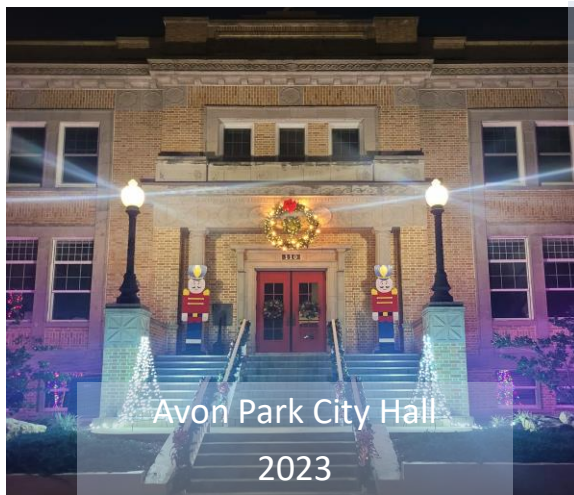


# AVON PARK COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY



## ANNUAL REPORT FY 2022 - 2023



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**CRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

\* The City Council also functions as the CRA Board of Directors.

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**VICE CHAIR**

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## INTRODUCTION

Government has a variety of techniques to improve or stabilize declining areas. The City of Avon Park has used the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) to address many of the City's issues. The CRA is funded through tax increment funding from the County and City and uses the increase in property values, not new taxes, to improve or participate in funding activities that directly benefit the redevelopment area.

To cultivate positive redevelopment, the CRA:

- Orchestrates orderly and progressive business development initiatives;
- Facilitates infrastructure and other public improvements to stimulate private investment;
- Encourages the creation of affordable housing, and
- Produces events and seminars that foster economic development and build a sense of community.

CRA's work for Florida communities. When a CRA uses tools to reinvest and guide future redevelopment, it creates opportunities for other partners to join in the community's revitalization. The result is a more vibrant, healthy, and engaged community for everyone.

The CRA develops and implements strategic community redevelopment plans to expand economic opportunities and foster dynamic commercial and residential environments. The agency also leverages resources and establishes partnerships with organizations to further its mission and improve neighborhood quality of life.

The CRA is a dependent special district of the City and has specific requirements established by Florida law. Since its inception in 1988, the CRA has undergone tremendous change; in 2016, the three redevelopment plans were updated, and the boundaries of the Main Street and Southside areas were expanded. This annual report, required by F.S. 163, Part III, highlights the activities of the CRA for Fiscal Year 2022 to 2023 (October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023).

## PART ONE – HISTORY OF AVON PARK



The City of Avon Park was incorporated in 1926. The first permanent settler in Avon Park was Oliver Martin Crosby, a Connecticut native who moved to the area to study the Everglades’ wildlife. In 1885 he entered the frontier of the territory he named Lake Forest. Mr. Crosby and another investor had purchased 20,000 acres of land for \$50,000.00 from a man named Hamilton Disston of Philadelphia, who had previously purchased 4,000,000 acres of

territory from the state of Florida. Mr. Crosby intended to survey off and sell the property to interested parties and receive a return on his investment. He hired a man named William King, who was from England, to manage the town’s development while Mr. Crosby took care of the financial business of selling property.

In 1885 Lake Forest was, as the name implies, a forest with many lakes. For Mr. Crosby to interest clients to purchase the property, he needed a place for prospective buyers to stay while being shown property. A hotel, built from the standing pine trees where it sat, began construction in 1887 and was finished in 1889. Built on Lake Verona’s shore and fittingly named Verona Hotel, it was regularly filled to the capacity of its 32 rooms. In his exploits to develop the town of Sebring, George Sebring frequently stayed at the Verona Hotel. By 1886, enough people had followed that the town of “Lake Forest” was incorporated. Mr. King’s wife, Mary, joined her husband in Lake Forest and convinced Crosby that the area was reminiscent of her English home of Stratford-upon-Avon and persuaded him to change the name of the settlement to Avon Park.

The closest early transportation line was the railroad in Ft. Meade, which was the line’s end. Mr. Crosby would send wagons to Ft. Meade to fetch his prospective clients and they would be registered in the Verona Hotel once they arrived. The hotel was the social center of the town. Everything happened there. Church services were held there until the various denominations constructed their own churches. A bandstand was built on the grounds to entertain the hotel guests and residents. As the town was growing around the Main Street area, the bandstand was moved in 1912 to the Main Street Area and when the double drive mall was completed in 1922, the bandstand was moved to its present location.

