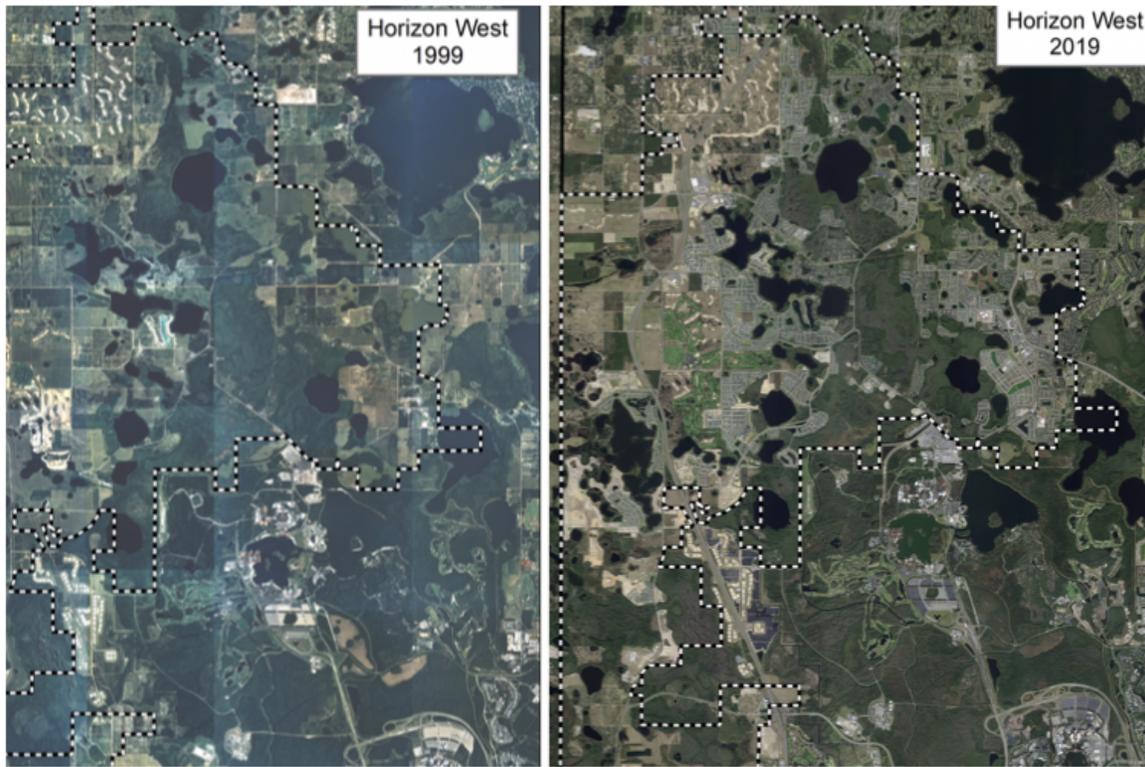




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SOUTHWEST ORANGE

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 8, 2020 8 months ago

# FORECAST: Rapid growth poses challenges for Horizon West

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Although the plan for Horizon West has not changed since it was conceived in the 1990s, no one could have anticipated the rapidity of the community's growth.

by: **Danielle Hendrix** | Associate Editor

Looking at Horizon West today, it can be hard to believe that just a few decades ago, there was nothing but abandoned orange groves.

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each village within it was adopted between 1997 and 2008. Buildout has progressed from village to village, despite the downturn of the economy a decade ago.



Rather, the growth is much faster than anticipated.

“The plan was always there — it’s the velocity with which the plan is executing that I think is a bit of a surprise to everyone,” VanderLey said.

### WELCOME TO HORIZON WEST

In 1995, the original concept for Horizon West entailed nine villages and a town center on 38,000 acres. However, thousands of acres were removed from the Horizon West area by way of annexations and creation of the Lake Avalon Rural Settlement.

The final concept consists of 28,000 acres containing six villages — Lakeside, Bridgewater, Town Center, Village F, Village H (aka Hickory Nut) and Village I. In total, they were approved for 40,282 units, making the projected population on buildout 100,705.

Horizon West comprises 4% of Orange County, and it’s also one of the most unique areas of the county. Because there is a master plan, there are tools available for Horizon West that are not available elsewhere, VanderLey said.

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When you think about the areas that are the most likely to grow and have the most kind of cohesive comprehensive plan, it’s always in the case of a large development with a master planner or a master developer in charge making one decision instead of a bunch of people trying to come to an agreement,” VanderLey said. “In terms of where you’re going to buy a house and what you want in place by the time it’s all said and done, a lot of thought has been given to the entire region for the Horizon West area that was just not available in other parts of the county that are being developed in a more piecemeal fashion.”

