



Horizon West

Orange County, Florida

by **Chris Testerman and Alissa Barber Torres**

Horizon West in Context

Horizon West, located in southwest Orange County, Florida, is a new community of mixed-use villages designed to reflect classic principles of Garden Cities and New Urbanism. These principles ensure that as the community is established over the next few decades, new development will contribute to a sense of place, a commitment to environmental protection, excellent architectural design, and quality pedestrian environments and community spaces.

Located north of Walt Disney World and other tourist attractions, Horizon West represents the evolution of rural lands no longer suitable for agricultural use into self-sustaining urban environments. These environments will feature mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented communities that provide community schools and parks and that respect the natural environment. By master planning these communities to avoid piecemeal growth and suburban sprawl, the Horizon West concept ensures the villages will contribute to the overall community and regional fabric.



Sandhill cranes enjoy a neighborhood park in Lakeside Village.
Photo by Galen Pugh.

In contrast with some New Urbanist communities and other areas of Orange County, Horizon West does not primarily attract seasonal residents. The project appeals to permanent community residents with its focus on neighborhood-centered schools, parks, trails, scenic natural settings, and other elements that build community life. A range of housing prices and types also supports community diversity and permanence.

Project History

Orange County often is thought of as urban, as it includes the City of Orlando and tourist attractions. However, much of its land is rural, including west Orange County. Orange County has defined areas within which central water, central sewer, and other urban services are available. Outside these areas, land predominantly may be developed in a rural setting with one house per ten acres.

In the 1980s, a series of devastating freezes eliminated west Orange County's citrus groves and its historic citrus industry on thousands of acres of this rural land. These freezes caused citrus production to relocate from Central Florida to warmer climates in South Florida. Over time, a number of property owners who lost their citrus groves sought to develop the land.



The rural development pattern in the Horizon West area was at odds with the area's proximity to Walt Disney World Company's theme parks and resort properties, as well as numerous other tourist attractions. The area's rural nature and location near major tourist areas promoted regional suburban sprawl by directing growth into adjacent counties. These development pressures also spurred municipal annexation and new suburban developments in adjacent cities and towns.

A different and more sustainable future was envisioned for the Horizon West area. In 1993, a sector plan—or conceptual master plan—for the Horizon West area was initiated by Horizon West, Inc., a group of property owners working in partnership with Orange County to find a sustainable, long-term solution for the area. Early in the process, the influence of Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities model led to the preliminary design of independent, self-sustaining villages. To fully realize this concept, the partnership committed to the master planning and full build-out design of the entire Horizon West area to ensure that all parts of the community would contribute to the goal of sustainability.

Horizon West, Inc., hired the firm Miller, Sellen, Connor, & Walsh, Inc., to develop the project concept, design standards, and a planning overlay for the area. In June 1995, Orange County approved this framework for Horizon West, marking the beginning of a new and visionary future for Horizon West's 38,000 acres.



The Lakes of Windermere Neighborhood in Lakeside Village.
Graphic courtesy Black Amber Developments, Inc.

Villages

Designed to achieve compact urban form, Horizon West will include six or seven mixed-use villages and a town center at completion. Villages are between 1,000 and 3,000 acres and surrounded by greenbelts. Villages include two to four neighborhoods, oriented around community schools and parks that are no more than one half-mile walking distance from the neighborhoods.

Housing will surround these community resources at an overall minimum density of five dwellings per net acre, creating an urban, pedestrian-oriented environment. The amount of housing in each village neighborhood is linked directly to the capacity of the community's schools, establishing schools as community focal points.



A neighborhood park in Lakeside Village echoes the silviculture once seen in the area with a gracious stand of pine trees.

Photo by Alissa Barber Torres.

Villages also include village centers to provide community shopping and services, parks, and recreation to surrounding neighborhoods. Village centers also will include townhouses and apartments above stores and retail offices to enhance housing diversity and density, as well as community life.

