

## Character Town Organizations.

### The Primary Vehicles for Civic Sociability and Community Collaboration.

#### Organizations Drive Civility and Sociability.

The organizations in a town reflect how people relate to one another. Committees, boards, service clubs and charitable groups are forums for communication, comradery and collective actions designed to achieve community goals.

The focus of the organizations also reflects the values of the city. Some towns have committees to limit government actions or watch tax dollars while others have boards to protect children, support the hospital or befriend the library.

Most cities have both, but the intensity of the efforts tends to favor one type of mission over the other. Towns with character tend to favor spending time building the community, providing services to residents and making positive things happen as opposed to preventing bad things from transpiring.

In Florida, State statutes provide for dependent and independent special districts. In addition, local governments use advisory committees and boards to tap citizen expertise and interest in specific issues. Finally, there are multi-jurisdictional organizations that include several cities and counties aimed at specific regional or metro issues. These three types of organizations form the basis for public action and advice.

#### Commonly Used Organizations.

This paper reports the survey results of commonly employed city organizations and advisory boards employed in Central Florida.

City organizations are generally aligned with community issues or specific functions of local government. NGOs usually focused on specific single issues. Business organizations tend to promote specific industries or community economic development goals. Residents organize as neighborhood associations for homeowners, renters or condo owners.

#### **Organizations in Character Towns**

1. **City Government Organizations and Advisory Boards.**
2. **Institutional and Non-Governmental Organizations, NGOs.**
3. **Private Business Organizations.**
4. **Neighborhood and Resident Organizations.**

#### **City Committees and Boards: A Website.**

Most city and town websites have an easy path to a page that presents the boards and committees of the jurisdiction. Such a page serves several purposes.

- First, it indicates the issues elected and appointed officials believe to be important enough to warrant the expense of a commission, committee, council or board.
- Second, an easily accessible webpage also enables residents and businesses to select where they might want to volunteer their time or that of their employees.
- Third, residents have a way to comment and offer ideas to elected officials during budget and regulatory sessions.
- Fourth, when partnership and regional organizations are listed, residents and businesses can see the town's participation in issues bigger than the city.

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At the end of the day, the city can use boards and committees to focus on important issues. The line-up of committees is a strategic tool that directs the budget and offers residents and businesses the opportunity to participate in the important issues of the community.

### The Prospects for Community Consensus.

Contemporary society has access to many tools not available to communities of a century ago. Television, radio, social media, global communication systems and ubiquitous access to a wide range of information changes the dynamics of citizen participation in public issues and city design.

Being transparent and collaborative is not enough; management of expectations and participation depends on the responsible party's ability to focus and prioritize proposals in a way that results in the feeling of a legitimate outcome. This is the growing challenge.

Our governmental system was established as a republic; people elect representatives to make decisions as proscribed in our Constitution. Today, social media has democratized decision-making by giving everyone a direct voice on issues, diminishing the role of elected officials to reasonably analyze issues. Everyone has an opinion; regardless of expertise, judgement, experience or information. This sounds great until the reality of the noise overwhelms the decision-making system and progress grinds to a halt. Reasoned consensus is hard to achieve.

Dealing with participants is tough but doable. Overcoming the all-to-common objection that "I was not informed or invited" is a bigger problem. The extensive use of social media and other means is essential to growing a consensus vision in a "character town". This process is getting harder, especially in multi-cultural, pluralistic communities.

The answer lies in the up-front work of visioning, setting goals and defining the evaluation metrics to be used in the decision-making process. The burden is on the civic leadership to work with stakeholders to focus on actionable plans.

### Types of Organizations Employed by the Ten Character Towns of Central Florida.

Organizations are called commissions, boards, committees, advisory committees, councils, or authorities. In some cases the designation makes a big difference in the power and funding of the organization. Usually the terms agency, authority or commission imply more decision-making power and a more independent funding source, but each is defined by its authorizing documentation.

