



Village of Estero | May 2026

ECO-HISTORIC PLANNING STUDY



Acknowledgments



VILLAGE OF ESTERO

MAYOR JOANNE RIBBLE
VICE MAYOR GEORGE ZALUCKI
COUNCILMEMBER JEFF HUNT
COUNCILMEMBER JON MCLAIN
COUNCILMEMBER RAFAEL LOPEZ
COUNCILMEMBER JIM WARD
COUNCILMEMBER LORI FAYHEE

CONSULTANT TEAM



LANDDESIGN
MASTER PLANNING & LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



COOPER CARRY
ARCHITECTURE



KITTELSON & ASSOCIATES
MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION



BDA
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS



RCLCO
MARKET & ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

This study establishes a **20-year framework** of projects and strategic actions for the Village Council to consider in order to broaden cultural, recreational, and social opportunities and enhance residents' quality of life.


WHY NOW?

Almost four years ago, Hurricane Ian caused significant impacts to the Estero Bay and the greater Fort Myers region. These impacts continue to emphasize the need for proactive planning that protects residents, infrastructure, and the unique assets that define the community.

In 2024, the Village of Estero was awarded a grant through the *Lee County Recovery and Resiliency Planning Program* to undertake a comprehensive planning study focused on balancing development, open space, and conservation in the study area (see context map at right).

The *Village of Estero Eco-Historic Planning Study* proactively addresses storm inundation and ecological preservation while recognizing that Estero's environmental and cultural assets are foundational to long-term growth and community identity.

PROJECT GOALS

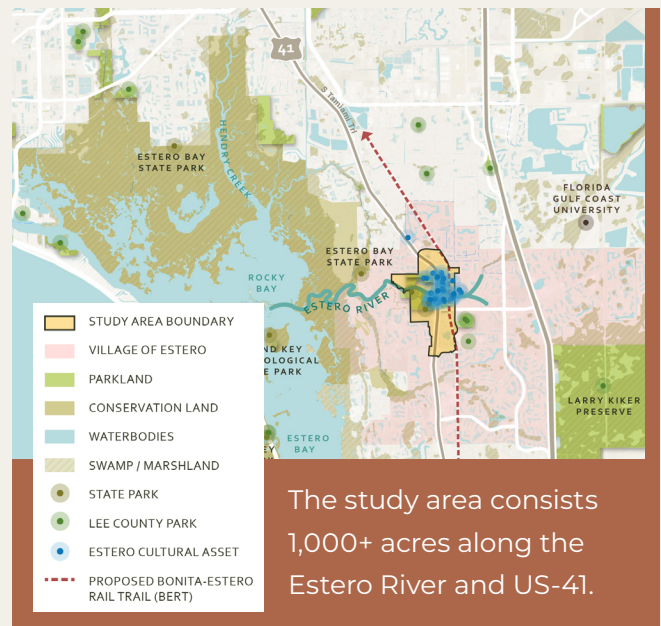
 PROTECT IRREPLACEABLE ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

 STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY IDENTITY & QUALITY OF LIFE

 GUIDE RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

The plan is grounded in a three-pronged approach to resilience – **environmental, generational, and economic** – recognizing that long-term success depends on addressing these systems together, rather than in isolation. Every recommendation within the plan supports one or more of these interconnected goals.

CONTEXT MAP



WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO ACHIEVE ESTERO'S VISION?

Recommendations in this plan are organized into four focus areas:



CONNECTIVITY & TRANSPORTATION



ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS



PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY

The projects and policies recommended are intended to support...

A GREATER MIX OF HOUSING TYPES
(NOT SHOWN IN RENDERING)

GROWTH THAT REINFORCES ESTERO'S UNIQUE IDENTITY

MORE LOCAL RESTAURANTS & DINING VARIETY

LESS RELIANCE ON US-41 FOR LOCAL TRIPS

MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL CONNECTION & COMMUNITY GATHERING

WALKABLE ACCESS TO PARKS, TRAILS, & EVERYDAY DESTINATIONS

THE ACTION PLAN

The **Action Plan** breaks down proposed projects into smaller, bite-size steps that could be implemented across a 20 years, with Village Council approval.

0-12 MONTHS FOUNDATIONAL STEPS

Establish priorities and develop a funding strategy

0-2 YEARS EARLY ACTIONS

Quick-win, visible projects that build momentum

2-5 YEARS SHORT-TERM

Evaluate design standards and launch **Catalyst Projects**

5-10 YEARS MEDIUM-TERM

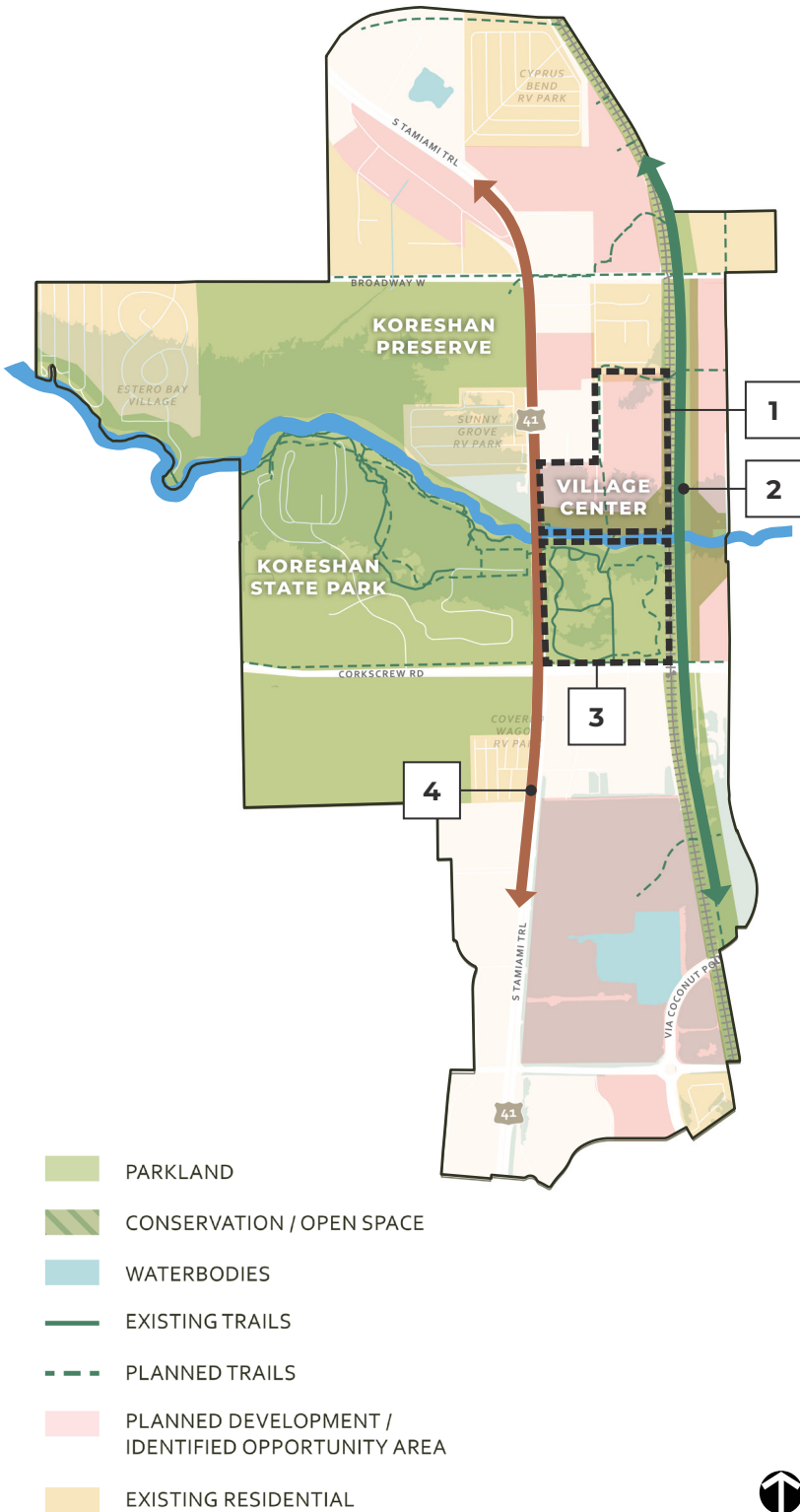
Advance signature destinations

10-20 YEARS LONG-TERM

Complete **Catalyst Projects**

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

STUDY AREA MAP



Early and Short-Term Actions described in the Action Plan include key **Catalyst Projects** and supporting policy updates that will define the next era of growth and identity for Estero, building momentum in the first few years while establishing a solid foundation for long-term change.

CATALYST PROJECTS

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | VILLAGE CENTER |
| 2 | BONITA-ESTERO RAIL TRAIL (BERT) |
| 3 | ESTERO RIVER PARK |
| 4 | US-41 CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS |

Opportunity areas (shown in pink at left) have also been identified for potential reinvestment where:

- » Environmental impact is limited
- » Connections to BERT or open space can be strengthened
- » Local businesses have the potential to cluster, strengthen foot traffic and overall destination appeal

TOP 6 CATALYST PROJECTS & POLICY UPDATES



1 VILLAGE CENTER

The Village Center is positioned to become a new riverside destination that attracts residents and businesses and supports more diverse local-serving dining and retail, walkability, and community life.



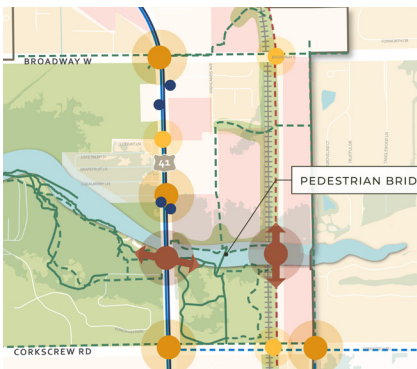
2 BONITA-ESTERO RAIL TRAIL (BERT)

Once the land is purchased, this project will establish a signature trail spine along a former rail line that can serve as an eco-tourism driver and off-street connector to neighborhoods, parks, and regional destinations.



3 ESTERO RIVER PARK

This project transforms the riverfront land across from Village Center into a nature-based destination, using natural play, visible ecological restoration, and expanded public access to create a more immersive experience.



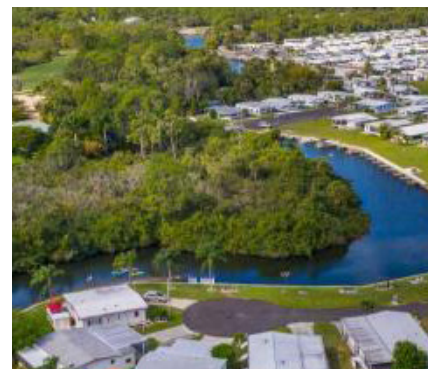
4 US-41 CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS

US-41 was identified as a key barrier to connectivity and quality of life in the study area. Initial assessment suggests that context reclassification and new or enhanced pedestrian crossings may be warranted.



5 ESTERO OPEN SPACE DESIGN MANUAL

Consider developing a clear framework for how parks, trails, streets, and public spaces in Estero should look and function. Creating a consistent design language helps ensure future projects contribute to a recognizable and cohesive public realm.



6 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

Consider protections (like the River Protection Overlay), incentive programs, and other standards to ensure that community growth is aligned with environmental constraints.

Page intentionally left blank.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY4

1

FOUNDATIONS

Introduction & Context	12
The Case for Action	14
The Planning Process	20
Plan Framework	22

2

VISION

Overview of Recommendations	29
Connectivity & Transportation	32
Environmental Systems	40
Parks, Trails, & Open Space	46
Economic Opportunities & Community	60
Action Plan	74
Next Steps	76
Cost Estimates	82

3

ANALYSIS

Community History	92
Existing Conditions	96
Planning Implications	134

4

APPENDIX

Document Review	140
Community Engagement	148
Market & Economic Analysis	168
Architectural Style Guide	188
Crossing Treatment Toolbox	192
Online Survey Responses	196
Community Engagement Materials - 1	214
Community Engagement Materials - 2	220
Nature Park Precedent Research	226





Village of Estero
Eco-Historic Planning Study

1

FOUNDATIONS

Introduction & Context

The Case for Action

The Planning Process

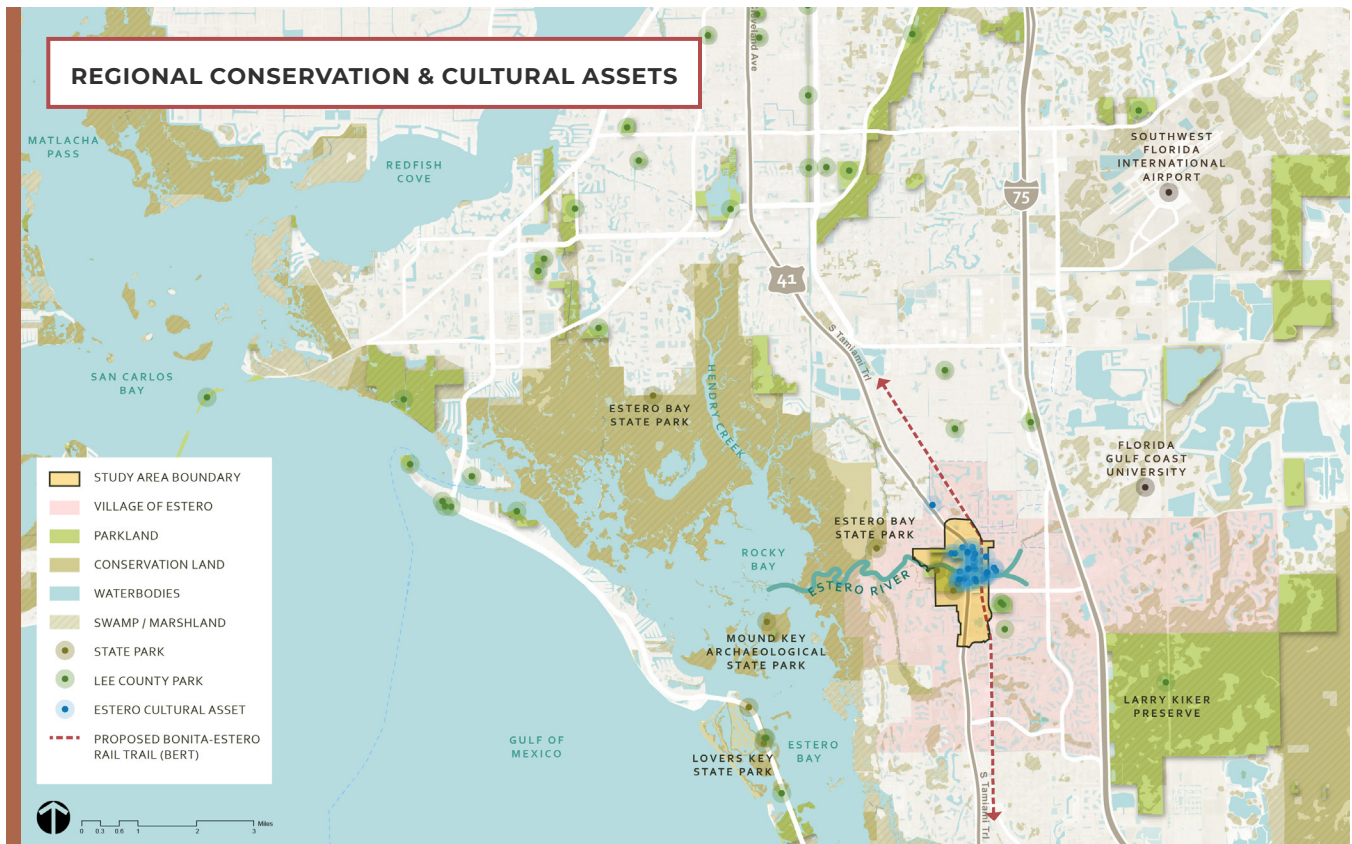
Plan Framework

Introduction & Context

Project Background

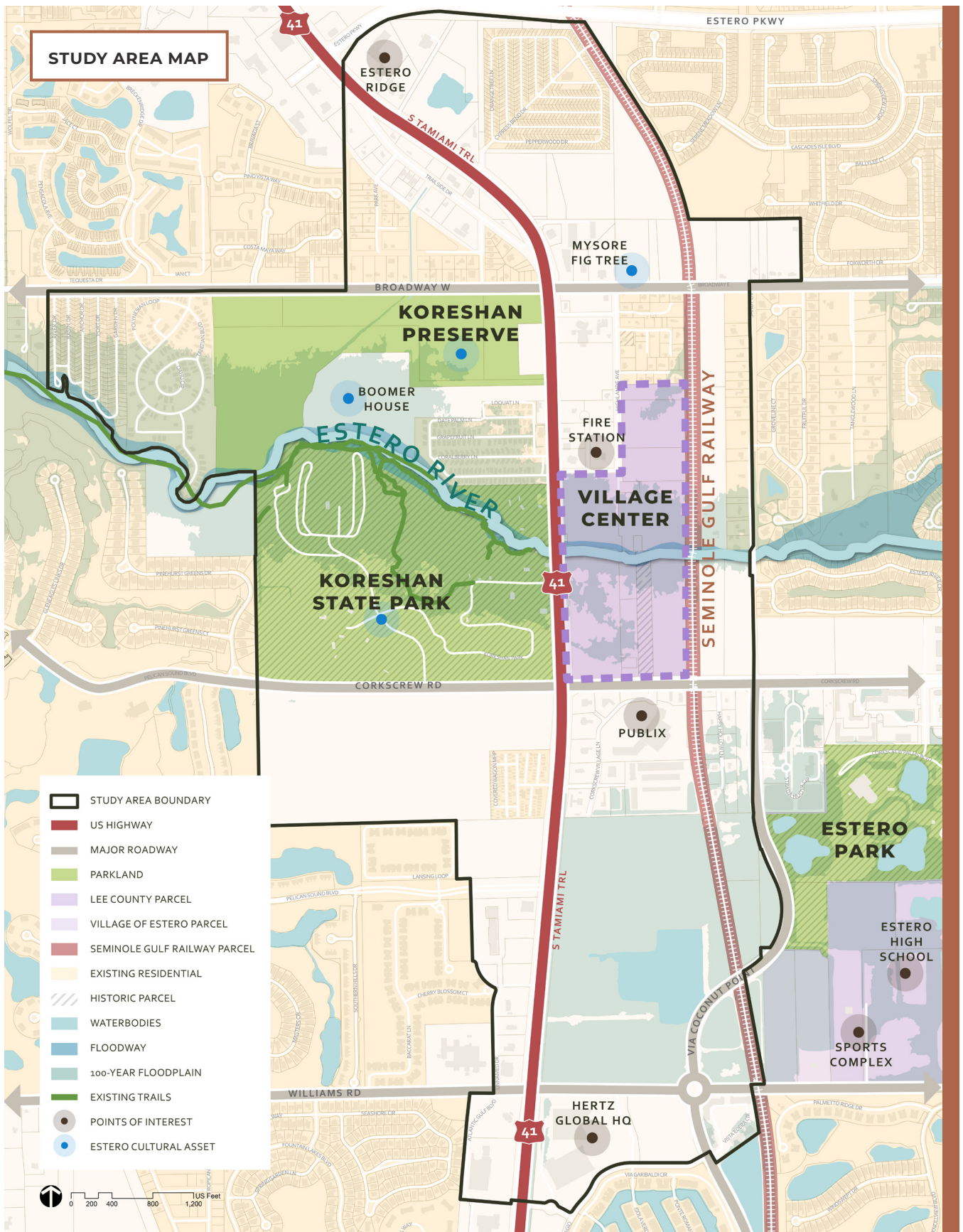
As the greater Fort Myers region continues to grow – and with the impacts of Hurricane Ian (2022) still fresh – Estero is at a pivotal moment. In 2024, the Village of Estero was awarded a grant through the *Lee County Recovery and Resiliency Planning Program* to undertake a comprehensive planning study focused on balancing development, open space, and conservation in developed area of Estero that lacks critical infrastructure.

The *Village of Estero Eco-Historic Planning Study* addresses storm inundation and climate change while recognizing the environmental and cultural significance of the Estero River and Koreshan State Park area to support long-term economic growth. Recommendations in this plan **establish a coordinated direction and 20-year framework for public and private investment** to broaden cultural, recreational, and social opportunities and elevate quality of life for Village residents.



The study area consists of more than 1,000 acres, including the Estero River, a portion of the US-41 corridor, and the planned Bonita–Estero Rail Trail (BERT), along with numerous historic sites and cultural assets, conservation lands, and publicly owned properties.

1 | FOUNDATIONS INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT



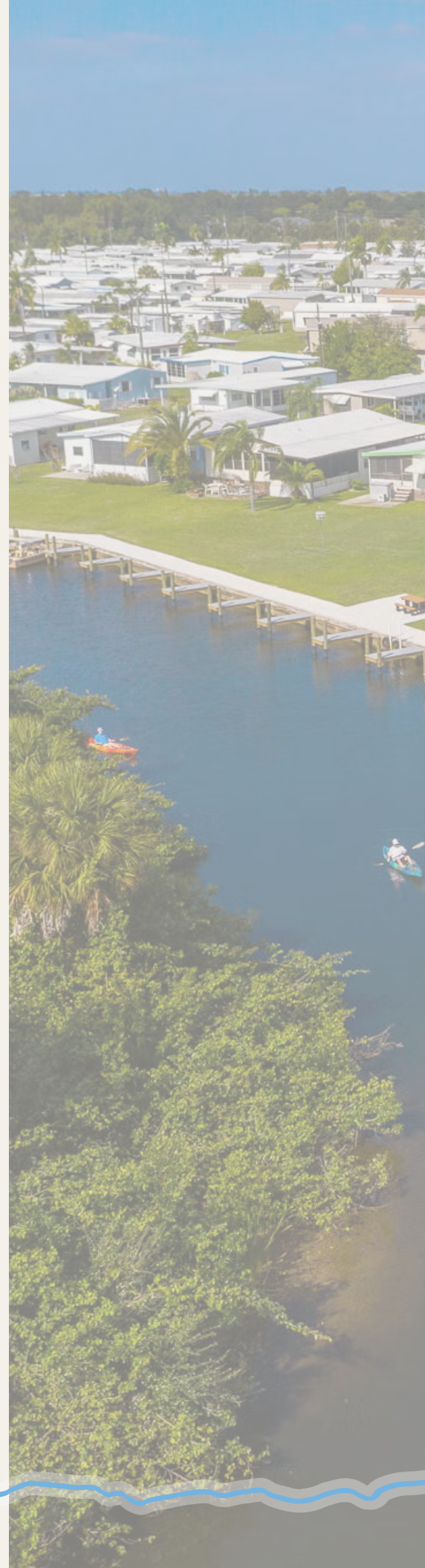
The Case for Action

Why Resilience Matters for Estero

Almost four years ago, Hurricane Ian caused significant impacts to the Estero Bay and the greater Fort Myers region. Storm surge, high winds, and heavy rain caused widespread flooding, erosion, habitat loss, and significant damage to homes and public infrastructure. In Estero, low-lying areas along the Estero River and surrounding wetlands are particularly vulnerable, highlighting the need for proactive planning to protect residents, infrastructure, and irreplaceable ecological and historic assets.

The storm also underscored the long-term challenges of climate change, including rising sea levels and more frequent intense storms. For Estero, resilience is central to sustainable community growth. Reducing the community's risk calls for an integrated approach; one that aligns stormwater management, ecological protection, and context-sensitive development in support of the local economy.

Funding through the Lee County Recovery and Resiliency Planning Program provides an opportunity to guide development that strengthens resilience and preserves environmental and cultural assets, including the Estero River and historic Koreshan sites. By thoughtfully integrating these assets into development and recreation strategies, Estero can provide long-term benefits for the community that support, not compromise, the natural and cultural systems that define the community.



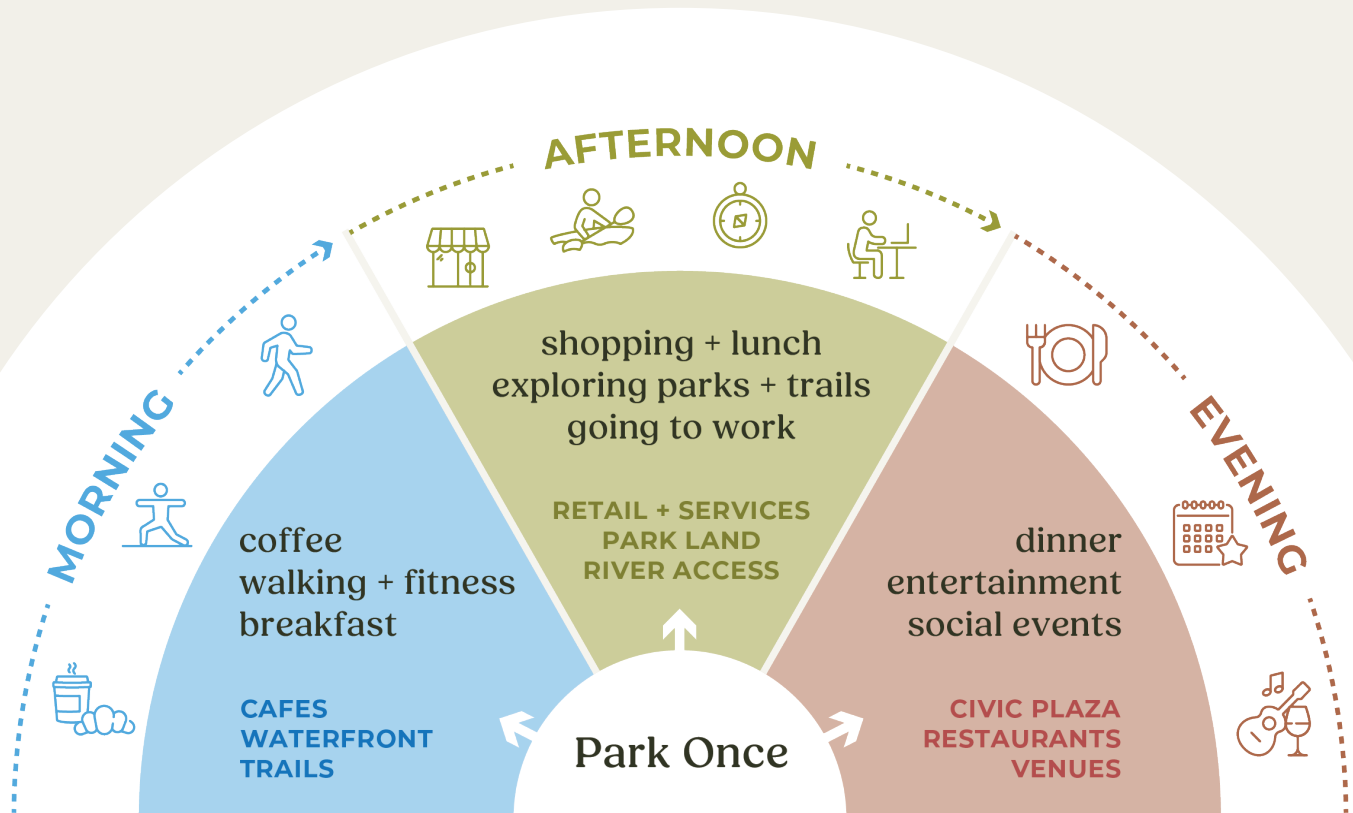
The All-Day Estero Experience

Great communities are not defined by a single destination, but by **how experiences build throughout the day**. The ability to move easily from one activity to another, without having to leave the community, shapes how people connect to a place and how long they choose to stay. Estero's unique places (see page 16) provide a strong foundation for this kind of experience.

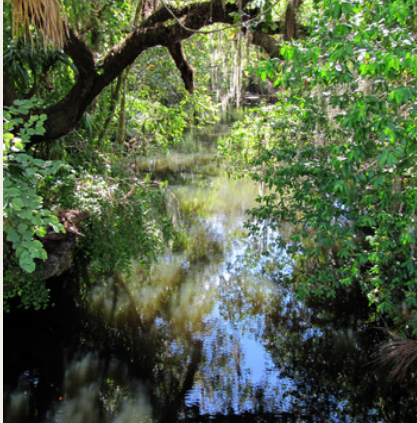
Each offers something distinct, but their real strength lies in how they work together to define Estero's character. When connected, and supported by walkable development, they can

create a regional draw that supports morning activity, midday gathering, and evening social life.

This all-day activity is what turns a collection of destinations into a cohesive community. It encourages people to linger, make multiple stops, and return more often. It supports local businesses, activates public spaces, and reinforces a sense of place that is built over time, not just in isolated moments. Strengthening these places is key to shaping Estero as a community where daily life is not only convenient, but meaningful and memorable.



UNIQUE, CHARACTER-DEFINING PLACES IN ESTERO



ESTERO RIVER



KORESHAN STATE PARK



VILLAGE CENTER



BOOMER HOUSE



BONITA-ESTERO RAIL TRAIL (BERT)



ESTERO PARK (LEE COUNTY-OPERATED)



KORESHAN GENERAL STORE



ESTERO RIVER OUTFITTERS

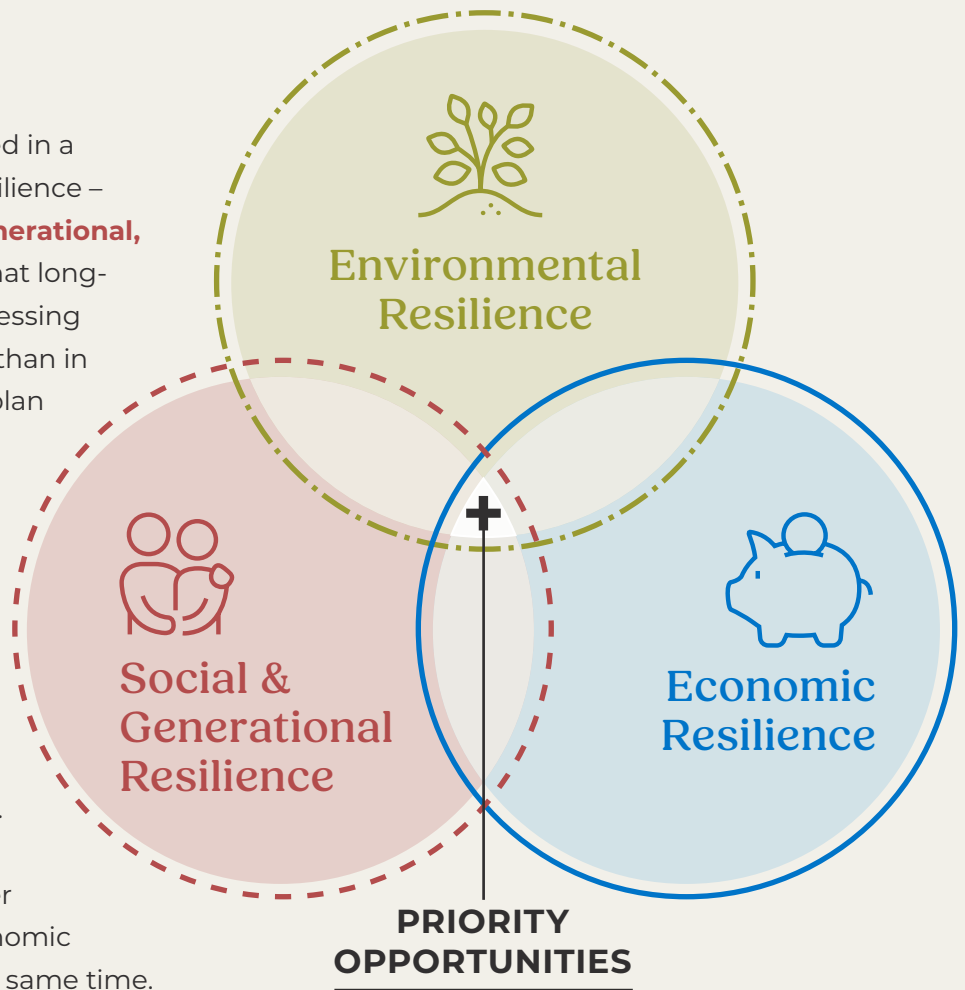


MYSORE FIG TREE

Resilience Goals

The plan framework is grounded in a three-pronged approach to resilience – **environmental, social and generational, and economic** – recognizing that long-term success depends on addressing these systems together rather than in isolation. Each element of the plan supports one or more of these interconnected goals, from land use and infrastructure to placemaking and economic development.

