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City of Weston

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Community Background Report

City of Weston

Boundaries

North: Markham Park and the City of Sunrise

East: The Cities of Sunrise, Davie, and Southwest Ranches

South: The Cities of Davie and Southwest Ranches

West: Florida Everglades

Community Type: Municipality

Report Last Updated: December, 2011

History¹

Incorporated in 1996, Weston is one of the nation's largest master-planned communities.² During the 1950s, Arvida (Weston's original and primary developer) began to amass land and develop plans. However, it wasn't until 1978 that the first planned development, Indian Trace, was completed. During this time, a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) was approved, allowing 25,000 new dwelling units to be constructed; subsequent amendments reduced that number to 17,000.

In 1981 the Indian Trace Community Development District (CDD) was created for the purpose of financing and managing the construction, maintenance and operation of the infrastructure to support the community. It was at this time that the name of the Arvida development was changed from Indian Trace to Weston. In 1994 the Board of Supervisors that governed the CDD initiated an Incorporation Feasibility Study to determine if Weston should incorporate as a city, annex to a neighboring city, or remain as a part of unincorporated Broward County. The stakeholders concluded that the residents of Weston would be best served by forming a new city, as the tax dollars generated by the residents would remain in Weston, under the control of and for the use of the residents. The City of Weston was incorporated two years after the residents of the CDD voted in favor of cityhood. It should be noted that the city is managed by a unique, contract-style government, in which privatized building and planning departments offer streamlined permitting and an expedited review process.³

Less than one year later, Bonaventure, a 1,300-acre community, was annexed to the city, bringing its overall area to approximately 22 square miles.⁴ It is interesting to note that the Bonaventure community is approximately 10 years older than the Arvida development. It consists of approximately 6,388 dwelling units, two golf courses and a resort hotel.⁵ In 1997 Weston's residents returned to the polls to elect their first mayor and city commissioners.

The city's jurisdiction expanded with the 1999 annexation of the conservation area along US 27 westward to the L-35 levee, from SR 84 to Griffin Road, and again with the 2004 annexation of the I-75/SR 84 corridor to the north. The city's current total land area is 16,539 acres, or 25.8 square miles.

Community Dynamics

The City of Weston has a high quality of life that recently has been recognized by both state and national media. Described as “Broward’s cul-de-sac”, Weston’s success is attributed to its good schools, safety, and manicured landscapes, which made it one of the last communities to fall after the housing crash and one of the first to recover.”⁶

In 2011 Weston was rated among the ten best places in Florida when it comes to quality of life, according to an “On Numbers” analysis by *The Business Journals*.⁷ The rating formula takes account of the strength of the economic base, the housing stock, and the effectiveness of the educational system.⁸ It is interesting to note that no large municipalities were acknowledged, and that Weston, with a population of 64,148, was the largest city to appear on the list.⁹ The City of Weston was also identified in 2011 as the best housing market in the nation. In a survey for Bloomberg Businessweek, markets with the biggest gains and losses in home values were identified, and the City of Weston was ranked as the best-performing city since Obama took office.¹⁰ In an economic landscape where Florida home values have plummeted 52.3 percent from 2006 peak levels, the median home value in Weston has climbed 15.1 percent to \$280,000 since early 2009.¹¹ Below is a list of additional factors that have contributed to Weston’s high quality of life:¹²

- A-rated public schools and excellent private schools
- Outstanding public safety and the lowest crime rate per capita in the county
- Fourteen meticulously maintained park and recreational facilities, which host cultural and community events and tens of thousands of registrants in organized sports leagues
- The lowest combined property taxes, municipal taxes and fees in the county
- The lowest millage rate in the county
- The lowest ratio of city employees per 1,000 residents in the county
- Weston’s extensive landscaping is considered an asset: rows of royal palms, city entry signs surrounded by lush foliage, which also lines the berms, medians and right-of-ways throughout the city

Weston’s reputation for quality of life has made it attractive to affluent immigrants fleeing troubled countries.¹³ Foreign business people and professionals from Latin American countries began moving to Weston for the same reasons as other people: they have families, and they want a place for them to live that is safe and makes them feel at home.¹⁴ Thus, Weston is considered Broward County’s epicenter of the “extraordinary growth” in the population of well-off immigrants that come with money to spend on new

homes and commercial investments.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that Weston homes have been marketed and sold in Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil and other countries.

