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City of West Park

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Community Background Report

City of West Park

Boundaries

South: Miami-Dade/Broward County Line

North: City of Hollywood

East: Town of Pembroke Park

West: City of Miramar

Community Type: Municipality

Report Last Updated: December, 2011

History

During the 1980s, Broward County asked its municipalities to submit annexation proposals for areas of the county that were unincorporated.¹ At various times, the City of Hollywood, the Town of Pembroke Park, and the City of Miramar all considered the annexation of various combinations of the unincorporated neighborhoods of Miami Gardens, Utopia, Lake Forest, and Carver Ranches (which at the time was considered one of south Broward County's poorest neighborhoods). All plans were suspended due to protest from the residents, who were afraid that annexation would increase their taxes.²

Under an agreement worked out in 1996, all unincorporated areas of Broward were ordered to be annexed by 2010.³ Commercial strips and expensive condominium neighborhoods were quickly annexed, leaving behind poorer areas made up largely of Black residents.⁴ However, in 1998, the City of Hollywood proposed the annexation of a pocket of southern Broward neighborhoods that included Miami Gardens, Utopia, Lake Forest, and Carver Ranches.⁵ Despite estimates that the annexation would bring about a net gain, Hollywood officials began to waver on the decision and described the neighborhoods as “blighted” and “tax poor.”⁶ In particular, Carver Ranches residents felt slighted by the process and protested. The experience was not much different a few years later, when a controversial plan required the Town of Pembroke Park to annex the same four neighborhoods.⁷ Pembroke Park spent \$40,000 hiring lobbyists to defeat the bill that would have required the annexation, with town officials citing concerns about being “unfairly burdened” in absorbing an estimated 15,000 additional citizens “without any help in paying for it.”⁸

At the time of the Hollywood proposal, the Carver Ranches Homeowner's Association called on leaders from the other unincorporated areas of southern Broward to develop a

unified strategy for postponing the vote, and to consider forming their own city. Residents felt they would have a better chance of influencing decision makers from a smaller city, rather than a larger city such as Hollywood.⁹ Discussions among Carver Ranches residents and their neighbors in Miami Gardens, Lake Forest and Utopia, regarding the formation of a separate city, had already begun during the 1980s.¹⁰ By June of 2004, the four neighborhoods of Miami Gardens, Utopia, Lake Forest, and Carver Ranches had begun the process of incorporation, after the Florida Legislature's approval of House Bill 1491.¹¹ Following a vote of 3,400 to 956 in favor of incorporation, West Park officially became Broward County's 31st city in 2005.¹² It was decided that the new municipality would be known as West Park until a consensus was reached on a permanent name.¹³

Community Dynamics

After the community decided that the best way forward was to become a city, the county's feasibility study supported the decision and estimated that there would be enough resources to incorporate.¹⁴ However, two years after West Park incorporated, the city began to struggle financially. It became evident that the feasibility study conducted in 2003 and used to convince voters to form a city was flawed, in that it overestimated the city's tax base and underestimated its expenses.¹⁵ In 2007 a report by the Broward State Attorney's Office found no criminal wrongdoing, but the flawed assumptions put the city in a "fiscal pickle."¹⁶ Soon after the Broward State Attorney's Office investigation, news surfaced of a Florida House of Representatives staff report which predicted that the city would not have the tax base to support itself.¹⁷ Released in 2004, the report detailed multiple problems with the feasibility study authorized by Broward County, and alerted state lawmakers and local officials that the four neighborhoods did not meet the criteria for being merged into a stand-alone city.¹⁸ The report points out inaccuracies, erroneous assumptions about revenue, and other concerns that were not disclosed to the general public prior to the vote for incorporation.¹⁹ Furthermore, the report found that the feasibility study grossly underestimated the costs of fire protection, police, and other services by millions of dollars, and overestimated the city's tax base.²⁰ West Park's lack of a sustainable tax base and looming revenue shortfalls were expected to cripple the city into the foreseeable future.²¹