The Verona Hotel was heavily damaged by fire in 1926 and was demolished. Salvaged lumber was used in numerous construction sites around the town. There are more than likely structures in Avon Park still standing containing lumber from the Verona Hotel. Construction-

on the Jacaranda Hotel had recently been completed. Also, the Florida “boom” was in full progress, and Avon Park developed into one of the nicest small towns in central Florida. (Avon Park Historical Society)

## PART TWO - NEW BEGINNINGS



Every good redevelopment plan starts with a vision, one that all the stakeholders share. Visions are about possibilities, ideals, and standards of excellence, as much as they are about people, bricks, and mortar. There are no magic bullets, and redevelopment takes time. There are a variety of resources to address community redevelopment needs. Solutions to some problems may simply require amendments to the zoning code. Others may require institutional changes

that allow the flow of information to move smoothly through the governmental system. While still others may require the construction of infrastructure, both physical, i.e., bricks and mortar, and social, i.e., human capacity. The CRA has been working for 30 years to find solutions to many of the issues facing cities today.

The City of Avon Park takes great pride in its people and its community. The resulting redevelopment plans for Main Street and Southside (Maps 2 and 3) were missing one thing that all redevelopment plans should include – a sense of place. The documents were inadequate for many reasons, the least of which was their comprehensive plan-like nature. This is not a bad thing if the intent is to identify goals and the projects that will implement the goals. Unlike a comprehensive plan that serves broader categories of activities which many people may not have the opportunity to appreciate because of their subtle effects, redevelopment plans can have an immediate impact. Therefore, the document should stir excitement and hope, not only for the physical improvements shown on a map, but also for those things that “stir men’s minds.” These things can be beautiful streets, parks, and homes as well as for jobs and inclusive amenities.

Redevelopment, for many communities, is the catalyst for private sector investment. Avon Park is fortunate to have had private development throughout the City. Recently, most of that has been outside the redevelopment area. Much of the choice to develop comes down to land values and visibility. This has been a significant factor in the location of new development in the City with transit-oriented commercial development along U.S. 27. Redevelopment also has a lot to do with the improvements the City itself makes to an area. If it looks like the community is not willing to spend funds to make improvements, then developers look elsewhere. The U.S.-

27 corridor is a perfect example of this. Start at either the southern entrance or the northern entrance; these are the gateways into the City. But what is striking is that the first impression is of a roadway to move cars through Avon Park. There is nothing there to distinguish Avon Park from any other place along this roadway and nothing that captures passers-by.

## PART THREE - REDEVELOPMENT BACKGROUND



THE JACARANDA HOTEL — Avon Park, Florida

Plans themselves, however, are only as good as the visions that inspire them and the actions that implement them. Daniel Burnham, a well-known planner of the late 19th and early 20th century once wrote: “Make no little plans, for they have not the power to stir men’s minds.” The plans that will be developed within the community redevelopment area(s) must encompass the ideals of the community and be limited only by the visions of the people who create them. Planners

have been interested in the neighborhood as a catalyst for redevelopment for over 100 years. Its roots are in the final decades of the 19th Century, as America tried to understand and shape the modern city. It was during this time that the neighborhood was considered to have an almost symbiotic relationship with other neighborhoods and the city itself. It has become clear over the last century that planning is just one step in the overall organizing process. Used as a tool, planning can help blaze a path to revitalization. If, however, creating the plan becomes the ultimate goal of organizing, neighborhoods will quickly find themselves at a dead end: a plan with no constituency or clout.

The neighborhood level of redevelopment is as critical as any large-scale citywide project which seeks to improve the quality of life for its residents. There is a hierarchy that is casually observed but must be accommodated both socially and physically. The hierarchy begins at the personal neighborhood demarcated by the people that live nearby. There is also a larger functional neighborhood, perhaps centering on a school or shopping area; and finally, there is the loose identity with the community as a whole (the city). The connections between people go beyond the neighborhood, and in the case of redevelopment, these linkages play vital roles.



## **PART FOUR: CRA OBJECTIVES**

### **Redevelopment Objectives**

Both the Main Street and Southside areas have consistent objectives for redevelopment. However, the Airport redevelopment plan relies heavily on outside funding for capital improvements and is not included here. The objectives for the Main Street and Southside CRA's are identified below:

**Review return on investment on CRA projects:** Each CRA project should show its ability to increase property values and the tax base. An analysis of the potential for a return on investment may be included in staff reports.

**Conservative, fiscal-driven growth:** CRA spending should be planned conservatively with adequate bids on projects contracted out to private companies. The CRA budget should be balanced, and any debt should be carefully considered.

**Ensure business-friendly implementation of building and zoning codes:** Building and zoning codes provide an important role in protecting the health and safety of residents and property rights and values. Predictable and efficient implementation of the building and zoning codes allows businesses to move forward and make investments.

**Enhance attractive, small-town atmosphere for residents and visitors:** The charm of Avon Park is its casual, laid-back atmosphere that is attractive for families and visitors. Improving Avon Park's attractiveness and aesthetics will enhance community pride and attract new customers.

**Attract uses that serve the local community:** Avon Park residents enjoy patronizing local businesses. The community spirit is enhanced by working, shopping, eating out, and recreating with neighbors near their homes. New uses should fit the needs of Avon Park residents.

**Utilize Communities for Lifetime principles:** Seniors are well-served by having medical, commercial, social, and recreational services nearby within the community. Diversifying uses and ensuring the availability of programming for seniors will allow Avon Park residents to comfortably "age in place."