Many of the people from Latin America who have moved to Weston are from Venezuela and Colombia- two countries that have battled economic and political problems over the past decade.¹⁶ Since Hugo Chavez took office in 1998, a wave of Venezuelan immigrants, mostly from the middle and upper classes, fled to the United States, fearing that the change in politics would significantly alter their quality of life.¹⁷ Most of these Venezuelans have relocated to South Florida, making the Venezuelan community one of the fastest growing Latino subpopulations in the region this decade. So many Venezuelans have moved to Weston that it has been dubbed “Westonzuela.”¹⁸

Demographic Highlights¹⁹

The City of Weston experienced significant growth over the past decade.

In 2010 Weston’s population was 65,333. The city grew by 16,047 (33 percent) during the previous decade. This growth is especially significant when compared to other cities that grew more slowly or lost population during the same period. It is also interesting to note that, despite being a suburban community, Weston’s population density is 2,486/square mile, compared to the county’s density of 1,325/square mile.

The city’s growth is largely due to an influx of White Hispanics.

The only racial category to lose population over the last decade was the White Non-Hispanics, whose numbers fell by four percent. However, it should be noted that this is still the largest category, with 29,287 individuals. All other categories experienced an increase in population during this same time period. The largest increase was in the Hispanic population, which represented 90 percent of the city’s growth. This population increased by 14,473 over the last decade, representing a 97 percent growth. While the city’s White population did grow, most of this growth is due to an increase in White Hispanics, totaling 26,757, and now making up almost half of the city’s White population. Much of this growth may be attributed to the relocation of Venezuelans and other Latin Americans to Weston, as mentioned in the previous section of this report.

Weston’s median age is 38, lower than the median age for the county.

In 2010 the City of Weston had a median age of 38, four years higher than a decade ago, but still lower than the county’s median age of 40.

In line with the population’s growth, the city has added a significant number of housing units over the last decade. Most are occupied by homeowners.

The growth in population is reflected by the growth in the number of housing units. In 2010 there were 24,394 units. The city added 5,451 units over the last decade, representing a 29 percent growth. Broward County experienced only a 9 percent growth in total housing units over the same period.

Approximately 76 percent of the city’s units are occupied by homeowners, compared to the county’s 67 percent.

Weston’s housing vacancy rates follow a similar pattern as the county, but differ in the distribution of vacancies due to seasonal/recreational use.

Of the 24,394 units in Weston, 87 percent are occupied, leaving a vacancy rate of 13 percent -- similar to the county’s vacancy rate of 15 percent. It is surprising, however, that the majority (63 percent) of the vacancies are attributed to seasonal and recreational use of housing units. One reason for this may be the large number of affluent immigrants that live in Weston and, therefore, may own more than one home.

The City of Weston is an affluent community.

According to the 2009 American Community Survey, the City of Weston’s median household income was \$95,093. This represents an 18 percent increase over the past decade; the 2000 Census estimated that the city’s median income was \$80,920. The city’s median income is significantly higher than the county’s median of \$51,731.

Transportation Trends²⁰

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

Travel time to work for the employed population, 2014

	City	County
Work at Home	7%	4%
Less than 15 minutes	13%	16%
15-29 Minutes	23%	33%
30-59 Minutes	46%	38%
60+ Minutes	11%	8%

Average household transportation costs

	City	County
2009	\$11,000.40	\$8,836.33
2014	\$13,420.50	\$10,880.30

Average household transportation costs for public transportation

	City	County
2009	\$867.49	\$555.02
2014	\$1,123.44	\$721.64

Forecasted number of vehicles per household, 2014

	City	County
0 vehicles	2%	7%
1 vehicle	24%	40%
2 vehicles	59%	40%
3 vehicles	13%	10%
4+ vehicles	3%	3%