The predictions in the state's report began to come true soon after incorporation. Other than the prospect of higher taxes and new problems to solve, there was little apparent difference in the four neighborhoods involved from when they were unincorporated.²² The city's grave challenges included:

- Losing almost 10 percent of the city's tax base when the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) converted commercial land along State Road 7 in order to widen the thoroughfare.²³
- Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) police and fire rescue service cost increases were projected to consume 80 to 90 percent of the city's revenue, leaving little money

for other city services.²⁴ In contrast, the feasibility study suggested 3.5 million a year would be sufficient for police and fire rescue.²⁵

- Cuts in property taxes, coming from the State Legislature.²⁶
- As of 2007, the city still did not have a city hall or signs indicating that the four neighborhoods were now a city.²⁷
- Few city employees and the prospect of higher taxes, higher fees.²⁸

At the time of the revelation of the state's report, and in the midst of the city's uncertain future, West Park's mayor was quoted in a newspaper as stating that the only information provided to him and the other residents was the flawed feasibility study that convinced him and others to support the city's formation.²⁹ The vice mayor felt he had been misled, and said that no one would have voted for incorporation after having read the state's report.³⁰ One member of the Make-A-City committee, an organization of residents established to push for the incorporation of West Park, stated that hidden agendas and politics may have played a hand.³¹ He was quoted in a newspaper as saying, "In all good faith, we trusted those who represented us, but it appears our trust may have been misplaced and we have to play the hand we have been dealt [...]."³² A few years later, the City of West Park would find itself in an admirable and stable financial situation and, in the same vein as this last statement, the city's attorney was quoted as saying, "We played the hand we were dealt and made the best of it."³³

By its fourth year of existence, the 2.2-square-mile area no one wanted to annex had become a thriving city at a time when other municipalities were struggling to maintain services.³⁴ In 2009, following dire predictions of failure, the City of West Park was "booming."³⁵ It was during this time that the city completed its capital improvement projects (i.e., a city sign and landscaped medians), had no debt and was making efforts to live within its means, allowing it to have a surplus.³⁶ The turn in fortunes began with West Park earning several grants totaling \$8 million from local and federal government and private foundations, which was raised in three and a half years.³⁷ Also, in 2005 property values were assessed 26 percent higher than the previous year, increasing property tax revenue to more than \$550 million, and helping to fill the gap left by the reduction in business tax revenue from State Road 7.³⁸ The city also sharpened its pencil and renegotiated the contract with the Broward Sheriff's Office that allowed it to share its police and fire services with the neighboring municipality of Pembroke Park.³⁹ Until recently, West Park shared a city hall with Pembroke Park.⁴⁰ In fact, it was only in 2011 that the City of West Park finally moved into its own city hall space in a retail location on State Road 7.⁴¹ Furthermore, West Park contracts its planning and engineering staff and its public works department, allowing it to control some of its fixed costs.⁴²

The City of West Park apparently continues to be fiscally sound, and had no plans to raise taxes as of October, 2011.⁴³ Thus, a city that seemed doomed from the start has, so far, beaten the odds. Recent positive changes include:

- The property from FDOT was transferred to the city and there are now plans to redevelop the four acres of commercial land along State Road 7 as a means of increasing the tax base.⁴⁴
- A new state-of-the-art fire station.⁴⁵
- The city annexed McTyre Park, an 18-acre site in the Town of Pembroke Park that the county no longer wanted, and is using it for children's programs.⁴⁶ In 2010 West Park was awarded \$100,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds from the county for improvements to McTyre Park. The City of West Park also operates Mary Saunders Park, which had \$300,000 in improvements in 2009.⁴⁷
- In 2011 the city commission approved a conceptual master plan for McTyre Park in an effort to meet the increased demand for the park's facilities. The master plan will define a balance between open field play areas, facilities for after school programs and events, improved vehicular parking, food and beverage concessions, exercise trails, a gymnasium, and expanded green space areas. This master plan will result in a state-of-the-art, family-friendly facility for residents.⁴⁸
- The City of West Park made KaBOOM's "Playful City USA" list for 2011. Cities were selected for their dedication to providing play areas for children.⁴⁹
- The West Park Community Health Center, in close partnership with the city, opened in 2009 after receiving \$1.5 million in federal stimulus funding.⁵⁰

Demographic Highlights⁵¹

Please note that the City of West Park was incorporated in 2005 and, therefore, does not have 2000 Census data available for a trend analysis.

