

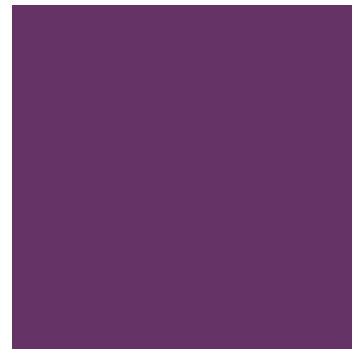


# Congress Avenue



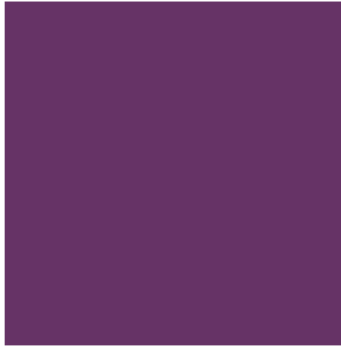
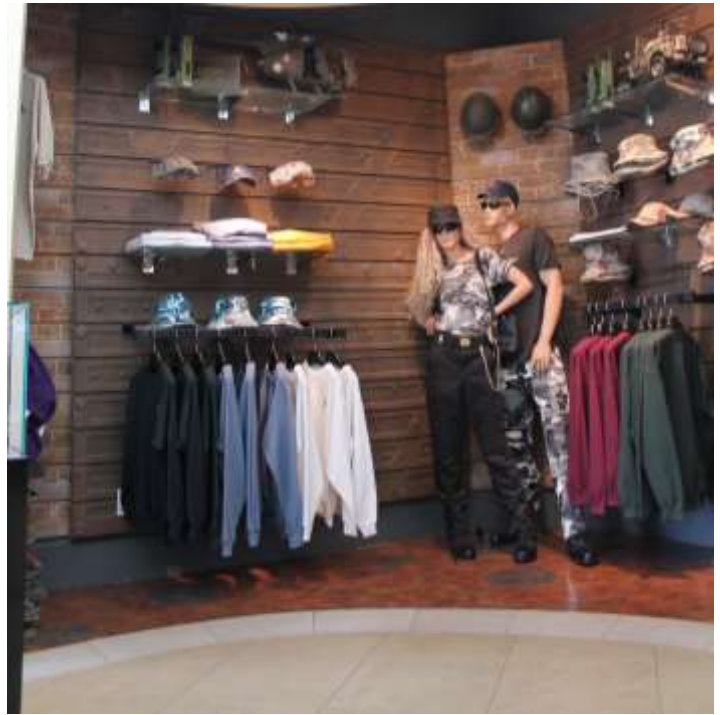
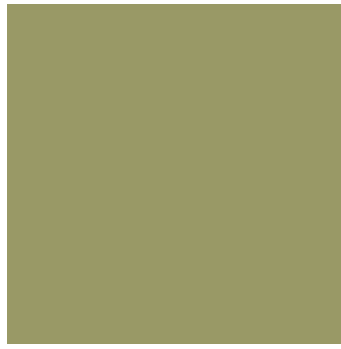
# Delray Beach's Next Great Street

*Presented by the Congress Avenue Task Force  
February 29, 2016*



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# Introduction

## Congress Avenue is Key to Delray Beach's Long-Term Success

For more than a decade, leaders in Delray Beach have recognized the potential of Congress Avenue to become Delray's "Next Great Street" and we should act now.

In order for cities to be truly successful and to generate the tax base and economic activity needed to be sustainable, they need multiple districts to perform well.

Delray Beach has been highly successful transforming its downtown into a nationally renowned destination. The city has also done tremendous work in several neighborhoods and commercial districts.

But in many ways, Congress Avenue remains the key piece to long term success.

Congress Avenue's potential for job creation, increased tax base, business incubation, workforce and affordable housing, transit-oriented development and place making should make the 4.1 mile corridor a top priority for public and private sector investment and attention.

The Task Force believes the corridor is a natural complement to the city's celebrated downtown and in many ways see a synergistic relationship between our urban core and what we hope will be a dynamic and successful corridor.

Delray Beach has proven time and again, that place making investments yield tangible and intangible returns.