**Increase employment:** Providing jobs for Avon Park residents within the CRA enhances community and ensures additional private capital is invested within the City. Providing employment opportunities within the City increases the overall viability of the local economy.

**Enhance tax base:** Enhancing the tax base is the goal of the CRA. Improving property values in the CRA will allow the City to maintain its reduced millage rates. This will allow the tax burden to be more equitably spread out through the community.

## **PART FIVE: CRA CORR DINATOR INITIATIVES**



**Monthly Calendar:** A monthly calendar was created in September 2023 and quickly became a unifying force for the community. People were pleased to see events in their city highlighted in printed form and many were surprised at the number of events in such a small city. With some research and publicity, the calendar listing grew to become a symbol of pride and increased the success and number of many events in Avon Park.

Additional benefits included storefronts posting the calendar and increasing interest; creating expectations among the citizens who now depend on this monthly update; and increasing the amount of events among groups who want to join the momentum. Many calendars were distributed by hand each month, which gave CRA staff the opportunity to engage business owners and community leaders. The calendar became an ice breaker and began discussions about the town’s history, successful events, and how to improve the city with entertainment options. There were many free-flowing conversations that inspired new ideas and innovative programs to address the challenges and opportunities ahead.

**Community Survey:** A community survey was created in September 2023 to determine the needs of the community and what capital improvements are most desired. The survey was distributed through personal visits to area businesses, civic meetings, various events, and organizations, plus online through the city’s website and social media platforms. It was also publicized through traditional and new media. Approximately 115 surveys were submitted and tabulated, with the results showing clear preferences for some items. This will give us an informed snapshot of what residents are expecting from their CRA. It also highlighted efforts by the CRA to engage the community and learn more from the insights of its citizens.

**Lakes of Avon Park:** Highlands County is known for its many lakes and Avon Park has plenty of waterfront living and activities. There are three lakes within the city limits and 13 that border the City. The CRA created the first complete listing of lakes, including details about size, depth, and access. This is a valuable device for full-time and part-time residents, newcomers, and visitors to discover the amenities available for recreation on the water. Recreational divers were sought and in December 2023 a group of diving instructors from Orlando did a reconnaissance dive. They experienced 45 feet of visibility and agreed that it was a good spot for instruction and recreation. Suggestions made included a diving dock and signage at the boat ramp.

**Inventory:** An inventory of vacant buildings along Main Street was created and widely distributed to interested parties. This included property strap numbers, building age, approximate size, and information on the owner(s). It has generated a lot of interest in the downtown area and several real estate transactions have occurred recently. Another inventory was conducted of the available parking spaces downtown. This will help with the planning of events, new businesses, and the placement of signage for visitors and seasonal residents.

**Media Relations:** Several media outlets were contacted to announce the hiring of a CRA Coordinator, upcoming plans, and events. This has led to a strong rapport with journalists and has generated numerous articles and interviews about businesses and activities in Avon Park.

## **PART SIX: CRA PROGRAMS**

### **CRA Assistance and Grant Programs**

The following programs are consistent with the overall objectives of both Main Street and Southside.

**Event Expenditures:** Event Grants had been made available to individuals and organizations on a case-by-case basis to include available funding (**Grants of this type are no longer authorized, which was brought to all municipalities with CRA's attention by memorandum from FRA General Council and reviewed by the city attorney**). They had to be approved in advance by the CRA upon recommendation by the Advisory Board. All paid receipts and returned checks had to be provided within two months of the event. The following event expenditures had already been approved prior to the memorandum being received.

Event Grants	
Avon Park Rotary Blueberry Festival	\$1,000
Heartland Cultural Alliance Fusion Fest 2023	\$995
Total	\$1,995

**Facade Improvement Grants:** These grants provide funds for exterior improvements costing up to \$5,000. Once approved, funds are made directly to the contractor performing the service and the grant recipient will need to claim the grant amount as income. Projects started before grant application are not eligible.

Home Facade Grants are made available for individuals residing within the Main Street and Southside Districts. Grants only apply to the exterior of the building.

Business Matching Facade Grants are available to improve storefronts within the Main Street and Southside Districts.

**Facade Grant Recipients:**

Southside CRA District		
Patricia Carter	508 S. Delaney Avenue- Painting	\$3,500
Fernald Davis	1216 S. Carolina Avenue- Painting, Soffit & Facia replacement	\$4,940
Otis and Jewell A. Culbreth	1258 Memorial Drive- Pressure clean exterior home	\$4,895
Prince and Roberta Martin	515 W. Hood Street- Pressure clean exterior home.	\$3,555
Lauren & Lewis McRae	1016 S. Delaney Avenue- Painting	\$4,010
Patricia Owens	1183 Memorial Drive- Remove and replace damaged wood, re-seal window, repair roof joist, remove and replace screen door - Awaiting repairs for hail damage.	\$4,320
Cheryl Darlene Williams	407 W Delaney Lane- Pressure wash home, paint exterior	\$3,250
<b>Total:</b>		\$28,470

