

# Affordable Workforce Housing

## Planning a community in South Walton that we can call home

By Tom Cordi  
Executive Director,  
Seaside Institute

Do you ever wonder where the “essential” workers live, those workers who do not qualify for remote work — the school teachers, police officers, firefighters, small business owners, clerks, artists, chefs, servers, construction and maintenance workers, caregivers, and health workers of our community? Given the high cost of living in South Walton, it’s a good bet that they do not live here.

Lest you think that the lack of affordable housing, or workforce housing, developed out of the blue due to the mysterious working of the invisible hand of the marketplace, it was a development foreseen way back in 1994 when the population of South Walton was half of what it is today.

In 1994, the South Walton Conservation and Development Trust spent 18 months and more than \$1million to prepare a conservation and development plan that, had it been fully implemented, would have changed the course of development in South Walton.

This comprehensive effort covered elements such as land use, education, transportation and mobility, housing, environment, recreation/open space/greenways, infrastructure and conservation/coastal zone protection. This strategic plan provided a vision for the long-term conservation and development of South Walton, a dynamic vision of the future.

For example, take the issue of affordable housing, sometimes called workforce housing. In 1994, the South Walton Conservation and Land Trust developed an “affordable housing” strategy to develop affordable communities, in village-like settings, not unlike the walkable New Urbanist communi-

ties found on Scenic 30A today.

Policies mandated that affordable housing should be distributed throughout South Walton, and not concentrated in single development projects. It encouraged the provision of a minimum of 10 percent low- and moderate-income housing. All state-owned properties disposed as neighborhood, conservation residential or coastal center should have an affordable housing requirement.

By 1996, it called for the establishment of a housing trust fund through taxes, fees, and other creative revenue sources for the production of low- and moderate-income housing. It called for a coordinated public-private partnership to encourage development through incentives (increased density) to developers who will devote 20 percent of their development to affordable housing. It called for the establishment of a hospitality industry affordable housing group to develop a plan to deliver affordable housing for workers, as well as a transportation plan.

One of the most creative suggestions was to create a new town near the intersection of US98 and US331. A new place that mixed schools, workplaces, civic and public uses with a variety of housing types and densities. A series of neighborhoods built in harmony with the natural environment. A village cluster with a school and community center at its hub. On state land, it was recommended that a series of neighborhoods be created that were connected by recreation and educational opportunities with a town center. A mixed-use development with an affordable housing component.

We built a civic center, schools and library, but we never developed the housing and neighborhoods. One must drive a car to get to this town center since there is little or no public transportation. This was an opportuni-



A group takes a walking tour during Seaside Prize weekend.

ty to create a walkable city center but instead, we devoted vast tracts of land for parking rather than housing.

Clearly, had the vision created by this plan been realized, we would not be where we are today. The study predicted that we would experience sprawl, overdevelopment, loss of wetlands, traffic congestion and a lack of workforce housing unless the steps outlined in the plan were implemented. It was thought then that the plan was our last chance to change the course of development in South Walton. Although many of the elements of the plan were later incorporated into our current comprehensive plan, there’s still much work to be done. The current plan was developed in 2011, and much development has taken place during the last decade.

We believe there is still hope if we act now. But first, we need to resurrect this strategic planning process. Let us revisit this plan and determine which policies and implementation steps are still relevant given the current state of development. We need a vision to guide future development. We need to engage the public in this planning process.

Do we still want to continue the sprawl of development creating further

dependence on the automobile? Do we want to connect our communities with public transit and opportunities for biking and other forms of micro-mobility? How can we bring our built environment in harmony with the wonders of our natural environment? How can we promote sustainable development that is resilient and adaptive to the climate changes we are experiencing?

Let’s resurrect the strategic planning process that was our goal in 1994, so we can truly determine our future development. We need to do a new environmental inventory. One that will provide protection of rare and endangered species and their habitat, including wetlands. One that ensures sustainable water resources and water quality. One that defines a network of greenways — parks, recreation and ecology. One that builds necessary infrastructure before further development occurs. One that can accommodate affordable work force housing. These were the goals in 1994, and they are still relevant today.