Estero’s highest-impact opportunities lie where environmental, economic, and community resilience intersect. These are the projects where strategic investment can deliver environmental protection, economic value, and public benefit at the same time.



Project Goals

The planning team translated the resilience goals for Estero (described above) into three project goals that reflect the intent of this planning study and the community's aspirations for what this effort should achieve.

 **PROTECT IRREPLACEABLE ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS**

Safeguard the Estero River, wetlands, and coastal systems

 **STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY IDENTITY & QUALITY OF LIFE**

Support walkability, gathering spaces, and aging-in-place

 **GUIDE RESPONSIBLE GROWTH**

Align with environmental system constraints and infrastructure capacity

Benefits of the Eco-Historic Planning Approach

Koreshan settlement patterns, the Estero River, and sensitive coastal habitats within the study area are key ecological and historical features that have affected growth in the Village of Estero across generations and continue to influence how the area is experienced by people today. This plan recognizes that these elements are not constraints to development, but assets that can benefit and build value in the community.

Planning with an eco-historic lens allows us to **reveal, connect, and steward** the assets that shape the place, rather than overwrite them. By aligning future growth with these assets, the plan supports context-sensitive investment, strengthens Estero's identity within the study area, and enhances its appeal as a place to live, work, and visit. Ultimately, this approach fosters long-term economic vibrancy by creating authentic, resilient places that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

With the entire vision and framework orienting itself to an eco-historic planning approach, new possibilities and long-term benefits begin to emerge.



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

PROTECT IRREPLACEABLE ASSETS

- » Prioritizes protection of the Estero River, coastal and wetland habitats, and other natural features that cannot be replaced when lost
- » Ensures that these assets are conserved while remaining accessible to the public

BUILD LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

- » Integrates planning techniques that provide flood mitigation to reduce future infrastructure costs and respond to environmental change
- » Respects the historic flow and function of the Estero River system to preserve water quality, habitat integrity, and long-term storm surge impacts

ENSURE QUALITY GROWTH

- » Guides future development to respect sensitive ecologies and historic landscape patterns and minimizes habitat disruption and environmental degradation
- » Ensures sustainable growth of Estero over time



SOCIAL & GENERATIONAL BENEFITS

ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION

- » Enhances access to the river with trails and open spaces that provide diverse recreational opportunities for daily use
- » Promotes active transportation modes through a network of connected trails
- » Blends nature-based recreation, retail, and entertainment

HEALTH & WELLNESS

- » Promotes lifelong health and active lifestyles by designing environments that support daily activity, social interaction, and connection to nature
- » Supports health and stress reduction by integrating natural landscapes and open space into daily life

PROMOTE LIFESTYLE DIVERSITY

- » Supports a mix of housing types that cater to residents of different life stages and economic backgrounds to help Estero become a place where people can live and age in-place
- » Promotes high-density nodes that create opportunities for social interaction



ECONOMIC BENEFITS

VALUE CREATION

- » Unlocks development potential along Estero River to increase market values by providing access to natural and cultural amenities
- » Proposes new development to attract a diverse population and new businesses

GROW SPENDING & TAX BASE

- » Contributes to a more stable economy by strengthening connections to the Koreshan Preserve, Estero River, and preserved parkland to encourage repeat visits and increased local spending
- » Enhances the quality of place in the study area, making the area more competitive for both private investment and public funding

PLACE-BASED ACTIVITIES

- » Supports small businesses, recreation-based enterprises, and cultural tourism rooted in local identity (which is more likely to be locally-owned, community-supported, and aligned with environmental stewardship goals)

1 | FOUNDATIONS

The Planning Process

Developed over five (5) phases in 2025 and 2026, the *Village of Estero Eco-Historic Planning Study* has been guided by input from an active Village Council, the Planning, Zoning, and Design (PZD) Board, and the broader public to ensure that the plan reflects community-wide priorities and interests.

For more detailed information on public engagement activities see the Appendix, page 148.

MAY 2025

PHASE 1 Discovery	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collect data <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Map upcoming development, opportunities, challenges <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conduct a market demand analysis
PHASE 2 Engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview Village Council members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Open House held on June 24, 2025
PHASE 3 Visioning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Analyze the feedback from Phase Two to generate a gap analysis and guiding principles <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PZD board meeting presentation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Develop an economic and land development strategy
PHASE 4 Engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Re-interview Village Council members <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Open House held on March 10, 2026 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online Community Survey
PHASE 5 Adoption	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prepare the Eco-Historic Planning Report with key recommendations, and prioritized action plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PZD board meeting presentation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Village Council presentation

MAY 2026



1. OPEN HOUSE SETUP

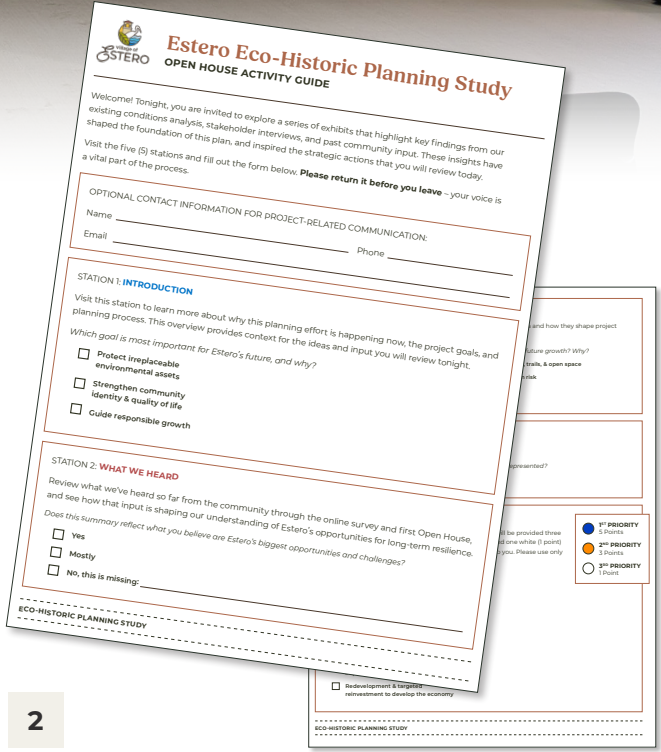
The 2nd Community Open House used a self-guided format, allowing participants to review the analysis stations and draft strategies at their own pace. WINK News provided ample coverage of the event, which broadened awareness of the project and encouraged strong community participation.

2. ATTENDEE ACTIVITY GUIDE

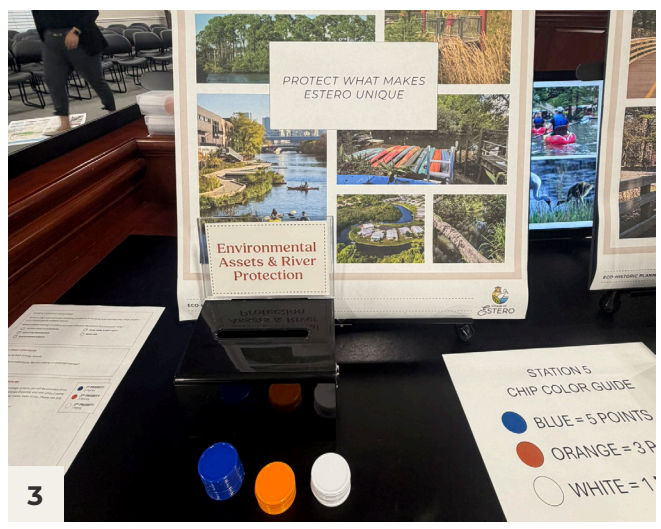
A one-page activity guide was provided to attendees to capture detailed feedback, including ideas, and open-ended input to help refine the plan's recommendations.

3. PRIORITIZATION EXERCISE

The chip prioritization exercise invited participants to identify and rank their top three priorities, which informed the phasing of the Action Plan and investments.



2



3

Plan Framework

The Organizing Structure

These recommendations are intentionally structured as a layered framework that moves from foundation to action, linking long-term community values (as understood through the community engagement process) to on-the-ground change.

At its foundation, environmental systems establish where and how Estero can grow. The Estero River, wetlands, floodplains, and open space network are a significant, defining feature of the community that shape development patterns, access, and resilience over time. This layer grounds the vision in a clear directive to **plan with the land, not against it** (see Planning Implications, page 134).

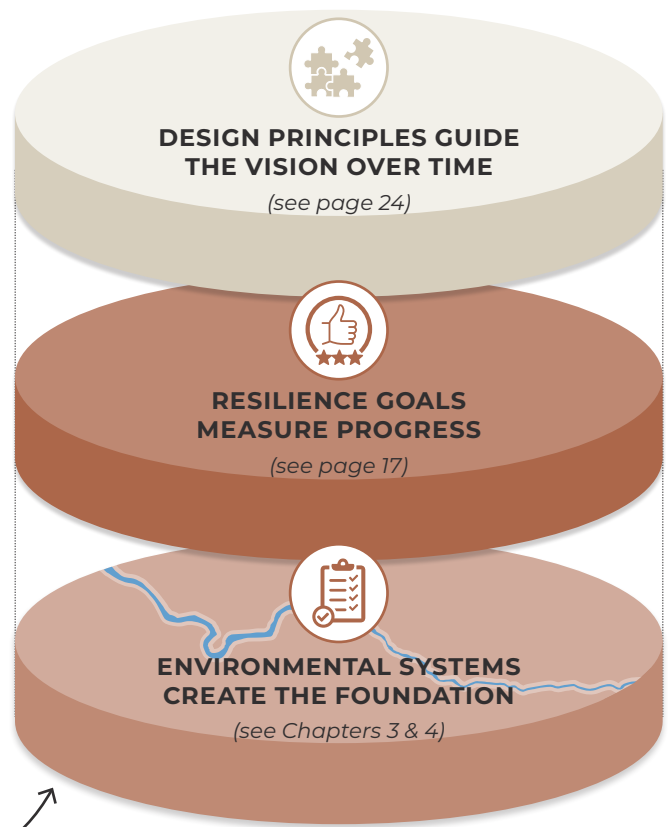
Building on that, **resilience goals provide the lens for decision-making**. Environmental, economic, and generational resilience are considered together to ensure that each recommendation contributes to long-term community stability and adaptability.

At the top, **design principles translate these priorities into the physical experience of Estero**. These principles shape how growth looks and feels on the ground. They are intended to be flexible and revisited as projects are implemented, ensuring the vision evolves with the community.

This structure ties "big-picture systems" to "everyday experience."

EVERY STRATEGY IN THIS PLAN:

- ✓ Aligns with existing and future environmental system constraints
- ✓ Advances Resilience Goals
- ✓ Follows best practices and guidelines



Elements of the Plan

CHAPTER

1

FOUNDATIONS

Establishes the plan context and frames the need for an eco-historic planning approach in Estero

CHAPTER

2

VISION

Presents a vision for the overall study area and key sites, with short-, medium-, and long-term strategic actions

Recommendations are organized into four focus areas:



CONNECTIVITY & TRANSPORTATION



ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS



PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY

CHAPTER

3

ANALYSIS

Summarizes the research, community engagement, and technical analyses conducted in early phases of planning

CHAPTER

4

APPENDIX

Supporting documentation, technical materials, and interim deliverables that inform the plan

This plan serves as a guide for both public and private stakeholders, serving as a reference for decision-making, investment, and long-term planning for the Village of Estero.



Design Principles

Shaped by feedback from the Estero Village Council and attending residents at the first Community Open House, the following design principles informed the recommendations, illustrations, and strategic actions described in the Vision chapter. They are non-prescriptive to allow for innovative ideas to flourish, but are meant to **ensure that the plan's original priorities persist** throughout the 20-year, multi-phase implementation process.

Balance Growth with Preservation

Shape future development to enhance Estero's character while meeting evolving needs.



- » Guide new development to fit within the existing community fabric and elevate quality standards.
- » Accommodate growth while maintaining "small town charm."

Celebrate Culture & Character

Infuse public spaces with Estero's identity and heritage.



- » Highlight historic sites, community traditions, and other local stories in parks and public spaces.
- » Express Old Florida vernacular and cultural heritage through architecture, design, and public spaces.

Protect & Enhance Natural Assets

Safeguard and integrate Estero's natural resources through sustainable design solutions.



- » Preserve waterways, habitats, and native landscapes.
- » Use green infrastructure to protect wetlands, manage stormwater, and support ecosystems.
- » Strengthen community connections to nature and recreation.

LOOKING AHEAD

As projects come online and new opportunities emerge over time, these principles should be revisited to ensure that Village decision-making is in alignment with the community’s evolving needs and its needs for the future.



Foster a Strong Sense of Place

Provide welcoming spaces that build community pride and connection.



- » Design streets, parks, plazas, and gathering areas to encourage shared experiences.
- » Prioritize comfort, access, and safety for residents of all ages and abilities.
- » Reinforce a consistent character through cohesive design elements.

Connect People & Places

Ensure safe, accessible networks that link neighborhoods, nature, and culture.



- » Establish continuous pedestrian and bicycle connections that link neighborhoods, town centers, and open spaces.
- » Promote mobility, health, and social interaction through walkable and bikeable design.

Plan for Generational Resilience

Design with adaptability and longevity to serve all ages for decades to come.



- » Ensure development is adaptable, sustainable, and benefits the community long-term.
- » Incorporate design strategies that are inclusive for all ages and support residents “aging in-place.”





Village of Estero
Eco-Historic Planning Study

2 **VISION**

Overview of Recommendations

Connectivity & Transportation

Environmental Systems

Parks, Trails, & Open Space

Economic Opportunity & Community

Action Plan

Next Steps

Cost Estimates

THE VISION STATEMENT

The Estero Eco-Historic study area is a resilient, intergenerational community that seeks to balance progress and preservation.

Rooted in nature and enriched by local culture, the area maintains its small-town character and connection to the river that defines Estero.



2 | VISION

Overview of Recommendations

Achieving the vision described in the Vision Statement (see previous page) depends on aligning multiple efforts over time. Transportation, public space, economic development, and environmental systems must work in concert to support a consistent direction for Estero. The following sections outline a framework for how that vision could be realized, and **present a range of ideas for continued discussion and consideration by the Village Council and project partners.** When advanced together, these focus areas can help shape a more connected and resilient Estero.

Recommendations are grounded in a clear understanding of the following:

- » Community priorities and aspirations
- » Existing conditions and the opportunities they afford
- » The environmental realities that shape future growth
- » Ability to implement over the short-, medium-, and long-term



HOW THIS CHAPTER IS ORGANIZED:

1. Connectivity & Transportation (page 32)
2. Environmental Systems (page 40)
3. Parks, Trails, & Open Space (page 46)
4. Economic Opportunities & Community (page 60)
 - » Action Plan (page 74)
Summary of all plan recommendations
 - » Next Steps (page 76)
Implementation & funding guidance
 - » Cost Estimates (page 82)

FROM INVESTMENT TO IMPACT

The graphic below illustrates how targeted investments in Estero will build over time to deliver broader community benefits (see page 18) and reinforce the Village's long-term resilience goals.



Phasing Strategy

The Vision chapter is intended to guide Village staff and partners in considering how the ideas and projects identified in this study may be incorporated into future Capital Improvement Program (CIP) efforts, if approved by Council.

The **Action Plan** breaks down these proposed projects into smaller, bite-size steps, with the ultimate goal of bringing Estero's vision to life.

Foundational Steps (0-12 MONTHS)

These steps build the capacity needed to move from planning to implementation, including organizational alignment and developing a funding strategy.

For more information see Next Steps, page 74-75.

Early Actions (0-2 YEARS)

Early Actions are high-priority "quick-win" actions that can be initiated immediately to make tangible progress in the short-term. These efforts kick off implementation of the plan and signal a clear direction for the Village.

Short-Term Actions (0-5 YEARS)

The short-term phase focuses on the Early Actions and other immediate improvements that respond directly to community concerns (safety, congestion, lack of walkability) while also establishing the policy structure that will guide future development.

**FIX SAFETY & CONNECTIVITY,
ESTABLISH IDENTITY**

This phase is about setting direction and building momentum:

- » Protect environmental systems first
- » Address safety and mobility issues
- » Design standards
- » Begin key projects

Medium-Term Actions

(5-10 YEARS)

The medium-term phase transitions Estero from planning and early implementation into a fully functioning system of connected places. Short-term projects begin to scale, linking open space and economic development into a connected system that supports regional identity.

BUILD SYSTEMS & DELIVER DESTINATION PROJECTS

Long-Term Actions

(10-20+ YEARS)

In the long-term, Estero can continue to strengthen its identity through coordinated public and private investments and improved connectivity. Earlier phases lay the foundation for long-term environmental, mobility, and community benefits.

ONG EVOLUTION OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY

This phase is about delivering the vision:

- » Build a complete, connected mobility network
- » Deliver signature destinations (BERT and Estero River Park)
- » Establish a functioning Village Center
- » Align development with environmental systems and design standards

This phase is about maturity and identity:

- » Complete Catalyst Projects
- » Reinforce a strong, authentic Village of Estero identity
- » Sustain long-term economic and environmental health

Connectivity & Transportation



Community input made one priority clear: transportation and safety matter.

THE CHALLENGE

Existing transportation conditions affect safety, comfort, and quality of life in Estero.

These include:

- » High traffic volumes along US-41
- » Limited safe pedestrian crossings
- » Fragmented bicycle and sidewalk networks
- » Heavy reliance on vehicle travel

GUIDING GROWTH WITH TRANSPORTATION

Transportation and mobility is not separate from redevelopment. Rather, it is what makes responsible growth possible. Selective transportation improvements should guide where and how reinvestment occurs, and focus growth in the areas that can support it. This applies to areas where:

- » Safe access can be realistically improved
- » Infrastructure capacity exists, or can support, growth without overburdening the system
- » Multi-modal connections are achievable

Reinvestment should not be prioritized in areas of Estero where development would remain isolated and auto-dependent, and encouraged in locations that can support more walkable, multi-modal patterns of development.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Estero has established destinations and clear opportunity corridors that can be used to create a more connected network for all modes. By enhancing access along these corridors, the Eco-Historic area can function more like a unified system, rather than a series of isolated destinations.

Key corridors:

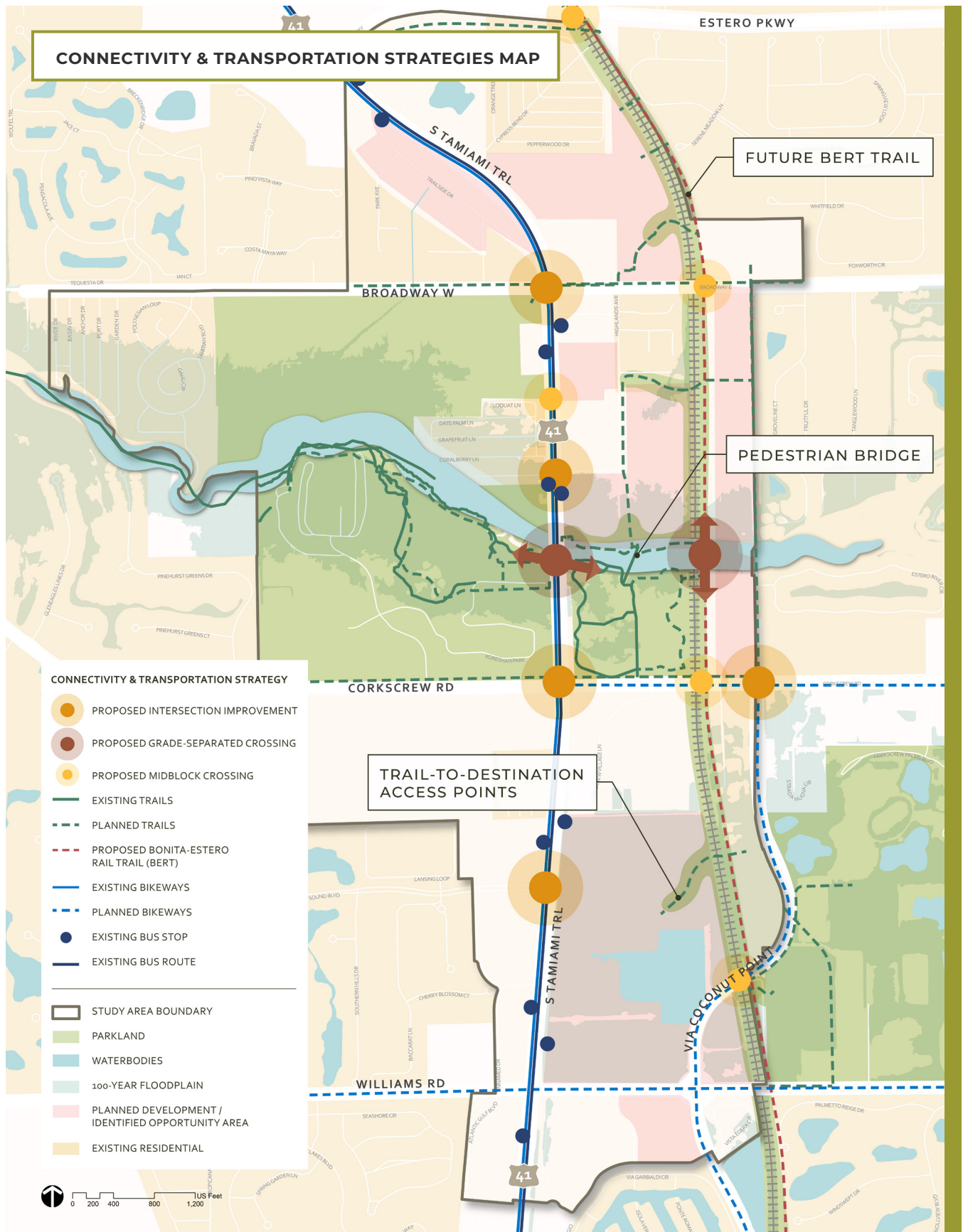
- » US-41
- » The planned Bonita-Estero Rail Trail (BERT)
 - › See page 53 for more details
- » Estero River corridor
- » Village-owned riverfront land



US-41 INTERSECTION

Typical crossing conditions at busy intersections along US-41 (Estero Parkway shown).

2 | VISION CONNECTIVITY & TRANSPORTATION



Phase 1: Short-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | **MAKE IT SAFER & EASIER TO MOVE AROUND TODAY**

In the near term, the priority is to make it safer and easier to move around Estero, regardless of mode. Early investments in east-west connectivity should be considered to reduce the barrier effect of US-41 and improve access between neighborhoods, parks, and emerging destinations.

Coordination with FDOT will be essential to advance improvements such as enhanced crossings, reduced speed environments, and other opportunities like an under-the-bridge greenway connection at the Estero River. At the same time, early streetscape pilot projects and branding efforts will begin to shift US-41 from a high-speed roadway, to a corridor that supports community identity and long-term redevelopment goals.

EARLY ACTIONS

- » **Adopt US-41 Landscape & Streetscape Master Plan**
 - › Explore reclassification of a segment of US-41 (see page 35)
 - › Define typical cross sections (lanes, medians, sidewalks, bike facilities)
 - › Identify priority pedestrian and bicycle crossings (top 10 locations)
 - › Evaluate grant opportunities

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- » Implement priority crossings on US-41 and key intersections (2-3 locations)
 - › Pilot protected bike lanes / shared-use paths
 - › Improve sidewalk gaps and ADA accessibility
 - › Launch “Safe Routes to Parks & Trails” program
- » Coordinate with FDOT on:
 - › Speed management strategies
 - › Under-bridge multi-use path at Estero River
 - › Other grade-separated crossing options to reduce US-41 as a barrier

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE MASTER PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE:

- » Multi-modal corridor design that accommodate all users
- » Community engagement
- » Crossing framework with identified priorities
- » Native-friendly landscape and shade framework
- » Node-based place strategy
- » Palette of materials, signage, and furnishings that build corridor identity
- » Phasing and implementation strategy, including identified grant opportunities

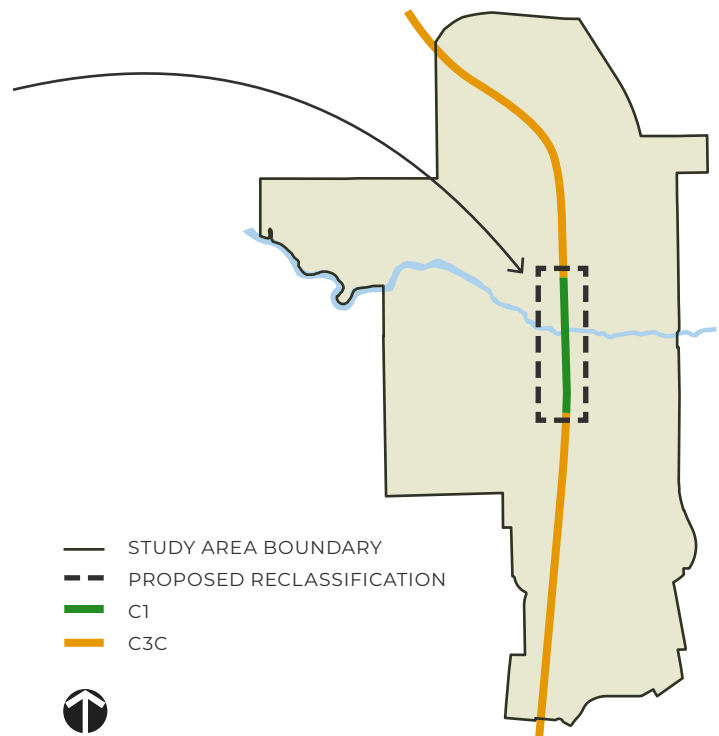
US-41 LANDSCAPE & STREETScape MASTER PLAN

Adopting a community-supported master plan is a critical first step to reposition US-41 as an active, safe, and navigable multi-modal corridor that supports Estero's mobility, economic, and community identity goals. The plan should set a long-term vision for US-41 between Estero Parkway and Williams Road that balances regional movement with local access, safety, and placemaking. This includes establishing standards for roadway cross sections, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, landscaping, lighting, and materials. These elements should work together to create a recognizable identity for Estero and reinforce connections to adjacent development and open spaces.

US-41 CONTEXT CLASSIFICATION

An early action for the Village of Estero is to coordinate with FDOT to **request a project-level analysis for the US-41 corridor between Broadway W and Corkscrew Road**, which is currently classified as C1. Based on this study's findings and the corridor's anticipated evolution toward a C3C context, the additional review will help determine whether reclassification is warranted to be consistent with the surrounding corridor and support the desired future land use and design character. The review should also consider opportunities for speed limit reduction, traffic calming interventions, and other pedestrian improvements around the future Village Center.

See page 114-121 for more details on US-41.



GRADE-SEPARATED CROSSING FEASIBILITY STUDY

US-41 is perceived by the community as one of the most significant physical barriers within Estero. High traffic volumes, multiple travel lanes, and limited crossing opportunities make it difficult for walkers and bicyclists to move between neighborhoods, parks, and other destinations. While enhanced at-grade crossings can improve safety in the near term, they may not fully address long-term mobility and comfort needs, especially as growth continues across the region.

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE:

- » Site analysis and selection criteria
- » Design typologies for underpasses and overpasses, considering:
 - › Vertical clearance requirements
 - › ADA-accessibility
 - › User comfort, visibility, and safety
 - › Drainage and flood conditions, especially for underpasses
- » Connectivity and regional network integration
- » Cost estimates, phasing and implementation strategy
- » Permitting strategy, including coordination with FDOT and other agencies
- » Design standards

A feasibility study for grade-separated crossings at strategic locations along US-41 would evaluate the potential for pedestrian underpasses or overpasses at locations that would provide the greatest benefit to the current and future community.

Priority locations may include:

- » Key spurs that connect to the Bonita-Estero Rail Trail (BERT)
- » Areas near Village Center, Koreshan State Park, Estero Sports Park, and other major destinations
- » Locations with high pedestrian demand or constrained at-grade crossing conditions
- » Locations that provide a critical connection between residential areas and essential services, retail, and the open space system



1

1. ESTERO RIVER OUTFITTERS

Proposed trail underpass location below US-41

2. TAMPA RIVERWALK (TAMPA, FL)

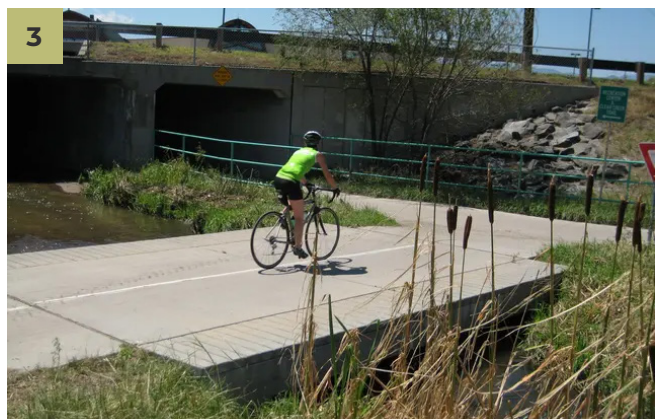
Running along the Hillsborough River, the Tampa Riverwalk navigates constrained downtown conditions with sections cantilevered over the water.

3. CLEAR CREEK TRAIL (WHEAT RIDGE, CO)

The trail corridor is constrained between the creek and the Golden Highway (Hwy 58), requiring it to navigate several roadway interchanges with limited space. At this location, it uses a low-water culvert to pass beneath a 5-lane roadway.



2



3

Phase 2: Medium-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | REDUCE CAR DEPENDENCY AS ESTERO GROWS

As the framework established in the short term takes hold, the focus shifts to expanding and completing a multi-modal network that reduces dependence on vehicles and improves connectivity across the community.

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS

- » Expand the bike and pedestrian network to residential areas
- » Identify and implement trail-to-destination connections
- » Integrate transit/shuttle connections (seasonal and local) to support eco-tourism and reduce vehicle dependence
- » **US-41 Corridor Improvements**
 - › Implement streetscape improvements in priority segments, focusing on high-activity nodes to start
 - › Introduce traffic calming and enhanced or new grade-separated crossings
 - › Redevelop priority nodes into walkable mixed-use centers
 - › Reduce corridor "barrier effect" through improved multi-modal connections
 - › Require streetscape enhancements as redevelopment occurs along US-41



ESTERO PARKWAY

Estero Parkway is a strong local example of corridor investment. A shaded sidewalk is well-buffered from the roadway with landscaping, and bike facilities are clearly defined with green pavement markings to increase visibility.



