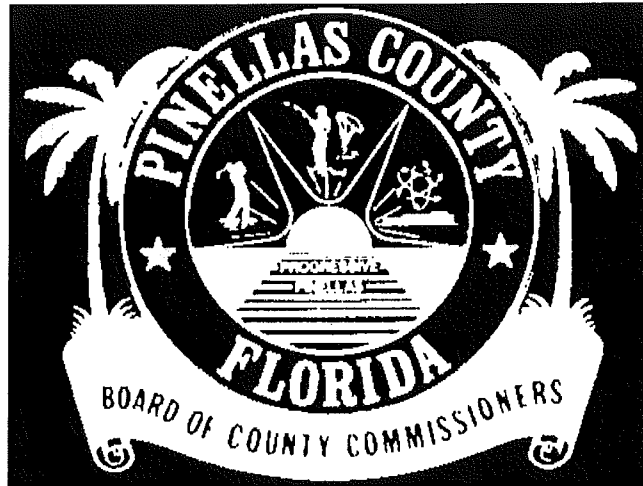


PINELLAS COUNTY FLORIDA CONSORTIUM
ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNITY
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR
1999-2000

Greater Ridgecrest Area
Approved by BCC: 7-20-99
Approved by HCD: 2-15-99, 10-31-2000



Prepared for: Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners
Largo City Commission

By: Pinellas County Community Development Department
Largo Community Development Department

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Greater Ridgecrest Area

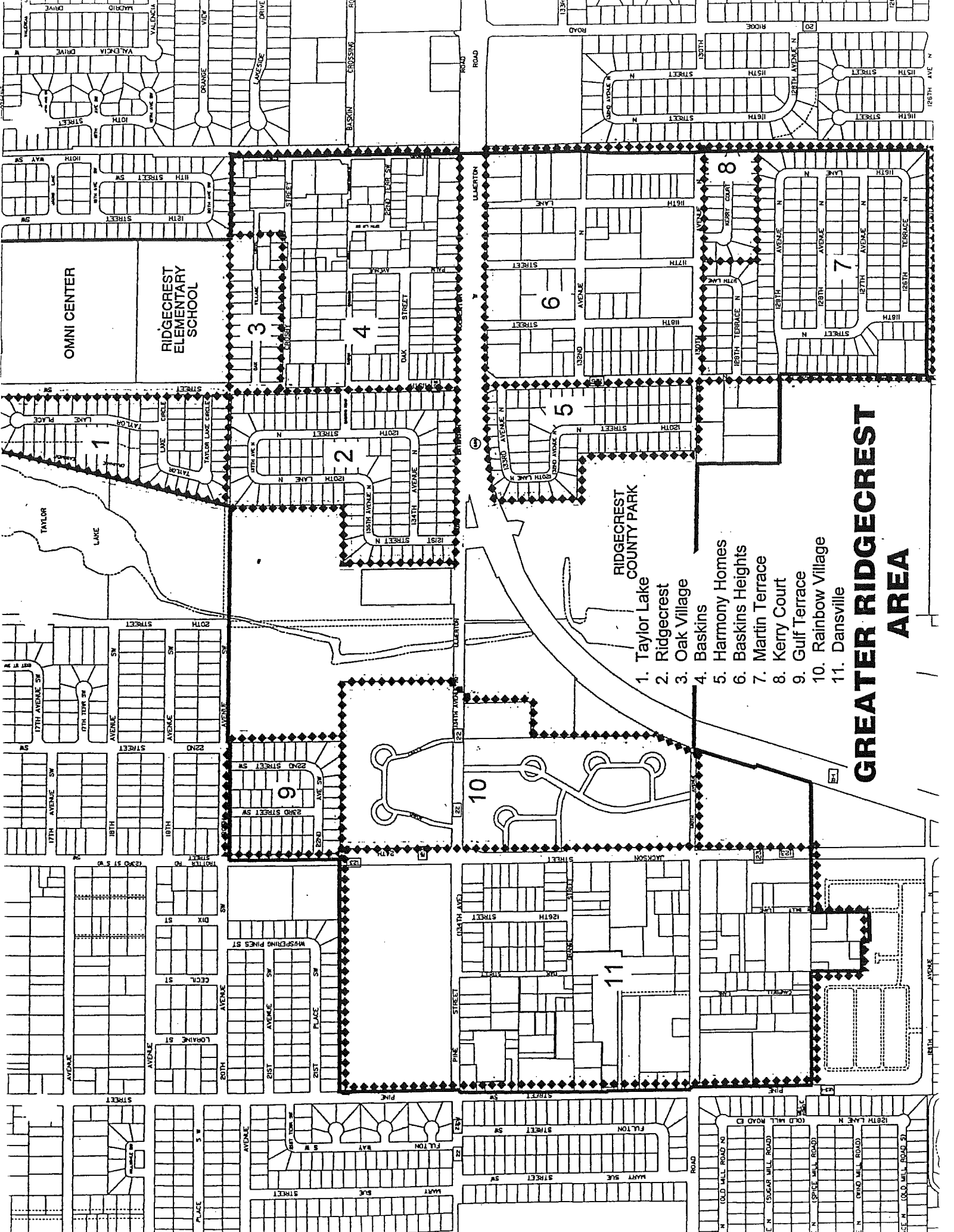
The Greater Ridgecrest Area, about 2/3 square miles in size, comprises the largest portion of an unincorporated community in the mid-western section of Pinellas County, Florida. The setting is suburban, with the City of Largo abutting on three sides, four county parks adjacent, and shopping areas nearby. A busy four-lane divided highway, Ulmerton Road, bisects the area, beginning as an east-west road then bending in a deep curve to the south and joining the east-west Walsingham Road for access to the beaches about two miles to the west.