Jodi Rutmann of Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin Lopez Rinehart, a design firm involved in several communities in Lakeside Village, comments, “The neighborhood design philosophy is to create a plan that does not compromise the social structure of the community, but embraces social and civic engagement needed to build social capital within communities. Physical connections and the integration of shops, workplaces,

homes, and schools will facilitate social interaction on a daily basis, rather than the occasional homeowner association meeting, school event, or park activity.”

Village centers are designed to be centrally located, no more than 60 acres in size, and incorporate quality architectural design standards. These factors will preserve their scale and function in support of the Villages.



The Lake Burden Neighborhood in Lakeside Village.

Click graphic for larger image with legend.
Graphic courtesy Glatting Jackson.

three neighborhoods and a village center on 4,022 acres. The Summerport community is seeing active construction of new housing, with single-family housing and townhouses already constructed and occupied in one of the neighborhoods. Several parks and green spaces also are in place, with space for soccer games and other recreation. Upon completion, the Village of Bridgewater will accommodate 7,270 single-family houses, townhouses, villas, and apartments.

Over 1,000 single-family houses and townhouses have been developed to date, accommodating over 2,000 residents. At completion, Horizon West is expected to have close to 60,000 residents. The first Horizon West village, Lakeside Village, was established in 1997. Lakeside Village includes three neighborhoods and a village center on 5,194 acres.

In Lakeside Village, single-family houses in the Lake Sawyer neighborhood’s Lakes of Windermere community are complete, with others under construction. A neighborhood park anchors the community with a gazebo for gatherings and a stand of stately pine trees that overlook a community green. Playgrounds and community squares provide spaces for active play and sports. When complete, Lakeside Village will include up to 10,455 single-family houses, townhouses, villas, and apartments.

The Village of Bridgewater was established in 1999 and is comprised of

To define the edges of villages and create transitions, greenbelts conceptually are created during the master planning process and are established through the transfer of development rights. Based on the loss of citrus in the area, greenbelts do not preserve active agriculture, but are oriented to preserving wetland systems and wildlife corridors. These greenbelt areas also provide scenic vistas and nature-based recreation for village residents. The transfer of development rights can only occur within the same village to ensure an appropriate balance of land uses and densities.

Town Center

The sustainability of Horizon West’s several villages is supported by a town center. In February 2003, Orange County approved a conceptual boundary for the first phase of the town center, the first step in the detailed master planning of the area. The town center site is west of the Village of Bridgewater and will include higher-density residential, office, retail, light industrial, and other “workplaces.” In doing so, the town center will enhance the villages with employment opportunities to help ensure the villages’ self-sufficiency. The town center also will include a high school, parks, and other community amenities.



A Georgian home in the Village of Bridgewater.

Photo by Alissa Barber Torres.

As west Orange County’s cities and towns develop over time, the town center will serve a regional market with goods, services, and employment—providing a measure of sustainability to the region by bringing workplaces and services “closer to home,” reducing long drive times for residents. At the same time, it will be near one or more interchanges of Orange County’s expressway network, providing mobility and access to the region as a whole.

Design and Architecture

Horizon West’s design concepts and standards are built on principles that create well-designed communities with a strong sense of identity. Paul Bergmann, an architect and planner who is Orange County’s chief urban design official, notes, “The design standards for Horizon West villages and their neighborhoods, set out in an adopted Village Code, are

based on neighborhood schools being co-located with parks, walkability, and front porches as the major principles.”

These concepts were articulated using a series of visioning workshops and design charrettes that included the community, planning consultants, local government staff. At the charrettes, participants contributed design ideas through surveys, group discussion, and review of photographs and design illustrations. Ultimately, these concepts were translated into a sustainable urban form based on a village concept.



Townhouse Apartment District designs in Lake Burden and Lake Sawyer neighborhoods.
Graphic courtesy Glatting Jackson.