Phase 3: Long-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | ACHIEVE A SEAMLESS, MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

By this phase, the mobility system is fully connected, seamless, and integrated with regional networks.

LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » Complete regional trail and greenway connections
- » Achieve seamless crossings across US-41
- » Integrate with the broader regional transportation system (i.e. trails and transit located outside of Estero and Lee County)
- » **US-41 Corridor Transformation**
 - › Fully realize multi-modal boulevard as envisioned in the Streetscape Master Plan
 - › Reinforce node-based development pattern



Key Takeaways for Connectivity & Transportation

Fix safety first: Evaluate improvements to crossings, sidewalks, and bike facilities, making it safer and easier to move around Estero today.

Establish the framework before building the system: Early actions (the US-41 Corridor Master Plan, BERT framework) ensure that future investments are coordinated and consistent with long-term vision and resilience goals.

Transform US-41: Phased improvements will transform US-41 from a high-speed corridor into a multi-modal boulevard with safe crossings, walkable nodes, and a cohesive public realm.

Leverage BERT as the community's primary mobility spine: The Bonita–Estero Rail Trail serves as the primary north-south connector, linking key destinations with safe access across Estero.

Proactive, not reactive: Transportation improvements should *guide* where redevelopment occurs, rather than *respond* to ongoing growth, to encourage walkable development and multi-modal access.

Environmental Systems



The Estero River, wetlands, floodplains, and conservation lands are interconnected (functionally and geographically) and shape where and how change can occur in the study area.

THE VALUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

Rivers, coastal and wetland habitats, and other natural systems in Estero provide essential functions that support community health, safety, and quality of life. They manage water quality, support native habitat, and influence the culture and character of the community. Once lost, these systems cannot be replaced.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Beyond their core functions, these systems can help shape how Estero grows and evolves. When stewardship and conservation are aligned with access, recreation, and community development, they can advance resilience goals and deliver lasting community benefits (see page 18 for more details).



THE ESTERO RIVER

- » Connects upstream riverine systems to the Estero Bay
- » Shapes historic settlement patterns
- » Anchors Koreshan State Park and the Village of Estero
- » Provides flood storage and critical ecological value
- » Opportunities for enhanced **access, recreation and interpretation**

FLOODPLAINS & WETLANDS

- » Reduce long-term risk of storm events
- » Provide water quality benefits
- » Limit development intensity
- » Opportunity to **align flood storage areas** with the existing open space network

EXISTING PARKS, CONSERVATION LAND, & RIVERFRONT LAND

- » Form a strong backbone of a larger, connected recreation system in Estero
- » Opportunity to **connect and strengthen what exists**, rather than adding new parks

Phase 1: Short-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | ESTABLISH GUARDRAILS BEFORE GROWTH ACCELERATES

In the short term, the focus is on establishing a clear structure to ensure that future growth aligns with these systems and avoids long-term vulnerability.

This includes adopting river protection overlays, securing key river access sites, considering additional land acquisition for environmentally sensitive areas, and developing resilience-based land use policies. Together, these actions define where development should and should not occur, reinforcing the principle of planning with the land rather than against it.

EARLY ACTIONS

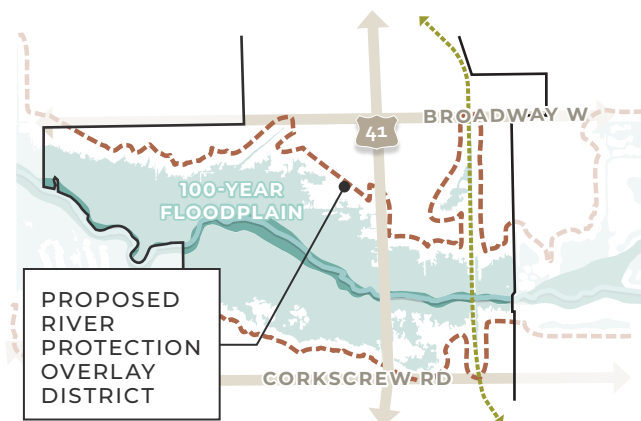
- » Consider adopting an **Estero River Protection Overlay District**
- » Develop and adopt a Village-wide **Green Infrastructure Handbook** to guide site and infrastructure design
- » Develop a **Green Infrastructure Incentive Program**

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- » Identify and secure 2–3 priority river access sites
- » Initiate wetland and floodplain land acquisition program
- » Secure river access sites through easements or purchase
- » Limit impervious surface coverage in sensitive areas

RIVER PROTECTION OVERLAY DISTRICT

A combination of floodplain regulations, wetland protections, and project-specific approvals govern development along the Estero River. While these tools provide important safeguards, they do not establish a corridor-wide approach to how the river edge is protected, experienced, or integrated into the community. As a result,



2 | VISION ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

conditions along the river vary and limit its full value as an ecological asset and defining community feature.

A River Protection Overlay District will introduce clear, consistent standards that align land use, design, and environmental stewardship. Overlay District standards can include a minimum setback (100' from the top of bank is recommended), with built-in flexibility to adjust based on site-specific conditions like habitat quality, flood risk, and existing development patterns. This setback area would function as a protected buffer zone for ecological preservation that serves a water quality and flood storage function, while still allowing for carefully designed public access, where appropriate.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Beyond regulatory policy, Estero has an opportunity to proactively guide how development contributes to environmental resilience. Green infrastructure (bioswales, rain gardens, permeable surfaces, native landscaping, etc.) can improve water quality, reduce flooding, and enhance the community's visual character when consistently applied.

The Handbook

The Village should consider developing a Green Infrastructure Handbook that provides clear guidance to developers, property owners, and public agencies on how to incorporate these strategies into site design and infrastructure projects. This should illustrate practical, locally-

appropriate solutions that respond to Estero's environmental conditions, including high water tables, flood-prone areas, and sensitive ecological systems.

KEY COMPONENTS THE HANDBOOK SHOULD INCLUDE:

- » Design typologies and applications of different green infrastructure strategies
- » Performance metrics (such as stormwater retention, water treatment, and impervious surface reduction goals)
- » Strategies for integration with site planning agencies
- » Design standards

Incentive Program

To complement these guidelines, the Village could establish an incentive program to encourage adoption of green infrastructure in private development. Incentives may include:

- » Density and intensity bonuses for development that exceeds baseline environmental standards
- » Stormwater management credits or permit fee reductions for developers that provide on-site retention and treatment
- » Expedited permitting or review processes for projects incorporating approved green infrastructure strategies

2 | VISION ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

- » Flexibility in landscaping or parking requirements when green infrastructure elements are integrated

These incentives help to align private investment with Estero's long-term resilience goals.



Orlando, FL offers incentives to support green infrastructure, like the bioswale in this image. These programs can offset costs for landscaping, pervious surfaces, and water quality improvements that aid in stormwater mitigation.

Phase 2: Medium-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | **MAKE THE RIVER USABLE, VISIBLE, & PROTECTED**

The medium-term phase builds on early protections by integrating environmental systems into everyday experiences and infrastructure.

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS

- » Identify priority restoration and mitigation sites
- » **Green Infrastructure Handbook & Incentive Program expansion**
 - › Refine handbook based on early implementation
 - › Identify priority public projects (roads, parks) to incorporate improvements
- » Establish continuous open space along the river corridor
- » Evaluate new or enhanced river access points (launches, overlooks)
- » **Nature-based flood mitigation project (implementation phase)**
- » Environmental Programming & Access
 - › Launch eco-tourism initiatives (kayak trails, educational signage)
 - › Integrate educational programming tied to natural systems

Phase 3: Long-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | LEAD IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP & RESILIENCE

Estero's environmental systems are fully protected, enhanced, and integrated into long-term resilience strategies.

LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » Update resilience strategies based on sea level rise and storm impacts
- » Expanded conservation lands and open space networks
- » Fully implement river and wetland protection systems
- » Require green infrastructure as baseline for all development
- » Continued expansion and maintenance of stormwater systems, tree canopy, and other environmental assets
- » Retrofit vulnerable areas with flood-resilient infrastructure and nature-based solutions in conjunction with the Village's *Vulnerability Study*
- » Ensure long-term performance of flood storage systems and water quality strategies



Key Takeaways for Environmental Systems

Protect first, before growth accelerates: Establishing clear protections (like the River Protection Overlay) ensures that community growth is aligned with environmental constraints from the outset.

Create a consistent and resilient river corridor: A defined setback and conservation strategy provides clarity for development while protecting ecological function, water quality, and flood storage capacity.

Phased integration: Over time, environmental assets become more visible and accessible through carefully designed river access, open space connections, and nature-based infrastructure that allows people to experience the river while maintaining its ecological integrity.

Leverage private dollars: Tools such as a Green Infrastructure Handbook and developer incentives help integrate stormwater management and resilience into standard practice.

Parks, Trails, & Open Space



Environmental systems form the foundation of the Estero Eco-Historic area. The open space system defines how people experience it.

THE CHALLENGE

The current park, trail, and open space system functions unevenly. Physical barriers such as major roadways, gaps in the trail network, and limited or unclear river access reduces connectivity and makes it difficult to fully experience these assets. Some parks are well integrated into surrounding neighborhoods, while others are more isolated or difficult to reach. River access is present but often understated, with limited visibility and supporting amenities. Addressing these challenges will be key to ensuring that the system works as a unified whole rather than a collection of individual destinations.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Estero's strength lies in what it already has. The next step is to connect, clarify, and enhance these assets so they function as a seamless system that supports recreation, ecology, and everyday life.



ESTERO PARK

PARK & OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

- » System is anchored by the Koreshan State Park and reinforced by surrounding public lands
- » Opportunities to **expand and diversify recreation** through nature play, enhanced trail expansion, and improved river access

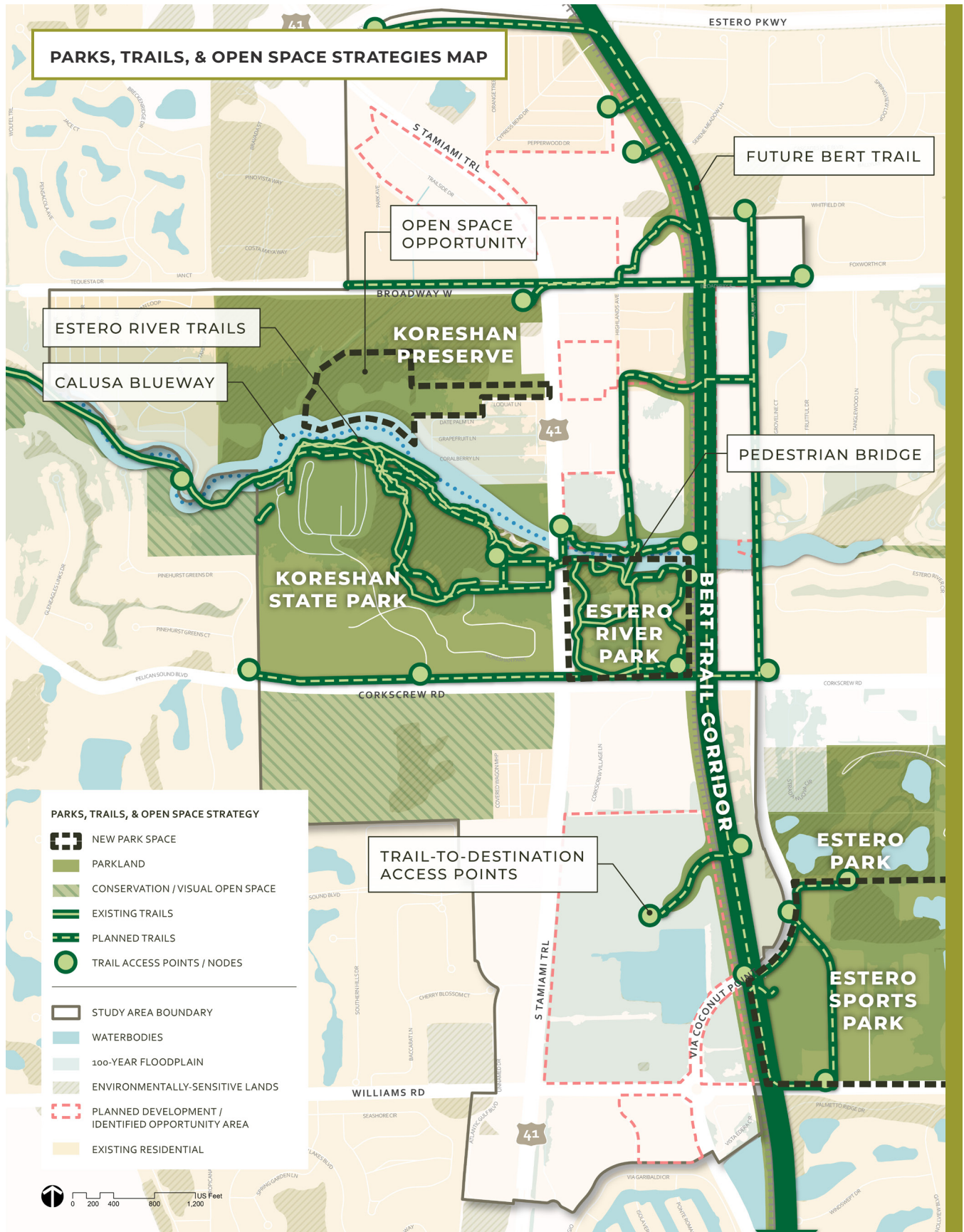
TRAILS

- » Trail segments along the riverfront are enclosed within Koreshan State Park, limiting continuous public access
- » Inconsistent quality of trails and support amenities
- » Opportunity to **build on the BERT as a primary spine** of the larger multi-modal network
- » Enhance access to neighborhoods, parks, and key destinations

RIVER ACCESS & WATERFRONT

- » Defining natural feature with access points distributed throughout the study area
- » Opportunity to enhance these access points and river visibility to **elevate the river as a central public amenity**

2 | VISION PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE



Phase 1: Short-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | MAKE PROGRESS ON DEFINING ESTERO'S IDENTITY WITH OPEN SPACE

Early open space investments focus on visibility, connectivity, and identity. Initial segments of the Bonita–Estero Rail Trail (BERT) should be advanced quickly, supported by temporary connections and pilot improvements such as shade, seating, and wayfinding.

Equally important is the development of comprehensive design standards. Guidelines for trails, parks, and the river corridor will ensure that all future investments contribute to a cohesive and recognizable identity.

EARLY ACTIONS

- » **BERT & Trail Design Guidelines**
 - › Establish signature trail identity (materials, lighting, signage, furnishings)
 - › Trail-to-destination interface standards
 - › Develop typical cross sections for trails and safe crossings
 - › Explore eco-tourism and heritage trail opportunities
- » **Estero Open Space Design Manual** for Village-owned parks and public spaces
 - › Define park typologies (civic greens, preserves, river access, neighborhood parks)
 - › Shade canopy standards
 - › Native planting and ecological restoration
 - › Materials, furnishings, and architectural elements
 - › Establish connectivity principles

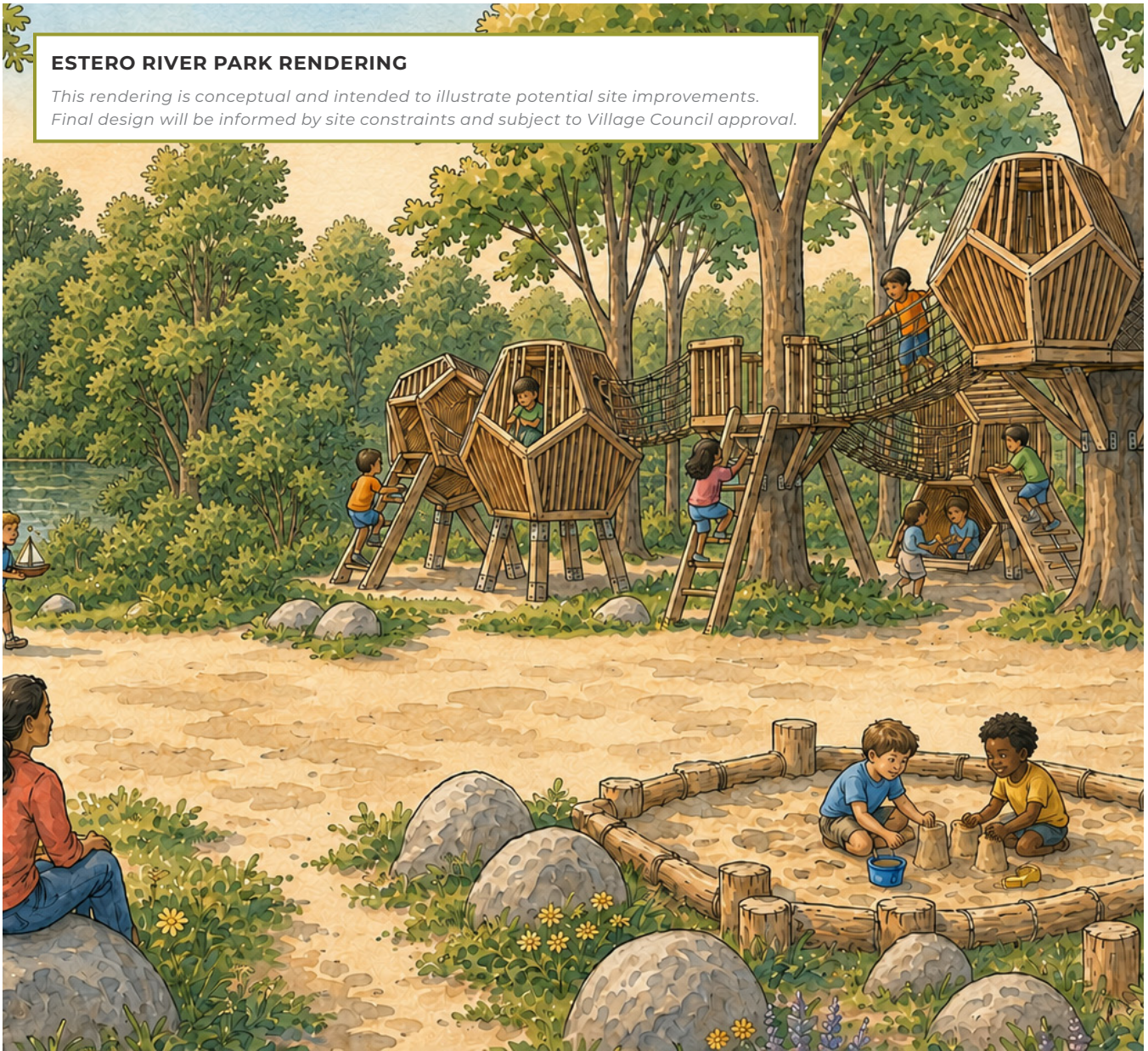
SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- » **Establish long-term design framework for Estero River Park** (see facing page)
- » **Begin priority segments of BERT** (see page 53)
 - › Prioritize connections to Village Center, Estero River, and Koreshan State Park
- » **Develop master plan for Boomer House property** (see page 57)
- » Install shade, seating, and wayfinding pilots across the system

2 | VISION PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE

ESTERO RIVER PARK RENDERING

This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.



ESTERO RIVER PARK

A major priority in the short-term is the Estero River Park, envisioned as a 30+ acre signature destination across the river from the Village Center. Early efforts will focus on conceptual design, visioning, and master planning. The park is intended to deliver an immersive, nature-based experience, including play environments, boardwalks, river access, and educational programming. This project would be a local amenity that could have regional draw.

Centering Play & Exploration

Estero River Park could be organized as a series of interconnected environments that blend play, movement, and ecological function. Drawing from similar parks (such as Bonnet Springs Park, where play is integrated directly into topography and circulation), the concept plan encourages unstructured movement rather than fixed, equipment-based play.

For additional detail on nature park precedent research, refer to Appendix J on page 254.

Key elements include:

- » Climbing structures
- » Slides and pathways woven into the landform
- » Play elements inspired by local wildlife and ecology
- » Interactive, shallow water channels and wetland edges
- » Opportunities for sensory play and seasonal variation
- » Meandering internal trail loop system that encourages exploration and repeat visits

Connection to the River

A defining feature of the park is its relationship to the Estero River. The design of the park could feature elevated boardwalks and overlooks that allow visitors to move through and above sensitive ecological habitats without disturbing them. A boardwalk system that follows the river edge would create multiple vantage points for viewing the environmental systems at work.



A COMBINATION OF EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE & INTERPRETIVE DESIGN

Immersive Learning

Program elements within the park create opportunities for environmental education and interpretation. Outdoor classrooms, interpretive signage, and interactive features can be incorporated throughout the site, allowing visitors to learn about:

- » Local ecosystems and wildlife
- » Hydrology and floodplain dynamics
- » The cultural and environmental significance of the Estero River

Educational programming should engage visitors through a combination of signage that communicates information directly and metaphorical interpretation within the landscape itself, conveying meaning through form, material, and spatial experience. This approach aligns with successful precedents where play, education, and ecology build a unified and unique park experience.

2 | VISION PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE

ESTERO RIVER PARK CONCEPT

This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.



Conceptual rendering; not to scale

CORKSCREW RD



ESTERO RIVER PARK CHARACTER IMAGERY

1. EXISTING BUILDING ARCHITECTURE

Trailhead facilities and other structures within Estero River Park should be cohesive with the design of the new restroom facility on the opposite side of the river.

2. INTERNAL TRAIL SYSTEM WITH SHADED GATHERING SPACES

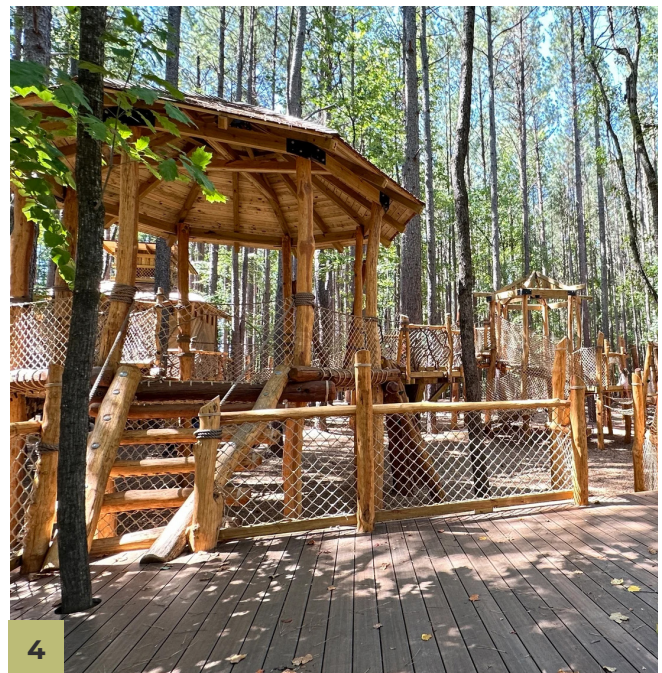
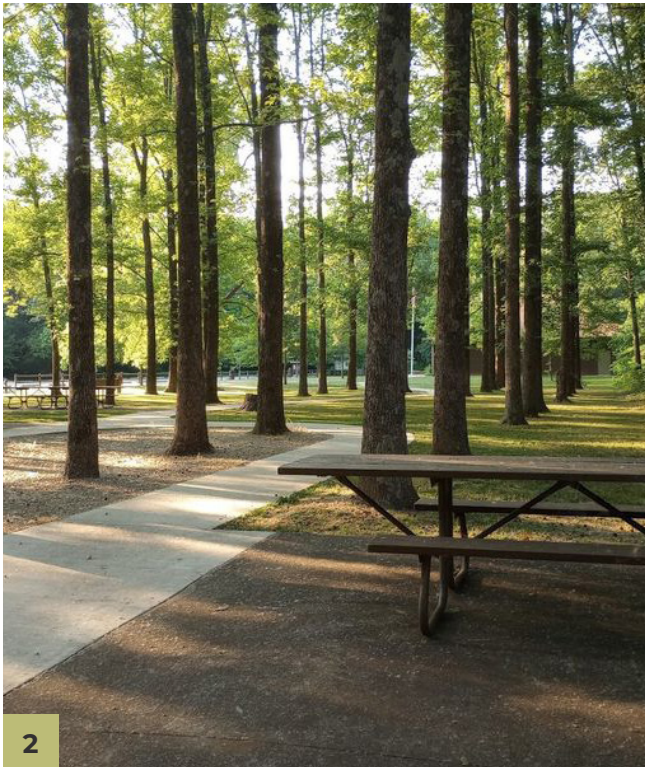
Preserve tree canopy while allowing selective clearing of understory vegetation to open up key views to and across the river, where feasible. An internal trail system creates multiple shaded walking loops.

3. THEMED PLAY STATION

Small rest areas and play stations integrated throughout the park create opportunities for sensory play, environmental education, and cultural interpretation.

4. NATURE PLAY WITH ELEVATED BOARDWALK

A central naturalized playground establishes a signature destination within the park that encourages repeat visits from residents and visitors.



THE BONITA-ESTERO RAIL TRAIL

The planned Bonita–Estero Rail Trail (BERT) is a unique opportunity to create a strong, central spine with secondary trails and spurs branching outward to connect neighborhoods, parks, and regional destinations.

Design of the corridor through Estero should be cohesive with adjoining segments in Fort Myers and Bonita Springs, but also incorporate distinctive elements that establish a recognizable identity unique to this segment.

This approach maximizes the value of the investment, positioning the trail not only as a connector, but as a destination and experience in its own right. These elements along the corridor serve multiple functions, such as:

- » **Placemaking:** Provide consistent visual cues that reinforce the corridor, signal continuity across crossings, and enhance the overall character
- » **Wayfinding:** Help users orient themselves, understand their location, and identify nearby destinations and travel times
- » **Safety:** Increase awareness for trail users and drivers through lighting, signage, and other features that highlight conflict points, crossings, and other nodes
- » **Comfort:** Create a more inviting and legible environment through shade, landscaping, and human-scaled design to support users of all ages and abilities

BERT & Trail Design Guidelines

To ensure a cohesive and recognizable trail system, the Village should develop and adopt a set of BERT & Trail Design Guidelines. These guidelines will establish a clear design framework for all trail segments, connectors, and related public realm elements, ensuring that the system functions not only as infrastructure, but as a signature landscape experience unique to Estero.

BERT & TRAIL DESIGN GUIDELINES SHOULD INCLUDE:

- » Typical shared-use path widths (12–14')
- » Surface materials appropriate for durability and user comfort
- » Lighting, signage, and wayfinding systems
- » Integration of shade through tree canopy and/or structures
- » Design typologies for major and minor trailheads, including a toolbox of preferred trail amenities (bike parking, bike fix-it stations, trail kiosks, etc.)
- » Standards for trail-oriented development (expectations for visibility, accessibility, and activation along the trail)
- » Safe and comfortable crossing treatments (see page 52)

Eco-Tourism & Heritage

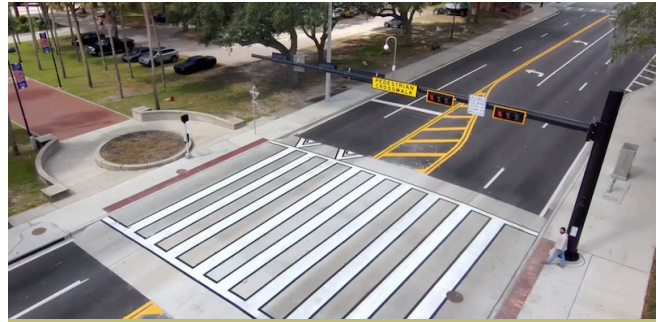
The trail system, anchored by BERT, offers an opportunity to reinforce Estero’s identity through storytelling and interpretation. These features transform the trail from a purely functional route into a meaningful and educational experience that offers glimpses into and celebrates Estero’s cultural and historic past. Guidelines should incorporate:

- » Interpretive signage highlighting local ecology, history, and culture
- » Wayfinding that connects users to nearby destinations and points of interest
- » Design elements that reflect local materials and environmental context.



TRAIL-BASED ECO-TOURISM

The PA Turnpike Trail in Sideling Hill demonstrates how well-designed access points and cohesive branding creates a memorable place, and invites visitors to engage with it, learn its history, and extend their visit beyond a single destination.



UNIVERSITY AVENUE MIDBLOCK

This is a strong example of a signalized midblock crossing in Gainesville, FL at a high-demand location along an FDOT-controlled roadway.

Safe & Comfortable Roadway Crossings

A higher level of design should be applied at crossing locations, where users are most exposed to conflicts with vehicles. This means going beyond standard pavement markings to provide clear priority, visibility, and intuitive navigation for all users. Distinctive materials, markings, and landscape elements reinforce the presence of the trail and improve visibility, while also signaling its environmental, cultural, and historic significance to users and drivers passing by.

At the same time, intersection design must respond to site-specific conditions. Each crossing (midblock and at roadway intersections), varies based on geometry, traffic volumes, lane configurations, median presence, and operating speeds. Because of this, design solutions should be tailored through detailed engineering analysis to ensure that each crossing treatment provides an appropriate level of safety and visibility.

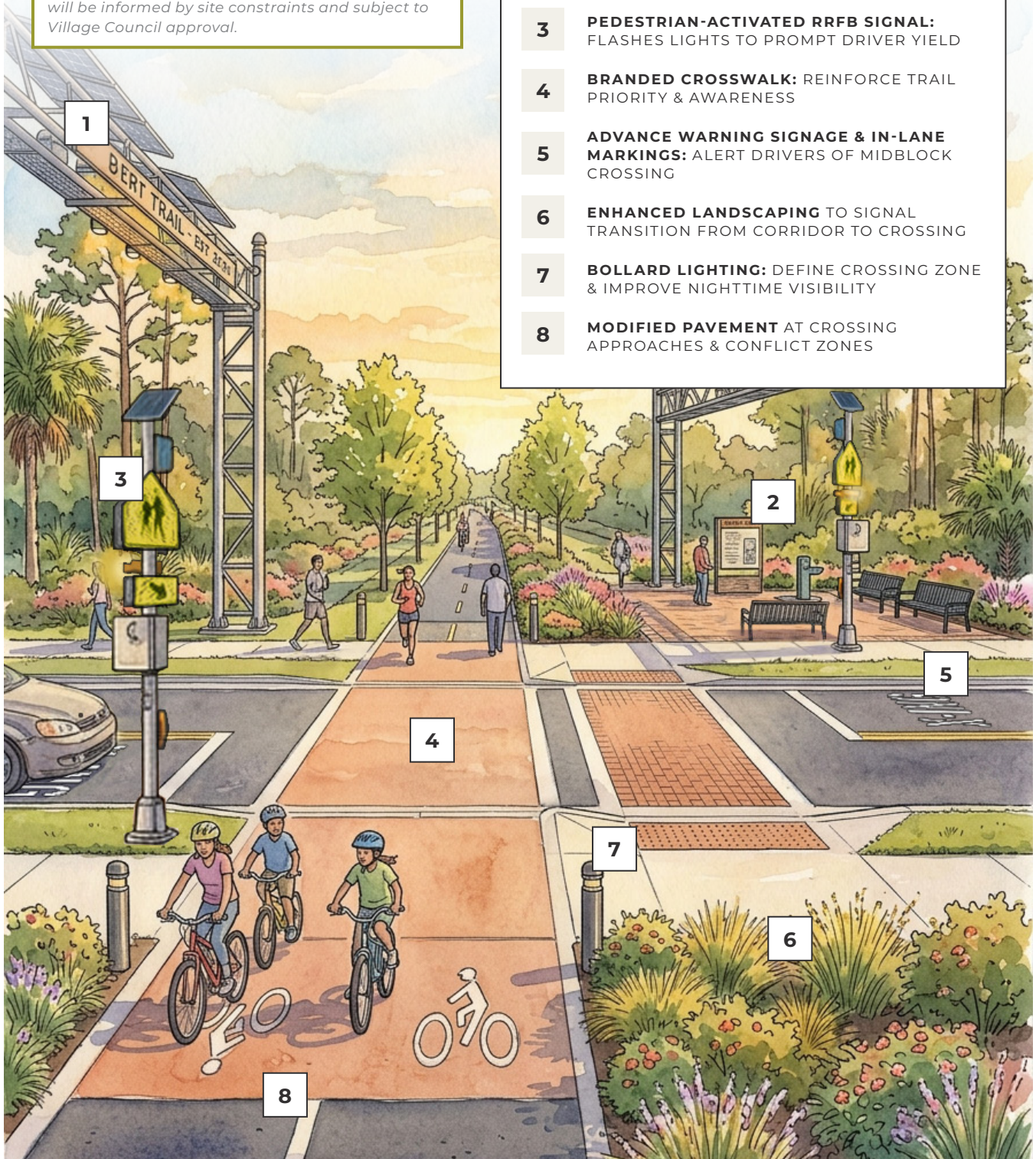
The image on the facing page illustrates a toolkit of design strategies that could be applied at BERT midblock crossings in Estero.

