Steinhatchee, Florida: Riverfront Visioning Project

Quick Facts
- County: Taylor
- Population: 1,459
- Growth Rate: 0.6%
- Median Family Income: $35,929
- Median Household Income: $26,188

Waterfronts Florida Program
In May 2007, Steinhatchee was designated as a Waterfronts Florida Community by the Florida Department of Community Affairs. The result is a special area management plan to guide the revitalization of the community's designated waterfront area. This project will enhance the community's efforts to fulfill the Waterfronts Florida objectives.

THE STORY OF STEINHATCHEE
Rivers have nourished delicate ecosystems and humble human cultures for millennia. Since the 1800s, Steinhatchee was a self-sufficient fishing village steeped in culture and history, and remained hidden from real estate developers as part of the "Forgotten Coast" of Florida.

As coastal property values skyrocketed, development finally began to creep into the marshes of Steinhatchee, a township that has only the resources and protections offered by Taylor County, one of the least prosperous and populated in the state. Without a city's development regulations, tax-based infrastructure, and powerful watchdogs, Steinhatchee lay unprepared and ripe for the taking.

Compounding the situation, recent changes in state fishing and wildlife law have adversely affected the economy. In response to these changes, the fishing industry moved from its historic commercial base to a recreational industry. At the same time, the real estate bubble burst, and many brand new developments are vacant.

This riverfront visioning project is the key to unlocking Steinhatchee's future as a vibrant recreational destination. And ultimately, empowered by a unified vision of its growth, the community will restore and maintain its collective unique heritage.

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"I'd much rather go somewhere fresh water and catch as many brim as I can end up being cheaper after the gas." - Local Resident

"Good down home country folk..." - Local Resident

"People come on the weekends and fish (or) spend a day!" - Local Resident

"No parking for miles along the river..." - Local Resident

Delicate Ecosystems
Culture & History
Township
Fishing Industry
New Development
Unique Heritage
The GRACE acronym, in addition to providing a framework for the use of specific criteria in the analysis, connotes a spirit of place. It facilitates one of the goals of the project, to give Taylor County a unique landmark(s) that clearly lets visitors know they are ‘there’. The analysis was confined to the portions of the county where access to water was possible.

**Growth (G)**
Potential opportunities for land aquaculture and Smart Growth

**Recreational (R)**
Diversification in recreational activities and social events that promote relaxation for a healthy body and mind.

**Agriculture (A)**
Relating to agriculture or farming, soils providing great land for crops, and a possible import and export trading network.

**Culture (C)**
Relating to shared knowledge and values of a society.

**Environment (E)**
Concerned with the ecological effects of altering the environment.

**Sustainability (S)**
Concerned with the sustainable effects of altering the environment.

Taylor County’s infrastructure provides adequate access to its coastal areas. The roads to popular destinations, Keaton Beach, Steinhatchee, and Spring Warrior are county maintained and paved, the roads to other potential sites are not. Also, adjacent natural areas need to be protected.

Recreational scalloping, fishing, and boating are very important activities in Taylor County. Access to preferred sites is limited by the amount of available parking for vehicles and boat trailers, adequate ramps for larger boats, and the lack of well designed roads to access sites.

Agriculture in Taylor County occurs inland not along the coast. The major activities of forestry and cattle ranching are clearly delineated from the uses along the coast. Here the mostly organic soils and limestone substrate are unsuitable for the construction of structures but are desirable for coting of parks.

From industry to recreation, nature provides the setting for understanding the culture of the people in Taylor County. Providing increased opportunities for the people to use the water resources will fortify the character of this County’s cultural identity.

Protected waters, topography, and natural communities are environmental factors that should be taken into account when considering recreational development.

Natural resources should be respected and celebrated with design conditions.
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Using the GRACES analysis as a basis, the designers analyzed Steinhatchee to aid in the development and implementation of design initiatives. A site visit and a thorough cycling of ideas led to the following compilation of images and information.

Maps of Steinhatchee's topography, floodplain, and relevant features provided valuable cultural background and environmental data.

Traffic - More recently, automobile traffic has increased along pedestrian areas, resulting in areas that are dangerous for pedestrians and bikers. This study investigates traffic patterns intended to improve traffic flow and increase safety.

Traffic Study Alternative 1
Traffic Study Alternative 2
Traffic Study Alternative 3

Steinhatchee is a community that derives a great deal of activity and commerce from the Steinhatchee River. The series of images below depict the current state of Steinhatchee as well as possible improvements.

**Areas of Design**
- Points of Interest
- Proposed Old Steinhatchee Trail

**Images**
- Fishing is a main activity in the community
- View of civic structure elements
- Growth Potential in Fish Market
- Fishing wares of Steinhatchee Culture
- Beautiful and Relaxing Environment
- Entrance to Starboard Boat Club

This 1983 map gives an estimate of the water table increase over 100 years. The data influenced the placement of certain design elements.
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The conceptual masterplan represents an improvement of land conditions through a series of progressive changes that include expansion, enlargement, and refinement. Studies that may strengthen the township of Steinhatchee include traffic, parking, trails, parks, preserved wetlands, and focal points.