To enhance the community setting, the Village Design Code ensures the pedestrian scale and walkability of villages. Bicycle and pedestrian paths line every street and connect schools, parks, shopping, and other villages. The villages’ streets are connected in a network to the maximum extent possible, given Horizon West’s many lakes and natural features. The community’s 6,000 acres of lakes and thousands of acres of adjacent wetlands will be preserved and enjoyed with conservation areas, scenic trails and overlooks, and restrictions on motorized boats.

In Horizon West’s villages, diverse housing types are available or will be built in the various neighborhoods. Housing types include single-family homes, townhomes, estates, and apartments above ground-floor offices and retail stores. Housing in the villages reflects a variety of architectural styles to create visual interest and design quality in the neighborhood streetscape. “Design guidelines for Lakeside Village define architectural styles and elements of each style, including Colonial, Georgian, Prairie, and Craftsman, that make each style unique. The mix of styles has resulted in a very attractive development,” says Paul Bergmann.

These design elements and housing styles are proving to be very attractive to potential residents of Horizon West. A senior official with a development company building a neighborhood in the Village of Bridgewater says, "Orlando has embraced the Traditional

Neighborhood Design concept. Homebuyers in our community appreciate the homes' detail, raised foundations, front porches, and other design elements. Given the choice, many buyers are adding front porches."



A Craftsman bungalow in the Lakes of Windermere in Lakeside Village.

Photo by Alissa Barber Torres.

Design standards offer a palette of choices to vary architectural features and styles. Front facades on single-family houses are varied and articulated and cannot be repeated too frequently on the same block. To provide additional visual interest for pedestrians, design standards also focus on architectural features like balconies and bay windows, require or encourage vehicle access from rear alleys, and minimize prominent front garages. The president of a construction company building houses in Horizon West notes, "The ability to alternate between front-loading and rear-loading houses makes a nice streetscape and offers buyers additional options, which are very popular."

To enhance the public realm and promote community interaction, front porches are required on at least 50 percent of houses. Noting the benefit of front porches, Amelyn Regis, an urban planner and homeowner in Horizon West, says, "As a resident of the Village of Bridgewater, I truly love my community. The front porch of our home allows us to communicate easily with neighbors as they walk or drive past our home."

The architectural diversity and enhanced streetscape of Horizon West neighborhoods are an antidote to the uniformity of traditional suburban subdivisions. The community's sense of place also is strengthened by the uniqueness of its physical environment. Amelyn Regis notes, "One of the main reasons we choose our home in Horizon West is the number of distinct features each home possesses."