Main Street CRA District		
Ruth Fleming	406 E Pleasant Street- Pressure wash home, seal windows, paint exterior and trim	\$4,145
Patricia Gase	221 E. Walnut Street- Paint exterior of home.	\$4,400
Brittany and Charles Johnson	201 S Delaney Avenue: Pressure wash home, seal windows, paint exterior	\$4,400
Stephanie Hodges	236 E Camphor Street: Paint home's exterior	\$4,585
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$17,530</b>

**Demolition Grants:** The purpose of the Demolition Program is to provide grants to eligible applicants on a first come, first served basis with remaining funds after grants for government demolitions, with the intent to reduce or eliminate the costs associated with the removal of substandard, uninhabited, or unsafe structures when the cost to rehabilitate is not financially feasible. Properties must be located within the boundaries of the Avon Park Community Redevelopment Agency to be eligible for grant funds. Up to 100% of cost, not to exceed \$15,000 for residential structures and up to \$25,000 for commercial structures, and up to \$50,000 for government demolitions.

**Demolition Grant Recipients**

Main Street CRA District		
Government Demolition	908 Dyal Street	\$5,588
Government Demolition	42 N Railroad Avenue	\$9,775
Government Demolition	120 S. Railroad Avenue (Project is still ongoing)	\$2,925 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$18,288</b>

<sup>1</sup> \* Total indicates all funds spent on the project in the 2022-2023 Fiscal Year

Southside CRA District		
Government Demolition	912 S Carolina Avenue	\$10,575
		<b>Total</b> \$10,575

**Community Investments:** The items in this category are initiated by the CRA and have helped improve both historic structures and provided additional incentives for people to come down to the Main Street shopping area.