Forecasted means of transportation to work for employed individuals, 2014

	City	County
Car, Truck, Van to Work	92%	93%
Public Transportation to Work	1%	2%
Other Transportation to Work	0%	2%
Work at Home	7%	3%

The information below briefly summarizes transportation trends, services, and projects in the City of Weston:

Weston's Roadways²¹

The city's roadway system consists of public roadways maintained by the city. Currently, there are no county or state roadways within the city. There is, however, the Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) that abuts the city limits. There are also several state roadways in the Florida Intrastate Highway System (FIHS) that are immediately adjacent to the city limits: I-595, I-75, US 27, and the Sawgrass Expressway.

By 2030, Weston Road and Royal Palm Boulevard are expected to function below level-of-service standards. Currently, there are no capital improvements planned for these roadways. The city plans to employ other techniques to improve the level of service and reduce congestion during peak hours. In addition, the City of Weston recognizes the Park of Commerce, in combination with the adjacent Meridian Business Campus, as a significant, potential transit attractor. These business and employment centers, located in the far eastern portion of the city near I-75, are anticipated to generate over 10,000 p.m. peak-hour trips. The city, as part of its development review process, will continue to ensure that adequate pedestrian and handicapped-accessible routes are provided for potential future transit.

Weston Bus Route 23

Currently, there is one fixed-route public transit service in the City of Weston: bus route 23, a north-south route which connects Pembroke Lakes Mall to Sawgrass Mills Mall via Weston Road.²²

In 2008 and 2010 Broward County Transit (BCT) targeted Route 23 for elimination.²³ First, in 2008, BCT recommended that the county commission outsource Route 23's functions to a third-party vendor to defray costs. After union negotiations prevented this from happening, the line was maintained for another two years, despite its sinking further

into debt.²⁴ Again in 2010, county commissioners spared Route 23 from being eliminated by voting down a BCT proposal to terminate six low-performing routes.²⁵

Transit workers have frequently pointed to recovery revenue and ridership data to illustrate Route 23's low performance: Route 23 carried 134,000 passengers during the 2009 fiscal year and averaged about 17 riders an hour.²⁶ Route 23's ridership is considered "very, very low" when compared to BCT's Route 18, its most heavily used route, with 3.7 million passengers annually.²⁷ However, the lack of another route even remotely close to Weston prompted BCT to restore partial service. As of October, 2010, the route was continued with a higher fare, reduced weekday service, and no service on Saturday and Sunday.²⁸ To avoid low ridership in the future, the transit authority is tweaking the southern half of Route 23. The line, which connects Pembroke Lakes Mall to Sawgrass Mills Mall via Weston Road, is cutting I-75 from its route and adding stops along Dykes Road between Sheridan Street and Griffin Road.²⁹ BCT is also swapping service inside the Weston Park of Commerce for a new bus stop in front of Cleveland Clinic.³⁰

It is worth noting that the loss of Route 23 would also have jeopardized Weston's bus stop shelters, built in 2010 for \$782,000, using grants and the taxpayer-funded Local Option Gas Tax.³¹ Had Weston not reached a compromise with BCT, the city's 14 shelters along Weston Road would have been rendered "useless," according to the city's mayor.³²

Bicycle Master Plan³³

A Bicycle Master Plan is currently in the design phase. The plan seeks to establish guidelines, educational goals, and policies that encourage and enforce development of a bicycle friendly community. Upon completion of the Bicycle Master Plan, an application will be submitted to the Bicycle League of America to officially designate the city as a Bicycle Friendly Community. The Bicycle League of America provides incentives, hands-on assistance, and recognition awards to participating communities. The Bicycle Friendly designation will identify Weston as a community that welcomes cyclists by providing safe accommodation for cycling, and encouraging people to bike for transportation and recreation.

I-595/I-75/Sawgrass Expressway Interchange³⁴

In 2010 the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) completed major renovations to ten connector ramps (bridges) in the I-595/I-75/Sawgrass Expressway Interchange, in the Davie/Weston area. The cost of the construction project was \$2.4 million (and an additional \$631,000 for construction management).