For additional detail on crossing treatments at midblock and standard intersections, refer to the Appendix on page 220.

2 | VISION PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE

BERT CROSSING RENDERING

This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.



- 1 REPURPOSED RAIL SIGNAL MASTS:** VISUAL LANDMARK & IDENTITY FEATURE
- 2 MIDBLOCK TRAILHEAD:** DEFINE TRAIL ENTRY POINT WITH SIGNAGE & GATHERING SPACE TO MARK ACCESS
- 3 PEDESTRIAN-ACTIVATED RRFB SIGNAL:** FLASHES LIGHTS TO PROMPT DRIVER YIELD
- 4 BRANDED CROSSWALK:** REINFORCE TRAIL PRIORITY & AWARENESS
- 5 ADVANCE WARNING SIGNAGE & IN-LANE MARKINGS:** ALERT DRIVERS OF MIDBLOCK CROSSING
- 6 ENHANCED LANDSCAPING** TO SIGNAL TRANSITION FROM CORRIDOR TO CROSSING
- 7 BOLLARD LIGHTING:** DEFINE CROSSING ZONE & IMPROVE NIGHTTIME VISIBILITY
- 8 MODIFIED PAVEMENT** AT CROSSING APPROACHES & CONFLICT ZONES

Phase 2: Medium-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | DELIVER ESTERO'S DEFINING OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

The open space network becomes fully realized during this phase, with major investments in trails, parks, and civic spaces.

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS

- » Construct a continuous BERT corridor through the study area
 - › Fully implement trail identity and design standards
 - › Deliver high-quality trailheads (1/2-1 mile spacing) and connections to adjacent neighborhoods.
- » **Estero Open Space Design Manual (Implementation Phase)**
 - › Build a connected system (not isolated parks)
 - › Expand shade canopy corridors, civic greens, neighborhood parks
- » **Estero River Park (Phase 1 & 2 Implementation)**
 - › Nature-based play areas
 - › Boardwalks, overlooks, and river access points
 - › Outdoor classrooms and education spaces
 - › Eco-tourism programming
 - › Amphitheater or event lawn
- » **Boomer House (Phase 1 Implementation)**

BOOMER HOUSE

The 26-acre Boomer House is a historically-significant home along the Estero River, nestled between Koreshan Preserve and Koreshan State Park. Built in the early 1900s when the area was still largely rural, the site reflects the architecture and practical craftsmanship of early Estero residents. The property is in good condition and largely unchanged, offering a rare opportunity for a local partnership with the State of Florida and adaptive reuse.



BOOMER HOUSE

2 | VISION PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE



BOOMER HOUSE CONCEPT

This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.

REIMAGINING THE BOOMER HOUSE AS A PUBLIC SPACE & EVENT VENUE

With careful design, the site could be repositioned as a low-impact destination that balances preservation with revenue-generating uses. Potential programs could include a rent-able venue for small events (riverfront weddings, company retreats, etc.) complemented by thoughtfully-integrated accommodations (like glamping).

- 1** **FORMAL ENTRY DRIVE:** DEFINED ARRIVAL SEQUENCE WITH LANDSCAPE FRAMING
- 2** **"GLAMPING":** APPROX. 44 SITES INTEGRATED INTO NATURAL AREAS
- 3** **EVENT & MULTI-PURPOSE CENTER:** INCLUDES BACK-OF-HOUSE CATERING KITCHEN
- 4** **EVENT PLAZA:** FLEXIBLE OUTDOOR VENUE FOR RECEPTIONS, GROUP ACTIVITIES, ETC.
- 5** **WATERFRONT OVERLOOK:** FORMAL CEREMONY SPACE
- 6** **AMENITY BUILDING:** SHARED DINING HALL & RESTROOM FACILITIES FOR EVENTS & OVERNIGHT STAYS
- 7** **VISITOR PARKING**
- 8** **RENOVATED HISTORIC BOOMER RESIDENCE**
- 9** **VEGETATED BIO-SWALE:** STORMWATER FEATURE



**BOOMER HOUSE "GLAMPING"
CHARACTER IMAGERY**

1. EVENT & MULTI-PURPOSE CENTER

2. RIVERFRONT CEREMONY SPACE

**3. "GLAMPING" CAMPSITE WITH
AMENITIES**

**4. EVENT PLAZA WITH FIRE PITS &
CANOPY TENTS**

Phase 3: Long-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | SUSTAIN & ENHANCE A REGIONALLY-SIGNIFICANT OPEN SPACE NETWORK

The open space system matures into a defining regional asset that supports both daily life and destination experiences.

LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » Invest in completion of regional trail and greenway connections
- » Continued investment in maintenance and upgrades
- » Evolution of design standards over time
- » **Estero River Park (Mature Destination)**
 - › Expanded programming and amenities
 - › Regional attraction with strong identity
 - › Integrated with broader trail and park system



Key Takeaways for Parks, Trails, & Open Space

Define identity early: Establish clear design standards and advance signature projects (Estero River Park, Boomer Property) to create a recognizable and cohesive open space system that reinforces the connection to local ecology from the outset.

Lead with design to ensure long-term quality: Early adoption of design standards ensures consistency in shade, materials, planting, and overall user experience.

Build over time from pilots to a complete system: Early improvements (shade, seating, wayfinding) evolve into a fully connected and mature open space network.

Connect what exists before adding new assets: Prioritize connections to existing parks, trails, the Estero River, and destinations, rather than developing isolated open spaces. A connected system encourages people to "park once," stay longer, and engage more deeply with the community. **BERT plays a critical role in making these connections.**

Economic Opportunities & Community



Not all areas in Estero are suited for change or redevelopment. Environmental systems, infrastructure capacity, and community priorities point toward a **focused approach for sustainable growth.**

THE APPROACH





By focusing on strategic locations, investment can support economic opportunity, strengthen local businesses, and create places that reflect the character and needs of the community. This approach helps ensure growth is both viable for the private sector and meaningful for the community.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The **Village Center** location has already been identified as an upcoming growth area in Estero that is a primary opportunity to:

- » Create a recognizable heart for Estero
- » Provide civic and gathering spaces
- » Support small-scale, locally serving commercial uses including food and beverage/restaurants
- » Integrate senior and mixed-use residential to expand housing diversity in Estero
- » Connect directly to trails and open space
- » Align with infrastructure and market feasibility
- » Respond to priorities repeatedly emphasized by residents during engagement

THIS STRATEGY DOES NOT PROPOSE:

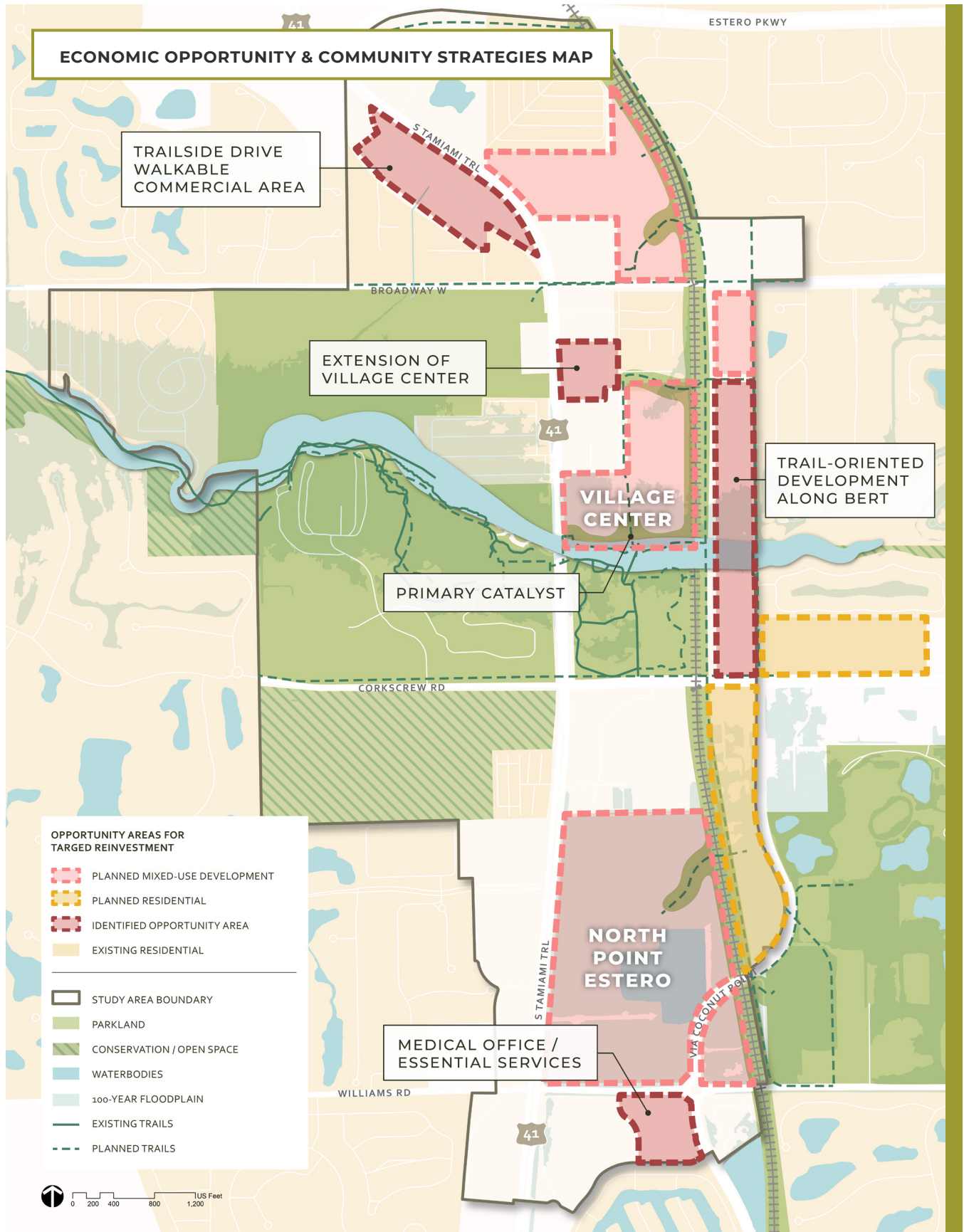
-  Broad residential expansion
-  Intense development in environmentally-sensitive lands
-  Corridor-wide strip development along US -41
-  Development that is disconnected from infrastructure capacity

Other opportunity areas are identified where:

- » Environmental impact is limited
- » Transportation improvements are feasible
- » Infrastructure capacity exists (like sewer and water)
- » Development will support daily needs
- » Connections to BERT or open space can be strengthened
- » Local businesses have the potential to cluster, strengthen foot traffic and strengthen overall destination appeal

Opportunity areas (shown in red on the facing page) represent parcels identified for potential reinvestment through this study.

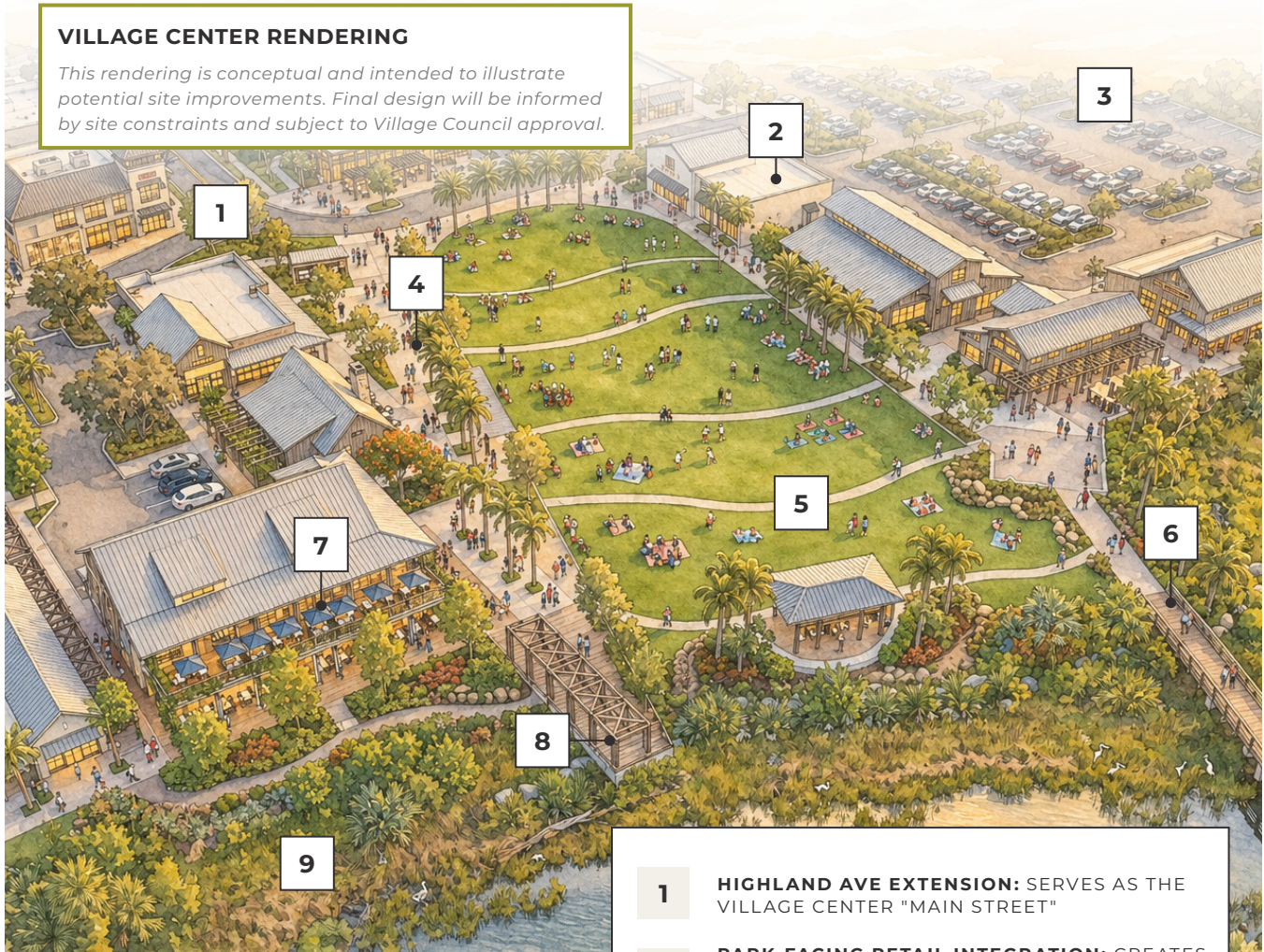
2 | VISION ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY



2 | VISION ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY

VILLAGE CENTER RENDERING

This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.



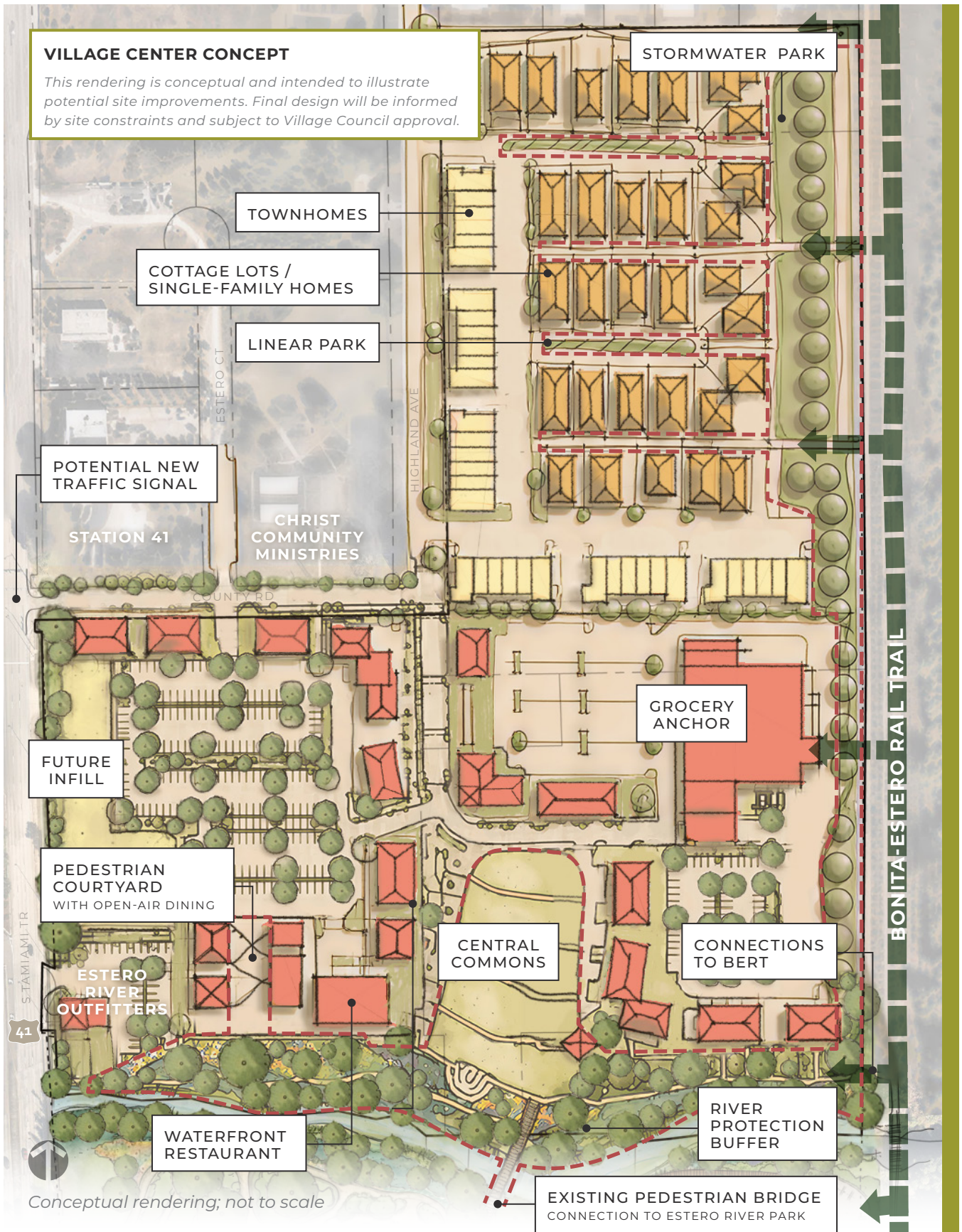
THE VILLAGE CENTER

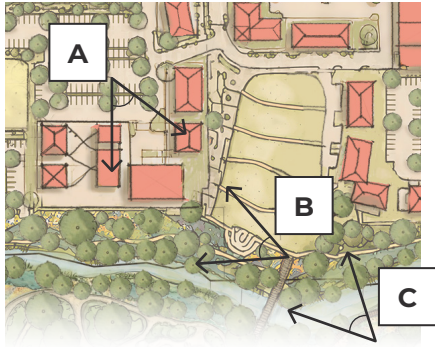
The Village Center is designed to function as a daily destination and community gathering place that attracts residents, businesses, and visitors because it offers a distinct experience rooted in Estero's natural character.

The concept for the district centers around the **Central Commons**, a terraced lawn that frames the Estero River as a defining backdrop. Creating strong physical and visual connections to the water, the Commons will anchor a mix of local-serving retail and dining organized around a shared civic space.

- 1 HIGHLAND AVE EXTENSION:** SERVES AS THE VILLAGE CENTER "MAIN STREET"
- 2 PARK-FACING RETAIL INTEGRATION:** CREATES ACTIVE EDGES THAT SPILL INTO CENTRAL COMMONS
- 3 GROCERY ANCHOR:** PROVIDES A DAILY-USE DESTINATION THAT SUSTAINS DISTRICT ACTIVITY
- 4 PEDESTRIAN-FOCUSED STREETScape:** WIDE PROMENADES SUPPORT WALKABILITY
- 5 CENTRAL COMMONS:** TERRACED LAWN FOR LARGE EVENTS & EVERYDAY USE
- 6 CONNECTION TO ESTERO RIVER PARK:** PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE TO NATURE-BASED PARK
- 7 WATERFRONT RESTAURANT:** DESTINATION DINING ORIENTED TO RIVER VIEWS
- 8 ESTERO RIVER OVERLOOK:** SCENIC NODE THAT BRINGS PEOPLE DOWN TO THE RIVER
- 9 RIVER PROTECTION BUFFER:** NATIVE RIPARIAN ZONE WITH MOWED TRAILS THAT SUPPORTS HABITAT & RESILIENCE

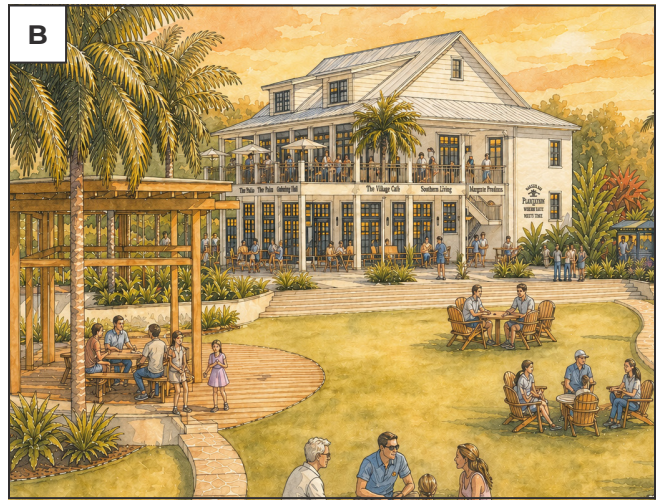
2 | VISION ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY





VILLAGE CENTER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Commercial	Retail / food and beverage / grocery / medical office	80,000-100,000 sf
Residential	Single-family / cottage	32 units
Residential	Townhome	36 units



The renderings on this page are conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.

VILLAGE CENTER RENDERING

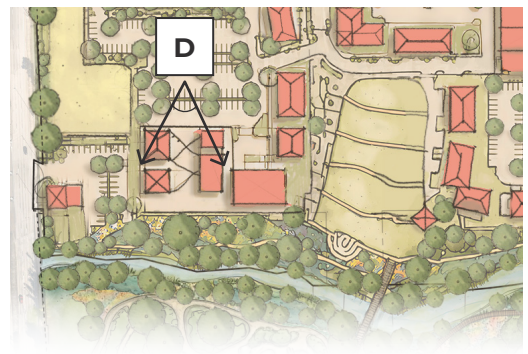
This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.



D

Destination Dining

The Village Center responds to a clear community desire for greater variety and higher-quality dining by creating the right setting and public realm to support it. Opportunities to front the Estero River, the Central Commons, and the open-air courtyard (see rendering above) will attract a mix of destination restaurants and local vendors that will benefit from being close to the action.



Phase 1: Short-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | ESTABLISH A LOCAL-SERVING, WALKABLE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

The short-term phase establishes the foundation for a local-serving economy centered around a defined Village Center. Early actions include adopting a master plan and zoning framework, recruiting key local businesses, and activating the area through temporary programming. Housing strategies begin to address demographic needs by enabling a broader range of housing options in walkable, connected locations.

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- » Evaluate a Historic District Overlay
 - › Include the Village Center, Estero River Park and Boomer House Property
- » **Village Center Master Plan**
 - › Adopt Village Center master plan, economic strategy, and zoning
 - › Consider adopting form-based code to establish a consistent architectural and landscape language
 - › Recruit local businesses and food & beverage anchors
 - › Program temporary events (markets, festivals)
 - › Incentivize small-scale, locally serving redevelopment
 - › Coordinate with FDOT on traffic signal improvements
- » Housing & Community
 - › Identify priority redevelopment and infill sites
 - › Update zoning to support senior housing and missing middle housing
 - › Incentivize walkable, mixed-use housing near Village Center
- » Consider creating a Main Street District Overlay for Trailside Drive

HISTORIC DISTRICT OVERLAY

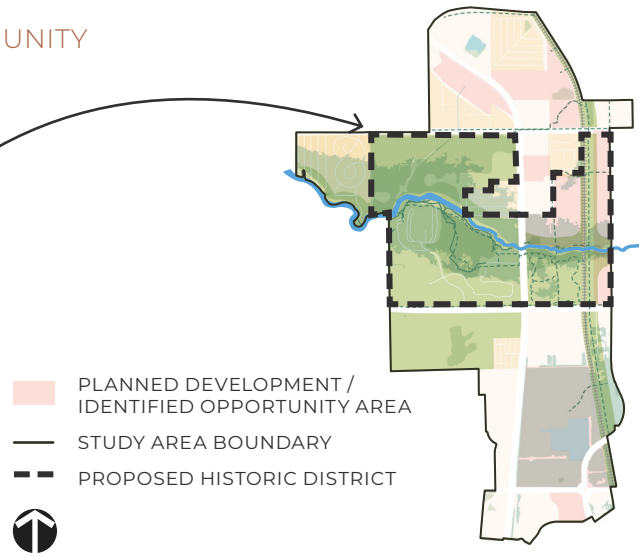
Rather than applying design standards to a single site (like Village Center), Estero has the opportunity to establish a broader overlay district that unifies key properties into a recognizable district of Estero. **The proposed overlay would encompass the Village Center, Estero River Park, Boomer Property, and adjacent riverfront parcels.** These properties are part of a continuous landscape system that can, when planned together, function as a cohesive place rather than a collection of individual projects.

The proposed overlay will:

- » Guide a consistent design and development framework across the Eco-Historic area
- » Reinforce Estero’s identity as a river-based, historically rooted community
- » Ensure that development is compatible with environmental systems, character and community scale
- » Create a recognizable destination district that supports tourism, local economy, and community life

Historic District Design Standards

A key component of the overlay is the adoption of Florida vernacular architectural and landscape principles, ensuring that new development reflects the region’s climate, history, and character.



DESIGN STANDARDS SHOULD ADDRESS:

- » Architectural design
 - › Elevated structures that are responsive to flood conditions
 - › Deep overhangs, porches, and verandas for shaded outdoor living
 - › Climate-responsive materials
 - › Building articulation and massing
 - › Open, breezy building forms that support natural ventilation
- » Site and landscape design
 - › Native vegetation and shade integration
 - › Buildings oriented to streets, trails, and Estero River
 - › Parking at the side or rear
- » Public realm character
 - › Materials palette
 - › Lighting and furnishings
 - › Indoor-outdoor relationships
- » Integration with environmental systems and River Protection Overlay

Phase 2: Medium-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | DEVELOP A VIBRANT, LOCAL-SERVING ECONOMIC CORE

With infrastructure and public realm systems in place, the medium term delivers a functioning town center and growing local economy.

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS

» Village Center Implementation

- › Evaluate opportunities for civic plaza and gathering spaces
- › Ensure walkable streets and mixed-use development
- › Integrate trails and open space connections
- › Integrate public realm design standards

» Economic Development & Tourism

- › Support local business, mixed-use development, and small-scale retail (medical office, grocers, and restaurants are identified gaps, see Wellness District on facing page)
- › Expand eco-tourism and heritage tourism
- › Strengthen connections between destinations (parks, trails, river)

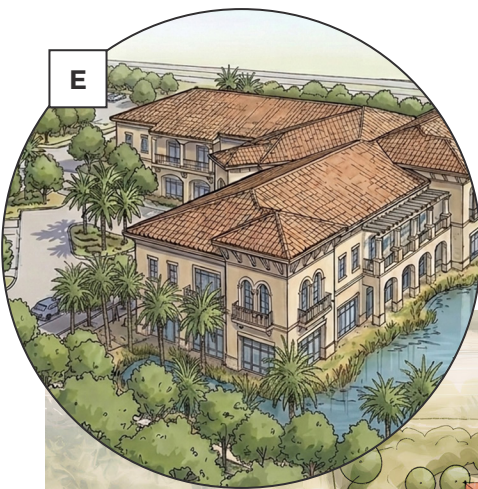
» Housing & Community

- › Pursue senior housing opportunities
- › Pursue workforce housing opportunities
- › Continue to support walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods

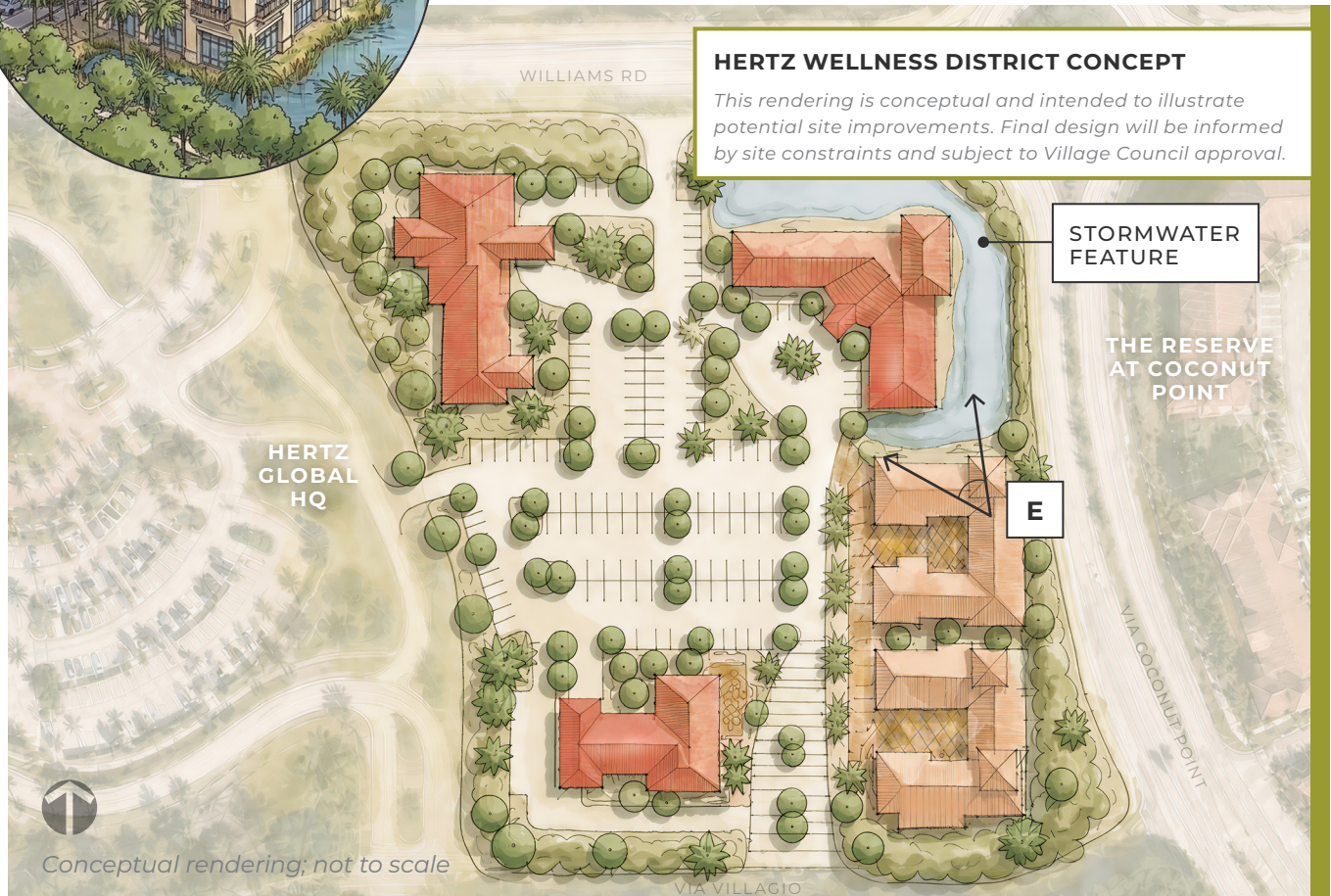


TARGETED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TO ADDRESS GAPS

Adjacent to a major employer and with strong access and visibility from Williams Road and Via Coconut Point, the land next to the Hertz HQ is well positioned for redevelopment that introduces complementary uses such as medical office, residential, and small-scale retail. This type of targeted infill can help address service gaps, including access to healthcare, neighborhood-serving grocers, and dining options, while supporting the daily needs of both employees and nearby residents.