\*There were none in FY 2022-2023

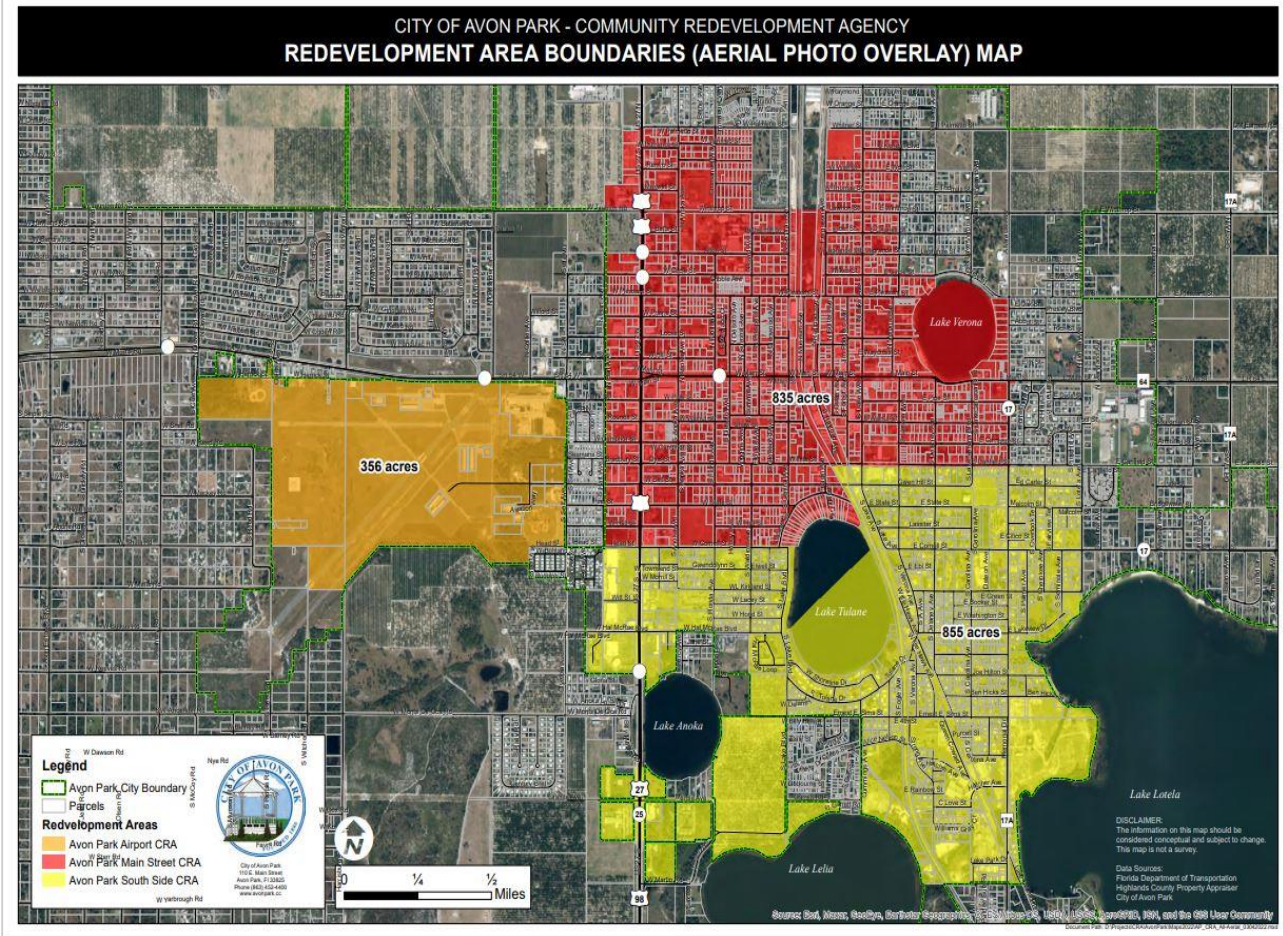
## PART SEVEN: CRA TARGET AREAS



The Avon Park Community Redevelopment Agency oversees the activities within three areas which include approximately 2,094 acres. The three CRA redevelopment target areas are Main Street, Southside, and Airport. These areas are shown in the following maps. Also, each map has a corresponding table that shows the original taxable value and the current taxable value for the area, including additions to Main Street and Southside



# Map 1. Avon Park Redevelopment Areas



Source: Central Florida Regional Planning Council (“CFRPC”), 2022

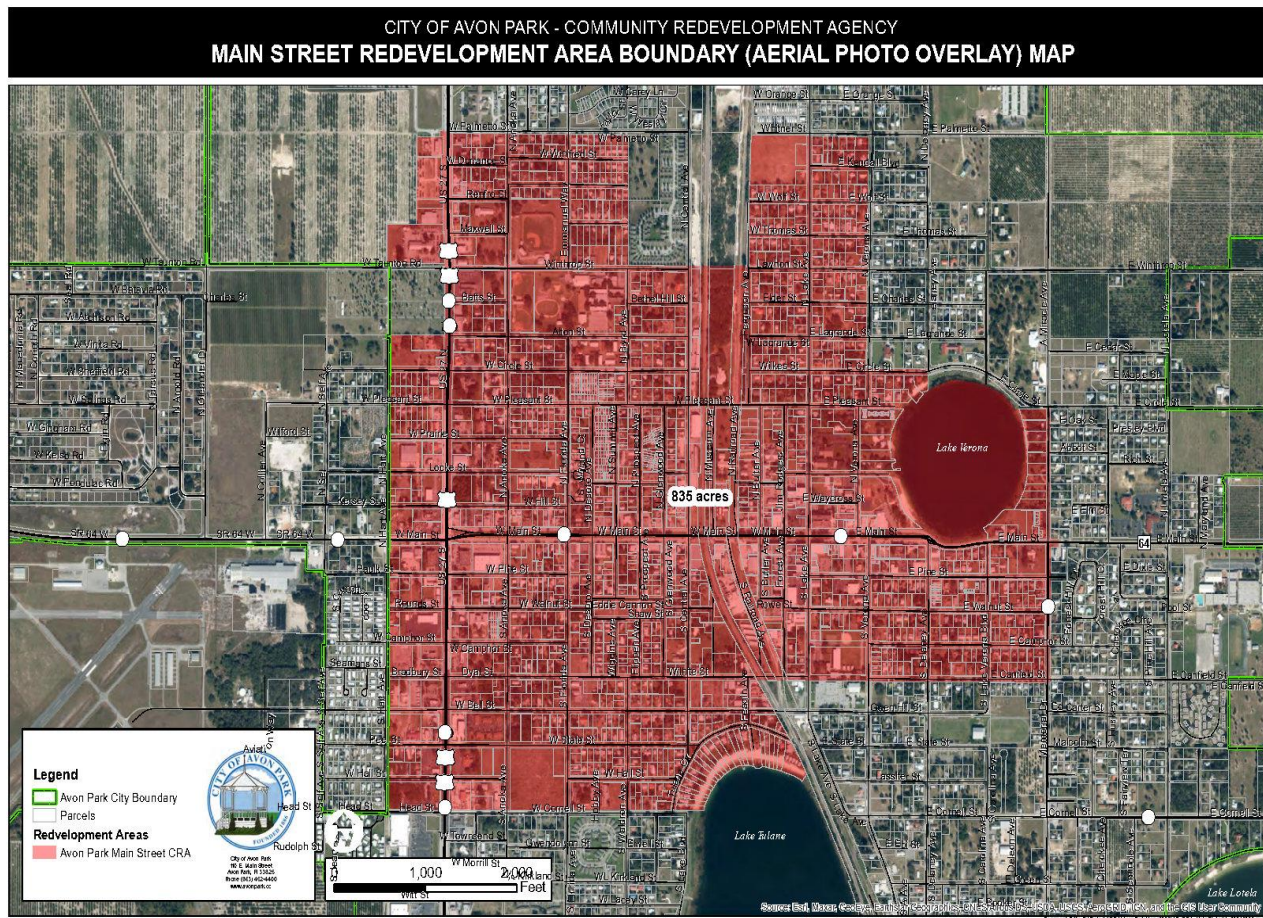
CRA Area	Base Year Taxable Value	Current Total Taxable Value
Main Street	\$63,421,733*	\$120,932,218
Southside	\$35,668,856*	\$59,660,112
Airport	\$1,587,463	\$4,549,391