The city's continuing investment in its downtown has created an economic and social powerhouse anchored by





# An Investment in Placemaking will Transform Congress Avenue

food, beverage, housing, retail and culture. The successful revitalization of the central business district and its older neighborhoods has increased property values citywide, changed Delray Beach's image and has generated a tremendous return on investment.

Similarly, we see the same opportunities along the Congress Avenue corridor.

An investment in place making—linear parks, complete streets, improved medians, public plazas and transit connectivity — will differentiate Congress Avenue in Delray Beach from our neighbors to the north and south while also benefitting from some of the successes Boca Raton and Boynton Beach have seen on Congress Avenue.

Over the past year and with City Commission interest, more than three dozen volunteers have spent countless hours studying the corridor and discussing recommendations for how to best bring about the potential we see on Congress Avenue.

The talent included residents, engineers, planners, landscape architects, real estate brokers, a university professor, land owners, investors, transportation experts, City and County representatives and economic development and business professionals.

We divided our large groups into committees to tackle aesthetics, finances, zoning, transportation, real

estate analysis, policy, branding, marketing and more and have produced a report that we believe can serve as a catalyst for transformation.

We see Congress Avenue as a key component to Delray's future success and financial sustainability.

We are passionate believers that a market exists for corporate investment, education, housing, food, retail, light industrial and government uses.

If we can connect to our downtown, we believe the transformation can happen more rapidly.

While we are bullish on the future, we also understand that we have a hard task before us.

While there are many pockets of progress and things to feel good about along the corridor, we are well aware of the amount of work that needs to be done.

There are substandard housing, crime and code conditions to deal with. There is a high level of vacancy and blighted conditions to alleviate.

This report offers practical and in some cases dramatic strategies to foster transformation.

We took a creative but real world approach to our work and look forward to next steps.

The ideas contained herein, if executed together, will create Delray's "Next Great Street."

**Jeff Perlman, Task Force Chairman**  
CDS Holdings, Delray Beach Mayor 2003-2007



# Rethinking Congress Avenue

*(Congress Avenue Corridor defined as the area bordered by Interstate 95 to the east, the E-4 canal to the west, Boynton Beach to the north and Boca Raton to the south. See Corridor map in Appendix.)*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economic Development Model

### Leadership

Public/Private Partnership vs. Public Sector

### Incentives

A la carte vs. Buffet

### Recruitment Strategy

Laser vs Shotgun

### Competitive Positioning

High Value vs. Low Cost

### Workforce Development

Talent vs. Labor

### Organization

Business Improvement Districts vs. Enterprise Zone

### Critical Infrastructure

Connectivity vs. Roads

Source: Greenstreet Ltd.

## Guiding Principles

The Task Force spent considerable time discussing and framing a new vision for Congress Avenue which would leverage existing assets while seeking to build human capacity, create unique places, establish a distinctive identity for the street and strengthen its connections and synergy with Downtown and Delray Beach's western communities.

These guiding principles seek to inspire, influence and guide future decisions, actions and approaches to Congress Avenue along with the implementation of a 21<sup>st</sup> century economic development model to ensure Congress Avenue's accelerated transformation.

1. New development and redevelopment should attract aspiring, diverse and talented people to live, work and play since jobs and other investment will follow the people.
2. Fostering an inclusive, welcoming community for all through more affordable housing choices and stellar neighborhood design.
3. Encouraging a higher intensity and increasing density with mixed uses will build vibrancy and a stronger tax base.
4. Growing the corridor's employment centers, manufacturing facilities and entrepreneur-maker-creator spaces is needed to diversify and benefit the City's local economy.
5. Making the area a destination, not just a passage way, comprised of unique users-tenants with a compelling draw that will contribute to Delray Beach's overall brand.
6. Transforming underutilized spaces into places to socialize and experience is crucial to improving the area's quality of life.
7. Linking Congress Avenue to east and west Delray Beach by building a highly mobile transportation network - emphasizing walking, biking, mass transit and not just driving - will provide a competitive advantage for the corridor.
8. Because aesthetics matter to residents, visitors, investors and placemaking, funding beautification projects and other strategic infrastructure along Congress Avenue is critical to demonstrating the City's commitment to the corridor.
9. The private sector as an engine of growth plays a key role in Congress Avenue's future success.