**THE CHALLENGE:** How do we provide a way for Steinhatchee to invite the world to visit while simultaneously maintaining a community sense of ownership and privacy, protect the resources that created the village, and still close the door on overdevelopment?

**THE SOLUTION:** We will repair the disconnection that has occurred in the economy of the fishing village, improve the sense of community to extend past SR 51, and provide Steinhatchee some level of control of their future by proposing a front porch, a screen door, and a secure door for Steinhatchee's master plan.

**Design Considerations and Initiatives**

**Growth**
- Enhance parking and circulation to accommodate larger volumes of people.
- Provide opportunities to promote economic expansion.

**Recreational**
- Preserve community gathering and activity venues for Steinhatchee citizens of all ages.
- Consider proposed Steinhatchee trail and offer features to enrich that event.

**Agricultural**
- Increase are beautification using native plant species.

**Cultural**
- Compliment the sense of identity through celebrated landmarks and unique spaces.

**Environmental**
- Preserve the natural resources and habitats.

**Sustainability**
- Create low maintenance solutions using adaptive reuse strategies wherever possible.
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Community Center Site Analysis

Precedents - Visual References & Inspiration

Concept Diagram

SKETCHES & PROCESS WORK

Land Use Map

Principles for Making Parks Accessible to the Community

1. Make No Small Plans
2. Ensure Effective Community Involvement
3. Design for the Place and Its Users
4. Support Parks through Public, Private, and Nonprofit Partnerships
5. Create Programs for Diverse Users
6. Manage Well and Cultivate a Constituency
7. Make Maintenance Consistent
8. Finagle Funding

Existing facilities and property are underutilized and parking is limited for anticipated growth.

Improved recreation equipment and programming to provide activities for a wide range of age groups.

Access to the water from the community center to fishing spots via county owned riverfront property.

Cultural activities are limited to small indoor events, while there is a need for outdoor event spaces for large public celebrations.

Enjoyment of the outdoors is an important part of life in Steinhatchee, but is not currently suited to public use.

Storm culverts are poorly suited for pedestrian and bicycle traffic - stormwater management can be integrated into the site.
The park will draw many people every day, with a boardwalk that seamlessly weaves together covered stages, play structures, gardens, a community center, a look-out tower, and several open grassy areas for games and picnicking. Together with artist-designed benches and plentiful public art, the park’s activity creates a unique fusion for growth, recreation, agriculture, culture, environment, and sustainability.
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1. Public Pier
   - The public pier gives all citizens access to the water for fishing and boat rental/parking.
   - There is room for fishing, crabbing, or sponging events, and connects to the community center for activities.

2. Amphitheater & Fort
   - The entrance towers provide an aerial view of the river and wildlife, a place to hang out, and public restrooms.
   - The towers nearest the river are connected by an aerial boardwalk (the mezzanine), which also provides extra seating for amphitheater events.

3. The Boardwalk
   - As viewed from the river, the boardwalk connects the fluid boundary, wrapping around the site. The wealth of green space encourages folks to garden, bring a lunch, or just play. Great views of the water abound, and outdoor events can be enjoyed in the amphitheater or on the dock.

4. & 5. Spring Fountain & Porthole Walls
   - Iconic "porthole" walls are incorporated in the interactive fountain area. These unique, locally constructed walls have portholes in them that encourage children to play near them, and can be dedicated to contributions.
   - The curves are reminiscent of the bow of a ship - an abstraction of Steinhatchee's life, culture, and history.

5. Section of Porthole Wall

Fluid Boundaries Diagram
- This diagram shows four distinct elements that were essential to the development of this master plan option.
- The blue line represents a fluid or dynamic boundary between the street, water, and community center property. The asterisks represent the primary entrance points and the green circles represent the main activity centers.
- Large shapes represent important views of the river that are enhanced and preserved in the design.

1. Section of Public Fishing Pier
2. Section of Amphitheater and Fort
4. Perspective View of Fountain
5. Section of Porthole Wall
This proposal of the Steinhatchee Community Center uses a form derived from the street grid and the curvilinear river bank. Retaining walls serve to protect in flood situations and offer vertical space to hold plaques and tiles commemorating Steinhatchee’s achievements. Native flowering shrubs and trees decorate throughout and open spaces alternate with shelters.
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**Precedents**
- Tallahassee, FL: Farmer's Market
- Daytona, FL: Fishing Pier
- Apalachicola, FL: Fishing Pier
- St. Andrews, FL: A Waterfront Community