This is a community of neighborhoods which began developing over 50 years ago. Historical records show that part of the community developed in the 1940s as the home of Black citrus workers that picked, packed, and processed oranges among the vast groves that once dominated Pinellas County. Other Black households began moving to the area, the majority arriving after 1960. Today, boundaries of the area, determined by residents, include these subdivisions: Taylor Lake, Ridgecrest, Oak Village, Baskins, Harmony Homes, Baskins Heights, Martin Terrace, Kerry Court, Gulf Terrace, Rainbow Village, and Dansville. However, Dansville is not being included here as part of the Greater Ridgecrest Area (GRA) Neighborhood Revitalization Area because Dansville was designated as a Revitalization Area in FY 1996. See GRA Figure 1. Cooperation among the neighborhoods is on-going, however.

Demographic Information: There are about 2700 persons in the GRA. Although there is a mix of income ranges, the population is predominantly of low- and moderate-income. The 1989 median income was \$18,935, well below the countywide median of \$26,296; however, 31% of the households made incomes in the \$25,00 to \$50,000 range. The majority of employed persons work in the technical, sales, administrative fields and in services. Families below poverty comprised about 26% of the population. A high percentage of residents 25 years and older did not graduate from high school (49%). Fourteen percent attended college but did not attain degrees, and 5% had associates, bachelors or graduate degrees.

Housing: The community is primarily residential and is comprised of modest homes, most of which are owned by the people who live in them. There are approximately 925 dwelling units in the area; 650 single family units and the remainder multifamily. Of the multifamily, there are only 24 units in complexes containing 10 or more units, and 251 units in structures of less than 10 units. Two hundred of the area's units are in Rainbow Village, family housing owned by the Pinellas County Housing Authority.

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the area's housing is homesteaded according to the County Property Appraiser's records. The estimated market value of most of the housing in 1998 was between \$25,000 and \$60,000. However, some housing in the area was valued at over \$80,000. Most of the homeowners are long term residents. Some have moved away, gotten jobs elsewhere, and then eventually moved back. Others have lived in the area continuously for years. A friendly community, neighbors are willing to help each other. People know each other, one of the things residents especially like.



OMNI CENTER
 RIDGECREST
 ELEMENTARY
 SCHOOL

RIDGECREST
 COUNTY PARK

1. Taylor Lake
2. Ridgecrest
3. Oak Village
4. Baskins
5. Harmony Homes
6. Baskins Heights
7. Martin Terrace
8. Kerry Court
9. Gulf Terrace
10. Rainbow Village
11. Dansville

GREATER RIDGECREST AREA

A 1998 windshield survey of the area's housing revealed that about 83% of the properties are in good condition. Eight percent need minor maintenance, and 7% have obvious structural deterioration and/or have abandoned vehicles on site. About 13 of the properties appear to have serious damage and should be demolished.

Physical Conditions: Although some residents have well-maintained yards, the physical condition of the area conveys an overall appearance of blight. This is due to the presence of junk and debris at scattered sites, lack of landscaping, garbage cans at curbs, the County Stockpile site, etc. Solid waste removal, being up to each individual property owner, is spotty and inconsistent, resulting in garbage cans being on the streets in one location or another at all times. There is also a lack of community identity for this unincorporated area, surrounded by the City of Largo and county parks, and divided by a principal arterial road.

Substandard infrastructure also adds to the blighted appearance of the area. Several streets are unpaved while others are in need of repair; drainage is poor; open ditches are clogged; and sidewalk coverage is inadequate. Baskin Crossing Road between Pinellas Trail and 119th Street exhibits some of the problems in the area: no sidewalks, dirt parking areas, a crumbling and potholed paved street surface, some deteriorated buildings and some standard ones, overgrown areas, and places where some residents "hang out" impeding traffic and strewing trash.

Community Facilities and Services: Although the community has many assets, programs to provide support services and recreation for children, youth, families and the elderly are inadequate.