West Park's majority is Black, and the city and has a sizeable Hispanic population.

In 2010 the City of West Park's population was 14,156. The majority of the city's population is Black (58 percent). According to the 2010 Census, approximately 38 percent of West Park residents are White. However, it is interesting to note that of the 4,646 White residents, the majority (61 percent) identify themselves ethnically as Hispanic. Furthermore, regarding ethnicity among all the race categories in West Park, 29 percent of the residents are Hispanic.

The city has a significantly younger population than the county.

In 2010 the median age in West Park was 34, significantly lower than the county's median age of 40.

West Park's housing vacancy rate is very low.

The City of West Park had 4,717 housing units in 2010, of which 92 percent were occupied. Thus, the city's vacancy rate (8 percent) is significantly lower than county's rate of 15 percent. Approximately 69 percent of the occupied units in West Park are occupied by homeowners, and 31 percent are renter-occupied units. This trend closely

mimics the county, whose homeowner and renter rates are 67 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

The city’s median income is lower than the county’s.

According to the American Community Survey, West Park’s median household income is \$44,362, lower than the county’s median of \$51,731.

The majority of West Park residents are US citizens.

The majority (69 percent) of the city’s population is native-born. Of the 4,452 foreign-born residents (31 percent of the total population), the population is nearly equally divided between naturalized citizens (51 percent) and those that are not US citizens (49 percent). It is also important to note that 94 percent of the city’s foreign-born population hails from Latin America.

Most West Park residents speak English, and Spanish is the most common foreign language spoken at home.

Approximately 61 percent of West Park residents speak only English at home. Of the 5,233 residents that speak other languages at home, the majority (4,580) speak Spanish, and slightly less than half of this population speaks English less than “very well.”

Transportation Trends

The tables below illustrate projected transportation trends in the City of West Park:

Forecasted means of transportation to work for employed individuals, 2014

	City	County
Car, Truck, Van to Work	%	93%
Public Transportation to Work	%	2%
Other Transportation to Work	%	2%
Work at Home	%	4%

Forecasted number of vehicles per household, 2014

	City	County
0 vehicles	%	7%
1 vehicle	%	40%
2 vehicles	%	40%
3 vehicles	%	10%
4+ vehicles	%	3%

Travel time to work for the employed population, 2014

	City	County
Work at Home	%	4 %
Less than 15 minutes	%	16%
15-29 Minutes	%	33%
30-59 Minutes	%	38%
60+ Minutes	%	8%

Average household transportation costs

	City	County
2009	\$	\$8,836.33
2014	\$	\$10,880.30

Average household transportation costs for public transportation

	City	County
2009	\$	\$555.02
2014	\$	\$721.64

The information provided below briefly summarizes transportation-related efforts in the City of West Park:

Traffic Calming Study⁵²

The City of West Park retained Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. to assess traffic conditions within the neighborhood bounded by SW 56th Avenue to the east, SR 7 (US 441) to the west, Hallandale Beach Boulevard (SR 858) to the north, and NE 215th Street (County Line Rd) to the south. The objective of the study was to determine if improvements were necessary to enhance the quality of life for residents by managing traffic concerns to minimize through-traffic intrusion into the residential neighborhoods, and to maintain vehicle speeds at suitable levels. The analysis of traffic data for the study demonstrated that traffic volumes do not exceed livability thresholds established in the Broward County Neighborhood Traffic Management Manual on any of the study area's streets. Regardless, the city plans to move forward with the construction of various traffic calming devices such as neighborhood circles, speed humps, speed tables and/or raised intersections in designated areas.⁵³ The city hopes that the improvements will significantly improve traffic congestion and increase safety along these roadways.⁵⁴

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.cityofwestpark.org/documents/pdf/NeighborhoodtrafficCalmiReportstudy.pdf>

Red-Light Safety Program⁵⁵

In January, 2012, West Park joined more than 80 other Florida communities currently using red-light safety cameras to enhance road safety. West Park worked with the

Broward County Sheriff's Office to deploy cameras at the city's most dangerous intersections.