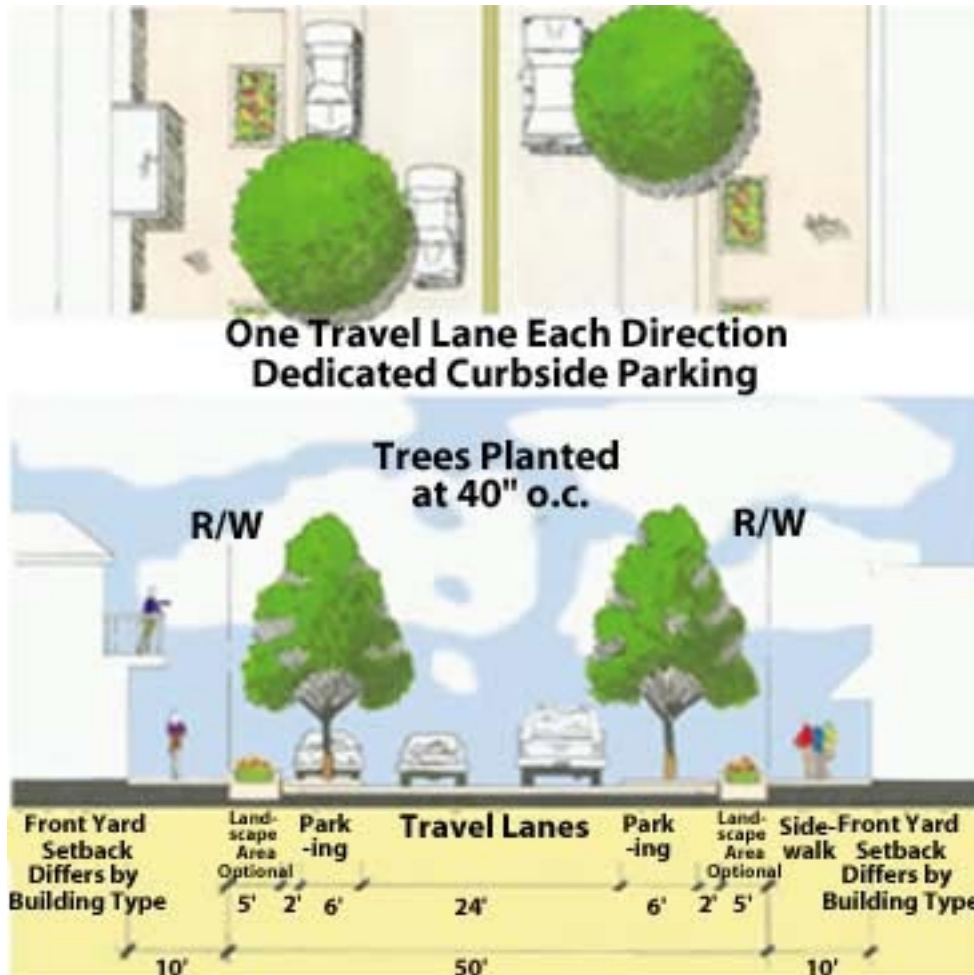
A view of the streetscape from a neighborhood park in Summerport.
Photo by Alissa Barber Torres.

Housing and the Market

Consistent with the principles of New Urbanism, Horizon West villages offer diverse housing types within the same community. As an example of a new neighborhood, the Colonial-style Independence neighborhood will feature 2,315 single-family houses, estates, townhouses, condominiums, patio homes, duplexes and apartments on 1,342 acres in the Village of Bridgewater. The developer and builder, Transeastern Homes, will offer townhouses and condominiums priced from the low \$100s. Single-family houses will be priced from \$150,000 to the \$300s, with lakefront estates at prices up to \$700,000.

A village center in Independence will serve the neighborhood with 20,000 square feet of commercial space and restaurants, with second-story residential units. Community amenities will include 58 acres of parks, playgrounds, picnic areas, pedestrian and bicycle trails, lakes, swimming pools, a clubhouse and neighborhood center, and access to two lakes. About half of the neighborhood's land will remain undeveloped to support the natural setting of the community.

In contrast with other New Urbanist developments nationwide, the price of housing in Horizon West is similar to comparable housing in the area. The median housing price in the adjacent City of Winter Garden in 2003 was \$161,950. Similarly, many townhouse developments countywide are priced at comparable levels to those proposed in Horizon West.



Neighborhood center street perspective and section.
Graphic courtesy Glatting Jackson.