State Bill 360³⁵

In 2009 a group of local governments, including the City of Weston, sued to block a new Florida law (SB360) that they claimed would fuel sprawl and force the public to pay more for roads around new strip malls, planned communities and other developments. The cities accused the state of passing an "unfunded mandate" to local governments, which could be forced to make up the cost of transportation projects once paid for by

developers. Among many other changes, SB 360 repeals transportation concurrency for most of the state's big and medium-sized metropolitan areas. The cities that filed the suit argued that the bill would hurt local governments financially by forcing them to build the infrastructure to support unbridled growth. The Senate sponsor of the bill said the "unfunded mandate" is not an argument because local governments could still charge developers impact fees and impose their own transportation concurrency rules.

The City of Weston joined the suit because the new law could tilt the scales in a long running disagreement concerning a massive, mixed-use project in Davie. The law repeals a state review process called "Development of Regional Impact," where neighboring local governments can have some say on big projects that could impact more than one community. In the case of "Davie Commons," a 2-million-square-foot office park, retail, and hotel development on the edge of Davie, the project could funnel more than 32,000 vehicles a day back and forth between its parking lots and Weston, creating a strain on roads that developers would have paid for before the law took effect in the summer of 2009.

For more information on the City of Weston's challenge, please visit:
http://www.westonfl.org/SB_360_Intro.aspx

Special Events

The City of Weston and a number of local community organizations sponsor events throughout the year. Below is a sample of recurring events. Please visit the city's community calendar for a full list of events:
<http://www.westonfl.org/Events/EventsCalendar.aspx>

Moonlight Movies in the Park –This movie series is sponsored by the City of Weston and is aimed at a family audience. The movies are shown monthly on a Saturday evening, from October to April, at the Weston Regional Park (20200 Saddle Club Road). For more information, please call (954) 389-4321.

Annual YMCA Fiesta -- The Sheinberg Family YMCA of Weston (20201 Saddle Club Road) celebrates National Hispanic Heritage Month every October. For more information, please contact Stephanie Brassie, Member Relations Director, at sbrassie@ymcabroward.org or at (954) 424-9622.

Taste of the West – Oktoberfest – Sponsored by the Ft. Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce and the Weston Business Council, this annual event features a benefit for the Children's Home Society and the Children's Diagnostic and Treatment Centers. The 2011 event took place in October at the Weston Town Center (1675 Market Street). For more information, please contact Heather House at (954) 465-6000 or at heather@ftlchamber.com.

Halloween Safety Expo - Sponsored by the City of Weston and the Broward Sheriff's Office, this trick-or-treat event takes place in October at the Tequesta Trace Park (600 Indian Trace).

Weston Foreign Film Series - Sponsored by the Arts Council of Greater Weston, the annual foreign film series takes place between November and March. Films are shown the second Monday of each month at the Weston Cinema 8 (1338 SW 160th Avenue). For information, please visit: www.artscouncilwestonfl.com or call (954) 389-4321.

Annual Weston Artwalk - Sponsored by the Arts Council of Greater Weston and the City of Weston, this outdoor event takes place in February and features local artists, at Weston Town Center. For more information, please visit: www.artscouncilwestonfl.com or contact the city at (954) 385-2000.

Run for Tomorrow – The Rotary Club of Weston sponsors a 5K run/walk, a half-marathon, and the Mayor's Challenge Walk every December. The races begin and end at Weston Town Center. For more information, please visit: <http://www.runfortomorrow.com>

Free Concert in the Park - The City of Weston and the Rotary Club of Weston present an annual free concert every March at the Weston Regional Park (20200 Saddle Club Road). For more information, please contact Denis Barrett or Jeff Skidmore at the City of Weston (954) 385-2000. For sponsorship requests, contact Tom Kallman at the Rotary Club of Weston at (954) 389-5897, or visit: <http://www.westonrotaryclub.com>

Business Landscape

Weston encompasses a diverse corporate and retail climate that includes Fortune 500 companies, owner-operated retail establishments, restaurants, warehouses and a range of other businesses.³⁶ Major employers in the City of Weston are: the School Board of Broward County, Publix, Cleveland Clinic and Cleveland Clinic Hospital, American Express, and Andrx Pharmaceuticals.³⁷