State Road 7-Miramar/West Park Charrette⁵⁶

State Road 7 serves as the dividing line between West Park (to the east) and Miramar (to the west).⁵⁷ The SR 7 - Miramar/West Park Charrette is part of a series of nine charrettes focused on the entire 25.6-mile section of SR 7/US 441 in Broward County. The main goals of the charrettes are to create a plan for redevelopment and to accommodate future mass transit. The Miramar/West Park Charrette considers the redevelopment of SR 7 between Pembroke Road and County Line Road, and includes the following features: 1) a well-defined center, edge and identity, 2) SR 7 at a maximum of six lanes, pedestrian-friendly, with landscaping and wide sidewalks, 3) pedestrian-scale street furniture, 4) elimination of water retention areas fronting SR 7, 5) retail destinations at the intersections of Miramar Parkway, Pembroke Road, and County Line Road, 6) a new city hall for West Park, 7) live/work opportunities within the industrial parks, 8) new school locations, and 9) new mixed-use buildings that include residential.

State Road 7/US 441 Widening

In 2007 FDOT started to widen State Road 7/US 441 from the county line to north of Hallandale Beach Boulevard, adding sidewalks, landscaped medians, traffic lights and bus bays at a cost of \$37 million, and then began to expand farther north.⁵⁸ The project is intended to reduce accidents, increase vehicle capacity, and beautify the corridor.⁵⁹ The project is "basically rebuilding the whole road again", and is expected to "change the face" of State Road 7.⁶⁰ The latest improvements to the corridor are expected to begin in 2012 and take three years to complete.⁶¹ This phase will affect the section of the corridor from SW 25th Street to Fillmore Street, which runs through Hollywood and borders Miramar and West Park.⁶²

Barack Obama Boulevard

Southwest 40th Avenue has been renamed Barack Obama Boulevard and is the entrance to the city of West Park from Pembroke Road.⁶³ In 2009 the city's commission passed the ordinance unanimously, and the commissioner said that none of the residents on the avenue complained about the address change.⁶⁴ As of 2010, the city was expecting to receive two grants totaling \$1.1 million for beautification projects on Barack Obama Boulevard, as well as on Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard.⁶⁵

Special Events

The City of West Park hosts a number of meetings and events for the community, including monthly meetings aimed at improving aesthetics and the quality of life of its citizens. Please visit the community calendar for a full list of events, periodically updated, on the city's official website:

http://www.cityofwestpark.org/index.php?option=com_jevents&view=month&task=month.calendar&Itemid=11 or see the city's newsletter "West Park News" at

<http://www.communitynewspapers.com/archive/west-park-archive/>

MLK Parade and Festival - The City of West Park's Parks and Recreation Department hosts a parade and festival to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the month of January. The event starts at 11:00 am and takes place at Mary Saunders Park (4750 SW 21st Street). For more information, call (954) 989-0242.

Halloween Bash – Sponsored by the City of West Park, this family-oriented party is held in October. The event takes place at McTyre Park (3501 Southwest 56th Avenue). For more information, contact the City of West Park's Parks and Recreation Department at (954) 985-1990.

Annual Mary Kendrick Thanksgiving Feed the Needy Feast – In the month of November, the City of West Park hosts this free event at Mary Saunders Park (4750 SW 21st Street). For more information, call (954) 989-8673.

Holiday Toy Drive – The annual toy drive is hosted by the City of West Park. Toys are distributed to children in the community at Mary Saunders Park (4750 SW 21st Street). For more information, contact the City of West Park's Parks and Recreation Department at (954) 985-1990.