HERTZ WELLNESS DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM	
Commercial <i>Medical office / retail</i>	50,000-70,000 sf
Residential <i>Townhome / apartment</i>	26-52 units



Conceptual rendering; not to scale

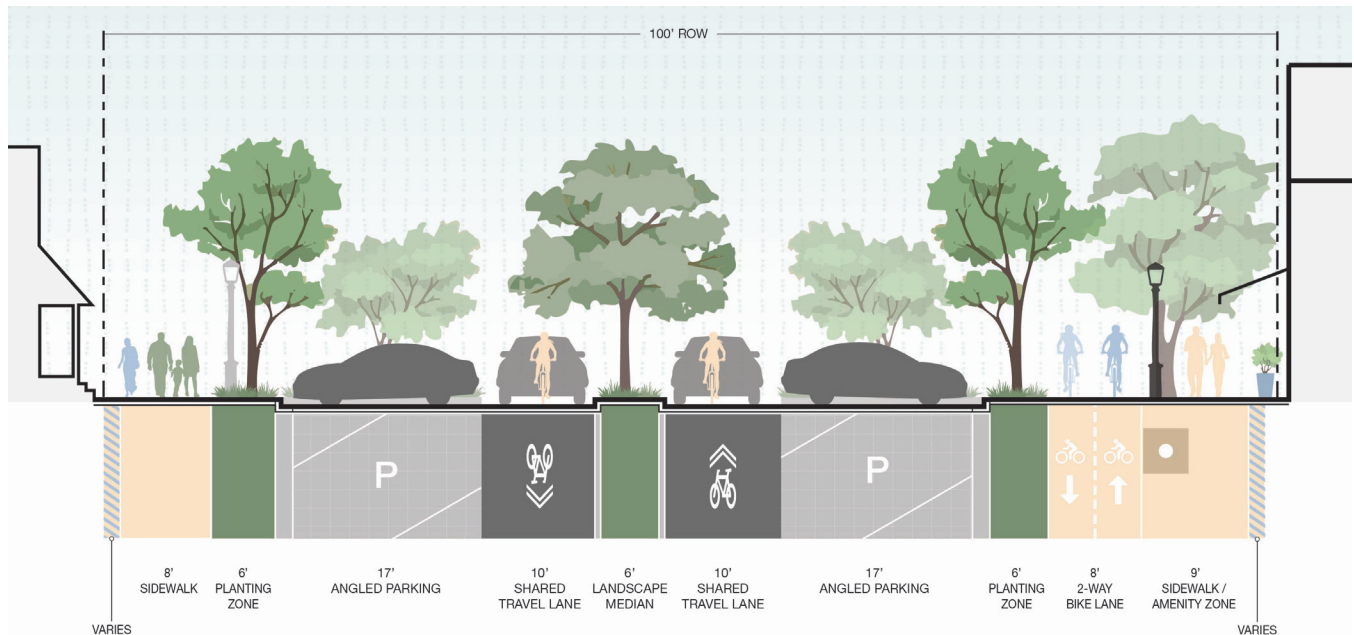
Phase 3: Long-Term Actions

OBJECTIVE | CREATE A LASTING & AUTHENTIC ECONOMIC / CIVIC IDENTITY

The long-term phase establishes Estero's identity through place-based economic development and a true town center.

LONG-TERM ACTIONS

- » **Trailside Drive "Main Street" District** (see facing page for more details)
 - › Traffic calming and other corridor improvements along Trailside Drive
 - › Construct civic spaces and plazas
 - › Recruit local food & beverage anchors
 - › Connect to Village Center, BERT, Estero River Park
- » Village Center and Trailside Drive function as dual anchors
- » Strong network of local businesses and destinations
- » Established reputation as a nature-based and cultural destination



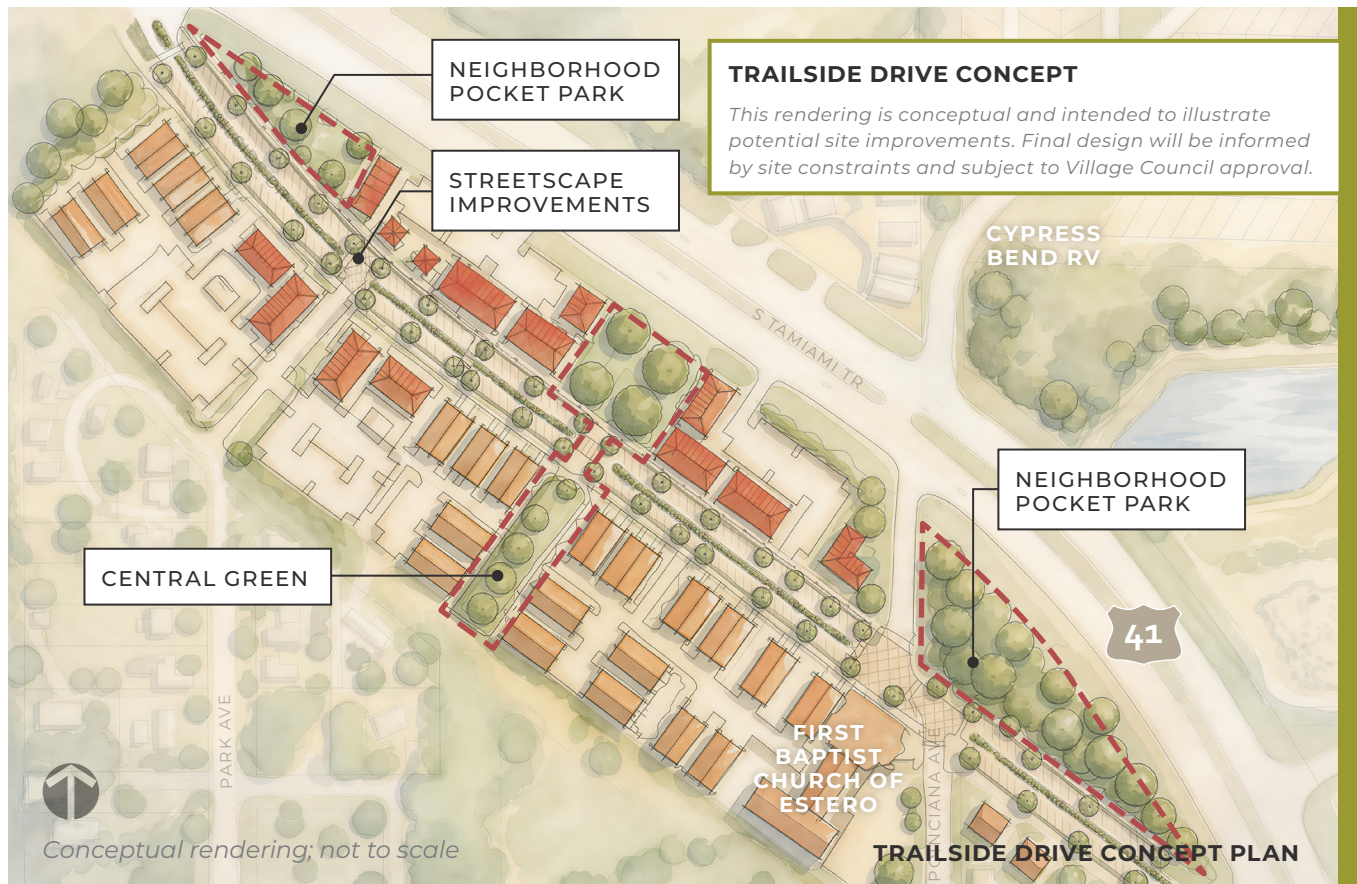
TRAILSIDE DRIVE PROPOSED TYPICAL SECTION

This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.

TRAILSIDE DRIVE MAIN STREET DISTRICT

A long-term vision is the creation of a new “Main Street” district along Trailside Drive at the north end of the study area. Envisioned as a walkable, mixed-use corridor, it brings together local businesses, daily activity, and community life. Street improvements will support a comfortable pedestrian environment, while active ground-floor uses and upper-story housing and office space sustain activity throughout the day.

TRAILSIDE DRIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM	
Commercial Medical / office / retail / food & beverage	40,000- 50,000 sf
Residential Townhome / duplex / single-family	22-44 units



2 | VISION ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY

TRAILSIDE DRIVE CONCEPTUAL RENDERING

This rendering is conceptual and intended to illustrate potential site improvements. Final design will be informed by site constraints and subject to Village Council approval.



Key Takeaways for Economic Opportunities & Community

Invest in a walkable, local-serving economic core: The Village Center should support daily needs, local businesses, and community life, reducing reliance on regional commercial corridors.

Activate Village Center early to build identity and momentum: Temporary programming, events, and small-scale development will establish the Village Center as a gathering place before full build-out.

Use design and form to shape outcomes: Master planning and design standards ensure that development contributes to a cohesive, high-quality environment, rather than fragmented growth.

Support a diverse, intergenerational community: Expanding senior and missing middle housing will allow residents to age in place and support Estero's workforce needs.

Walk, don't run: Phased development ensures that economic growth aligns with infrastructure capacity, market demand, and long-term community goals.

Create a lasting sense of place: Combining walkability, local businesses, intentional design elements, and connections to natural systems will develop a distinct and authentic identity for Estero that cannot be replicated anywhere else.

Page intentionally left blank.

Action Plan

Summary of Strategic Actions

 CONNECTIVITY & TRANSPORTATION	 ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS
<p>US-41 Landscape & Streetscape Master Plan Pg. 35</p> <p>Implement priority crossings on US-41 and key intersections</p> <p>Coordinate with FDOT on context reclassification of the US-41 corridor</p> <p>Coordinate with FDOT on grade-separated crossings Pg. 36</p>	<p>Estero River Protection Overlay Pg. 42</p> <p>Identify and secure 2–3 river access sites</p> <p>Wetland / floodplain land acquisition for Mitigation Project</p> <p>Green Infrastructure Handbook Pg. 43</p> <p>Green Infrastructure Incentive Program</p>
<p>Expand the bike and pedestrian network to residential areas Pg. 38</p> <p>Identify and implement trail-to-destination connections</p> <p>Integrate transit/shuttle connections</p> <p>Construct enhanced or grade-separated crossings</p>	<p>Identify priority restoration sites Pg. 44</p> <p>Green Infrastructure Incentive Program expansion</p> <p>Construct river access points</p> <p>Nature-based Flood Mitigation Project implementation</p> <p>Launch eco-tourism initiatives and educational programming</p>
<p>Achieve seamless crossings across US-41 Pg. 39</p> <p>Integrate regional mobility systems</p> <p>Full US-41 corridor transformation</p>	<p>Update resilience strategies based on sea level rise and storm impacts Pg. 45</p> <p>Expand conservation lands and open space where feasible</p> <p>Fully implement flood, river and wetland protection systems</p> <p>Consider green infrastructure requirements</p>

0-5 YEARS

5-10 YEARS

10-20 YEARS

 PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE		 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY	
Estero Open Space Design Manual Pg. 48 Pilot project: shade, seating, and wayfinding		Village Center Master Plan Pg. 62 Consider a Main Street District Overlay for Trailside Drive Pg. 66 Identify priority redevelopment sites	
Estero River Park Master Plan Pg. 49 BERT & Trail Design Guidelines Pg. 53 Construct priority BERT segments Boomer House Master Plan		Housing policy updates to support housing diversity Consider a Historic District Overlay Pg. 67	
BERT implementation through the study area Pg. 56 Build a connected system, expand shade canopy corridors, civic greens		Village Center implementation Pg. 68 Support local business, mixed-use development, and small-scale retail Expand tourism and destination connectivity Continue to support walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods	
Estero River Park (future phases of implementation) Pg. 57 Boomer House implementation			
Complete regional trail and greenway connections Pg. 59 Continued investment in maintenance and upgrades Estero River Park expansion as a distinct regional destination		Trailside Drive "Main Street" District implementation Pg. 70 Strong network of local businesses and destinations Established reputation as a nature-based and cultural destination	

0-5 YEARS

5-10 YEARS

10-20 YEARS

Next Steps

The *Eco-Historic Planning Study* establishes a clear vision for a connected, resilient, and place-based community. The Action Plan outlined in this report translates that vision into a structured, phased approach to guide how projects, policies, and investments can be prioritized and delivered over the next 20+ years. Implementation is organized around four interconnected systems:

- » Connectivity & Transportation
- » Environmental Systems
- » Parks, Trails, & Open Space
- » Economic Development & Community

These systems are designed to work together. Transportation improvements support economic development. Environmental systems help guide where growth occurs. Open space enhances both quality of life and economic activity.

This integrated approach ensures that individual actions contribute to a larger, coordinated outcome.



Public & Private Sector Roles

Successful implementation will require coordination across multiple stakeholders, including the Village of Estero, Lee County and FDOT, private developers and property owners, and community organizations.

The Village plays a central role in:

- » Establishing policies and standards
- » Investing in infrastructure and public spaces
- » Facilitating partnerships and development

Private investment will be essential to deliver mixed-use development, housing, and destination uses, guided by the framework established in this plan.

Adapting to New Opportunities

The implementation framework is intended to remain flexible as conditions change and new opportunities emerge. The Village should:

- » Monitor Estero's progress toward key resilience goals
- » Periodically revisit priorities
- » Update the action plan to reflect new opportunities or challenges

This ongoing evaluation ensures that the plan remains relevant and effective over time.

Foundational Steps

PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To successfully bring the plan to life, the Village must first lay the foundation to ensure that the plan is able to progress. These efforts will help guide long-term implementation and deliver visible results.

1

ADOPT THE PLAN FORMALLY

The plan establishes a framework for Council to evaluate and prioritize implementation as funding opportunities arise. Adoption signals Estero's commitment to the vision in this plan, strengthens grant applications, and ensures long-term alignment between public and private efforts.

Please note: Adoption does not prevent future updates; it simply provides a living framework that can evolve as needs and opportunities arise.

2

IDENTIFY FUNDING FOR LEVERAGE & MATCH

The Village could evaluate federal, state, philanthropic, and private funding programs, with a focus on identifying grant cycles and eligibility aligned with identified Catalyst Projects.

This effort can support preparation of match-ready proposals and help prioritize early-phase projects based on funding readiness.

3

PURSUE TARGETED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The Village should pursue grant funding aligned with early-phase projects, particularly those focused on resilience and mobility infrastructure.

Potential sources include FEMA BRIC for flood mitigation and stormwater projects and the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program (FRDAP) for park and trail improvements.

Funding Sources

With the foundational steps in place, the Village can deploy a range of financial tools, partnerships, and policies to keep momentum going. These funding sources help ensure the plan is financially feasible and sustainable, aligned with Estero’s "small but mighty" governmental structure and capacity.

PHASING INTEGRATION

<p>Local Funding & Strategic Planning</p> <p><i>Master plans, setting design standards, and early improvements</i></p>	<p>0-5 YRS</p>
<p>State & Federal Funding</p> <p><i>Implement major infrastructure, trails, and key park projects</i></p>	<p>5-10 YRS</p>
<p>Private Investment & Long-Term Partnerships</p> <p><i>Complete build-out and sustain operations</i></p>	<p>10-20 YRS</p>

LOCAL FUNDING / VILLAGE INVESTMENT

The Village of Estero will play a central role in advancing the early phases of the plan (0–5 years) through strategic planning, policy changes, and targeted coordination. This could include leveraging local funds by providing a match for state and federal grants. These contributions demonstrate the Village’s commitment to the vision in this plan and can help attract additional external investment.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)

- » Streetscape improvements (US-41, Trailside Drive)
- » Parks and open space
- » Mobility and infrastructure upgrades

PARKS & RECREATION FUNDING

- » Estero River Park
- » Neighborhood parks and civic spaces
- » BERT amenities / trailheads

STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

- » Flood mitigation projects
- » Green infrastructure implementation

STATE FUNDING

State programs provide strong alignment with Estero’s priorities, particularly for transportation, trails, environmental protection, and recreation.

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (FDOT)

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM (TAP)

- » Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure
- » BERT connectors and crossings

FDOT BEAUTIFICATION & LANDSCAPE PROGRAM

- » FDOT right-of-way improvements require Joint Participation Agreement
- » Village assumes maintenance

SUN TRAIL PROGRAM

- » Regional trail systems
- » BERT

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (FDEP)

RESILIENT FLORIDA PROGRAM

- » Flood mitigation and resilience planning
- » River corridor and green infrastructure

FLORIDA RECREATION DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (FRDAP)

- » Park development and recreation amenities
- » Estero River Park features, play areas, etc.

OTHER SOURCES

FLORIDA COMMUNITIES TRUST (FCT) A.K.A. FLORIDA FOREVER

- » Land acquisition for conservation and parks
- » Larger funding potential (multi-million range)

SW FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD) COOPERATIVE FUNDING INITIATIVE (CFI)

- » Stormwater and water quality projects
- » Green infrastructure

FEDERAL FUNDING

Federal programs align strongly with Estero’s goals around infrastructure, resilience, and community connectivity.

US DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (USDOT)

RAISE GRANTS

- » Large-scale infrastructure projects
- » US-41 and other major mobility investments

SAFE STREETS AND ROADS FOR ALL (SS4A)

- » Safety improvements
- » Crossings and corridor redesign

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES SET-ASIDE

- » Trails, sidewalks, and bike facilities
-

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS)

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)

- » Park development
- » Land acquisition
- » Requires 50/50 match

OUTDOOR RECREATION LEGACY PARTNERSHIP (ORLP)

- » Large-scale, transformative park projects
 - » Estero River Park
-

OTHER SOURCES

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA) FUNDING

- » Green infrastructure and environmental justice initiatives
- » River corridor and stormwater systems

HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD) COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTS (CDBG)

- » Public spaces
- » Economic development areas

PRIVATE & PHILANTHROPIC

Private investment and philanthropy can play a critical role in advancing amenities, programming, and long-term operations.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- » Corporate sponsorships
- » Naming rights
- » Partnerships with local foundations, cultural and environmental organizations
- » Community-led fundraising
- » Programming partnerships for events, recreation programming, arts, and culture

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (P3)

Public-private partnerships will be essential for delivering key components of the plan, particularly within the Village Center and destination areas.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- » Shared parking strategies
- » Joint-use public spaces integrated into development
- » Developer contributions through incentives, and development agreements
- » Concession or lease agreements for event venues and other programming

Cost Estimates

Rough Order-of-Magnitude (ROM) Cost Approach

The cost estimates provided in this plan are developed using typical unit costs, comparable case studies, regional benchmarks, and assumptions about project scope, materials, and complexity. These cost ranges provided can be used to:

- » Compare relative scale between projects
- » Prioritize investments in capital improvement planning
- » Support grant applications and funding strategies
- » Guide discussions with partners and stakeholders

These estimates generally include construction, basic site preparation, utilities, and allowances for design, permitting, and contingencies, but **do not account for land acquisition, detailed engineering, site-specific constraints, or long-term inflation, unless noted.** As projects advance, more refined cost estimates should be developed through schematic design and engineering studies.

PHASING INTEGRATION

Lower Cost, but High Impact <i>Planning, design, pilot projects, and catalyst projects with high visibility</i>	0 - 5 YRS
Major Capital Investment <i>Construction of the core infrastructure and destination projects</i>	5 - 10 YRS
Completion & Expansion <i>Ongoing but more targeted, long-term investments and system upgrades</i>	10 - 20 YRS

2 | VISION COST ESTIMATES



CONNECTIVITY & TRANSPORTATION

\$ = \$150-250K	\$\$ = \$500K-1M
\$\$\$ = \$1M-5M	\$\$\$\$ = \$5M+

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	
US-41 Landscape & Streetscape Plan	\$	N/A	0 - 5 YEARS
US-41 Grade-Separated Crossing Feasibility Study	\$	N/A	
US-41 Context Reclassification	\$	N/A	
US-41 Intersection Safety Improvements <i>Priority locations</i>	\$	\$ - \$\$\$	
Sidewalk Gap / ADA-Accessibility <i>Priority locations</i>	\$	\$\$	
Multi-Modal Pilot Projects <i>Test bike lanes and shared-use paths</i>	\$	\$ - \$\$	
"Safe Routes to Parks & Trails" Program	\$	\$	
Additional Bike / Ped Connections <i>To residential areas and destinations</i>	\$	\$\$	5 - 10 YEARS
Transit / Shuttle Service Program	\$	\$\$	
US-41 Grade-Separated Crossing	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$	
US-41 Streetscape Improvements <i>Priority segments</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$	
US-41 Intersection Safety Improvements <i>Additional locations</i>	\$	\$\$\$	

Please note: The table continues on the following page.

2 | VISION COST ESTIMATES

\$ = \$150-250K	\$\$ = \$500K-1M
\$\$\$ = \$1M-5M	\$\$\$\$ = \$5M+

CONNECTIVITY & TRANSPORTATION (CONT.)

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	
Regional Coordination <i>Trail and transit agencies</i>	\$	N/A	10 - 20 YEARS
Regional Trail Connections <i>Complete connections</i>	\$	\$\$	
US-41 Streetscape Improvements <i>Final segments</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$	



ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	
Estero River Protection Overlay	\$	n/a	0 - 5 YEARS
Green Infrastructure Handbook	\$	n/a	
Green Infrastructure Incentive Program	\$	\$ - \$\$	
River Access Improvements <i>Acquire 2-3 priority locations</i>	\$	\$\$ - \$\$\$	
Wetland / Floodplain Acquisition Program	\$	\$	
River Corridor Improvement Plan	\$	N/A	5 - 10 YRS
Stream Restoration / Flood Mitigation <i>Identify priority locations</i>	\$	N/A	

Please note: The table continues on the following page.

2 | VISION COST ESTIMATES

\$ = \$150-250K	\$\$ = \$500K-1M
\$\$\$ = \$1M-5M	\$\$\$\$ = \$5M+

ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS (CONT.)

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	
Green Infrastructure Incentive Program <i>Program evaluation and expansion</i>	\$	\$ - \$\$	5 - 10 YEARS
River Access Improvements <i>Construction</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$ - \$\$\$	
Nature-based Flood Mitigation Project <i>Implementation</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$	
Eco-Tourism Initiatives & Educational Programming	\$	\$\$	
Green Infrastructure Handbook Integration <i>For all Village of Estero projects</i>	\$	\$\$	
Resilience Strategy Recalibration <i>Update based on climate projections</i>	\$ - \$\$	N/A	10 - 20 YEARS
Conservation Lands & Open Space <i>Expand system</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$ - \$\$\$	
Flood, River, & Wetland Protection <i>Complete</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$	

2 | VISION COST ESTIMATES



PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE

\$ = \$150-250K	\$\$ = \$500K-1M
\$\$\$ = \$1M-5M	\$\$\$\$ = \$5M+

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	
BERT & Trail Design Guidelines	\$	N/A	0 - 5 YEARS
Estero Open Space Design Manual	\$	N/A	
Estero River Park Vision & Design Framework	\$	N/A	
Boomer House Vision & Design Framework	\$	N/A	
BERT Construction <i>Priority segments</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$	
Public Space Amenity Pilot Projects <i>Test new shade, seating, and wayfinding</i>	\$	\$	5 - 10 YEARS
BERT Construction <i>Complete segments</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$	
Public Space Amenities <i>Expand neighborhood parks, tree canopy, and civic greens</i>	\$	\$ - \$\$	
Estero River Park <i>Phase 1-2 implementation</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	
Boomer House <i>Phase 1 implementation</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	
Additional Trail Connections <i>To residential areas and destinations</i>	\$	\$\$ - \$\$\$	

Please note: The table continues on the following page.

2 | VISION COST ESTIMATES

\$ = \$150-250K	\$\$ = \$500K-1M
\$\$\$ = \$1M-5M	\$\$\$\$ = \$5M+

PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE (CONT.)

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	10-20 YEARS
Regional Trail and Greenway Connections <i>Complete system</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$	
Park Maintenance Evaluation & Upgrades <i>Continued investment</i>	\$	\$ - \$\$\$	
Estero River Park <i>Expansion</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	
Boomer House <i>Complete</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	0-5 YEARS
Village Center Master Plan & Adoption	\$	N/A	
Village Center Design Standards	\$	N/A	
Village Center Traffic Signal Determination	\$	N/A	
Trailside Drive Main Street District <i>Establish overlay</i>	\$	N/A	
Village Center / Koreshan Historic District <i>Establish overlay</i>	\$	N/A	

Please note: The table continues on the following page.

2 | VISION COST ESTIMATES

\$ = \$150-250K	\$\$ = \$500K-1M
\$\$\$ = \$1M-5M	\$\$\$\$ = \$5M+

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY (CONT.)

STRATEGIC ACTION / PROJECT	PLANNING / DESIGN PHASE	IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	
Housing Policy Update	\$	N/A	0 - 5 YRS
Senior & Workforce Housing <i>Identify 2-3 priority locations</i>	\$ - \$\$	N/A	
Village Center <i>Phase 1 implementation</i>	\$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	5 - 10 YEARS
Heritage & Eco-Tourism <i>Identify priority opportunities</i>	\$	N/A	
Senior & Workforce Housing <i>Implementation (private development)</i>	N/A	N/A	
Trailside Drive "Main Street" Pilot Project <i>Streetscape improvements</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	
Small-Scale Retail & Local Economy <i>Support and incentivize private investment</i>	\$	\$	
Trailside Drive "Main Street" District <i>Final phases</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	10 - 20 YEARS
Village Center <i>Final phases</i>	\$ - \$\$	\$\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$	
Market Study <i>Update based on new projections</i>	\$	N/A	
Heritage & Eco-Tourism <i>Expand program</i>	\$	N/A	
Identify Additional Catalyst Sites	\$	N/A	

Page intentionally left blank.





Village of Estero
Eco-Historic Planning Study

3

ANALYSIS

Community History

Existing Conditions

Planning Implications

3 | ANALYSIS

Community History

Native American Roots

Estero's history began with the Calusa Native Americans, who lived along the Estero River and relied on fishing and trade. Spanish explorers passed through the region in the 1500s, but the area remained largely unsettled for centuries.



1. CALUSA TRIBE DEPICTION

Instead of farming, Calusa Native Americans lived off of the spoils of the sea. The men and boys of the tribe would make nets from palm trees to catch mullet, pinfish, pigfish, and catfish, and would use spears to catch eels and turtles.

2. LIFE ALONG THE ESTERO RIVER

The Estero River shaped early settlement and daily life in Estero, serving as a vital corridor for fishing, trade, and transportation long before roads connected the community.

3. CROSSING THE RIVER

Early bridges over the Estero River marked a shift from boat-based travel to connected neighborhoods.

4. KORESHAN UNITY STORE

Along the river, the Koreshan Unity Store and post office functioned as a hub for commerce and communications in early Estero.

5. ESTERO CREEK SCHOOLHOUSE

Built in 1904 near the Estero River, the Estero Creek Schoolhouse served local families—including Koreshan and non-Koreshan residents—as one of the community's earliest public institutions.





“Estero’s story reflects a journey from ancient Calusa lands to a unique Utopian settlement and a thriving modern village.”

In 1894, Estero became home to the Koreshan Unity, a Utopian religious group led by Dr. Cyrus Teed. The Koreshans built a self-sustaining community that strongly influenced early development. Their preserved settlement is now Koreshan State Park.

During the 20th century, Estero evolved from a rural area into a growing community. Increased development and tourism led to its incorporation as a village in 2014, blending the community’s historic roots with modern growth.





1882 FIRST HOMESTEADER

Gustave Damkohler, Estero's first recorded settler, farmed citrus along the Estero River and shipped crops north by boat.

16th-18th century

THE CALUSA NATIVE AMERICANS

This community thrived in Estero, building a coastal empire from engineering canals to use as trade routes along the Caloosahatchee River.

THE FALL OF THE CALUSA

Spanish explorers brought warfare and disease, devastating the Calusa population. Their legacy endures through Seminole descendants who preserve Calusa heritage.

1894 ARRIVAL OF THE KORESHANS

Visionary Cyrus Teed and the Koreshan Unity established a Utopian community along the Estero River, promoting shared wealth, equality, and cultural pursuits.

1901-1903 ESTERO CREEK SCHOOL

Mr. and Mrs. F.M. Hendry founded the first local school outside Koreshan influence.

1907 TOWN ABOLISHED

Estero's incorporated status was dissolved.

1904 BUILDING A TOWN

The Koreshans incorporated Estero, opening businesses, schools, and cultural venues, including an art hall for music and theater.

1904-1927 COMMUNITY EDUCATION

A second Estero Creek School opened, later preserved at Estero Community Park.

Spanish for “estuary,” Estero takes its name from the river that shaped its early settlement and development.

ESTERO THROUGH TIME

Estero's history reflects a lasting legacy of individuals and groups of people drawn to the river and united by a shared sense of purpose. From its Native American and experimental Koreshan settlements, to the community's agricultural era and eventual incorporation, each chapter reinforces a pattern of self-determination and deep ties to the natural environment. Together, these stories form the foundation of Estero's identity today, as a place shaped by the river and the collective will to build community.

1921-1949

EXPANDING EDUCATION

A new four-room school with indoor plumbing supported 100 students.

2001

EPICENTER OF GROWTH

The Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) is formed to guide development and set design standards still visible today.

2015

FIRST MAYOR

Nick Batos, a leader in the incorporation effort, was elected Estero's inaugural mayor.

TODAY

BUILDING A BETTER TOMORROW

Estero continues to plan for growth while honoring its unique heritage and natural assets.

1961

LEGACY OF THE KORESHANS

The last members of the Koreshan Unity deeded their land to the State of Florida, creating Koreshan State Park.