# Initial Assessment:

## Pockets of Progress . . . No Sense of Place



### **“Good Bones” But Needs Attention**

While some visionary property owners and investors have already created pockets of progress along Congress Avenue, most stakeholders believe the area has been largely ignored as evidenced by lack of building and landscaping maintenance, litter, graffiti, abandoned vehicles, illegal signage and generally low curb appeal.

Working with owners to refresh buildings and maintain parcels is an important first step in uplifting the area.



### **A Drive-Thru Corridor**

With six through lanes and posted speeds of 45 miles per hour, the strategically positioned corridor is regularly used as a thoroughfare (or raceway) to neighboring cities where Congress Avenue is better known as a corporate hub or a strong commercial-retail corridor.

The Task Force believes by slowing speeds, redesigning the road into a Complete Street, developing more destinations and enacting place making, Congress Avenue can revamp its character similar to the redesigns along Delray Beach’s Atlantic Avenue and Federal Highways.



### **Unfilled Potential**

Congress Avenue is a street of unfilled potential. It has broad vistas and wide rights-of-ways; significant undeveloped and underdeveloped parcels; opportunities for parks and greenways; multiple modes of transportation; proximity to schools, a municipal golf course, recreational areas and one of Florida’s preeminent downtowns.

The corridor’s 1960-70s suburban aesthetic, areas of blight, underutilized industrial sites, outdated plazas and minimal food-retail establishments are ripe for rebuilding with an urban 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibility.





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# New Vision

“A vibrant,  
24/7,  
mixed-use  
urban and  
industrious  
district for  
21<sup>st</sup> century  
life.”



# Catalysts

## From Vision to Reality

Creative catalytic strategies and solutions are needed to transform Delray Beach's Congress Avenue into a dynamic producer of jobs, tax base and prosperity for the next 30+ years. Here's what is needed most.



### Updated Zoning & Fast-Track Development Approvals

Existing zoning and other land development regulations are not keeping with the times and are serving to deter development and new businesses. As a multi modal transportation corridor, Congress Avenue needs to foster higher density and intensity through mixed uses and urban-oriented zoning versus its current suburban scale in order to thrive economically.

The creation of an expedited development services and permitting approval process for area projects will help trigger adaptive reuse and new development on the Corridor.



### Aesthetics

The overall design of the corridor should be of the highest architectural and environmental standards. More areas should be made available for parks, open space, wide sidewalks, bike paths and public art.

Medians should be updated, water features added and lighting improved to positively impact the lifestyle and look of the Corridor.

Finally, a complete signage program including gateway and banner pole signs should be implemented to distinguish the area from "anywhere USA."



### Mobility: Complete Streets & More Transit Options

Mobility - with limited reliance on cars - is key to the future success of Congress Avenue. As a Complete Street, the corridor will be equally inviting to pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motorists.

Trolleys, bus rapid transit, high tech scheduling and bike-ped paths can combine to provide the necessary instantaneous availability and mobility to Downtown, west Delray and regionally generating economic and environmental benefits.

Also, lower traffic speeds and redesigned lanes will improve safety for neighbors and children walking-bicycling to and from home, schools, neighborhood stores and other services.





# Catalysts

## From Vision to Reality



### Transit-Oriented Development

Transit-Oriented Development at or near the Delray Beach Tri-Rail Station on Congress Avenue is a transformational opportunity for the area.

By mixing office, retail, housing and other amenities like public and recreational places into a walkable neighborhood located within a half-mile of the existing Tri-Rail station, Delray Beach has the opportunity to improve access to jobs, expand mobility, increase property values and accommodate a more healthy, active, lifestyle for its neighbors and families.



### Sustainable Development & Living

The “greening” of Congress Avenue will help support the City’s commitment to sustainability and improve quality of life along the corridor.

Active public square, open space and plazas, waste to energy infrastructure, rainwater harvesting, high performance buildings, tree planting campaigns, urban agriculture, smart grid and other eco-district-like projects and initiatives will make the corridor extremely attractive to future growth and development.



### New Housing Choices

Increasing housing opportunities for varying income levels along with offering new housing choices in the Congress Avenue area will help to build its vibrancy and attract new talent.

Energy efficient equipment and high speed digital communications technology are key components to home-based work units.

