

City manager describes redevelopment strategy for downtown Wildwood

Wildwood's city manager on Monday presented an overview of the city's redevelopment of the downtown to the League of Women Voters of The Villages/Tri-County.

The LWV is a national nonpartisan political organization that focuses on promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation in government. The local Villages/Tri-County chapter serves Lake, Marion and Sumter counties with the similar goal of educating voters on local issues.

City Manager Jason McHugh presented an overview of the Downtown Master Plan, or DMP, to the group at Manatee Recreation Center. The DMP serves as part of the city's strategic goals from 2023 to 2027, which include community engagement, employee recruitment and retainment, transportation, affordable housing, infrastructure and the redevelopment of Downtown Wildwood.



Wildwood City Manager Jason McHugh spoke Monday to the League of Women Voters.

The cornerstone of the DMP lies with significant planned changes to U.S. 301, or Main Street. Efforts will be made to slow down traffic and give pedestrians who gather in that area safer routes and easier access to their favorite retailers. Potential strategies to accomplish this include adding medians in conjunction with roundabouts and widening sidewalks by removing bike lanes.



Last week, demolition began on old buildings in downtown Wildwood.

While adopting the DMP, the city commission was able to purchase several properties across the street from City Hall. In place of several buildings that were in disrepair, a private development named the "Railyard" will be built. It will be an 8,000 square foot of leasable commercial space with an open outside area. This project will incorporate the architectural integrity of the historic buildings that came before it, including name plates and hundreds of bricks.

A three-story parking garage with about 125 spaces is also planned for Downtown Wildwood. This garage will serve all businesses in the area, remedying the struggle for parking that many citizens have voiced in recent years.

Outside of the DMP, McHugh detailed several infrastructure projects the city will incorporate in upcoming years. The city is on track to expand the Wastewater Treatment Plant with a \$60 million dollar project that will filter 2.0 million gallons of water daily to match the rapidly increasing amount of water used in the city.

Various waterline replacement projects are being targeted as the city works to replace rusty water lines that many citizens have voiced concern about, including a new water main through County Road 209. McHugh clarified that the iron in the water from the rust does not pose a health issue, simply an aesthetic issue.