2013-2014

PATH TO INCORPORATION

Following community meetings, 86% of residents voted to incorporate Estero as a village, approved on December 31, 2014

2022

RESILIENCE AFTER HURRICANE IAN

Hurricane Ian caused widespread damage, but residents united to rebuild stronger.



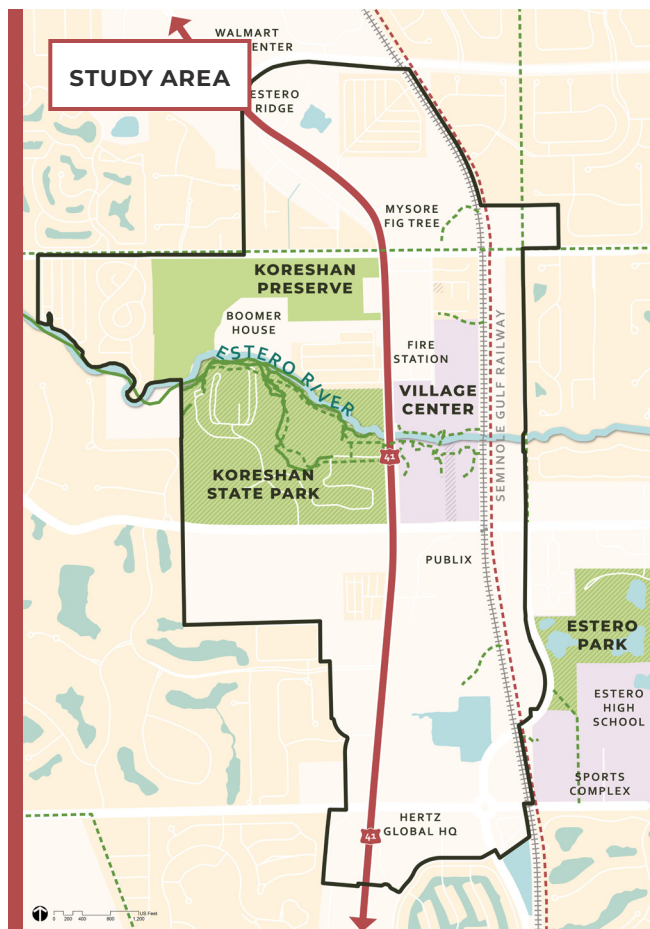
Existing Conditions

Study Area Overview

The study area for this plan represents one of the most environmentally, culturally, and historically distinctive parts of the Village, and plays a central role in defining Estero’s identity. The study area includes a diverse mix of land uses and ownership patterns. These varied conditions reflect Estero’s evolution over time and contribute to both the opportunities and constraints present today.

Key defining elements of the study area include:

- » Koreshan State Park & Historic Site
- » Village-owned riverfront property
- » Nearby Lee County parkland
- » Estero River corridor
- » Older residential neighborhoods, including mobile home and manufactured housing communities
- » Commercial plazas
- » Underutilized or redevelopable parcels along major corridors



Transportation infrastructure, US-41 in particular, plays a major role in structuring the study area. While the corridor provides regional access and visibility, it also creates physical and functional barriers between neighborhoods, parks, and riverfront areas. Local streets, trails, and emerging multi-modal facilities provide important connections but are not yet fully integrated into a cohesive network.

These conditions establish the study area as a place where environmental systems, historic and cultural assets, transportation realities, and community character intersect. They influence where reinvestment and economic activity can realistically occur, and reinforce the importance of targeted, context-sensitive planning.



1



4



2

The Estero River is the defining natural feature of the study area, shaping land use patterns, environmental conditions, and historic settlement. The river corridor connects Estero to downstream estuarine and coastal systems, reinforcing the area's broader ecological significance. Extensive wetlands, flood-prone lands, and conservation areas further influence where and how development has occurred.

1. LOCATION OF NEW PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE BY THE VILLAGE CENTER (UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

2. RIVER-BASED RECREATION

Kayak launches at Estero River Outfitters highlight the river's ongoing role as a recreational asset for the community.

3. RIVERSIDE PINE FLATWOODS

Wetlands, floodplain forests, and dense riparian vegetation make up much of the conserved land along the river.

4. NATURAL CONSTRAINTS

Dense vegetation surrounding the river limits access and views of the river.



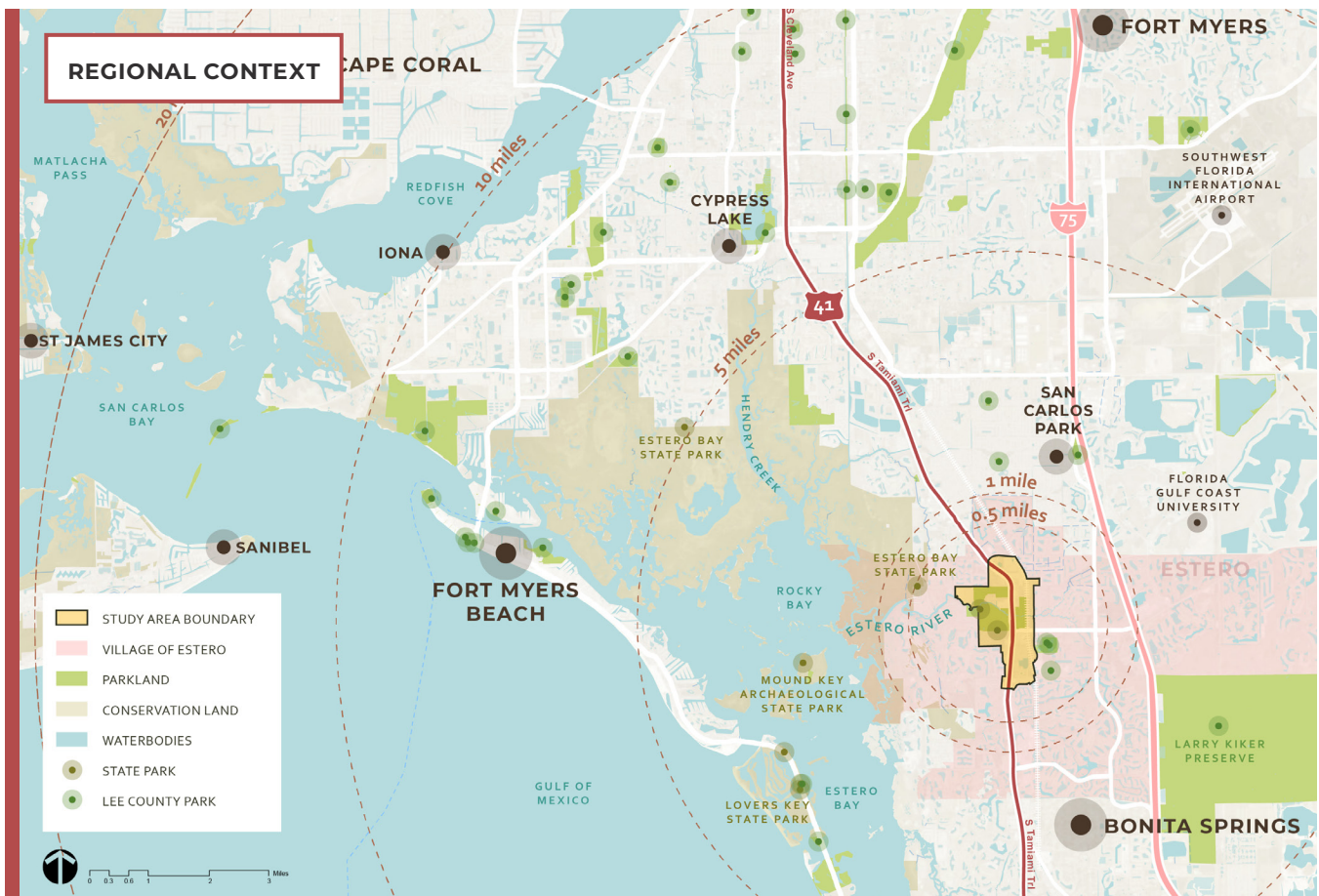
3

Regional Context

The Village of Estero is located in southern Lee County within the broader Southwest Florida coastal region, positioned between Fort Myers and Naples/Collier County. Estero’s location places it within an active growth corridor along Florida’s Gulf Coast, influenced by regional travel patterns, seasonal visitation, and continued in-migration to the region.

REGIONAL TRAVEL PATTERNS

Estero is shaped by its role as both a residential community and a regional destination area. Major north–south facilities, including I-75 and US-41, support regional travel between Lee and Collier counties, and they also carry local daily trips to jobs, schools, shopping, and services. Because these corridors serve multiple functions, Estero experiences the



Estero, Florida, where lush coastal swamps and wetlands support rich ecosystems along the state’s scenic Gulf Coast on Florida’s west coast.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

benefits of accessibility (economic activity and reinvestment potential) as well as the pressures that come with it (congestion, safety concerns, and complex multi-agency implementation). Estero's regional destination role is reinforced by several high-activity centers in and near Estero, including:

- » Southwest Florida International Airport
- » Coconut Point, a large retail and dining destination
- » Miromar Outlets, another regional retail destination located in Estero
- » Hertz Arena, a regional entertainment venue in Estero
- » Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU)

Regional destination activity, events, and seasonal visitation will add demand to the same corridors residents rely on every day, including US-41, Corkscrew Road, and connections to I-75.

REGIONAL COORDINATION

Transportation planning and investment in Estero occur within a countywide and regional framework. The Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is responsible for transportation planning across the Cities of Bonita Springs, Cape Coral, Fort Myers, Sanibel; the Town of Fort Myers Beach; the Village of Estero; and unincorporated Lee County. This governance structure influences how projects are identified, studied, and funded. Many transportation solutions, particularly

on regionally-significant corridors, require coordination across agencies and partners rather than relying on Village action alone. Understanding this is important for setting realistic expectations for implementation, phasing, and partnerships.

REGIONAL COASTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Estero Bay is recognized as Florida's first Aquatic Preserve. The Estero River plays an important ecological role in the river-to-bay system and influences upstream conditions like water quality and habitat health.

The region also includes large conservation lands, like the Estero Bay Preserve State Park, which encompasses extensive conservation acreage intended to help protect water, inlets, and islands along the bay. This environmental setting provides significant community value that cannot be replaced, and practical constraints to development, reinforcing the importance of integrated resilience strategies when making land use and infrastructure decisions for the study area.

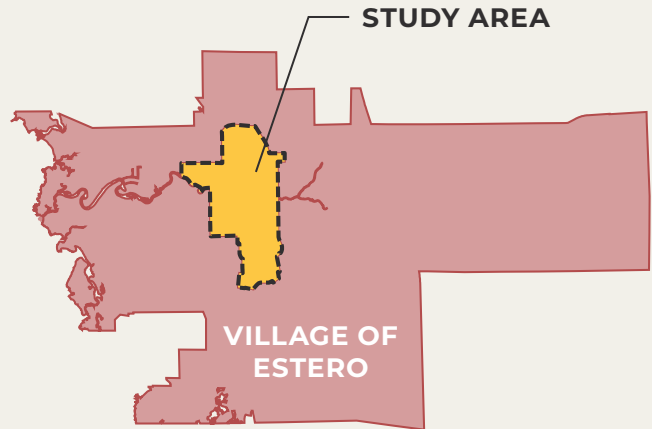
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Future opportunities in the Eco-Historic Planning Area must be evaluated through both a local lens and the realities of regional mobility, coastal environmental systems, and multi-agency decision-making.

Community Demographics

ESTERO'S
MEDIAN AGE IS
65.7
YEARS OLD

50%
OF THE
POPULATION IS
65+



77%
OF THE
POPULATION
HAS A WHITE
COLLAR JOB

82%
OF THE
POPULATION
OWNS THEIR
HOME

The Village of Estero is characterized by a significantly older population than much of the surrounding region, reflecting its popularity as a retirement destination and relatively small youth population. The median age in Estero is well above the median for Lee County as a whole (which is closer to 49 years), indicating a demographic profile that skews older than the broader county average. Estero's population is predominantly White, with smaller proportions of Hispanic, Asian, and Black residents compared to Lee County.

Estero stands out within the region from an economic perspective.

Households in Estero have a notably higher income than Lee County, and the community's poverty rate is lower than the broader county average. Homeownership rates are high, and property values have appreciated, reflecting both the desirability of the area and its relative economic affluence.

ESTERO'S
MEDIAN INCOME IS
\$100,459

LEE COUNTY'S
MEDIAN INCOME IS
\$73,099

ESTERO'S
AVERAGE HOUSE PRICE IS
\$431K

LEE COUNTY'S
AVERAGE HOUSE PRICE IS
\$326K

Information provided by US Census

Economic Development & Market Context

Economic conditions within the Eco-Historic Study Area reflect a combination of regional growth pressures and localized constraints shaped by environmental systems, transportation access, and historic context. While Estero continues to experience strong market demand at a regional scale, existing conditions within the study area suggest that **development opportunities are more appropriately focused on targeted, context-sensitive reinvestment rather than broad intensification.**

The market analysis prepared by RCLCO highlights ongoing demand for residential development and neighborhood-serving commercial uses that support daily needs and local activity. These findings are consistent with community input and adopted Village policy, which emphasize development that enhances quality of life, supports local residents, and reinforces community character.

Within the study area, environmental constraints, floodplain conditions, and proximity to the Estero River limit the extent and location of future development. As a result, **economic development opportunities are most likely to occur in areas that already exhibit access, infrastructure availability, and compatibility with surrounding uses.** Existing commercial corridors, redevelopment sites, and underutilized properties represent the primary locations where reinvestment could align with environmental protection and mobility considerations.

SERVING EXISTING & FUTURE POPULATION

Existing demographic trends and market conditions suggest that economic development within the Eco-Historic Study Area should focus on **diversifying both housing options and local activity**, while continuing to support Estero's existing population.

The Village's demographic profile reflects an **aging population**, with a high proportion of older adults and seasonal residents. At the same time, community input and adopted policy direction point to a desire to:

- » Support residents who wish to age in place,
- » Attract a broader mix of households and age groups, and
- » Strengthen everyday, neighborhood-serving amenities that support daily life.

Within this context, targeted economic development opportunities that align with the Eco-Historic Study Area's goals include:

- » Housing types that increase diversity, such as smaller-scale units, mixed-use residential, and housing that supports workforce and multigenerational households
- » Local-serving commercial uses that meet daily needs and create social gathering places, particularly in walkable locations
- » Development that complements parks, trails, and riverfront assets, supporting active lifestyles and health across age groups

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

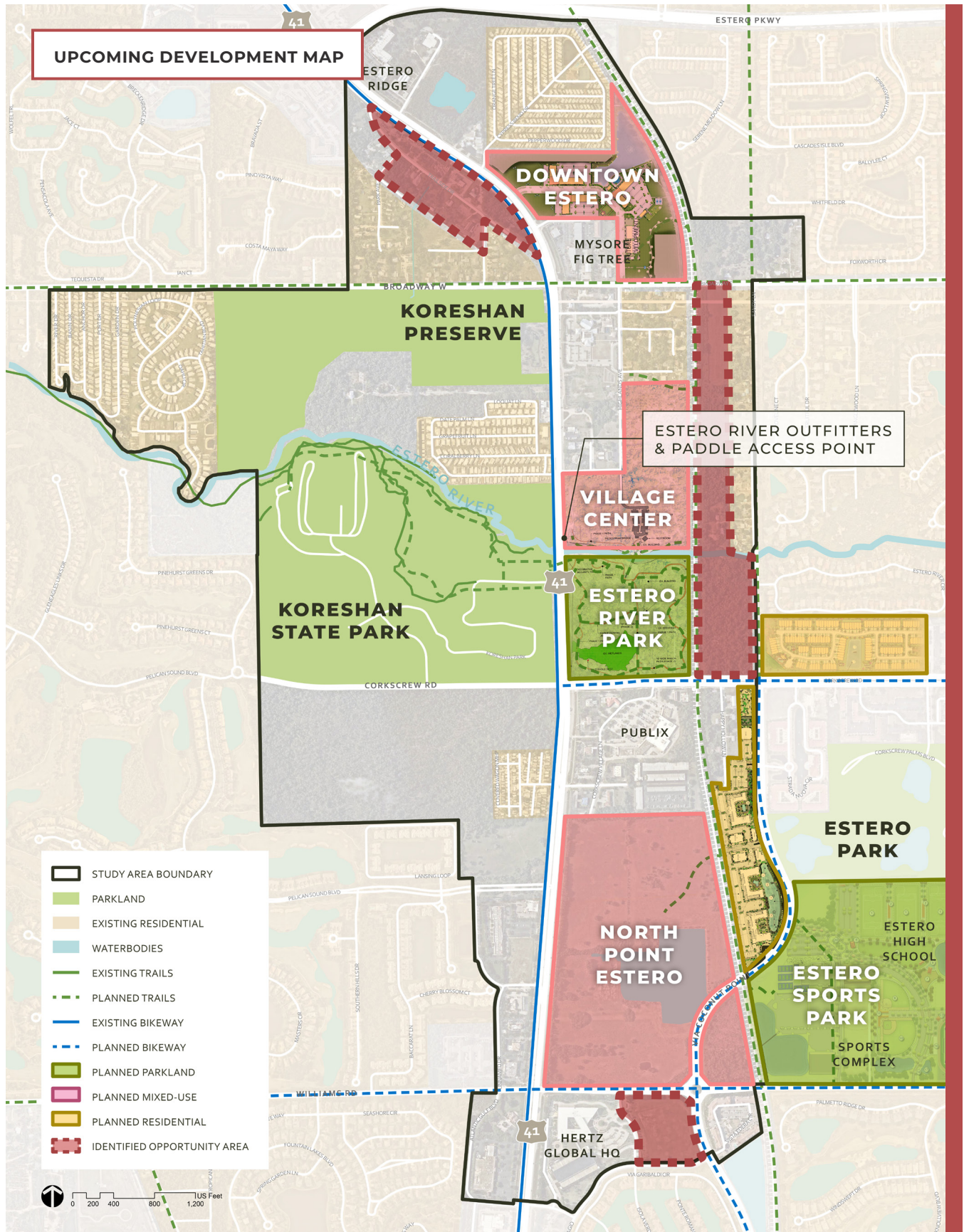
By aligning economic development strategies with demographic realities, the Village can support a more balanced and resilient community; one that continues to serve older residents while also creating opportunities for younger households, families, and workers to live, work, and invest locally.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Existing conditions point to **a gap between regional growth demand and locally-appropriate development opportunities**. Addressing this gap does not require attracting new large-scale uses, but rather focusing on development types that:

- » Serve local residents and nearby neighborhoods
- » Complement historic and environmental assets
- » Support walkability and multi-modal access
- » Contribute to long-term fiscal sustainability

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



Land Use & Zoning

Existing land use and zoning within the study area reflect a pattern of incremental growth shaped by environmental constraints, historic development, and transportation access. Land uses include a mix of residential, commercial, conservation, recreational, and institutional uses, with notable variation in intensity and character across different locations.

- » **Residential uses** are prevalent throughout the study area and include a range of housing types, such as single-family neighborhoods, mobile home and manufactured housing communities, and multifamily developments. Many residential areas are older and established, contributing to the character of Estero while also presenting opportunities for reinvestment and diversification over time.
- » **Commercial uses** are primarily concentrated along US-41 and at key intersections, typically in the form of retail plazas and auto-oriented development. These areas provide important neighborhood-serving functions but are often separated from adjacent residential neighborhoods and open space by roadway design and access patterns.
- » **A significant portion of the study area consists of conservation lands, parks, and publicly owned open space**, including Koreshan State Historic Site, Village-owned riverfront property, and nearby County parkland. These areas are foundational to the Eco-Historic Study Area's identity and limit the extent and location of future development.



Residential in Estero

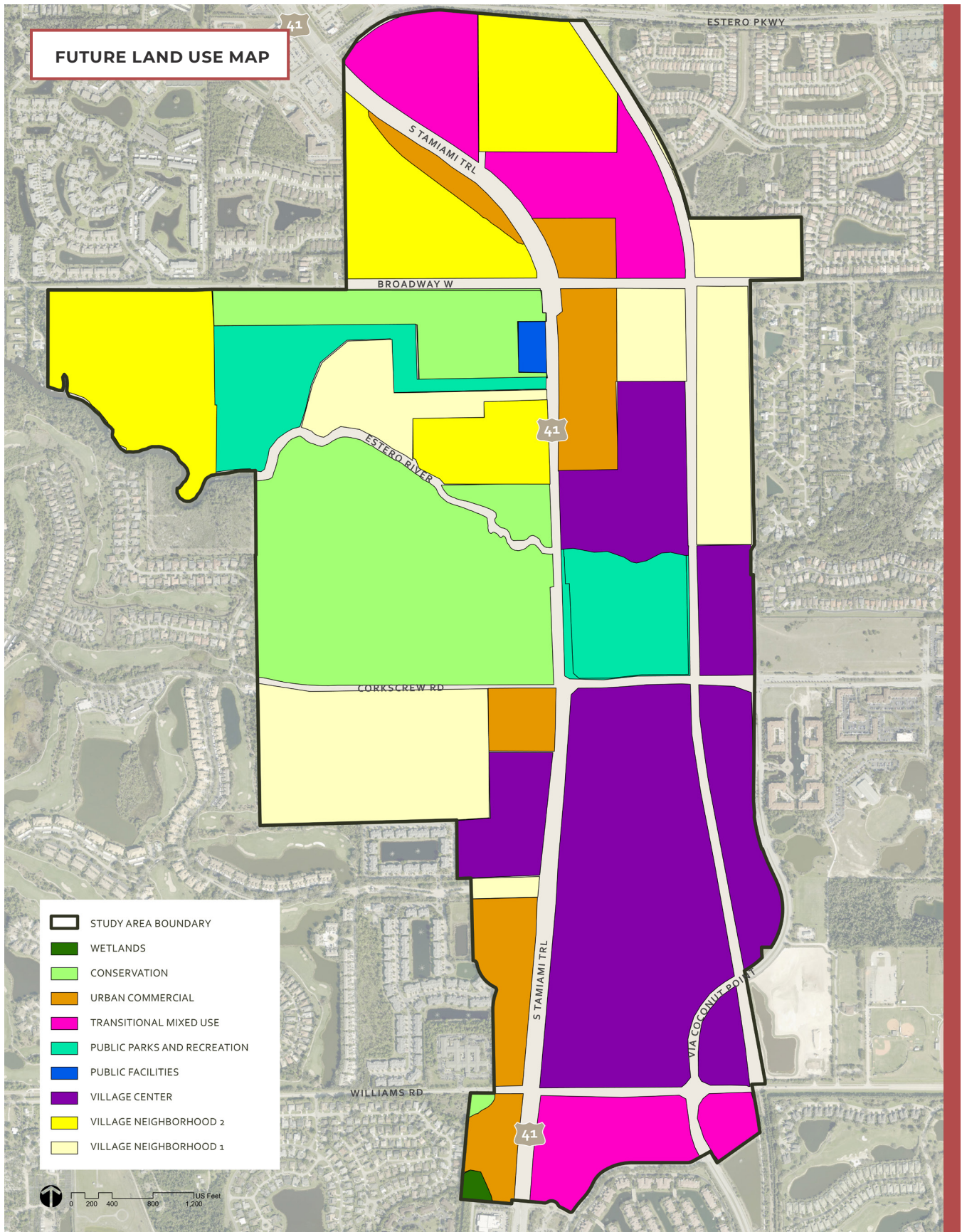
ZONING IMPLICATIONS

Zoning within the study area is dominated by Planned Development (PD) districts, which provide flexibility in permitted uses, density, and site design. While portions of the study area remain zoned Agricultural, much of this land is no longer used for active agricultural purposes and instead reflects legacy zoning applied to conservation lands, parks, or large undeveloped parcels. As a result, zoning classifications do not always align precisely with existing land use.

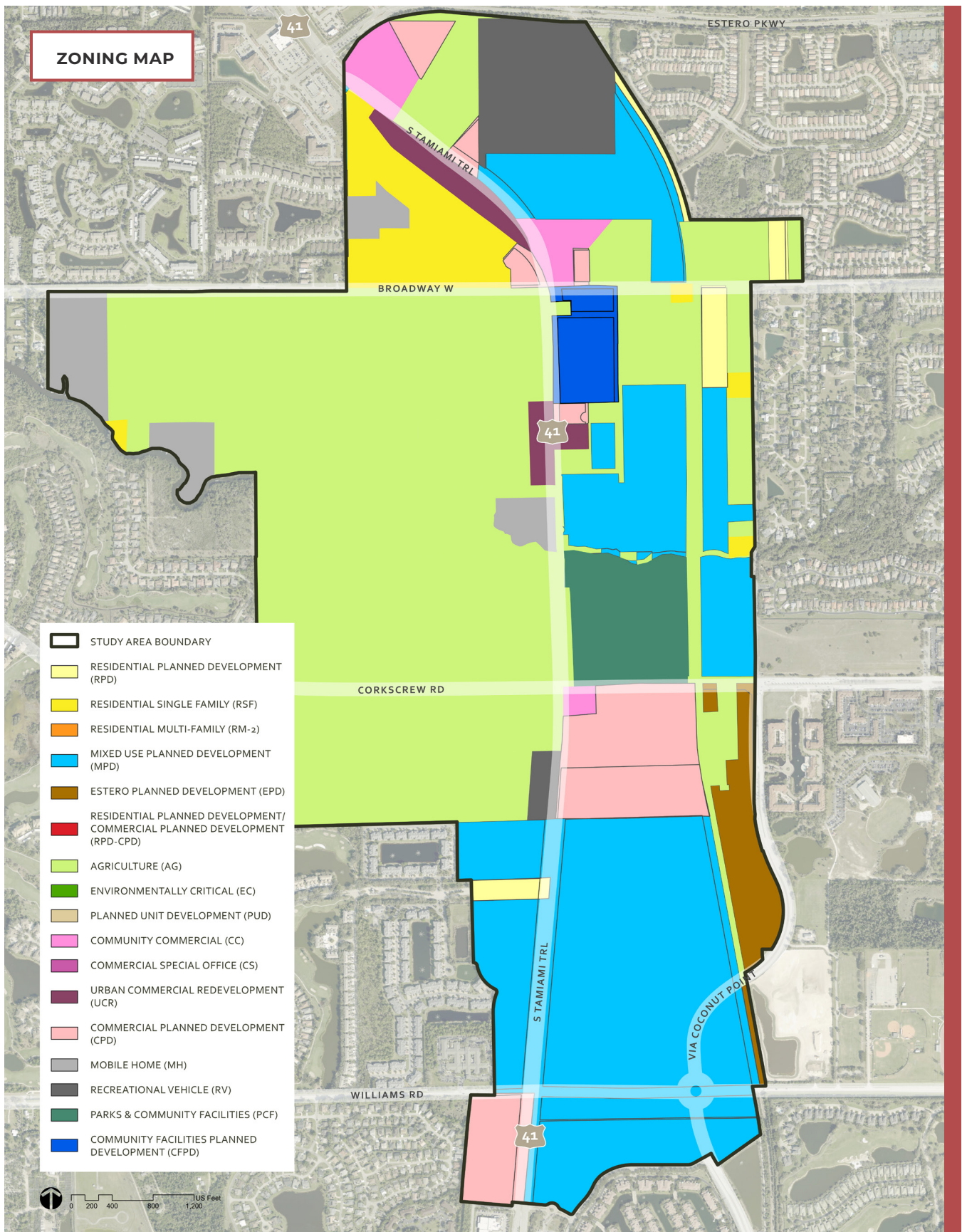
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » Future development opportunities within the Eco-Historic Study Area are likely to be selective and context-driven, rather than widespread.
- » Environmental constraints, infrastructure availability, and surrounding uses will continue to influence where reinvestment can occur and what forms of development are most appropriate.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



Page intentionally left blank.

Environmental Conditions & Open Space Systems

Environmental and open space systems are defining features of the study area and play a central role in shaping existing conditions, redevelopment feasibility, and long-term community resilience. The presence of the Estero River, extensive wetlands, flood-prone lands, and connected conservation areas distinguishes this area from other parts of the Village and establishes a strong ecological and historic foundation for future planning.

Rather than serving solely as constraints, these systems function as organizing elements that influence land use patterns, access, infrastructure investment, and sense of place.

ESTERO RIVER & RIVERFRONT CONTEXT

The Estero River is the most significant natural feature within the study area and a defining asset for Estero. The river corridor supports regional water quality, habitat connectivity, and flood storage while also offering opportunities for recreation, education, and cultural interpretation.

Large portions of land adjacent to the river are publicly owned or protected, including Koreshan State Historic Site, Village-owned riverfront property, and nearby conservation lands. Together, these properties form a continuous open space corridor that reinforces

the historic and ecological identity of the area and limits the extent of intensive development along the river's edge.

At the same time, proximity to the river introduces important considerations related to flooding, environmental regulation, and long-term maintenance.

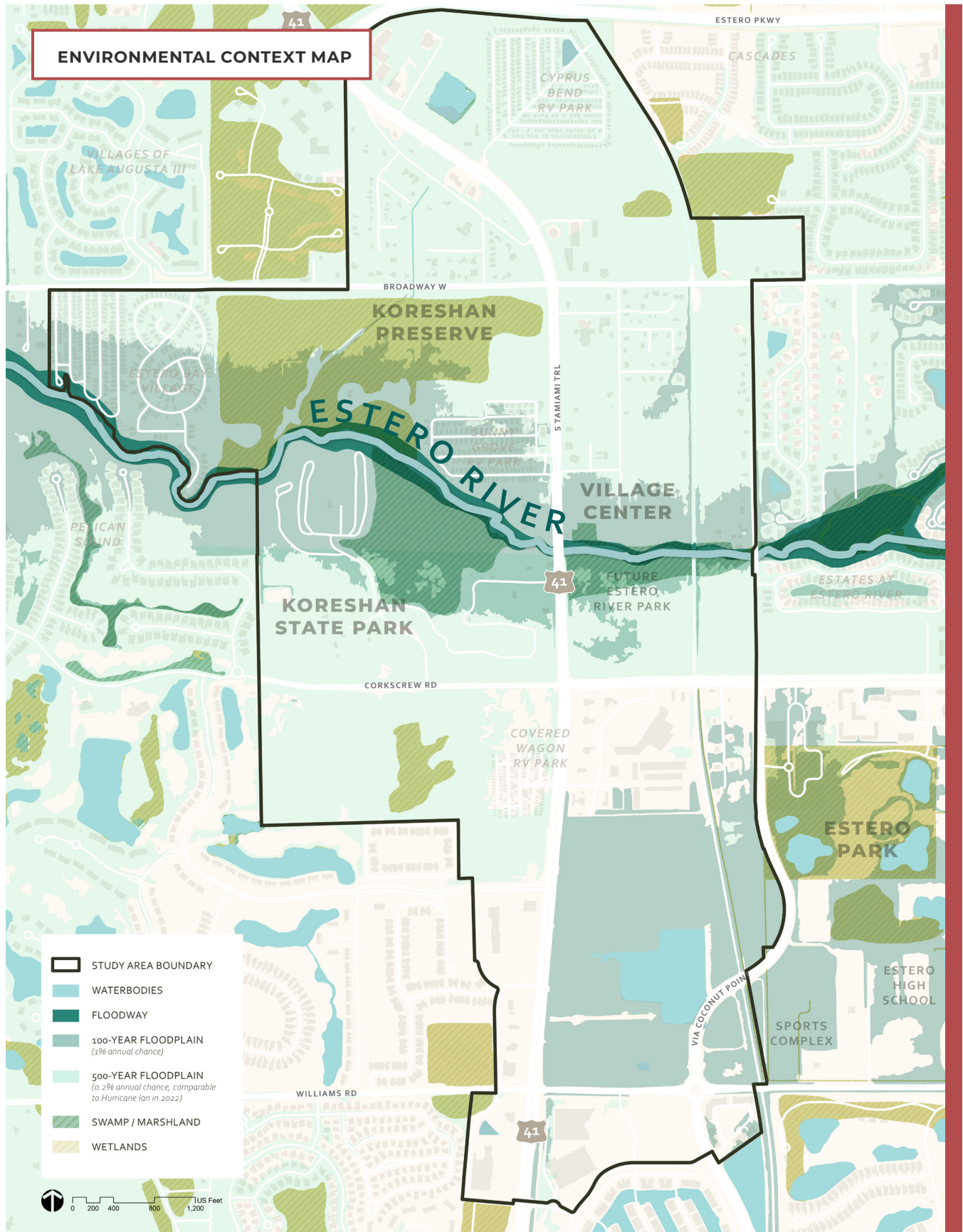
WETLANDS & ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS

Wetlands are prevalent throughout the Eco-Historic Study Area and represent a significant environmental constraint on land disturbance and development intensity. These wetlands provide essential ecosystem services, including stormwater retention, flood attenuation, water quality improvement, and wildlife habitat.