Micro and modest size units in more densely populated neighborhoods will meet the ever-changing needs of the emerging millennial generation, aging boomers and new 21<sup>st</sup> century families.



# Catalysts

## From Vision to Reality



### Placemaking and Spaces Activation

Fred Kent and the team at Project for Public Spaces promote the idea that “it takes a place to create a community and a community to make a place.”

Congress Avenue is Delray Beach’s next opportunity to unleash our creativity and breathe life into new spaces and personalize our community.

Food truck rallies, warehouse art events, corporate barbecues, neighborhood camps, musical gatherings or shipping containers as the next proof of concept pop-up store are just a few of the exciting possibilities.



### A Learning Presence

It’s been a long-held desire of Delray Beach to strengthen its education system and institutions.

Attracting and developing a higher-education presence on Congress Avenue will help the community raise its educational level and provide additional lifelong learning opportunities.

Additionally, an expanding college or university offerings will improve the quality of Delray Beach’s ever-growing workforce and add to its intellectual vibrancy.

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### Naming, Identifying and Marketing

When asked where we live or work, we often identify the place by using a neighborhood name.

Developing a unique and authentic identity for Congress Avenue will require community engagement and image building. Additionally, it is anticipated that as emerging hubs, neighborhoods and larger sites along the corridor are redeveloped, new names will be created organically.

A resourced and comprehensive public relations and marketing program will be important to ensure the community and potential investors are kept ‘in-the-know.’





# Key Emerging Hubs

To ignite and accelerate momentum on Congress Avenue, building on its existing assets and synergies makes sense. Here are a few of the corridor's evolving hubs which if supported in the right ways will propel our transformation forward.



## Old School Bakery and Saltwater Brewery Area

When Old School Bakery relocated to Congress Avenue in 2003 and Saltwater Brewery opened in late 2013 around the corner, the corridor started to become a location of choice for locals, hipsters and visitors seeking to enjoy the best locally-made bread and beer in Delray Beach. As these businesses have grown so has the reputation of Congress Avenue.

As such, there is now growing interest to expand culinary crafts, urban farming and restaurants in this “makers” area.



## Palm Beach County South Administrative Center

This 7-parcel, 28.38 acre site currently houses six buildings totaling 112,500 square feet of office space. Additionally, the site features three ancillary structures, one communications tower, one fuel island, one intermodal center and more than 800 parking spaces for transit users and customers of Palm Beach County.

The County is willing to work with the City to update its master plan and is supportive of our revised long-term vision of the Corridor.



## Former Office Depot Campus

Office Depot relocated its headquarters from Delray Beach in 2008 and since then the 42-acre site has been dormant. Current owners have developed a mixed-use master plan and have declined offers by others interested in developing the land.

Some believe the site would be well-suited for an institution of higher learning, various municipal operations, large corporations, mixed-use and new residential development.



## Lake Ida Road Area

When it appeared that some of the artists residing in Artists Alley would need a new home, several considered the Lake Ida Road area. As a result, more artist-maker-tech entrepreneur types are gravitating to this area of the corridor to take advantage of some of the underutilized spaces.

Additionally, the City's vacant parcel on the NW corner of Lake Ida Road and Congress Avenue is prime for future (re)development.





# Key Recommendations

Suggested timing for recommendations to be completed (immediate < 30 days; short-term ≤ 1 year; mid-term 2-3 years; long-term ≥ 4 years) and proposed City management lead in parentheses.

## Immediate

1. Declare the redevelopment of Congress Avenue a City goal and begin to align policies, programs, funding, staffing and partnerships around it. *(City Commission)*
2. Form a public/private Congress Avenue Implementation Committee for overseeing plans, marketing the corridor and building community engagement. *(City Commission / Economic Development)*