**Sketches & Process Work**

**Land Use Map**

**Case Study**
Ten Principles for Rebuilding Neighborhood Retail
1. Great Streets need great Companions
2. It takes a vision
3. Think Residential
4. Honor the pedestrians
5. Parking is Power
6. Merchandise and Leasing Proactivity
7. Make it Happen
8. Be Clean, Safe, and Friendly
9. Extend Day into Night
10. Manage for Change
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Steinhatchee has a reputation of working community, people know each other and the common good is brought together by the environment. The town’s culture is recognized as a fishing capital and past wood milling center. The idea of conserving the fish market is of great importance for the proper growth and wellbeing of the town’s new waterfront community space. The Fishmarket becomes the center of attention with it becoming a Maritime Museum, which has elements from the museum displayed along Riverside Dr. The refurbished building once again becomes an active fishmarket where the people of Steinhatchee can trade goods and services, as well as enjoy the new features and activities within the area. In addition, the FishMarket is part of a larger Mixed-Use hub including parks and civic areas, commercial buildings, a variety of residences, and an entertainment center for day and night life.
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Fish Market Proposal C

Site Plan

The diagram connects the renovated Fish Market with the adaptive re-use boat dock to the north. The connection invites a stroll through the park, a visit to the new civic building, dining at the corner restaurant, checking on the teens at the Skate Park, or picking up a go-lunch before boarding the boat for a day of fishing. Not buying a holiday? Shop at the Fish Market or cross the Mall to the Boutiques at Steinhatchee. Pause under the palms by the fountain or browse the Maritime Museum or the Fish Market before enjoying the activities of the Maritime Museum.

Kevin Lynch, 1982

Site planning, then, is the organization of the external physical environment to accommodate human behavior. It deals with qualities and locations of structures, land, activities, and living things. It creates a coexistence of those elements in space and time.
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**Local Opportunities**

With some of the major issues in Steinhatchee pertaining to river access and parking, designs focused on some strategies to resolve problems and shed light on opportunities for Steinhatchee. The visioning project helps recognize the potential in some areas that should be acquired for preservation and management of the resources available.

**Significant Site tower concept**

**Trails & Boardwalks**

Marshes present unique opportunities. They typically attract wildlife and bird species. This design demonstrates how to use the wetland for recreational and educational purposes.

**Street End Parks**

These parks are perfect for the smaller vehicle. Both alternatives have the same amenities including Canoe Launch, Restroom, Shower, Water fountain, Picnic and Outdoor Grill.

**Mid-Size Boat Launch**

A high-volume boat launch facilitates the access to recreational activities on the water. Circulation within this area is meant to reduce traffic congestion and increase safety. The area is connected by trail to the Pahkahhaha Area and the Community Center by means of Steinhatchee's Historic trail system.

**Process**

The development of all our efforts are made possible not only by countless hours of production but communication among the group members. Hopefully, this process can be expressed by the people of Steinhatchee and the region when realization of these suggestions or alternatives are made. Finally, a serviceable Waterfront Community is the close future.
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THE FUTURE OF STEINHATCHEE

Create public-private partnerships for the future of Steinhatchee. Require all new development to add amenities to the township as a part of the cost to build. Develop public infrastructure as well as public access amenities such as sidewalks or boardwalks where appropriate, street lighting, and public parks. Allow the permit requirement to link with the Street End Program, so that the Street End Program can be kick started. Encourage developers to provide the design implementation and construction on County owned land instead of requiring the parks to be contiguous with the new construction.

Continue to build on the strength of old Steinhatchee by providing new gathering areas to continue cherished outdoor festivals and add new ones as the place for these new gatherings. Enhance water access for the general public by reactivating the boat dock at the Fish Market. Increase public access to the water by identifying and building new hubs on the water or by expanding existing ones. Create alternate boat launches for small boats and canoe through the Street End Program.

Strengthen the fishing industry by renewing the concept of a site in the renovated Fish Market. Expand the wood products industry by encouraging artisans and light wood workers to set up shop in Steinhatchee. Use the business incubator model suggested below to stimulate growth in the industry.

Preserve a portion of the history of Steinhatchee by purchasing and renovating the Fish Market. Designate a part of the Fish Market as a Maritime Museum, featuring the seafaring and spawning history of the town. Continue and expand the tourism industry.

Create a strongly recommend an architectural pattern book that includes, masonry, height restrictions, material, and architectural character.

Partner with independent conservation organizations to retain and maintain the Marshes of Steinhatchee and other endangered natural communities. Use native plants in all new community projects. Recommend pattern books that use green materials for new construction projects.

In all grant writing include the funding to provide LEED certification for new and renovation projects. When renovating the Fish Market as a Maritime Museum, set aside spaces for business incubation. Small business can have a space rent free for a period of time in exchange for part time care of the museum and boat dock. Use sustainable materials in all new community projects.

Considerations & Implementation

Front Porch:
Visitors will be attracted to the new places that will serve as the village’s “front porch” areas. They’ll come for a weekend or a week to boat, shop, fish, and bird watch. The new gathering places attract the wider community for a variety of day festivals or for an evening.

Screen Door:
Artistic residents or part-time residents will find Steinhatchee’s screen door place where new relationships are formed. The renovated Fish Market and the Community Center encourage interaction and forms the basis for the screen door welcoming those new to the community. People of the the business incubator program are to become full-time residents.

Secure Front Door:
Your new residents now have a plan which can be used to define the future of their community, preserving its natural resources, developing forest for economic growth and diversity, while enhancing a long cherished way of life.