**Table 1. Cumulative Taxable Values in CRA Areas**

\*Includes original area and expanded area



## Map 2. Main Street Redevelopment Area



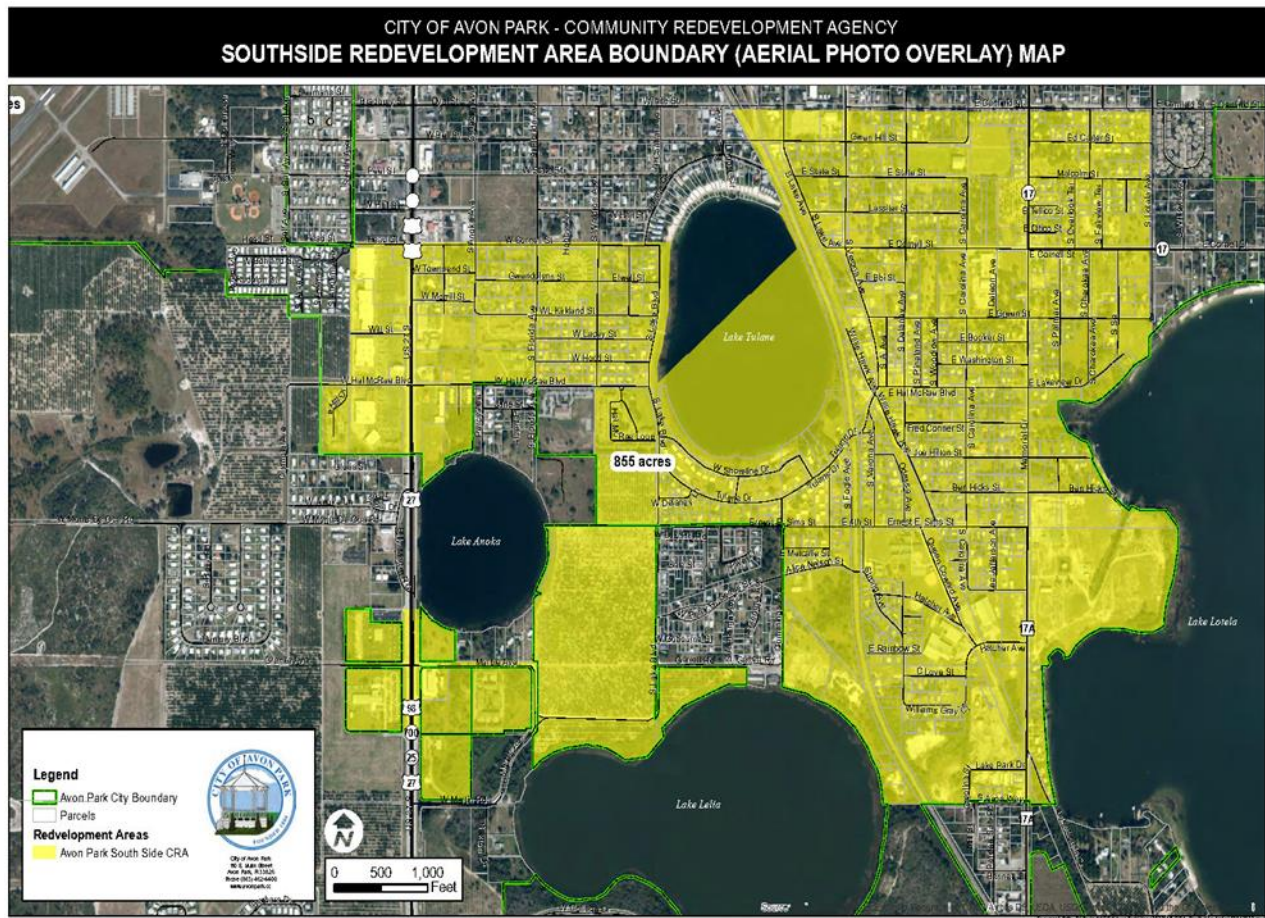
Source: Central Florida Regional Planning Council (“CFRPC”), 2022

	Initial Taxable	Current Taxable	Increase
Addition	\$43,979,023	\$71,764,598	\$27,785,575
Base Year	\$19,442,710	\$49,167,620	\$29,724,910