The eight churches in the area provide many of the existing services. In addition to religious training and guidance, they offer youth development programs, drug counseling, recreation, and other activities.

Community facilities located in or near the area are the Omni Center, Family Service Center of Rainbow Village, and the open field north of the Center, the Ridge Center, the Ridgecrest Center, and the Ridgecrest Day Care Center. The GRA Neighborhood Family Center is beginning to provide services as well. Available youth activities are youth football and cheerleading, pickup basketball and volleyball, summer camp, Bad Boy Wrestling, Brothers Helping Others, outreach including camping, tutoring, mentoring, community choir, R'Club (before and after school care for ages 2 - middle school), and Girls, Inc. Head Start provides child development services for ages 3 to school age, and other child care is provided for children ages 2-5. Activities for seniors consists mainly of congregate dining and a few other activities at the Ridgecrest Center. Family activities are usually special events offered through the churches or community facilities.

Public Facilities and Services: As an unincorporated area, GRA is provided police protection by the Sheriff's Office. Three community police officers are available to the area, one at Rainbow Village. Crime, and especially drug traffic, is still a problem however. Street lights are not available throughout the area, though residents have cooperated to seek and obtain street lighting districts in

many neighborhoods; residents pay the annual electric bill. Fire protection is provided by the Largo Fire Department; Largo Fire Station No. 39 is located within the community.

A division of the Pinellas County Health Department was constructed in Ridgecrest in 1997 and provides health services, immunizations, clinics for family planning, maternal and child health, and free pregnancy testing and counseling. Other services are to be added later.

Public bus transportation is provided but currently only one bus route runs within the community and one along Ulmerton Road. These run hourly during the week. There are no bus routes for any of the neighborhoods south of Ulmerton. There's only one covered bus waiting shelter.

Ridgecrest Elementary School is located within the community, though its enrollment comes primarily from areas outside of Ridgecrest. Many of the neighborhood children are bused to other schools.

Other public facilities available to the area are: Cooperative Extension Service which manages a number of programs that could be of interest to neighborhood residents; Florida Botanical Gardens, Gulf Coast Museum of Art, Heritage Village and Museum, Ridgecrest Park, Taylor Lake Park, and Walsingham Park.

Many residents are committed to improving conditions for area residents. They are currently participating with community and public organizations to improve the physical living conditions of the area, provide a higher degree of pride in the community, increase the feeling of public safety, and expand the social, recreational, and educational opportunities available.

VISION

A community of friends, living in a flourishing, safe and well-maintained environment with community facilities and services that promote the development of children, youth, and adults so that individual potential can be reached.

In further stating what this vision means, residents added that this should be a community with:

Well-maintained housing, landscaping, and amenities.

Informed homeowners and renters combined in efforts to maintain a high standard of quality throughout the community.

Neighborhoods that are free of drugs.

Standard infrastructure, landscaped and well maintained private and community property free from trash and debris, and top community services.

A full range of recreational and social programs available to all residents of GRA offering individuals and families opportunities for social interaction, skills development and physical fitness.

A community recreational and social center to provide a safe environment and operated in a manner that supports the community's values and promotes the healthy development of mind and body.

Opportunities that will enhance the education of youth, extend adult education, and open avenues for advancement for all residents in the community.

A balanced life for area residents through training designed to meet their needs to provide adequate employment, and opportunities for growth and development.

Residents' vision included a community that would be an example for other neighborhoods to pattern themselves after.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Environmental/Neighborhood Improvement:

Objective: Renovate, build, clean and beautify the community and provide a safe environment for residents.

Strategies:

1. Encourage residents and owners to keep properties clean of trash and debris and to keep vegetation pruned and maintained.
2. Create a sense of neighborhood identification.
3. Encourage landscaping as well as lawn maintenance throughout the area.
4. Pave, resurface, or repair all streets.
5. Install drainage gutters on both sides of every road, and repair damaged gutters.
6. Pipe, fill, and grass certain ditches.
7. Construct sidewalks along streets and provide access to the Trail.
8. Slow the speed of vehicular traffic on neighborhood streets.
9. Encourage better traffic circulation around the Omni Center.
10. Make improvements to the holding areas on both sides of Ulmerton Road at the crosswalk.
11. Increase police protection and enforcement.
12. Work with the Sheriff's Office and local youth organizations to establish youth programs.
13. Encourage the Sheriff's Office to concentrate on drug activity areas.
14. Sponsor crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).
15. Ensure that animals have proper identification, are on leashes or fenced.
16. Provide concentrated code enforcement in the area.
17. Publish and promote the "Code Enforcement in Your Neighborhood Handbook."
18. Encourage the provision of one trash and garbage collector for the entire area.
19. Hold community clean-ups on a regular basis.
21. Contact PSTA about a bus route along 119th and about covered bus shelters.
22. Keep mosquitoes down in the area.