The organizational types and topics most commonly used in the ten character towns in Central Florida surveyed below are:

- **Community Redevelopment Agencies,**
- **Historic Preservation Boards,**
- **Library and Museum Advisory Boards,**
- **Beautification, Arts or Tree Preservation Committees, Councils or Boards, and**
- **Airport, Hospital or Housing Authorities.**

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In addition to the most popular types of committees, boards and agencies, communities also employ the following types of organizations to help manage the city's affairs:

- **Educational or Health Advisory Boards,**
- **Neighborhood Improvement Districts or Community Redevelopment Agencies [CRAs],**
- **Community Development Block Grant [CDBG] Advisory Committees, and**
- **Economic Development Commissions or Chambers of Commerce.**

#### Public/Government Organizations in the Ten Character Towns of Central Florida.

The ten towns specifically have the following organizations. The websites of each vary in content. Some merely list the boards and committees while some state the mission, meeting times and staff coordinator.

The listing of the organizations in each town is presented herein in hopes of demonstrating the range of organizations. Each community has a different line-up; each designed to address specific issues and opportunities facing the city and each intended to capture the interest of community volunteers and stakeholder groups.

#### CLERMONT.

- Planning and Zoning Board
- Downtown Clermont Community Redevelopment Agency
- Site Plans and Development Review Committee
- South Lake County Historical Society in cooperation with Lake County
- The Art League

#### DELAND.

- Airport Advisory Committee
- Citizens Advisory Task Force
- Community Redevelopment Agency
- Economic Development Committee
- Firefighters' Retirement Committee
- General Employees' Retirement Committee
- Historic Preservation Board
- DeLand Housing Authority
- Joint City/County Coordinating Committee
- Planning Board
- Police Officers' Retirement Committee
- Senior Council Committee
- Spring Hill CRA
- Tree Advisory Committee
- Volusia Growth Management Commission

#### EUSTIS.

- Cemetery Board
- Code Enforcement Board
- Fire Pension Board
- Historic Preservation Board
- Housing Authority of the City of Eustis
- Library Board
- Police Pension Board

#### KISSIMMEE.

- Airport Advisory Board
- Board of Adjustment
- Building Trades & Examining Board
- Charter School Advisory Board
- Code Enforcement Board
- Community Redevelopment Agency Board
- Fire Pension, Police Pension and General Pension Boards
- Historic Preservation Board
- Housing Advisory Board
- Parks & Recreation Board
- Planning Advisory Board

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#### LAKE MARY.

- Planning & Zoning Board
- Code Enforcement Board
- Elder Affairs Commission
- Firefighter's Pension Board
- Historical Commission
- Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
- Police Pension Board
- Tree Board

#### MOUNT DORA.

- Charter Review Committee
- Code Enforcement Special Magistrate
- Collective Bargaining Agreement
- CRA Advisory Committee and CRA Board
- Development Review Committee
- Firefighters' Pension and Retirement
- General Employees' Pension and Retirement System
- Historic Preservation Board
- Library Advisory Board
- Mount Dora Health Facilities Authority
- NECRA Advisory Committee and NECRA Board
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee
- Police Officers' Pension and Retirement
- Public Arts Commission
- Visioning Steering Committee

#### SANFORD.

- Community Development Block Grant [CDBG] Advisory Board
- Community Redevelopment Agency
- Firefighters' Retirement System
- Historic Preservation Board
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Police Officers' Retirement System

- Public Art Commission
- Sanford Airport Authority
- Sanford Housing Authority
- Sanford Museum Advisory Board

#### TAVARES.

- Fire Pension Board
- Police Pension Board
- Planning and Zoning Board
- Tavares Library Advisory Board
- Tavares Greater Downtown TIF District
- Bicycle Pedestrian Committee of the MPO – Tavares Representative
- Citizens Advisory Committee of the Metropolitan Planning Organization – Tavares Representative
- Lake Community Action Agency
- Lake County Cultural Affairs Council – Tavares Representative
- Lake County Library Advisory Board – Tavares Representative

#### WINTER GARDEN.

- Architectural Review and Historic Preservation Board
- Citizens Advisory Task Force
- Code Enforcement Board
- Community Redevelopment Board
- Community Redevelopment Advisory Board
- Planning and Zoning Board
- General Employees' Pension Board
- Police Officers' & Firefighters' Pension Plan
- Election Canvassing Board
- Winter Garden Village at Fowler Groves Community Development District [CDD]

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#### WINTER PARK.