As of March, 2011, there was a 6.8 percent unemployment rate in the City of Weston, compared to 9.3 percent in the county during the same period.³⁸

The following section lists business-related initiatives and developments that help to describe the City of Weston's business landscape:

Weston Town Center

In 1999 the City of Weston broke ground on the Weston Town Center, a \$42 million, 32-acre collection of boutiques, restaurants, and offices, a Publix Market, City Hall, a 1.2-mile-long park along a lake, and a band shell.³⁹ The town center was patterned after Mizner Park in Boca Raton, and features turn-of-the-last-century architecture and narrow roads that encourage walking.⁴⁰ In 2011 the city approved plans for building improvements to the northwest retail center that will accommodate a new urgent care facility occupying the majority of this new space.⁴¹ The area will also have a pedestrian

walkway, more substantial signage, windows and a grand entrance.⁴² For a listing of tenants and events, please visit the Town Center's website:

<http://www.westontowncenter.net>

Business Parks

The City of Weston's Comprehensive Plan acknowledges that the Weston Park of Commerce (850 acres) and the adjacent Meridian Business Campus (158 acres) are both potential, significant transit attractors.⁴³ These business and employment centers are located in the far eastern portion of the city, between Weston Road and I-75.⁴⁴

Businesses, headquarters, and distribution centers located within this business district include: Levi Strauss, Nabisco, DHL Global Mail, Watson Pharmaceuticals, American Express, Caremark Prescription Services, Edy's Grand Ice Cream, and distribution centers for the Sun Sentinel and Office Depot.⁴⁵ In 2011 Florida Community Bank also moved its headquarters to this area, making it the second-largest bank based in Broward County.⁴⁶

Healthcare Industry

The City of Weston is home to the Cleveland Clinic Florida, Broward Health Weston, the Weston Outpatient Surgical Center, and the Miami Children's Hospital Dan Marino Center.⁴⁷ The medical centers are located in the Weston Park of Commerce (Broward Health/Weston Regional HealthPark and the Weston Outpatient Surgical Center) and the Meridian Business Campus (Cleveland Clinic and Miami Children's Hospital).

In 1998 the North Broward Hospital District broke ground on the 77,000-square-foot facility, Broward Health Weston, also known as the Weston Regional HealthPark.⁴⁸ The building sits on 10 acres and offers primary care, urgent care, outpatient surgery, comprehensive imaging and lab services, women's and children's health services and education programs, multi-specialty medical offices, and a pharmacy.⁴⁹ During this same time, Cleveland Clinic Florida and a private developer, Weston Outpatient Surgical Center (a 30,000-square-foot outpatient surgery center across the street from the HealthPark), moved forward with their large medical centers nearby.⁵⁰

Despite fear of a saturated market, the Cleveland Clinic moved its 1,000 employees to a 43-acre campus in Weston in 2001. The campus unites the clinic's outpatient offices with a 150-bed, \$150 million hospital, formerly in Fort Lauderdale.⁵¹ In 2009 a \$2.2 million expansion and renovation of Cleveland Clinic's hospital was completed.⁵² The project includes a second floor built atop a one-story section of the hospital to accommodate a 10-bed expansion of the hospital's Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU), as well as an expansion of the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and the hospital's pharmacy department.⁵³

Related Links

City of Weston

<http://www.westonfl.org/>

Weston Area Chamber of Commerce
<http://www.westonchamber.com>

City of Weston Comprehensive Plan
http://www.westonfl.org/media/other/comp_plan.pdf

City of Weston Trafficway Map
<http://www.westonfl.org/Departments/DevelopmentServices/TrafficwayMap.aspx>

BCT Route 23 (Weston)
<http://www.broward.org/BCT/MAPSANDSCHEDULES/ROUTES/Pages/23.aspx>

City of Weston Current Roadway Projects
<http://www.westonfl.org/Departments/DevelopmentServices/Projects/Roadways.aspx>

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