## Short-Term

3. Update Congress Avenue zoning and land development regulations to add incentives to increase density; reduce entitlement timelines; simplify the list of permitted uses; modify the need for master development plans; reduce the minimum lot size requirement; revise building setbacks, update conditional uses and reduce the number of zoning districts (consider combining Mixed Residential Office Commercial, Mixed Industrial Commercial and Planned Commerce Center). *(Planning)*
4. Provide new fast-track permitting and development services for Congress Avenue projects and pilot a single board approval approach for (re)developments. *(Short-to-Mid-term / Planning)*
5. Complete a corridor Traffic Study to examine the feasibility of a Transportation Concurrency Management Area and identify the best places to reduce speed limits and convert Congress Avenue to a Complete Street. *(Planning / Environmental Services)*
6. Expand the Delray Beach Downtown Roundabout service to all employment centers along Congress Avenue and pilot an “express lunch shuttle” to Downtown Delray Beach. *(Environmental Services)*
7. Redesign and fund the City’s grants and incentive toolbox to help revitalize residential and commercial properties along Congress Avenue. *(Community Improvement / Economic Development)*
8. Conduct a Congress Avenue housing study and determine approaches to creating new housing options along the corridor. *(Community Improvement)*

## Mid-Term

9. Work with Palm Beach County to develop a new master plan using transit-oriented development principles and mixed uses to better serve its employees, customers and the public at its 28-acre South County Administrative Center on Congress Avenue. *(City Manager’s Office)*
10. Explore a public-private partnership with the owners of the former Office Depot site to “jumpstart” development on this key site. *(City Manager’s Office / Economic Development)*
11. Initiate and invest in an original public art and sustainable eco-scape program along the corridor. *(Environmental Services / Planning / Economic Development)*
12. Create a 10-Year Congress Avenue Master Plan and develop a funding plan for its implementation. *(Planning / Economic Development)*

## Long-Term

13. Advocate for a greenway along the E-4 canal, a network of open spaces and linear parks, a shared use pathway along the CSX railway (“rails with trails”) and a pedestrian bridge over Interstate 95. *(Long-term / Planning-Environmental Services)*



# Next Steps

Once the City Commission provides policy direction and declares the redevelopment of Congress Avenue a new City goal, the following tasks and activities are anticipated.

1. Request the formal adoption of the Congress Avenue Task Force's recommendations at an April 2016 Regular City Commission meeting.
2. Form the new public/private Congress Avenue Implementation Committee and begin meeting bi-monthly.
3. Hire a planning consultant to assist with preparing amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations to minimize the impediments to economic development along the corridor and to support the vision and development patterns being recommended by the Task Force.
4. Launch an internal cross-functional Congress Avenue "GO" team to agree to a new level of service for Congress Avenue and integrate into the City's three-year strategic planning-budget cycles.
5. Meet with Palm Beach County elected officials and County Administration to present the new vision and make a request that the South County Administrative Center master plan be updated using the corridor's new guiding principles.
6. Submit applications for local initiative and transportation alternative grants to fund future greenway and Complete Street construction programs.
7. Conduct a Congress Avenue Business Walk with economic development partners and City departments.
8. Update and expand Community Improvement resources such as code enforcement and neighborhood services to Congress Avenue.
9. Develop and begin executing a community activation, marketing and public relations plan for Congress Avenue and continue to meet with residents, tenants, property owners and stakeholders to gather feedback, ideas and report progress.
10. Conduct an updated 'hard and green' infrastructure needs analysis of Congress Avenue to support the area's future development potential.
11. Hire a firm to provide an economic impact and market analysis of the Congress Avenue corridor.
12. Assign resources and funding to create a 10-Year Congress Avenue Master Plan before Spring 2018.



# Special Thanks & Acknowledgements

The Congress Avenue Task Force with partners, stakeholders, neighbors and City staff worked determinedly since April 2015 to assess the corridor and dream about its possibilities. They are champions for Congress Avenue and they invite you to join in and make the vision reality. Sign up at [www.congressavenuedelray.com](http://www.congressavenuedelray.com) or [mydelraybeach.com](http://mydelraybeach.com) to get involved.



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Delray Beach Public Arts Advisory Board

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Page 7: Fresh Market and Saltwater Brewery

**“Great cities need more  
than just one great street  
– they need many great  
streets that connect  
people to key  
destinations and  
places.”**

*- Project for Public Spaces*



# **Congress Avenue:** Delray Beach's Next Great Street

For more information on Delray Beach's Congress Avenue, contact the Office of Economic Development at 561.243.7009 or visit [congressavenuedelray.com](http://congressavenuedelray.com) or [mydelraybeach.com](http://mydelraybeach.com).