Business Landscape

There is currently a 14.5 percent unemployment rate in the City of West Park, compared to 9.3 percent in the county during the same period.⁶⁶ Those residents that are employed work mostly in the following industries: educational services, health care and social assistance (23 percent) and retail trade (14 percent).⁶⁷

While most of West Park is composed of residential neighborhoods, the city also has a number of business, commercial, and industrial parcels.⁶⁸ Its major employers include: Home Depot, Acura of South Florida, and Countyline Lexus.⁶⁹

The following section lists various business-related initiatives and recent developments that help to describe the City of West Park's business landscape.

The City plans to attract business along the State Road 7 Corridor

Since the City of West Park was incorporated, the state of Florida has been working on a reconstruction project that entails the widening of State Road 7 (also known as US 441).⁷⁰ Part of the project area runs along West Park's city limits, which has resulted in a sacrifice of part of the city's land and tax base.⁷¹ Portions of the land within West Park were needed for the roadway, and three large parcels purchased by FDOT were slated for new retention ponds.⁷² In 2006 about a dozen businesses along the mile-and-a-half stretch of the corridor between West Park and Miramar were forced to relocate to

accommodate the expansion of the road.⁷³ Almost all of the businesses lost were on the West Park side, which was unincorporated during the planning phase of the project.⁷⁴ In comparison, the City of Miramar lost less than two percent of its land because FDOT decided to focus the project along the edge of West Park, whose land was less expensive to acquire by \$27 million.⁷⁵

West Park officials have since signed a Memorandum of Understanding with FDOT to reclaim land that would be lost to the retention ponds, located east of SR 7/US 441, between County Line Road and Hallandale Beach Boulevard.⁷⁶ West Park received about a half million dollars from the state of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District to address the issue of the ponds by building a series of underground storage vaults for the water, allowing for the construction of parking lots and a building on top of the retention pond.⁷⁷ As of 2011, the city was still working with FDOT to find a place to store the water.⁷⁸ The intention is to build new retail and commercial buildings on the site, instead.⁷⁹

Furthermore, in an effort to spur economic development in West Park, the city hopes to develop this portion of SR 7/US 441 into an urban boulevard which would include commercial buildings, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, pedestrian lights, and landscaping.⁸⁰

Over the next five years, West Park plans to increase the number of businesses in the city and establish its own chamber of commerce.⁸¹ Despite improvements to the SR 7/US 441 corridor being incomplete, the city thinks it can already begin to have businesses move to or open along the corridor.⁸²

Smart Growth Partnership⁸³

The Broward Smart Growth Partnership (BSGP) has received several grants from the Sun Sentinel Diversity Venture Fund and from the Broward Community Foundation to assist the City of West Park in empowering and educating residents on using smart growth principles for a more sustainable city. In addition, the BSGP received a second grant from the Community Foundation that explored the use of smart growth principles in the economic redevelopment of the Pembroke Road corridor. A charrette was held in conjunction with the Center for Urban Redevelopment and Education (CURE) of Florida Atlantic University (FAU). Issues targeted in the charrette included: water retention, the widening of the SR 7/US 441 corridor, and the resulting loss of economic development.

Enterprise Zone⁸⁴

In 2011 the City of West Park was successful in receiving the state's designation as an Enterprise Zone. The designation makes the city a target area for economic revitalization, offering financial incentives to businesses that invest in or are located within the city. Incentives offered include: a job tax credit, a property tax credit, a building material sales tax refund, and a building equipment sales tax refund.

Related Links

City of West Park

<http://www.cityofwestpark.org>

Neighborhood Traffic Calming Study -West Park Area “A” (2011)

<http://www.cityofwestpark.org/documents/pdf/NeighborhoodtrafficCalmiReportstudy.pdf>

Smart Growth for West Park (2007)

<http://www.smartgrowthpartnership.org/pdf/West%20Park%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

State Road 7-Miramar/West Park Charrette (2005)

http://www.tcrpc.org/departments/studio/sr_7_collaborative/miramar.htm

West Park Newsletter

<http://www.communitynewspapers.com/archive/west-park-archive/>

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