Currently, Orange County planners estimate Horizon West is at about 52% buildout. Olan Hill, assistant manager in the Orange County Planning Division, said between single- and multi-family lots and units platted and

### By The Numbers

- 4**  
Percentage of Orange County that Horizon West comprises
- 6**  
Horizon West Villages
- 52**  
Current percent buildout of Horizon West
- 3,335**  
Multi-family units constructed in Horizon West as of 2019
- 17,958**  
Total units platted/constructed in Horizon West as of 2019
- 28,000**  
Total units allowed by the original Horizon West Specific Area Plans.

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units allowed by the original Horizon West Specific Area Plans.

“That said, the 40,282 units anticipated by the SAPs is a maximum number, and some of those areas may be underdeveloped compared to the original





### Village Land Use Classification Area

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Prepared by:  
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Exhibit 3.1

Scale in Feet  
 0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000

Scale in Miles  
 0 0.5 1 1.5 2 2.5 3 3.5 4 4.5 5

North

Date: October 9, 1996

Disclaimer: This map is for informational purposes only and is subject to technical change due to available mapping information, conditions and other factors. This map has been prepared for the Orange County Planning Department for concepts of planning and information and does not constitute a final plan. It is not intended to be used for any other purpose, and its use for any other purpose is prohibited. This map is not intended to be used for any other purpose, and its use for any other purpose is prohibited. This map is not intended to be used for any other purpose, and its use for any other purpose is prohibited.

This map shows the conceptual location of each original village in 1996 and includes areas that were eventually removed from Horizon West. (Courtesy Orange County)

Aside from the original concept downsizing from nine villages and a town center to six villages — including the town center — the plans and village frameworks have played out closely to what was envisioned, Hill said.

There have been changes because of the evolving market. Because Horizon West’s plan provided flexibility, developers could use Transferable Development Rights credits to decrease their maximum buildout. TDR are acquired by protecting wetlands and designated upland greenbelts, Hill said.

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#### By The Village

##### Lakeside

Acres: 5,202  
Approved Units: 8,915

##### Bridgewater

Acres: 4,223  
Approved Units: 10,450

##### Town Center

Acres: 3,624  
Approved Units: 4,870

##### Village F

Acres: 2,551  
Approved Units: 3,891

##### Village H (Hickory Nut)

“The biggest challenge has been recognizing important market changes and implementing necessary regulatory changes while continuing to adhere to the original Horizon West guiding policies,” he said. “Other than the slightly reduced buildout, the other notable change to the original plan is to the type of non-residential activity in the Town Center. (It) is still considered as the regional employment center for Horizon West and much of Southwest Orange County. However, with the approval and development of the Winter Garden Village at Fowler Groves, much of the retail or commercial activity planned for the Town Center was delayed or converted into other types of land use.”

Other than that, each of the villages has been planned and approved according

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##### Village I

Acres: 2,129  
Approved Units: 5,608

##### Horizon West Villages Total

...and they added the plan for Horizon West is the same as it has been, but the differentiator is the growth of the economy in the area.