**Table 2. Main Street Taxable Values - Base Year vs. Current Year**



### Map 3. Southside Redevelopment Area

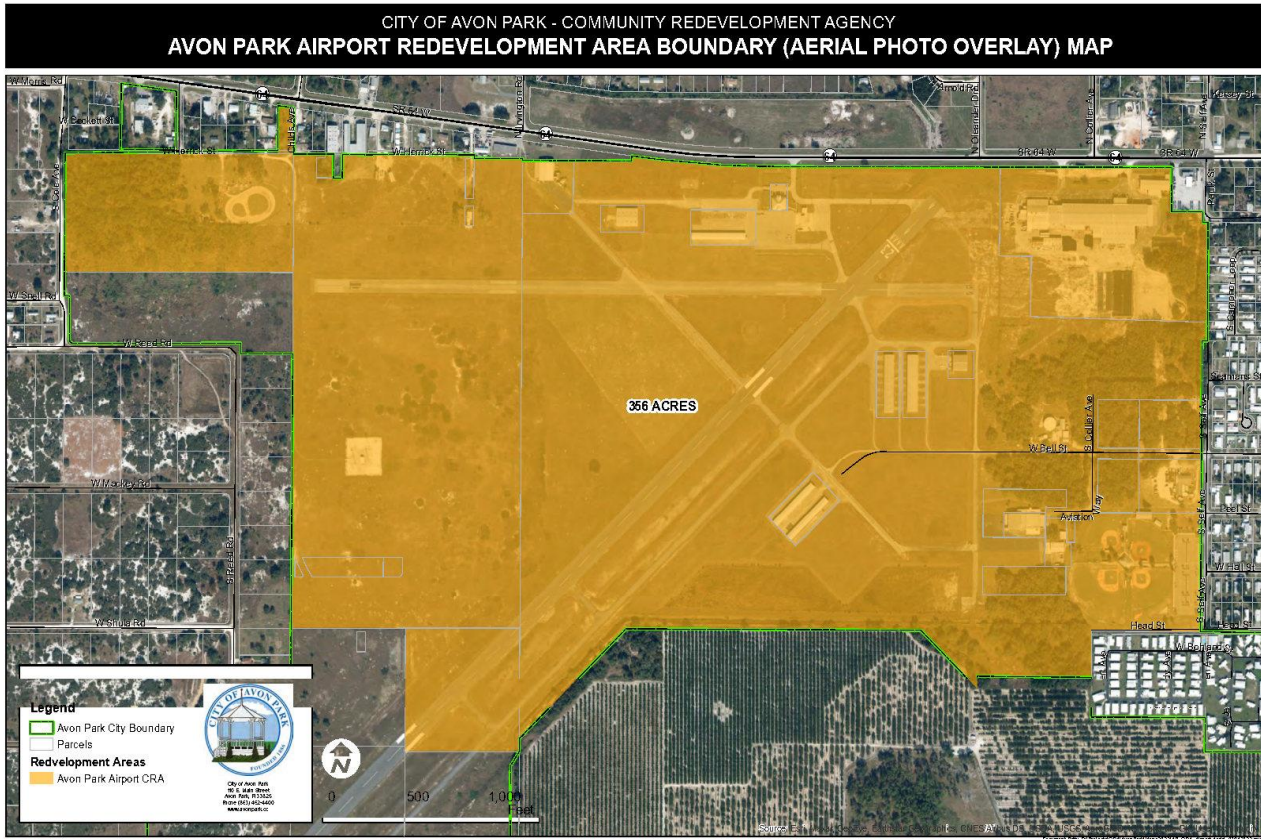


Source: Central Florida Regional Planning Council (“CFRPC”), 2022

**Table 3. Southside Taxable Values - Base Year vs. Current Year**

	Initial Taxable	Current Taxable	Increase
Addition	\$25,396,804	\$35,210,515	\$9,813,711
Base Year	\$10,272,052	\$24,449,597	\$14,177,545

## Map 4. Airport Redevelopment Area



Source: Central Florida Regional Planning Council (“CFRPC”), 2022

**Table 4. Airport Taxable Value - Base Year vs. Current Year**

	Initial Taxable Value	Current Taxable Value	Increase
Base Year Original	\$1,587,463	\$4,549,391	\$2,961,928

## PART EIGHT: CRA Property Values

“Tax increment value” is the cumulative increase in taxable value from the base year to the current year within the defined geographic area. It is used to determine the payment to a redevelopment trust fund under:

- § 163.387(1), F.S. or
- An ordinance, resolution, or agreement to fund a project or finance essential infrastructure. In this case, the taxing authority must certify the boundaries and beginning date to the property appraiser.

“Dedicated increment value” is the portion of the tax increment value used to determine the redevelopment trust fund’s payment. (See § 200.001(8)(h), F.S.)

The numbers and description shown are from the required form DR-420TIF “TAX INCREMENT ADJUSTMENT WORKSHEET” submitted to the City by the Highlands County Property Appraiser.