Many parcels within the study area are partially or fully affected by wetlands and associated buffers, which influences site design, infrastructure placement, and redevelopment feasibility. In several locations, wetlands overlap with areas identified for conservation or public ownership, reinforcing their role as permanent landscape features rather than future development sites.

Existing conditions indicate that early environmental evaluation and avoidance-based planning approaches will be critical to any future reinvestment or infrastructure improvements within the study area.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

FLOODPLAINS, FLOODING, & RESILIENCE

Portions of the Eco-Historic Study Area lie within FEMA-designated flood zones associated with the Estero River and surrounding low-lying terrain. Recent storm events, including Hurricane Ian, have reinforced the community's exposure to flooding and the importance of resilience-focused planning.

Floodplain conditions affect:

- » Appropriate land use intensity and building placement
- » Infrastructure design and elevation requirements
- » Long-term operational and maintenance considerations
- » Emergency access and recovery planning

Flood-compatible land uses, nature-based solutions, and open space preservation should be integrated into future planning efforts. Flood-prone areas within the study area often coincide with conservation lands and open space, reinforcing the role of environmental systems as both protective infrastructure and community assets.

PARKS, CONSERVATION LANDS, & OPEN SPACE NETWORK

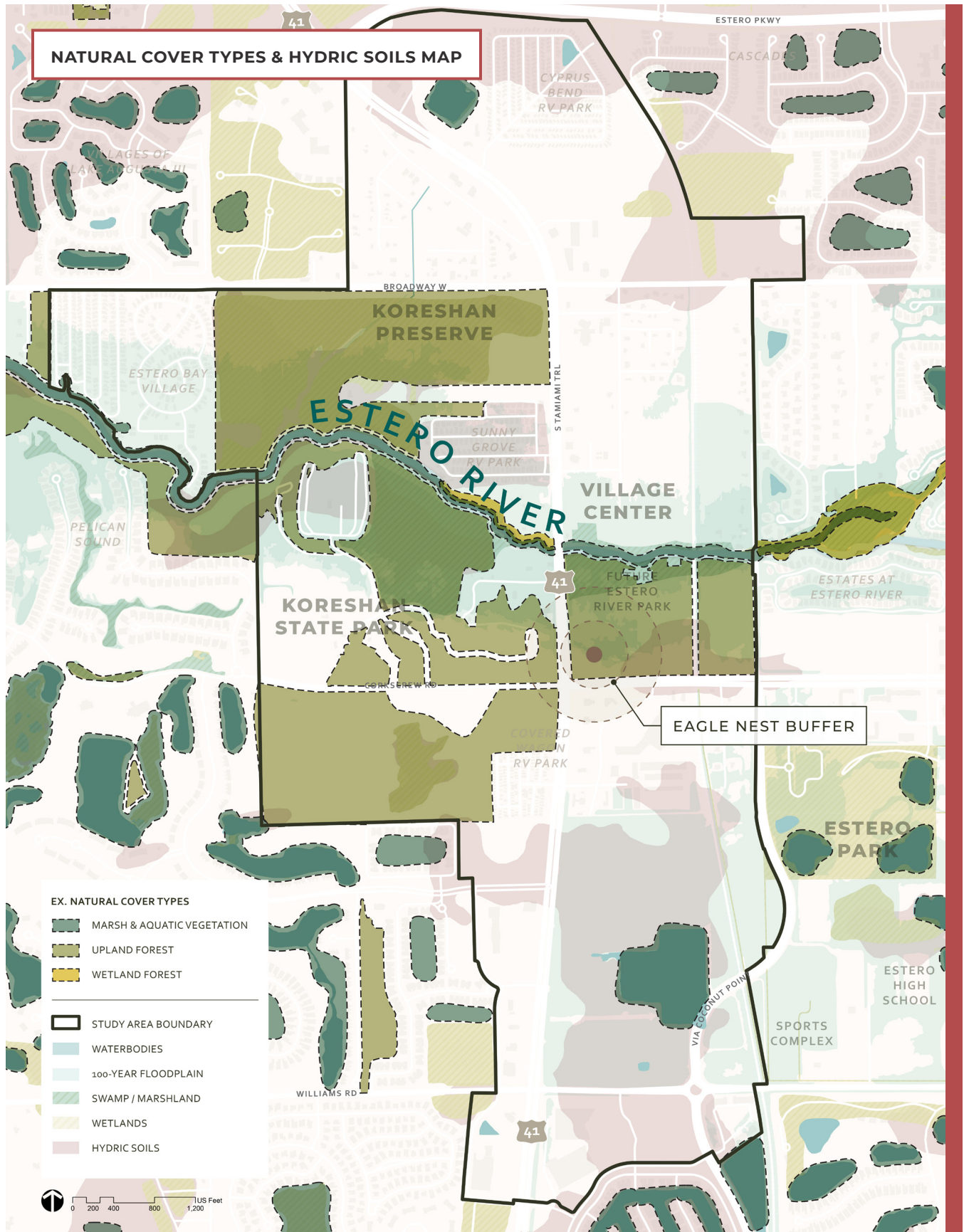
The Eco-Historic Study Area benefits from a strong foundation of existing parks and conservation lands that contribute to both quality of life and environmental resilience. Koreshan State Historic Site serves as a central cultural and recreational asset, while Village-owned properties and nearby Lee County parks expand opportunities for passive recreation, environmental education, and community gathering.

These assets collectively form an interconnected open space network that supports:

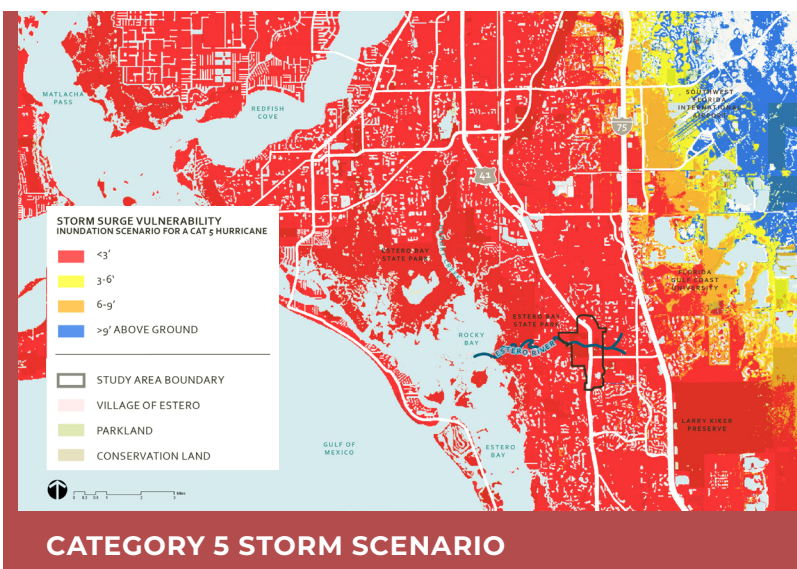
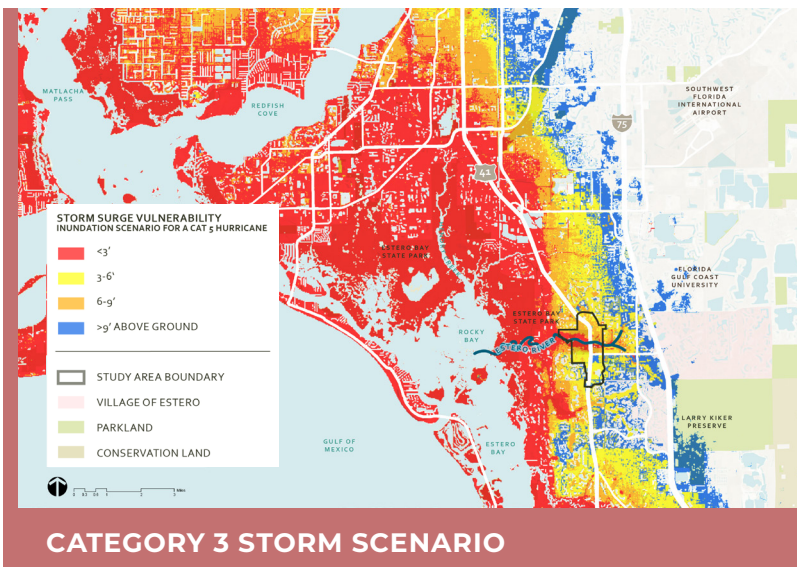
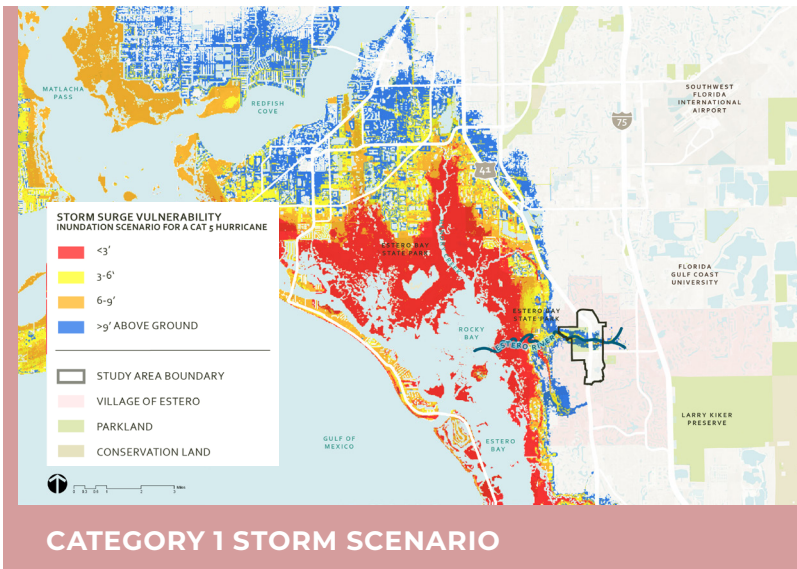
- » Public access to natural and historic resources
- » Trail and riverfront connectivity
- » Flood storage and ecological protection
- » Community identity and sense of place

While the quantity of protected and publicly accessible land is a major strength, access to these spaces varies. In some locations, connections between parks, neighborhoods, and the river are limited by roadway barriers, environmental constraints, or lack of supporting infrastructure.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



STORM RISK

Neighborhoods next to the river and low-lying lands and are especially vulnerable to coastal flooding.

- » Inundation depth and vulnerability increases under higher-intensity storms
- » The river and floodplain are primary flood pathways, where surge and tidal influence move inland during major storm events

Understanding the study area's storm risk reinforces constraints on future development, particularly within low-elevation and sensitive areas. It emphasizes the importance of considering elevation strategies, flood-compatible open space, and protected evacuation routes as part of the overall infrastructure strategy for Estero.

DID YOU KNOW?
HURRICANE IAN IN 2022 WAS DESIGNATED A CATEGORY 4 STORM.

Storm scenario mapping informed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA)

Page intentionally left blank.

Transportation & Mobility

Transportation and mobility conditions are among the most influential factors shaping daily life, redevelopment feasibility, and access to natural and historic resources within the Eco-Historic Study Area. Existing conditions reflect a transportation network designed primarily to support regional vehicular movement, with more limited accommodation for local access, pedestrian comfort, and multi-modal connectivity.

These conditions significantly influence how people experience Estero and how future investments can be prioritized.

LOCAL ROAD NETWORK & ACCESS

The local roadway network within the study area consists primarily of lower-speed streets serving residential neighborhoods, parks, and commercial uses. While these roads generally function adequately for local access, connectivity between neighborhoods and key destinations is often indirect and dependent on travel along or across US-41.

Key access considerations include:

- » Limited east–west connectivity across the corridor
- » Reliance on a small number of signalized intersections
- » Potential conflicts between through traffic and local access needs

These conditions affect emergency access, redevelopment design, and the ability to create walkable connections between neighborhoods, parks, and commercial areas.

PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE CONDITIONS

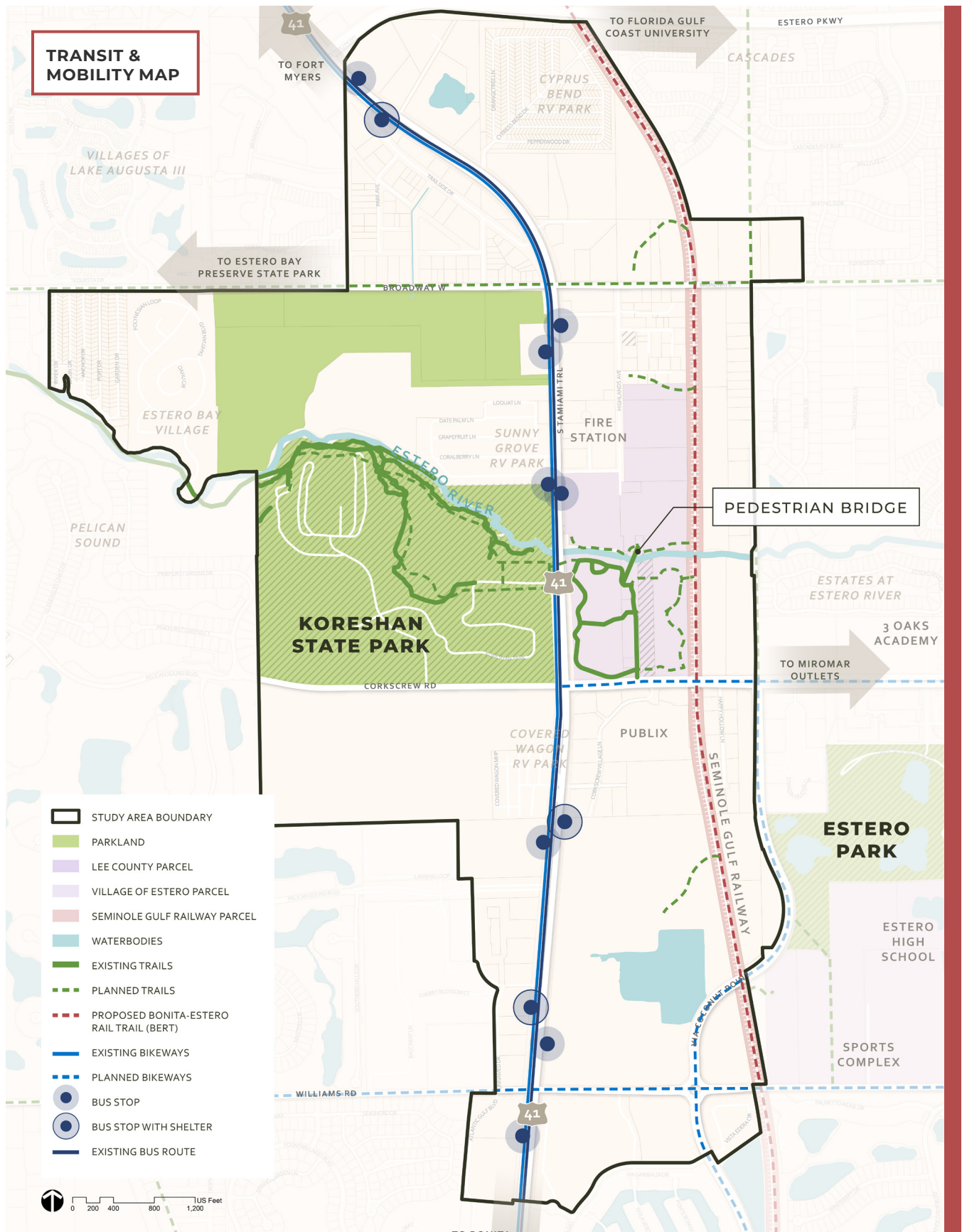
Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure within the study area is inconsistent and fragmented. Sidewalks, shared-use paths, and bicycle facilities exist in some locations but are often discontinuous, particularly near major intersections and along US-41.

Existing conditions include:

- » Gaps in sidewalks and bicycle facilities
- » Limited safe crossings of US-41
- » Variable pedestrian access to parks, riverfront areas, and commercial destinations
- » Challenges navigating between neighborhoods and regional trail facilities

These gaps reduce the effectiveness of existing open space and trail assets and limit opportunities for safe, non-motorized travel.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



US-41: REGIONAL CORRIDOR & LOCAL BARRIER

US-41 is the dominant transportation feature within the study area. It functions as a major regional corridor carrying high traffic volumes and providing access to commercial centers and regional destinations. At the same time, its width, traffic speeds, and intersection spacing create challenges for pedestrians, cyclists, and local circulation.

Existing conditions along US-41 include:

- » High traffic volumes and frequent turning movements
- » Limited pedestrian crossing opportunities
- » Auto-oriented development patterns
- » Physical and visual separation between neighborhoods, parks, and riverfront areas

As a result, US-41 serves as both a connector and a barrier – supporting regional mobility while limiting safe and comfortable local movement within and across the study area.

Crash Map

Crashes along US-41 are spread out along the corridor but cluster at major intersections, where the most severe incidents occur. Rear-end and sideswipe collisions dominate, indicating congestion, frequent stopping, and lane changes as key factors. While less common, bicycle and pedestrian crashes are concentrated at specific nodes, highlighting targeted safety concerns on US-41.

Context Classification

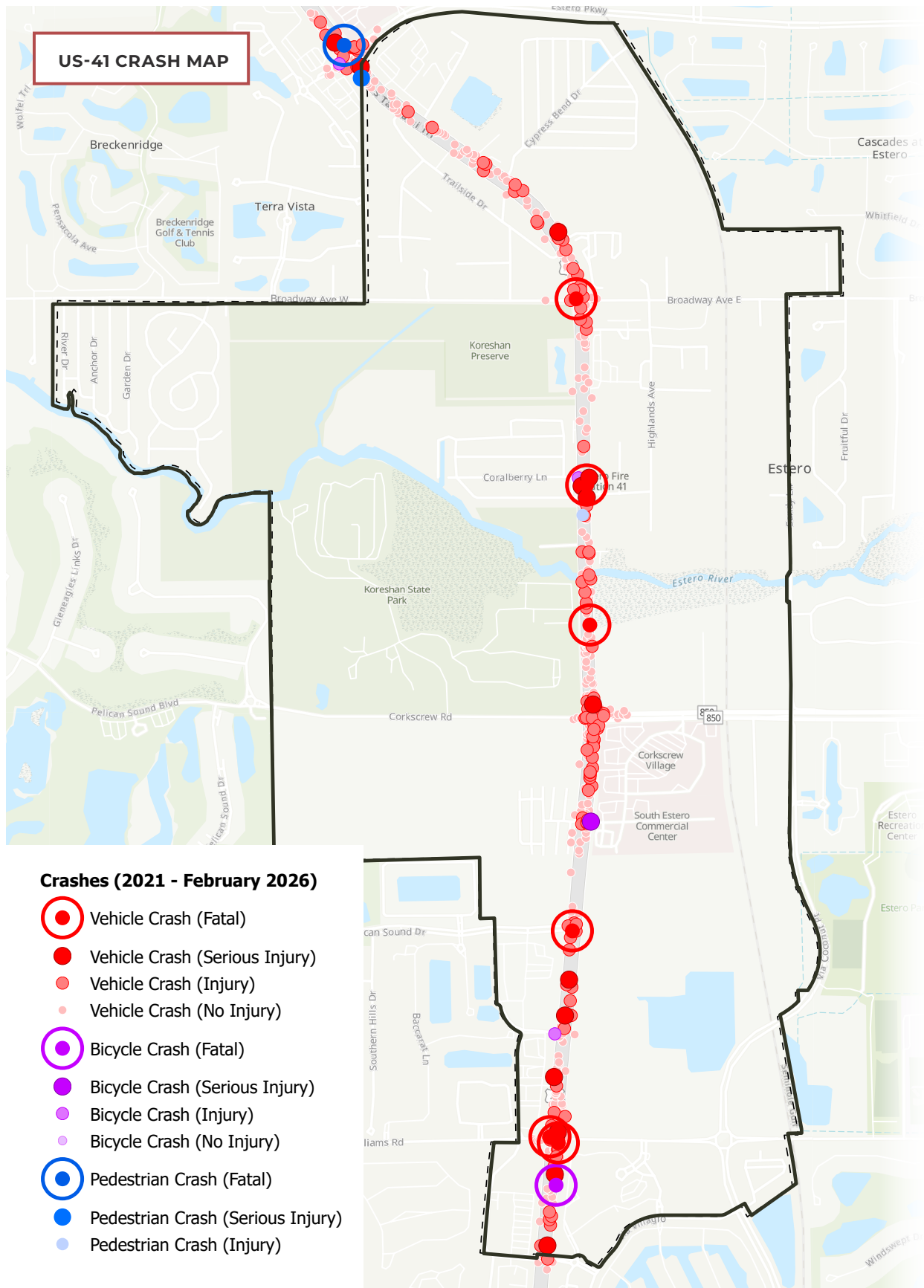
As part of the Village of Estero Eco-Historic Planning Study, the project team requested a project level context classification analysis for US-41, from Corkscrew Road to Coralberry Lane. The segment is currently designated as C1. Based on traffic counts and other considerations – and understanding that the future context classification for this corridor is C3C – the planning team sees an opportunity for this segment to be consistently classified C1, to align with the rest of the corridor.

Local Precedent for Corridor Investment

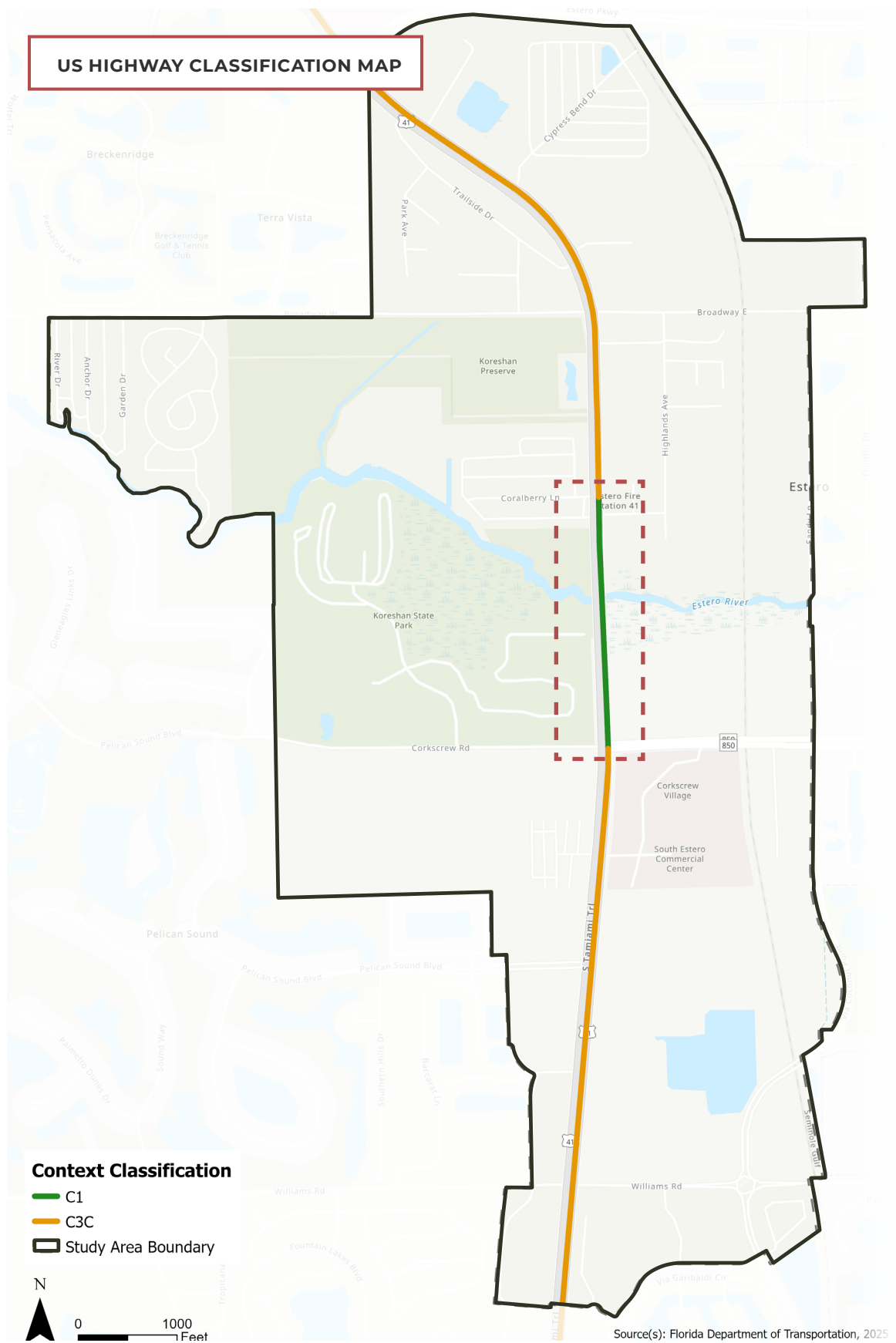
Recent landscape and streetscape improvements along Estero Parkway demonstrate how strategic public investment can enhance corridor identity, environmental performance, and sense of place. The transition to native and climate-appropriate plantings has improved visual quality, reduced long-term maintenance needs, and reinforced the character of Estero.

This project illustrates how strategic public investment can support both mobility and placemaking objectives. While US-41 is currently a federally maintained roadway, existing conditions suggest that similar context-sensitive public realm enhancements (implemented through partnership, phased investment, or future jurisdictional changes) could significantly improve the corridor's relationship to surrounding neighborhoods and public spaces over time.