Projected Buildout  
Population: 100,705

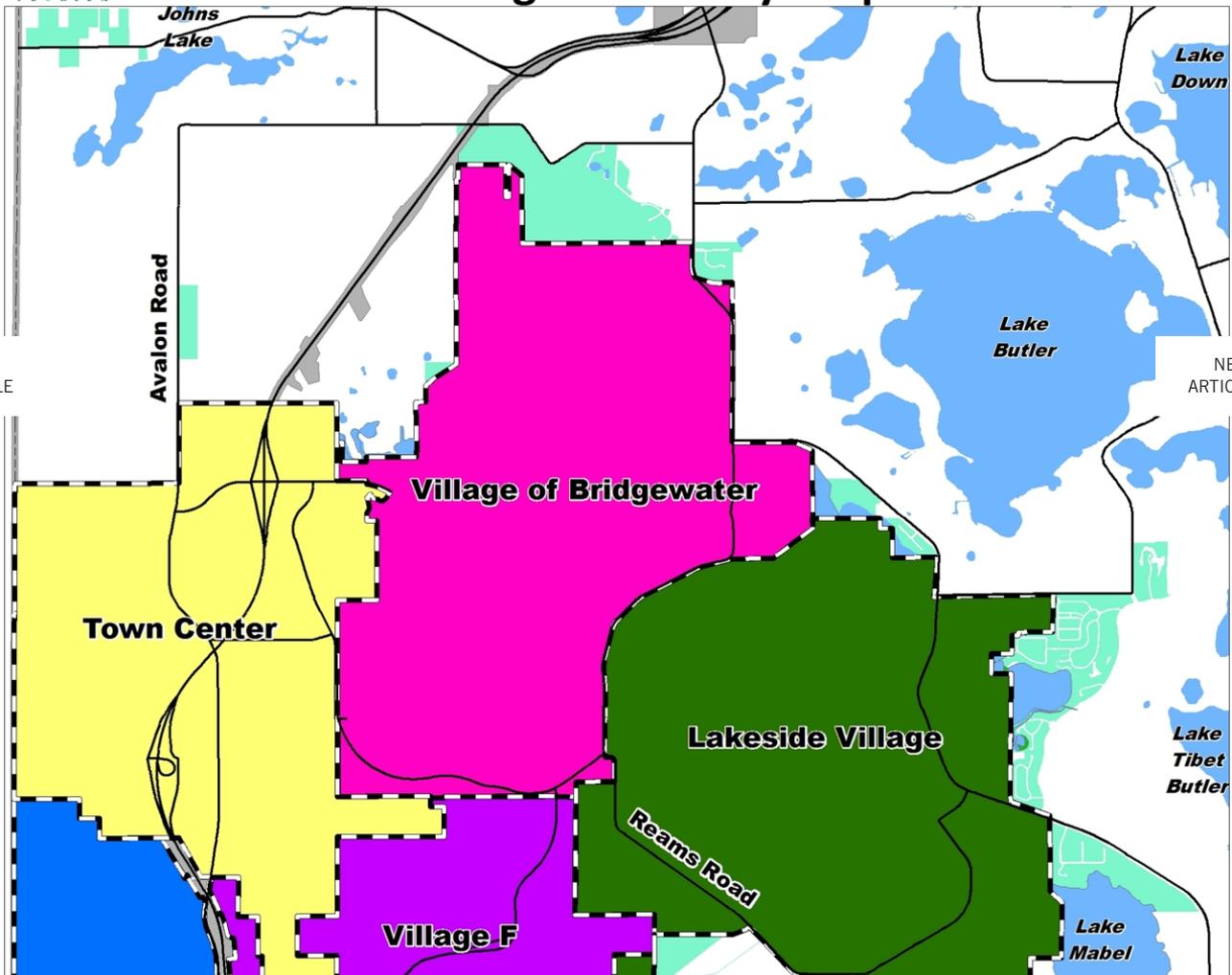
\*\*Numbers from Orange  
County

before the downturn of the economy, and it was on pace to be good, healthy growth, but not quite the pace that we're at right now. Then, it just stopped altogether during the downturn. But when it came back, it came back with such velocity that I really think it surprised everyone."

### GROWING PAINS



## Horizon West Special Planning Area and Village Boundary Map



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Today, Horizon West consists of six villages — Bridgewater, Lakeside, Town Center, Village F, Village H (Hickory Nut) and Village I. (Courtesy Orange County)

Such velocity comes with challenges, many stemming from the disparity in timelines between building new homes and creating the infrastructure required to support a community.

“Everybody that’s driven in that area will tell you that road construction and road improvements have not kept pace with building the homes, and part of that is just a natural disparity in timeline,” VanderLey said. “We fund our roads with impact fees, with ad valorem taxes, with gas tax, those kinds of things. Two of those — the gas tax and ad valorem — are lagging by a certain period of time, so we’re reacting to the cars already on the road to build the capacity for the future.”

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However, the necessary infrastructure must be funded before the county can build it. Revenue from the development has to be in place to implement the infrastructure and services.

People deciding to move to the area isn’t a variable the county can control.

“While I think people get frustrated that the roads are not completed and those improvements are not done, I think what they miss — because they don’t see anything visible — is that there are so many roads in design and getting ready to go out to bid and coming forward,” VanderLey said.

The ballooning population also has posed challenges for Orange County Public Schools.

“In the master plan, we have school sites that were provided, but we have definitely seen not only a change from townhouses going to multi-family and single-family going to townhouses — which cause density

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Gould said. “Nobody could predict the popularity, but it’s the perfect storm,” Gould said. “We have jobs, tremendous potential for entrepreneurs who want to come here and start businesses ... there’s plenty of work. ... We’re very blessed, but it brings challenges.”



Increasing traffic and the disparity between home and infrastructure buildout have been putting pressure on east-west connector roads, as well as rural roads. It's not just plaguing West Orange County, either: South Lake County also is experiencing a development boom, and County Orange County Commissioner Betsy VanderLey said many people in both areas work in downtown Orlando.

That poses a problem, because the only two viable east-west roads at the moment are State Road 50 and U.S. 192. It creates heavy traffic on these roads, as well as some back roads in Horizon West.

That won't be the case for much longer. In October, the Central Florida Expressway Authority Governing Board approved the Lake/Orange County Connector Project Development and Environment Study, advancing the project to production phases that include design and construction.

The five-mile tolled expressway will provide a nonstop access route linking U.S. 27 in South Lake County to State Road 429 in West Orange. Design is expected to begin in this spring, with construction potentially beginning by the end of 2022.



## The Author: Danielle Hendrix

Danielle Hendrix is the Associate Editor for the West Orange Times & Observer and the Windermere Observer. She is a 2015 graduate of the University of Central Florida, from which he earned a bachelor's degree in journalism with a minor in world comparative studies. ...

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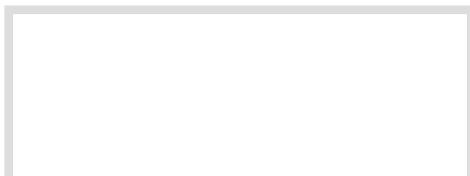


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