**Table 5. Main Street Area Property Values**

MainStreet-Original	
1. CurrentYearTaxableValueinArea	\$49,167,620
2. BaseYearTaxableValueinArea	\$19,442,710
3. CurrentYearTaxIncrementValue	\$29,724,910
4. Dedicated Increment Value (@ 95%)	\$28,238,665

Source: Highlands County Property Appraiser, 2023

**Table 6. Main Street Addition Property Values**

MainStreet-Addition	
1. CurrentYearTaxableValueinArea	\$71,764,598
2. BaseYearTaxableValueinArea	\$43,979,023
3. CurrentYearTaxIncrementValue	\$27,785,575
4. Dedicated Increment Value (@ 95%)	\$26,396,296

Source: Highlands County Property Appraiser, 2023

**Table 7. Southside Area Property Values**

Southside - Original	
1. CurrentYearTaxableValueinArea	\$24,449,597
2. BaseYearTaxableValueinArea	\$10,272,052
3. CurrentYearTaxIncrementValue	\$14,177,545
4. Dedicated Increment Value (@ 95%)	\$13,468,668

Source: Highlands County Property Appraiser, 2023

**Table 8. Southside Addition Property Values**

Southside - Addition	
1. CurrentYearTaxableValueinArea	\$35,210,515
2. BaseYearTaxableValueinArea	\$25,396,804
3. CurrentYearTaxIncrementValue	\$9,813,711
4. Dedicated Increment Value (@ 95%)	\$9,323,025

Source: Highlands County Property Appraiser, 2023

**Table 9. Airport Area Property Values**

Airport	
1. CurrentYearTaxableValueinArea	\$4,549,391
2. BaseYearTaxableValueinArea	\$1,587,463
3. CurrentYearTaxIncrementValue	\$2,961,928
4. Dedicated Increment Value (@ 95%)	\$2,813,832

Source: Highlands County Property Appraiser, 2023

## PART NINE: FINANCIAL SUMMARY

As a dependent special district of the City of Avon Park, the CRA has the ability to have its budget shown within the City's budget, which it has done over the years. The CRA's audit report is submitted, along with the City's, to the appropriate State Departments for compliance. Below is the required Financial Statement, listing the CRA's Assets, Liabilities, and Fund Balance for FY2022-2023. \*

**Table 10. CRA Assets as of September 30, 2023**

EQUITY in POOLED CASH and CASH EQUIVALENTS	\$1,326,785
CRA Real Property: 1921 Whitehurst Road	\$45,783
TOTAL ASSETS	\$1,372,568

Source: City of Avon Park, 2023

**Table 11. CRA Liabilities as of September 30, 2023**

ACCOUNTS PAYABLE and ACCRUED LIABILITIES	\$4,725
ADVANCE FROM OTHER FUND	\$0
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$4,725

Source: City of Avon Park, 2023

**Table 12. CRA Fund Balances as of September 30, 2022**

COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT	\$1,326,785
TOTAL FUND BALANCE	\$0
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE	\$1,326,785

Source: City of Avon Park, 2023

\* These are preliminary numbers. The City has not completed its audit for FY 2022-2023.



## PART TEN: CRA BUDGETS

The following expenditures for projects and programs are statutorily tied to the implementing redevelopment plan. The page number(s) in the following tables refer to the specific project or program as identified in the respective redevelopment plans, updated in 2016. Expenditures of trust fund dollars must be identified in the redevelopment plan, according to state statutes.

**Figure 1. CRA Main Street Budget**

Description	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Executive Salaries	0	0	0
Regular Salaries	0	0	8,510
FICA	0	0	770
FRS Contribution	0	0	1,360
Life & Health Insurance	0	0	30
UHC	0	0	800
Workers' Comp	0	0	0
Accounting & Auditing	500	1,000	2,220
Other Contractual	0	3,250	6,050
CRA Director	0	0	27,570
Pre-Employment	0	0	100
Travel & Per Diem	0	0	1,000
Communications	0	0	300
Postage	0	0	450
Façade Grants	29,281	230,000	300,000
Demos/Foreclosures	0	0	100,000
Event Sponsorship	0	20,000	25,000
Memberships & Dues	140	150	150
Operating Supplies	0	0	100
Special Projects	0	0	200,000

Source: Avon Park, 2023

**Figure 2. CRA Southside Budget**

<b>Description</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
Executive Salaries	0	0	0
Regular Salaries	0	0	10,000
FICA	0	0	770
FRS Contribution	0	0	1,360
Life & Health Insurance	0	0	20
UHC	0	0	410
Accounting & Auditing	500	1,000	2,200
Other Contractual	1,500	3,250	2,150
CRA Director	0	0	7,220
Pre-Employment	0	0	100
Façade Grants	44,933	100,000	110,000
Demos/Foreclosures	1,500	0	50,000
Event Sponsorship	0	0	10,000
Memberships & Dues	50	50	150
Special Projects	0	0	135,140

Source: Avon Park, 2023

**Figure 3. CRA Airport Budget**

<b>Description</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>
Executive Salaries	0	0	0
Regular Salaries	0	0	0
FICA	0	0	0
FRS Contribution	0	0	0
Life & Health Insurance	0	0	0
UHC	0	0	0
Accounting & Auditing	0	0	2,000
Other Contractual	6,500	1,000	0
Ball Field/Matching	0	0	84,000
Memberships & Dues	2,100	150	140
Special Projects	0	0	120,000

Source: Avon Park, 2023