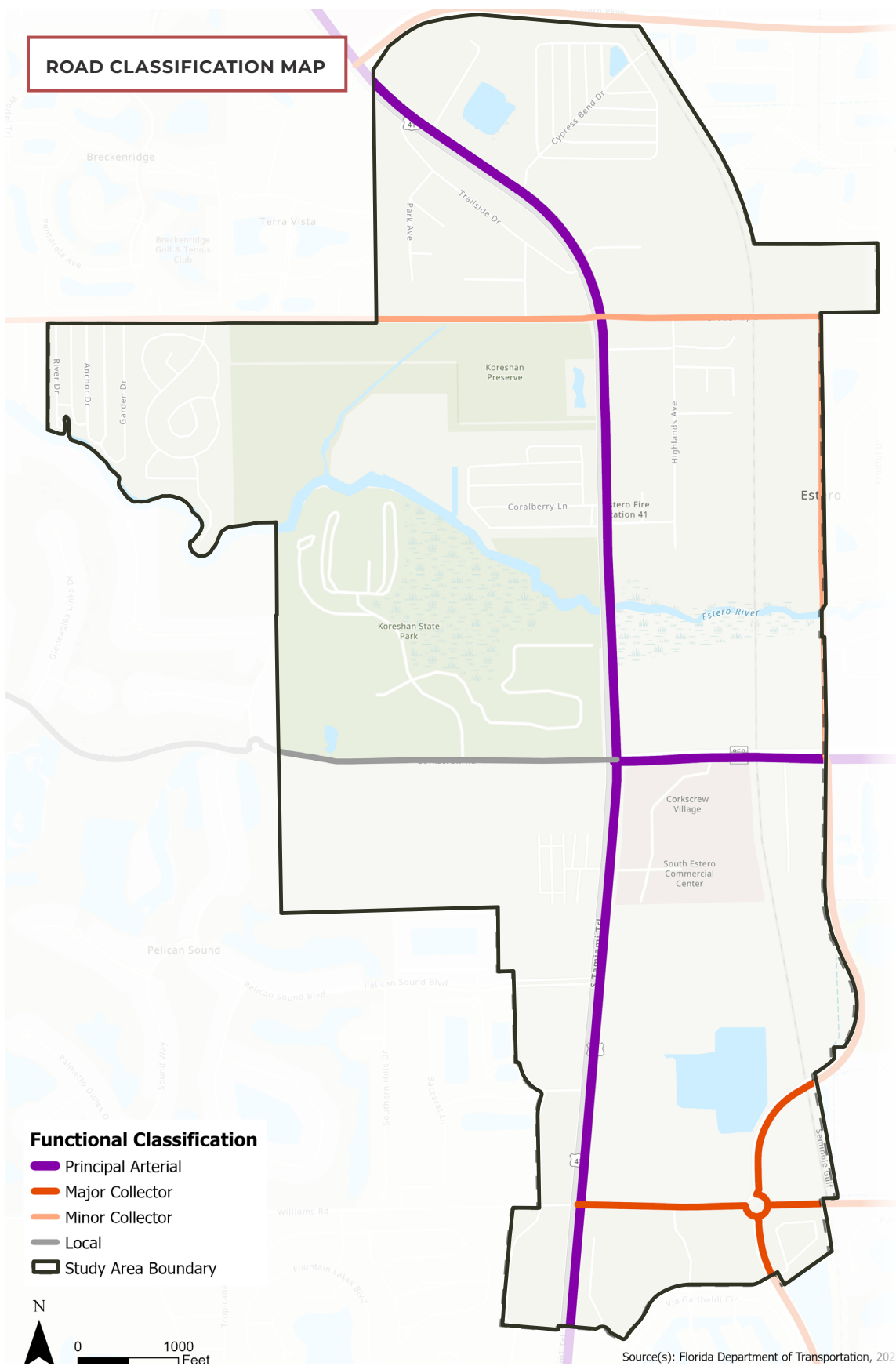
3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

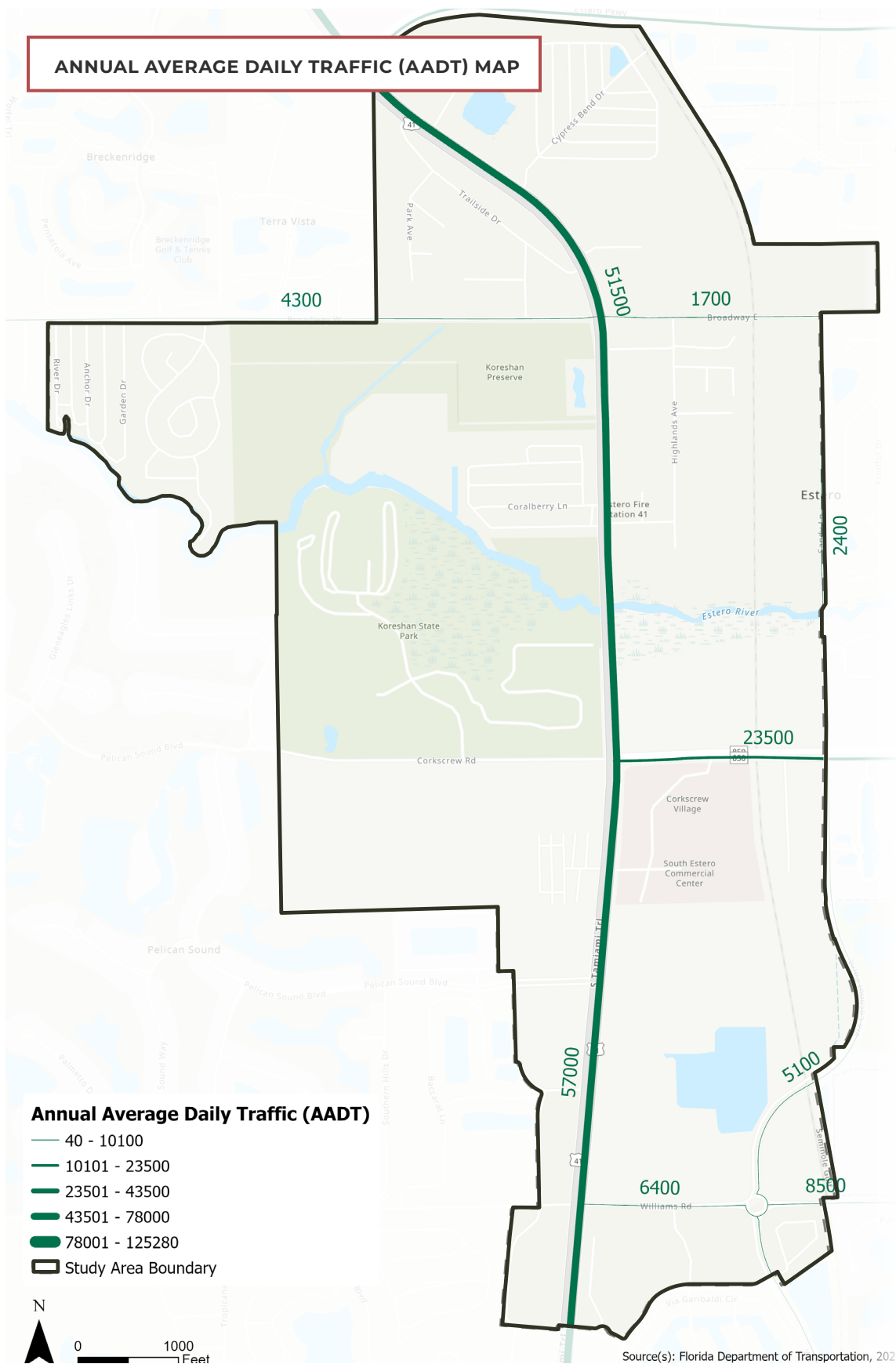


3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

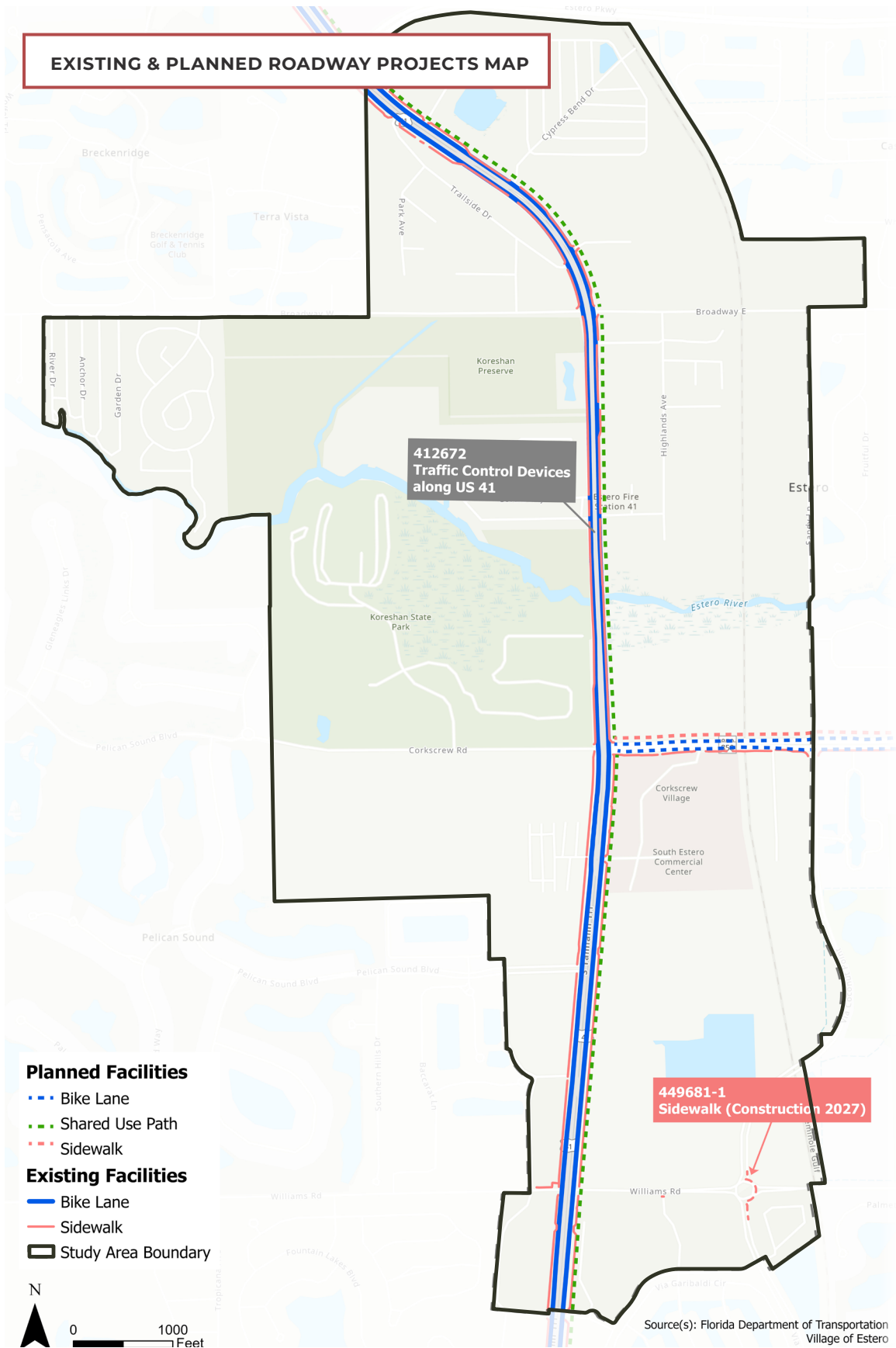


3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

ANNUAL AVERAGE DAILY TRAFFIC (AADT) MAP



EXISTING & PLANNED ROADWAY PROJECTS MAP



3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

BONITA-ESTERO RAIL TRAIL (BERT)

The planned Bonita–Estero Rail Trail (BERT) represents a transformational multi-modal investment within the Eco-Historic Study Area. When completed, BERT will provide a continuous, off-road facility for walking and bicycling, connecting Estero to neighboring communities and regional destinations.



Within the study area, BERT:

- » Expands non-motorized access to parks and riverfront areas
- » Increases visibility and accessibility of adjacent properties
- » Creates opportunities for improved neighborhood connectivity
- » Has the potential to influence redevelopment patterns and public investment priorities

Existing conditions highlight the importance of integrating BERT with local streets, crossings, and access points so that it functions as part of a broader mobility network rather than a standalone facility.



EXISTING CONDITION

Typical mid-block crossing conditions for a two-lane roadway (Broadway Ave E shown)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » US-41 is a vital regional corridor that also functions as a barrier to local connectivity.
- » Transportation conditions directly influence redevelopment feasibility and quality of life.
- » Pedestrian and bicycle networks are fragmented, limiting access to parks and riverfront areas.
- » BERT represents a major opportunity to improve multi-modal connectivity and access.
- » Strategic public realm investments can enhance corridor identity and function when aligned with community character.

Page intentionally left blank.

Infrastructure & Utilities

Infrastructure and utility conditions within the Eco-Historic Study Area influence redevelopment feasibility, phasing, and long-term operational considerations. While most of the study area is served by centralized water and sewer systems, existing conditions reflect multiple service providers and service areas, which adds complexity to planning and implementation.

This section focuses on system context and implications, rather than technical specifications or capacity analysis.

WATER & WASTEWATER SERVICE AREAS

The Eco-Historic Study Area is served by two distinct water and wastewater service areas, reflecting historical development patterns and jurisdictional boundaries. Portions of the study area are served by Lee County, while other areas are served by Bonita Springs Utilities. As a result:

- » Infrastructure availability and service responsibility varies by location
- » Redevelopment feasibility may differ between parcels based on service provider
- » Coordination between the Village and Lee County is required for system upgrades, extensions, or modifications
- » Long-term planning decisions must consider service area boundaries and operational responsibilities

Existing conditions indicate that utility service is generally available within developed portions of the study area; however, service area boundaries and system capacity considerations may influence the timing and cost of future redevelopment or public improvements.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Stormwater management within the Eco-Historic Study Area is closely tied to environmental conditions, including wetlands, floodplains, and proximity to the Estero River. Existing drainage systems include a mix of public and private facilities designed to manage localized runoff and regional flows.

Key considerations include:

- » Regulatory requirements for stormwater treatment and discharge
- » Limited opportunities for new stormwater infrastructure in environmentally constrained areas
- » The importance of integrating stormwater management with open space and conservation lands
- » Opportunities for nature-based and low-impact solutions where appropriate

Stormwater conditions reinforce the need for coordinated planning that aligns infrastructure improvements with environmental protection and resilience goals.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

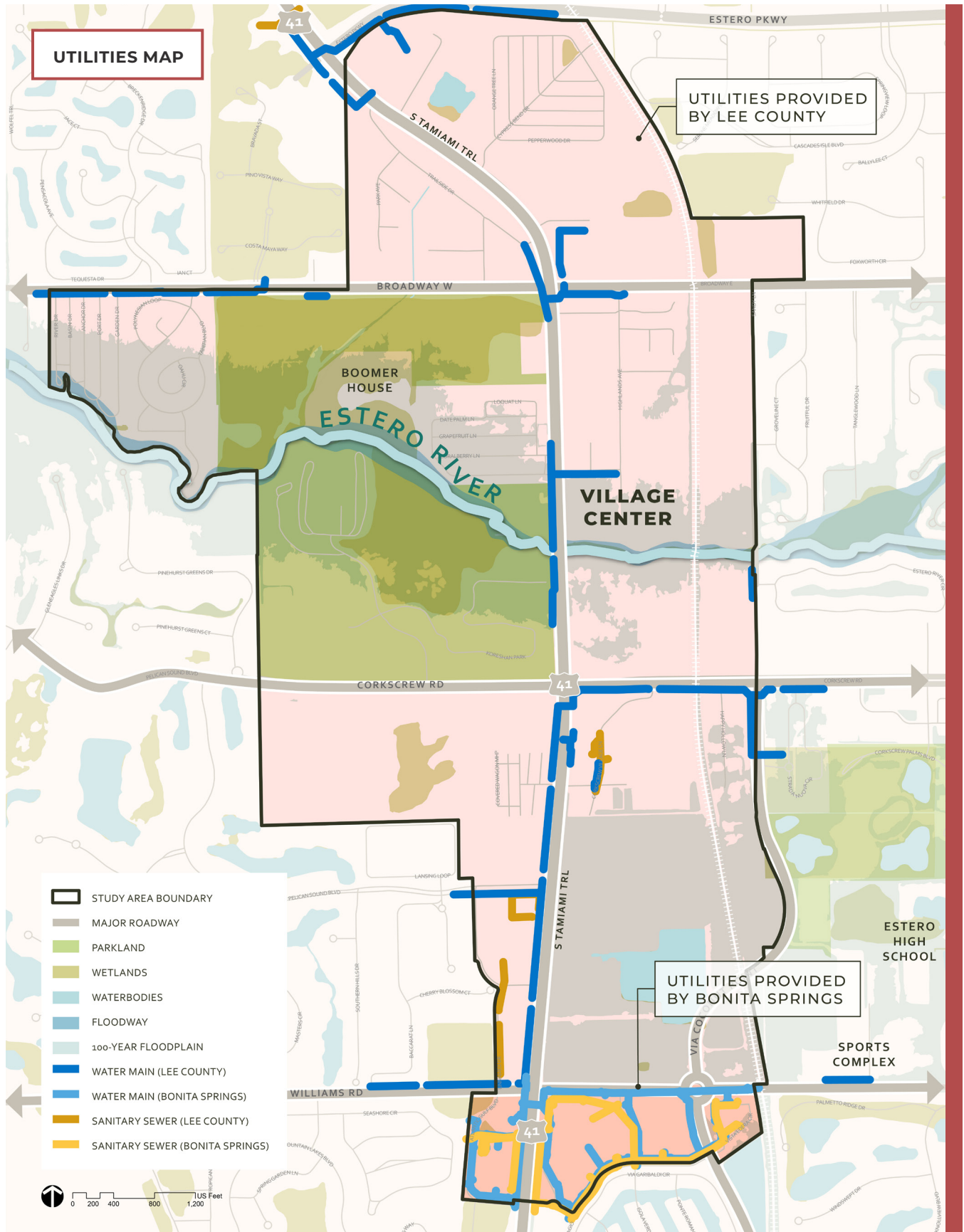
OTHER UTILITIES

Other utilities, including electric, telecommunications, and solid waste services, are generally available throughout the Eco-Historic Study Area and support existing development patterns. These services do not represent major constraints to future planning at a study-area scale, though site-specific upgrades may be required as redevelopment occurs.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » The study area is served by two water and wastewater service areas, requiring coordination between providers.
- » Utility service availability varies by location and may influence redevelopment feasibility and phasing.
- » Stormwater management is closely linked to environmental and floodplain conditions.
- » Infrastructure considerations reinforce the importance of early coordination and phased implementation.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



Page intentionally left blank.

Parks, Trails & Public Realm

Parks, trails, and public realm assets play a central role in defining the character, identity, and livability of the Eco-Historic Study Area. Existing conditions reflect a concentration of regionally significant open space and cultural resources, combined with more localized neighborhood parks and emerging trail infrastructure. Together, these assets provide a strong foundation for recreation, environmental stewardship, and community identity, while also revealing gaps in access, connectivity, and public-facing amenities.

KORESHAN STATE HISTORIC SITE & CULTURAL OPEN SPACE

Koreshan State Historic Site is the most prominent park and cultural resource within the Eco-Historic Study Area. The site functions as a historic landmark, conservation area, and recreational destination, drawing visitors from across the region while also serving as a defining element of Estero's identity.

The surrounding open space and riverfront context reinforce the site's historic setting and limit incompatible development nearby. Existing conditions indicate that Koreshan serves not only as a destination, but as an anchor around which surrounding parks, trails, and public spaces are organized.

VILLAGE-OWNED & COUNTY PARK LANDS

In addition to Koreshan, the study area includes Village-owned riverfront property and nearby Lee County parks that expand opportunities for passive recreation, environmental education, and community gathering. These lands contribute to a broader open space system that supports flood storage, habitat protection, and public access to natural resources.

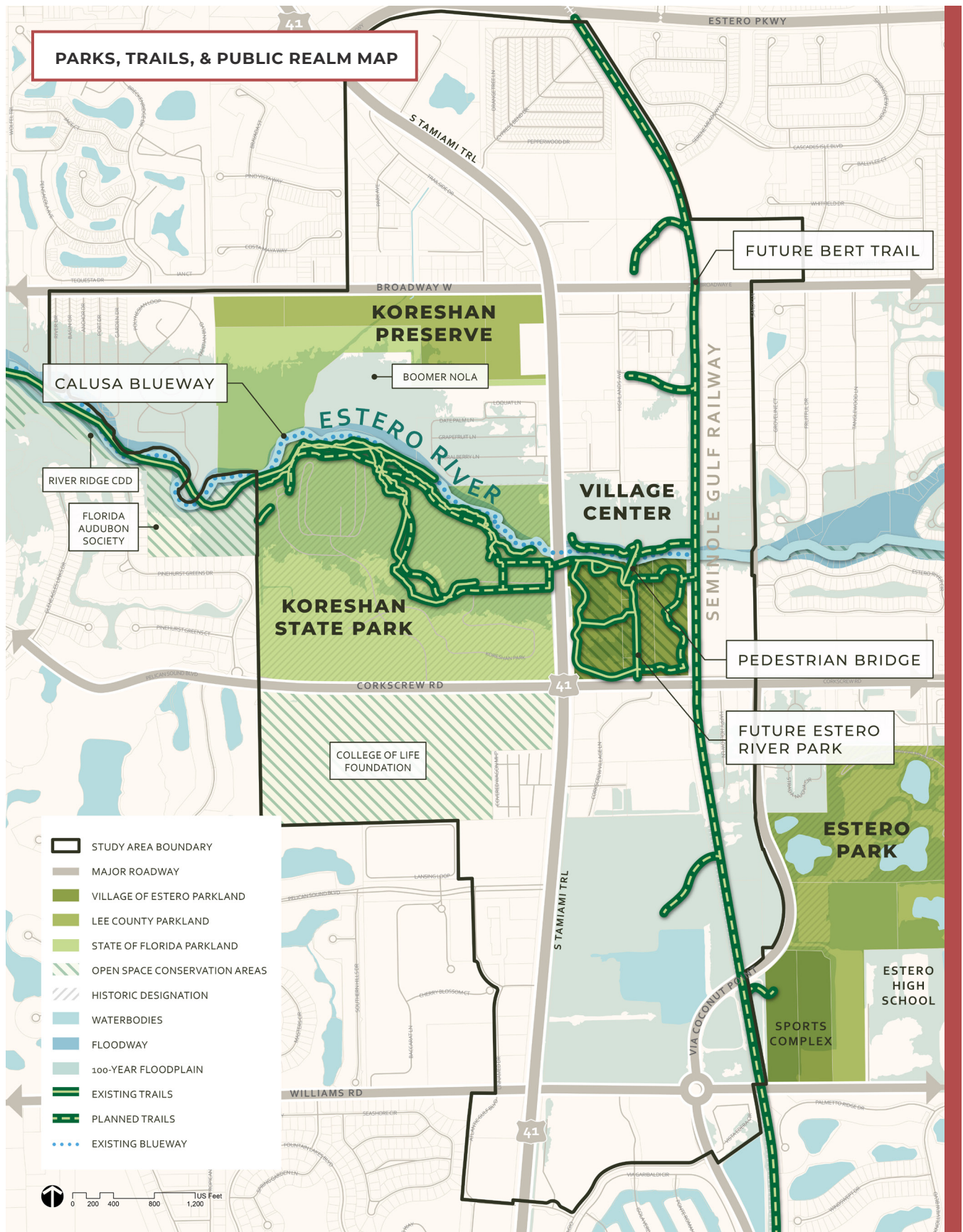
While the presence of publicly owned land is a major asset, the experience of moving between these spaces is uneven. Some parks are well integrated into surrounding neighborhoods, while others are separated by roadway barriers, environmental constraints, or limited access points.

TRAILS, RIVER ACCESS, & CONNECTIVITY

Trail infrastructure and river access are key components of the public realm within the Eco-Historic Study Area. Existing trails, combined with the planned Bonita–Estero Rail Trail (BERT), establish the framework for a connected, non-motorized network linking neighborhoods, parks, and regional destinations.

River access opportunities exist but vary in visibility, accessibility, and level of support infrastructure. In some locations, access points are informal or lack clear connections to surrounding streets and trails. Existing conditions suggest that improving connectivity between assets, rather than creating new isolated facilities, will be central to enhancing the public realm experience.

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS

PUBLIC REALM QUALITY & SENSE OF PLACE

The quality of streetscapes, landscape treatments, and gathering spaces influences how residents and visitors experience Estero. Recent public realm improvements, such as landscape upgrades along Estero Parkway, demonstrate the Village’s ability to invest in infrastructure that reinforces local character while improving environmental performance.

Across the study area, public realm conditions vary significantly. Some corridors and park edges benefit from cohesive design and landscaping, while others remain auto-oriented or lack pedestrian amenities. These contrasts highlight opportunities to strengthen sense of place through consistent, context-sensitive public realm treatments.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- » Koreshan State Historic Site functions as a cultural, recreational, and identity-defining anchor.
- » Village and County park lands provide a strong foundation for open space and resilience.
- » Trails and river access opportunities exist but are not consistently connected.
- » Public realm quality varies across the study area, influencing how spaces are experienced.
- » Connectivity and access are as important as the quantity of parks and open space.



1. KORESHAN STATE HISTORIC SITE

This site is a key cultural, recreational, and identity-defining open space in Estero.

2. KORESHAN PRESERVE

Trails and open lawn areas provide everyday recreation but are not consistently connected to the broader network.

3. SEATING AT KORESHAN STATE PARK

4. RIVERSIDE CONDITIONS

5. US-41, LOOKING NORTH

Wide travel lanes, utilities, and limited pedestrian amenities reduce comfort and sense of place along US-41.



3



4




5

FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS OF OPEN SPACE

The open space system is made up of individual assets that, together, shape how a community is seen, used, and experienced by residents and visitors. This system extends beyond traditional public spaces designed for community use to include undeveloped land, natural wooded areas, street corridors, and other everyday landscapes that contribute to the overall sense of place.

 **VISUAL OPEN SPACES**
Landscapes that define everyday views




 **PARTICIPATORY OPEN SPACES**
Places to spend time



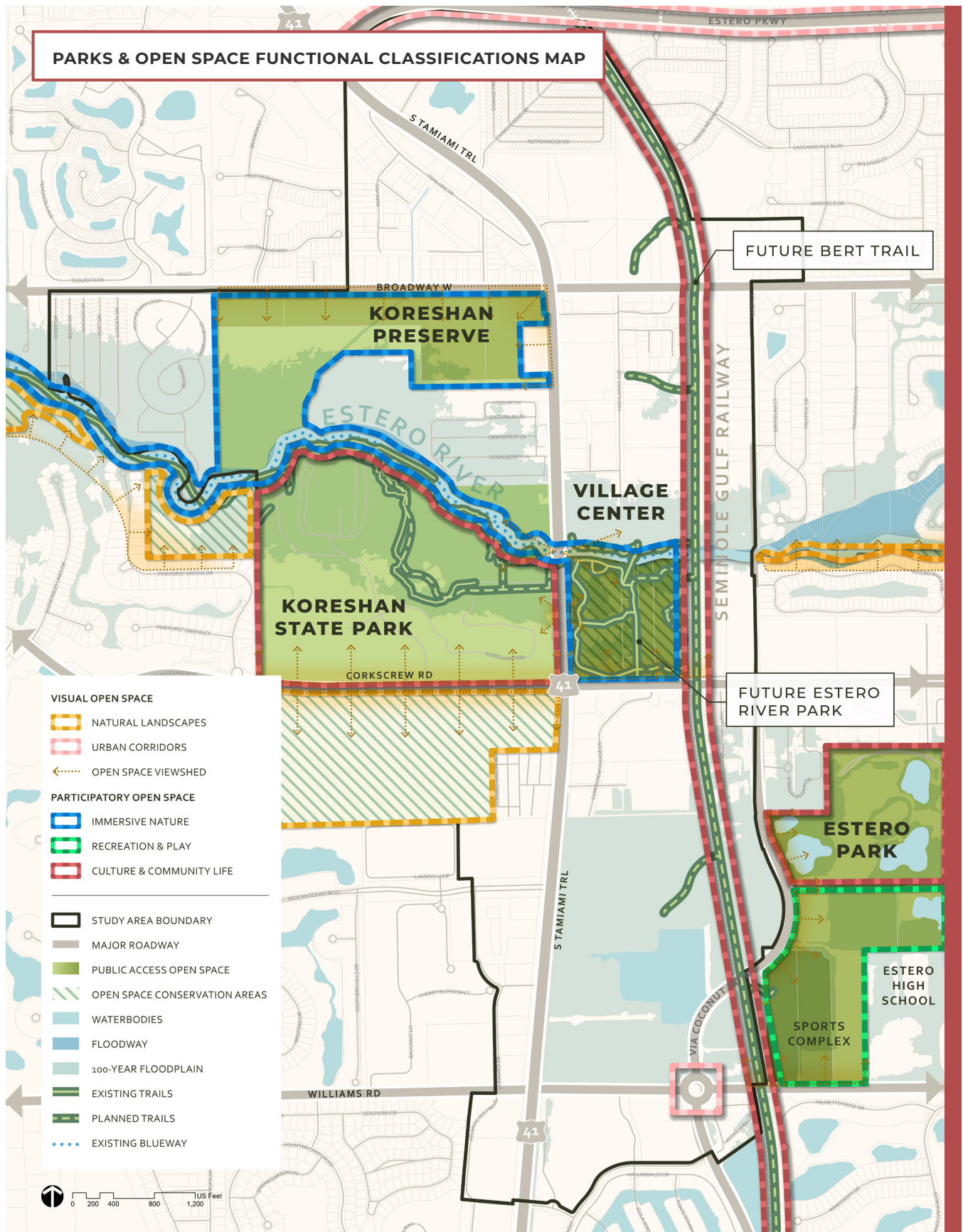
 Much of Estero's open space is experienced visually:

- » Tree-lined corridors
- » Natural river edges
- » Preserved wetlands
- » Landscaped streets and buffers
- » Viewsheds and shaded pathways

 Other open spaces are designed for activity and interaction:

- » Trails and shared-use paths
- » River access points
- » Parks and civic greens
- » Community gathering spaces
- » Recreation and play areas

3 | ANALYSIS EXISTING CONDITIONS



Planning Implications

The Existing Conditions assessment and review of adopted Village plans and prior studies reveal a consistent set of factors that shape how future planning and investment decisions should be evaluated within the Eco-Historic Study Area. These planning implications do not represent recommendations; rather, they describe the contextual realities and policy-informed considerations that must guide future actions, prioritization, and implementation..

PLANNING IMPLICATION 01

Environmental Systems as Organizing Elements

Adopted Village plans consistently identify the Estero River, associated wetlands, floodplains, and conservation lands as foundational systems within the Eco-Historic Study Area. Existing conditions demonstrate that these environmental features are not incidental, but instead structure land use patterns, access, infrastructure placement, and long-term resilience.

Planning within the study area must recognize that environmental systems both constrain and enable future investment. Flood-prone and environmentally sensitive lands are often aligned with publicly owned open space and conservation areas, reinforcing their role as protective infrastructure and community assets. Decisions regarding land use intensity, access improvements, and public investment must therefore be informed by environmental performance, resilience, and long-term stewardship considerations.

PLANNING IMPLICATION 02

Historic & Cultural Assets

Historic and cultural resources – particularly Koreshan State Historic Site and the broader Estero context – function as anchors of identity within the Eco-Historic Study Area. Adopted plans and cultural resource studies emphasize the importance of preserving these assets while enhancing public understanding and access.

Existing conditions indicate that historic resources are closely tied to the Estero River and surrounding open space. Planning implications include the need to protect historic settings, avoid incompatible development patterns, and leverage cultural assets as organizing elements for public spaces, interpretation, and community identity.

PLANNING IMPLICATION 03

Open Space & Connectivity

Adopted plans consistently frame parks, trails, and open space as interconnected systems rather than isolated facilities. Existing conditions confirm that while the Eco-Historic Study Area benefits from a significant concentration of public and conservation lands, connectivity between these assets and surrounding neighborhoods is uneven.

Planning implications include the importance of prioritizing connections—particularly pedestrian and bicycle linkages—between residential areas, parks, trails, river access points, and civic destinations. Improving access to existing assets may be as impactful as creating new facilities and should be evaluated as part of a system-wide approach to open space and mobility.

PLANNING IMPLICATION 04

Transportation & Feasibility

Transportation conditions are a primary driver of feasibility within the Eco-Historic Study Area. Prior Village studies document the role of US-41 as a regional corridor with high traffic volumes, while existing conditions highlight its function as a barrier to local access and connectivity.

Planning implications include the need to balance regional mobility with local safety, access, and quality-of-life considerations. Transportation capacity, access management, and jurisdictional constraints must be understood early in the planning process, as they directly influence redevelopment potential, phasing, and the viability of public realm and connectivity improvements.

PLANNING IMPLICATION 05

Public Realm Investment

Existing conditions and adopted plans demonstrate that public realm investments play a critical role in shaping sense of place, access, and community identity. Recent corridor improvements, such as landscape upgrades along Estero Parkway, illustrate how targeted public investment can enhance environmental performance and reinforce local character.

Planning implications include recognizing public realm improvements as strategic tools that can support broader goals related to mobility, identity, and access. Future planning decisions should consider how public investments can be phased, coordinated, and aligned with existing environmental and transportation conditions.



PLANNING IMPLICATION 06

Land Use Flexibility, Economic Opportunity, & Accountability

The study area includes a range of zoning districts and Planned Development (PD) entitlements that provide flexibility in land use, intensity, and site design. Existing conditions and adopted Village policies indicate that this flexibility can be a powerful tool for supporting targeted economic development, provided it is applied in a manner that is accountable to environmental constraints, transportation capacity, and community priorities.

Market analysis, community input, and adopted policy direction collectively point toward demand for locally supportive development—including housing options and neighborhood-serving commercial uses—rather than large-scale or regionally oriented development. Within the study area, environmental systems, floodplain conditions, and access limitations naturally constrain where development can occur, creating a need to focus economic development efforts on appropriate locations and forms rather than broad expansion.

3 | ANALYSIS PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

From a planning perspective, this creates a clear gap analysis condition: regional growth pressure exists, but opportunities within the study area are best suited to selective reinvestment that aligns with the area's environmental and historic context. Addressing this gap requires using land use flexibility strategically—directing development toward sites with existing infrastructure and access while ensuring that new investment supports community character, resilience, and quality of life.

Accountability is therefore as important as flexibility. Land use decisions should be evaluated based on their ability to:

- » Support local residents and daily needs
- » Reinforce walkability and multi-modal access
- » Respect environmental systems and flood-prone conditions
- » Contribute to long-term fiscal sustainability
- » Align with adopted Village plans and community priorities

This approach positions economic development not as a competing objective, but as an integrated strategy that supports environmental stewardship, historic preservation, and community resilience. By aligning flexibility with accountability, the Village can better ensure that future development within the study area fills identified gaps while advancing the broader goals of this planning effort.

PLANNING IMPLICATION 07

Prioritization & Partnerships

The scale and complexity of issues within the study area, ranging from environmental protection to mobility and public access, highlight the importance of prioritization and collaboration. Adopted plans and prior studies reflect a clear understanding that not all improvements can occur simultaneously and that partnerships are essential to implementation.

Recommendations will identify near-term and long-term opportunities, coordinate across agencies and jurisdictions, and leverage partnerships to advance shared goals. Prioritization frameworks should consider feasibility, community benefit, environmental performance, and alignment with adopted policy direction.

SUMMARY

This framework establishes the analytical foundation for recommendations in this plan, clarifying how environmental systems, community assets, and transportation realities shape what is feasible and appropriate. They provide a shared understanding of existing conditions and adopted Village direction that will be tested and refined through community and stakeholder input and inform recommendations and implementation strategies.