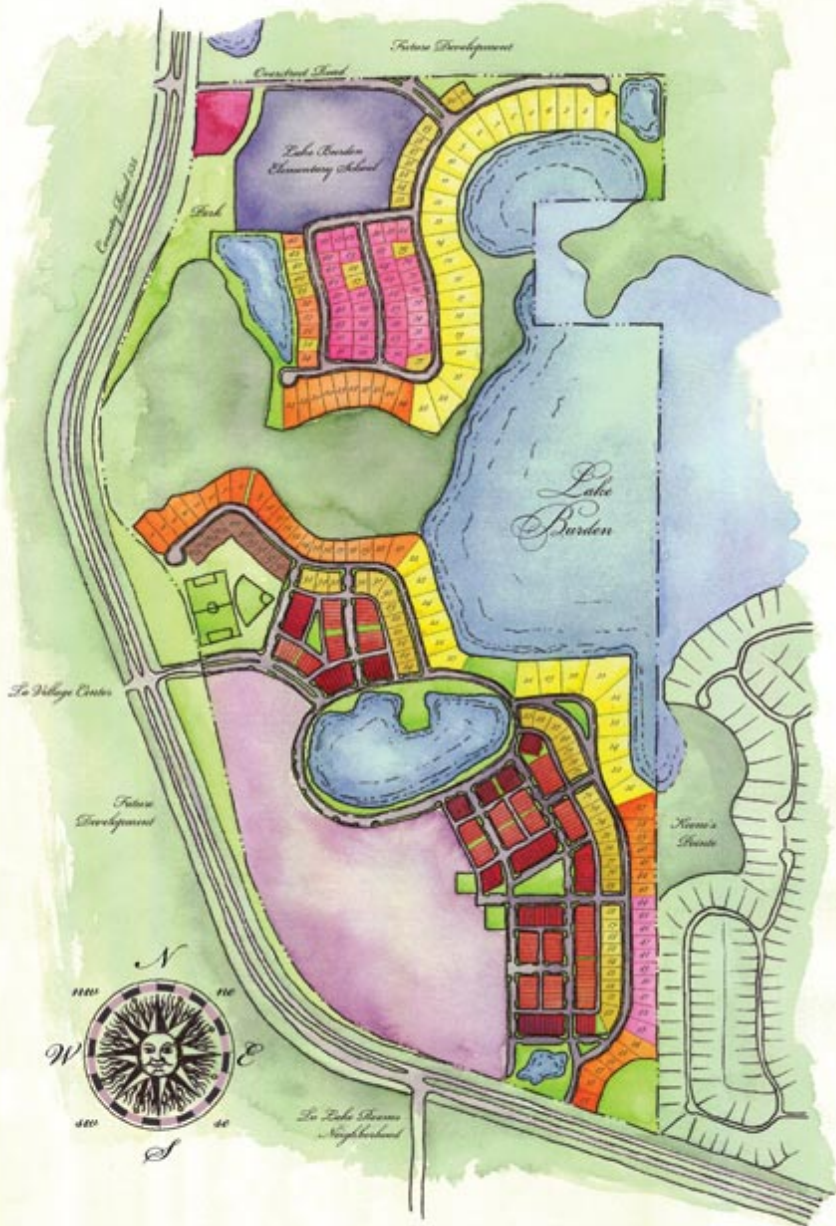
At the other end of the housing price spectrum, Horizon West's lakefront estate homes are priced near \$700,000. Compared to the nearby community of Windermere, which features multimillion-dollar mansions that are home to many of Orlando's top sports stars and executives, Horizon West offers many of the area's location and lifestyle amenities at a very attractive price. The market's response to Horizon West has been very positive, with buyers citing the convenience to downtown Orlando via nearby expressways, new schools, and the proximity to Walt Disney World. With the community's location and amenities, one resident says, "For the price, I couldn't beat the value."

Horizon West's diverse housing options at a range of prices provide broader access to sustainability, excellent design, and community-based lifestyle. Jodi Rutmann notes that "when people's sense of pride and ownership run deep within the community, the community is sustained over time." Time should tell that Horizon West will be both sustained and sustainable, part of a new vision for the future of west Orange County.

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Lake Burden Neighborhood



Legend

- Property Boundary
- Waterfront Estates (1/2 Acre)
- Village Park/Open space (70' x 120')
- Cottage Park/Open space (60' x 120')
- Townhouse Park/Open space (20' x 120')
- Townhouse Standard (20' x 120')
- Village Standard (70' x 120')
- Cottage Standard (60' x 120')
- Open Space
- Lakes
- Multifamily Units
- Neighborhood Center

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