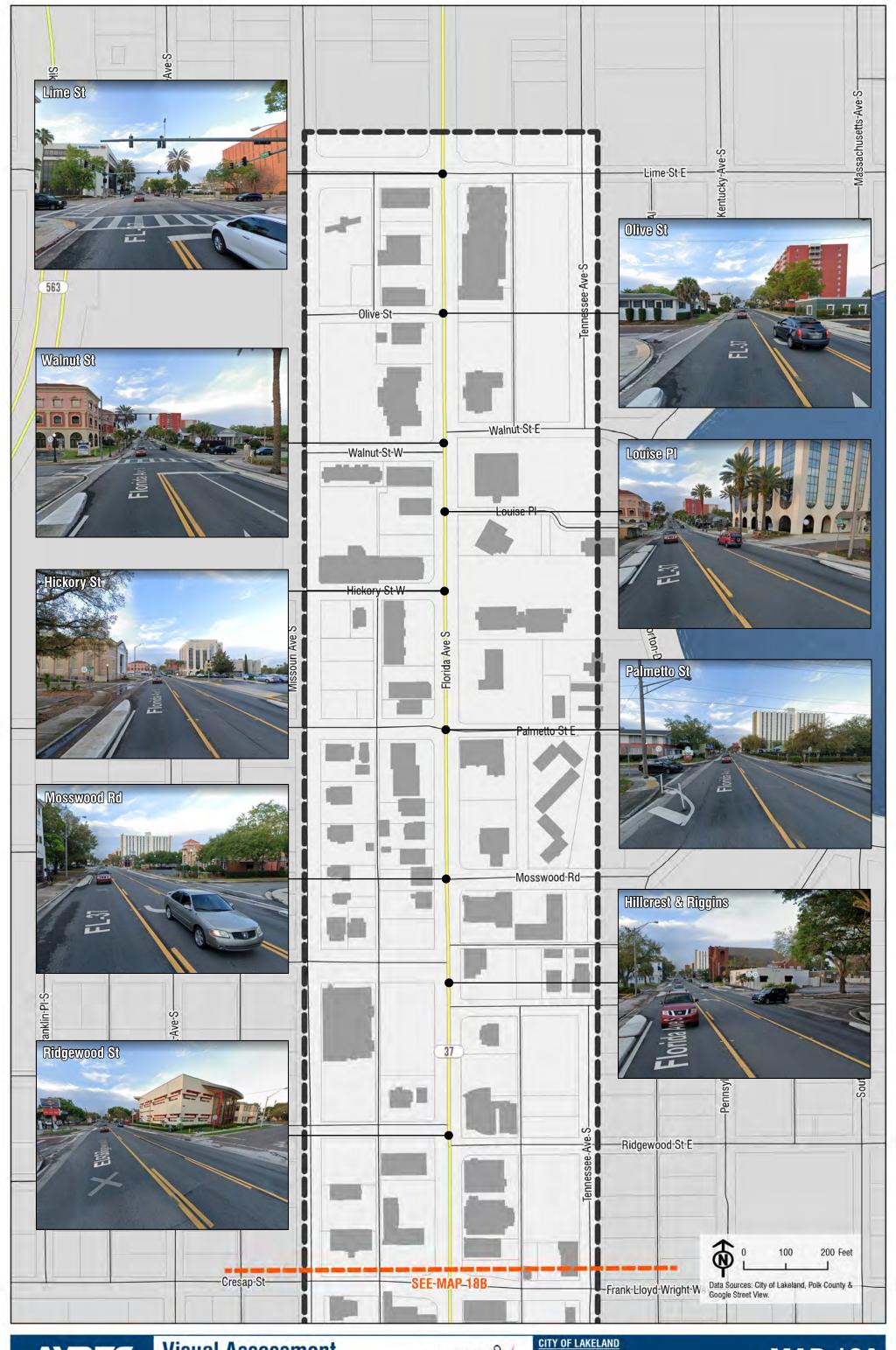


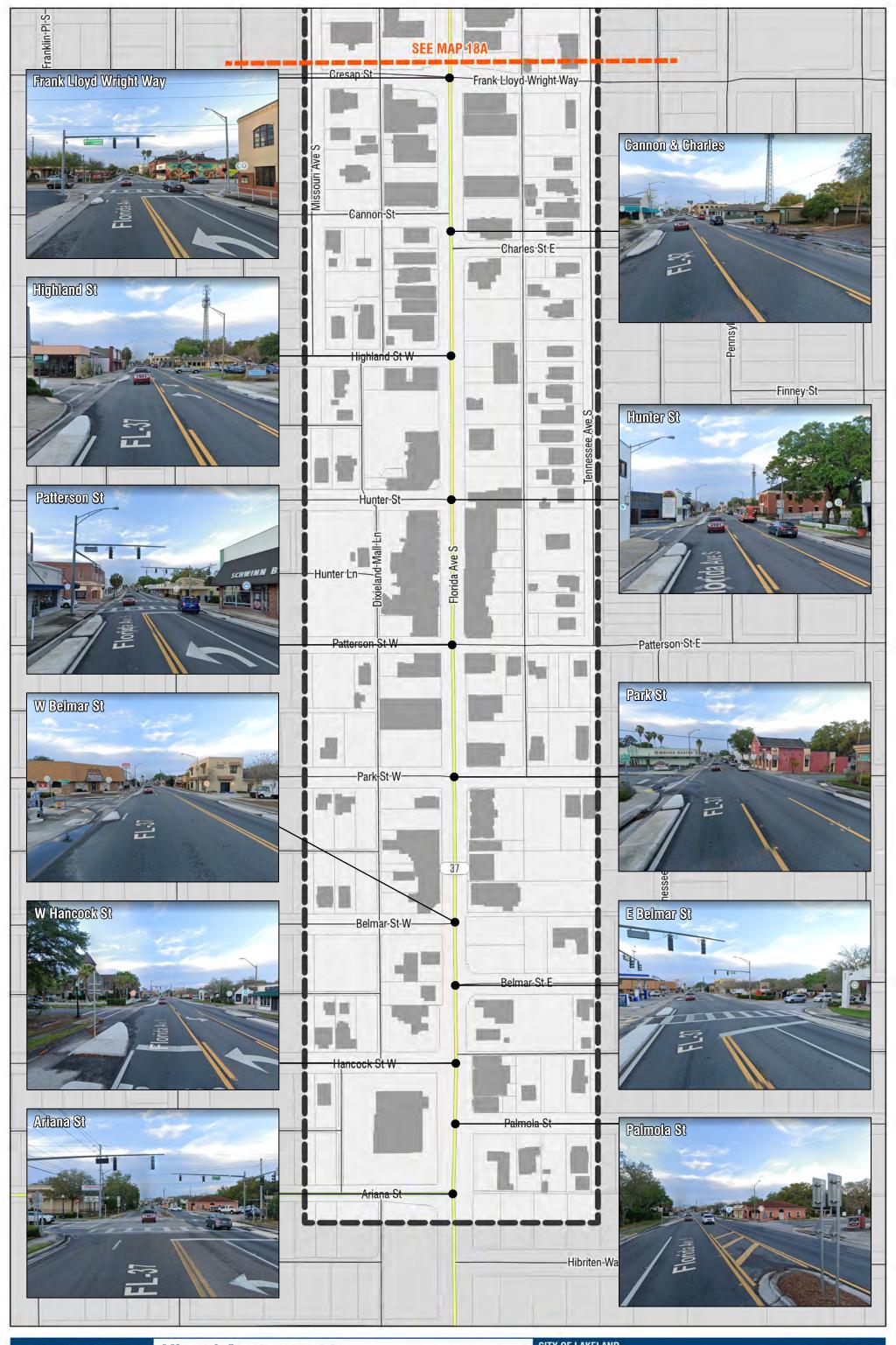












## South Florida Avenue Strategic Master Plan