- Board of Adjustment
- Civil Service Board
- Code Compliance Board
- Community Redevelopment Agency [CRA]
- Community Redevelopment Advisory Board
- Comprehensive Plan Task Force
- Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals
- Development Review Committee
- Economic Development Advisory Board
- Golf Course Strategic Plan Task Force
- Historic Preservation Board
- Housing Authority Board
- KWPB [Keep Winter Park Beautiful] & Sustainability Advisory Board
- Lake & Waterways Advisory Board
- Library Facilities Task Force
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Planning and Zoning Board
- Public Art Advisory Board
- Transportation Advisory Board
- Utilities Advisory Board
  
- Visioning Steering Committee
- Winter Park Firefighters' Pension Board
- Winter Park Police Officers' Pension Board

#### Typical Business and Economic Development Organizations.

Cities and towns also benefit from the many business, economic development and merchants' associations that evolve. A downtown merchants' association, an economics club, commercial property owners' associations and chambers of commerce contribute to the economic development and well-being of the community.

City support for these organizations with space, inclusion in city celebrations and declarations of appreciation are important.

#### Typical Social and Service Organizations in Ten Character Towns of Central Florida.

Service clubs like Rotary, Lion and Kiwanis clubs, homeowners' associations, garden clubs and a myriad of clubs and groups that are consistent with and supportive of the city's vision warrant city support. They all contribute to the towns' civility and socialization. Moreover, they provide forums for sharing ideas on issues of the day by airing questions and exploring options before public decisions are made.

Issue related organizations also prompt philanthropy. Contributions of time, money, assets and connections contribute to the prosperity of the community. Organizations facilitate philanthropy and provide a forum for showing appreciation.

#### Character Towns: Historically.

Civic, city, business and residential organizations are important city assets. Their care and feeding is a legitimate function of city and town government. The inventive period for character towns was from 1876 to 1920 when many Central Florida character towns were designed and built. It was a period that brought social organizations and clubs as well as automobiles, ubiquitous electricity and airplanes along with the plight and blight of the industrial cities. Interestingly, nine of the ten Central Florida cities were incorporated as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century became the 20<sup>th</sup>.

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This period is known by several names:

- The Age of American Empire [1886-1908] sponsored by Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt when the United States began to be an important international power.
- The Progressive Era [1890-1920] when the abuses of the robber barons were being attacked by social service advocates and the trust busters.
- The City Beautiful movement era [1890-1910] when public buildings and infrastructure was given the role of driving community values; an era that benefited from Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmstead, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the young John Nolen and many other devotees of The City Beautiful movement. It was a part of the Progressive Era with the World Columbian Exposition [1893], the McMillan Plan for Washington D.C. [1902], the Plan for Chicago [1909] and countless other city plans across the nation.

Dates of Incorporation Character Towns of Central Florida	
Clermont	1916
DeLand	1882
Eustis	1883
Kissimmee	1883
Lake Mary	1973
Mount Dora	1910
Sanford	1887
Tavares	1885
Winter Garden	1903
Winter Park	1887

**Source: wckplanning from Wikipedia**

#### **The Idea of a Character Town.**

A “character town” is a small city or town with unique and authentic qualities that foster home town pride. Character Towns are friendly and inviting places with great neighborhoods, vibrant downtowns and respected historic and natural resources.

Character Towns support a sociable and civil society; a society that is proud of its home town, protective of its heritage and committed to its well-being. A character town is an interesting, pleasant and prosperous place for residents, businesses and visitors.

#### **The Character Town Workshop.**

The initial “workshop” gathering of nearly ten Central Florida town planners, downtown development directors, and economic development directors has nearly doubled. The quarterly workshops are informal with two main features: a Roundtable Discussion with each town presenting their current activities, dilemmas and questions followed by a presentation of current activities in the host community.

#### **Conclusion.**

The seminal work of Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* and his subsequent work demonstrate beyond question to importance of social capital and infrastructure. City and civic associations and organizations are one vehicle for enabling residents and businesses to participate actively in the life of the town. A main obligation of civic leaders is to use city and civic organizations to capture the energy and creativity of the town’s residents and businesses to achieve the community’s vision.

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### Readings.

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### Source for Committees and Boards by City:

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- Active Special Districts, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity  
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