Inspire
PLACEMAKING COLLECTIVE

To: Scott Thomason, Richard Benderson, Lake City

From: Erik Bredfeldt, PhD, AICP, Economic Development Director

CC: Julia Clark, Laura Martinez, AICP

Date: November 18, 2025

Reference: Lake City CRA Workshop Summary

Workshop #1

The first in a series of two Community Workshops was held on October 29, 2025, at the Richardson Community Center (255 NE Coach Anders Ln, Lake City, FL 32055) at 5:30 pm. In addition to City Staff and Inspire Staff, there were around 30 community members in attendance.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

The event was promoted using the following outreach methods:

- Flyers
- Yard Signs
- Project Website

PURPOSE:

The goal of the first Workshop was to gather preliminary data on the existing conditions of the area. The Community Workshop began with a brief presentation that introduced the project team, the scope of the project and tentative timeline. The presentation then covered the basics of the CRA and Tax Increment Financing, observations and data analysis of challenges found within the CRA. Lastly, the team answered any questions and gave an explanation of the activities for public input. The engagement activities included the following and can be found in the appendix of the memo:

- Open-ended Key Challenges board
- Open-ended Key Opportunities board
- Open-ended Key Assets board
- Waterfront Entertainment District
- Commercial Corridors
- Institutional Campus
- Neighborhood Reinvestment Areas
- Historic Downtown

PUBLIC INPUT:

Many attendees were unfamiliar with what the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is or how it functions. This lack of awareness contributed to some skepticism about where funds are spent and who benefits. Several participants felt that most CRA investments have focused too heavily on the

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downtown area, while residential neighborhoods that need the most reinvestment have seen little improvement. There is a clear need for more transparency and public communication – both in explaining what the CRA does and in showing ongoing progress. Residents suggested that CRA meetings be streamed on City social media so people who work evenings can still participate and stay informed.

The following is the direct input received from the boards:

Key Challenges

- More green spaces for walking & biking sports

Key Opportunities

- Façade Improvement Grant
- Entrepreneur & Small Business grant
- Landscaping/Beautification
- Downtown Market needs farm food for sale
- Potential incoming food truck park located on parcels north of NW Escambia St and East & West of NW Columbia Ave
    - Several Food Truck businesses already exist in the area that could conglomerate here
- Roofing/Commercial building code compliance assistance

Key Assets

- Miriam Bristow
- Gateway Art Gallery
- Junkyard at Marion + Wilson needs to go
- Junkyard needs to go

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Community Assets	Not Satisfied/Needs Improvement*	Satisfied / Working Well
Waterfront Entertainment District		
Activation of Properties Along the Lakefront	5	0
Improved Parks & Trails	4	0
Weekly and Annual Events	5	0
Commercial Corridors		
Safe & Efficient Travel	4	0
Gateway Character & Corridor Identity	4	0
Active Commercial Frontages	6	0
Institutional Campus		
Health & Education Campus Development	7	0
Redevelopment of Vacant Institutional Land	5	0
Transit-Friendly Public Realm & Streetscape	4	0
Neighborhood Reinvestment Areas		
Healthy & Vibrant Housing Stock	2	0
Community Green Spaces & Urban Gardens	10	1
Safe, Walkable Connections	4	0
Historic Downtown		
Activated Mixed-Use Development	4	0
Cultural Corridor Enhancement	3	0
Vacant Land Urban Agriculture Initiatives	6	0

*Participants expressed that red stickers should be interpreted as 'needs improvement' and green stickers as 'satisfied'

Participants generally felt dissatisfaction with the CRA's assets, receiving only one green mark for "Community Green Spaces & Urban Gardens". This asset, however, also received the most amount of

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dissatisfaction marks (10). Following after, were "Health & Education Campus Development" (7), "Active Commercial Frontages" (6), and "Vacant Land Urban Agriculture Initiatives" (6). While lack of community spaces seems to be a high priority for improvement, the lack of active storefronts and the presence of vacant lands also seem to be of high priority for improvement in the community.

Idea Wall

- Lad Soup Kitchen redeveloped (3 votes)
- A place for the homeless (2 votes)
- Stream CRA meetings on City socials so those working late can have input (1 vote)
- A place for women and children to be rehabilitated and have a better future
- Bring back the Boys and Girls club and more stuff for youths age 13-18
- Have the fireworks moved back to Desoto Lake area

WHAT WE LEARNED:

Residents expressed strong interest in community-serving amenities and public spaces that promote safety, recreation, and togetherness.
Top priorities included:

- Creating more green spaces for walking, biking, and recreation.
- Developing community resources such as a place for the homeless, a women and children's rehabilitation center, and the return of youth programs like the Boys and Girls Club.
- Enhancing parks, trails, and the lakefront for everyday use and special events.
- Bringing weekly or annual events back to the community

Local entrepreneurs see opportunity but face real barriers to opening or sustaining businesses downtown. According to input from business owners:

- Many small or young entrepreneurs lack access to capital, guidance, or confidence to move from food trucks or pop-ups into permanent storefronts.
- Downtown rents are comparable to larger commercial strips, which discourages investment due to the higher ease of access in commercial strips compared to downtown storefronts
- Foot traffic downtown is low except during special events, making it difficult for small businesses to thrive.
- Some existing businesses are perceived as not community-oriented, impacting the district's reputation.

Participants recommended incentives such as temporary rent relief, storefront clean-up assistance, and façade or business improvement grants to help lower the barrier to entry for new businesses.

Several opportunities were identified for targeted CRA investment:

- Beautification and landscaping projects to enhance streetscapes and gateways.

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- Façade improvement grants and entrepreneur support programs to strengthen small businesses.
- A potential food truck park north of NW Escambia Street - building on the area's existing food truck vendors to create a shared destination.
- Roofing and code compliance assistance for aging commercial buildings.
- Activation of the lakefront as an entertainment and recreation district.

The overall message from the community is that people want to see visible, equitable improvements across all CRA neighborhoods, not just downtown. Residents want the CRA to focus on:

- More inclusive communication and transparency,
- Support for small and emerging businesses,
- Public amenities that strengthen community wellbeing, and
- Tangible results that residents can see and experience in their daily lives.

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