Let’s create the kind of community where we all can put down roots, and create a more diverse and equitable community that benefits all, including our workers. A community that we all can call HOME.

## Seaside Institute announces new members of Board of Governors

The Seaside Institute welcomes our newest members to our Board of Governors. A few of these names, you might recognize, and all have interesting backgrounds and specializations that significantly contribute to the mission of the Seaside

Institute to Inspire Livable Communities. Read more about these individuals on our website.



John Robert Smith



Lisa Burwell



Micah Davis



Mike Ragsdale

## Otocast

It is the year anniversary since Seaside Institute launched Seaside’s very own self-guided walking tour. Have you walked through Rose Walk? What about the Pyramid landmark? Download the Otocast app by scanning the QR code to the right and be guided down iconic

Krier Walks to some of Seaside’s hidden landscapes. Hear the personal accounts of the architects, designers and planners who brought you Seaside.



## Charter Awards

The Seaside Institute team recently returned from Oklahoma City attending the weeklong event, CNU30. We met with architects, planners and the like to discuss New Urbanist principles and honor Dhuru Thadani on receiving a 2022 Charter Award for his work on the Krier Plaza. Krier Plaza won an award in the Neighborhood, District, and Corridor category for its role in the evolution of the Civic Realm in Seaside.

It demonstrates how New Urbanist principles can inspire architects to solve problems. What was once the backside of Bud & Alley’s Waterfront Dining facing the Square is now an open passage to the sea.

Read “How Seaside’s Public Space has Improved Over Time,” by Robert Steuterville” by scanning the code here:



## Seaside Prize Recap

The 2022 Annual Seaside Prize was held March 4 – 6 honoring Jeff Speck, FAICP, FCNU, LEED-AP, Honorary ASLA. The Seaside Institute awards the Seaside Prize to individuals, organizations, or communities who have made major contributions to the quality and character of their community. Seaside Prize winners are leaders in urban design, planning, architecture, development, and education, having a major influence on how towns and cities can best be built and re-built to reflect and promote New Urbanist princi-

ples. These elements: walkability, diversity, design, beauty, and sustainability are exemplified in more than 200 New Urban communities throughout the United States which inspire and enrich quality of life.

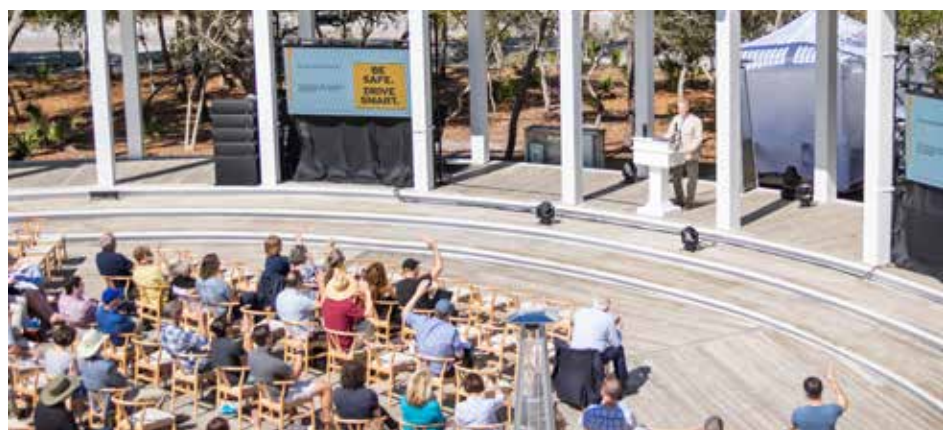
We celebrated Speck’s accomplishments with a weekend of lectures focused on walkability, a gala dinner following the award ceremony, and tours of our neighboring New Urbanist communities Alys Beach and Rosemary Beach. To reserve tickets for next year, please call (850) 231-2421.



Jeff Speck receives the Seaside Prize award from Robert Davis. Photos courtesy The Seaside Institute



Rodney Ellis, Harris County Commissioner for Precinct One and Mike McGinn, Executive Director of America Walks.



Chuck Marohn, Founder & President of Strong Towns, gives a lecture during Seaside Prize weekend.