Housing:

Objective: Insure the preservation of existing housing stock, develop affordable housing, and educate residents of the community.

Strategies:

1. Development of high quality affordable housing on onfill lots.
2. Increase awareness of existing educational components in credit, qualifying for mortgage loans, and home maintenance.
3. Promote homeownership among young people.
4. Increase promotion of home rehabilitation.
5. Development of landscaping improvement strategies.
6. Develop a committee to focus on tenant rights.
7. Establish a standing housing committee to implement strategies.
8. Implement an in-depth study to determine need for additional assisted living facilities.

Recreation:

Objectives:

1. Provide recreational and social activities shown to be most desired by the youth survey.
2. Provide recreational and social opportunities for adults and families, and for senior citizens.

Strategies:

1. Renovate and add additional parking at the Ridgecrest Center to accommodate programs for senior citizens.
2. Renovate and expand the Omni Center to accommodate a full range of recreational and social programs for children, youth, and adults, by adding a two story wing behind the existing building and a multi-purpose swimming pool that would be used for recreational family use, lessons, and perhaps limited competitive events, along with a separate kiddy pool with water play features (a pool would be subject to finding an experienced agency to operate the aquatic program). The two-story building could hold shower and rest rooms, office space, and other spaces for activities that are now or would be interrupted by the noise in the gym.
3. Provide other recreational activities desired by youth: gymnastics, Teen Center, Fitness Center (also to accommodate adults), game room (if not included in the Teen Center), tennis courts, weight lifting, outdoor play court for basketball, volleyball, etc.; cooking classes, play room for ages 1 to 6 including an indoor jungle gym, baseball and/or softball (perhaps Little League), powder puff football, and sewing classes.
4. Continue current activities offered through providers such as the popular Youth Football sponsored by Largo for Youth.
5. Provide adult/family activities such as arts and crafts, potluch socials, a card room, an adult community choir, dance club, and neighborhood family nights. Also a Fitness Center.
6. Provide opportunities to participate in activities outside the community: bowling team, cultural arts field trips, etc.

Drug Education:

Objectives:

1. Develop an enriching program for drug education, rehabilitation and mentorships. Unite community members to combat drugs.
2. Build up the male image and the male support system in the community.

Strategies:

1. Support the Brothers Helping Others program.
2. Involve youth in mentoring programs early.
3. Screen and train mentors, and make careful matches between mentors and youth.
4. Support the provision of outreach workers, one-on-one counseling, substance abuse prevention programs, and literacy programs through the Neighborhood Family Center.

Education:

Objective: Provide opportunities that will enhance the education of youth, extend adult education, and open avenue for advancement for all residents in the community.

Strategies:

1. Support on-going and expand tutoring and literacy programs in the Greater Ridgecrest Area.
2. Provide computer classes, to be coordinated among local agencies. (NFC strategy also.)
3. Encourage utilization of Head Start and other early childhood enrichment programs.
4. Initiate a coalition of providers/services in the Largo area.
5. Provide connections with education programs at Urban League, Pinellas Technical Education Center, St. Petersburg Junior College Seminole campus, and Pinellas County School System.
6. Partner with Family Service Centers to provide educational and developmental activities for children and youth. (NFC)

Job Training:

Objectives:

- 1) Provide resources that will help people in the community.
- 2) Upgrade current jobs of residents through training programs. Explore mechanisms for better employment opportunities through appropriate training.
- 3) Identify the talents of qualified individuals.

Strategies:

1. Develop a Job-Hot-Line with potential partners in Largo and Pinellas County areas.
2. Research jobs with benefits in the local vicinity and provide training sessions to assist applicants.
3. Work with Omni Center to develop and enhance the Job Assistance Program.

4. Provide job posting board for local community businesses including Albertsons, Target, Olive Garden, Red Lobster, etc. who have agreed to partner with GRA in providing regular up-to-date listings of available jobs. (NFC)

Neighborhood Family Center:

Objectives:

1. Develop supportive activities for parents and other caretakers of children.
2. Develop activities that will increase the number of community residents who are employed and the level at which they are employed.
3. Provide child development activities.
4. Develop activities that will enhance the education of youth of the Greater Ridgecrest Area.
5. Provide a center that encourages the coming together of families to strengthen bonding with each other and create greater community cohesion.
6. Provide quality child care at all activities, thereby supporting parents' ability to participate.
7. Provide support to young men who are at risk of involvement in drugs and other potentially detrimental activities.
8. Enhance education and economic opportunities by operating a facility with programs and services that provide opportunities for personal, spiritual, and professional growth.

Strategies:

1. Create an intergenerational parent support group for young parents and their extended family network to be held bi-weekly at the neighborhood family center, with a collaborative partner.
2. Provide home visits to at least 50 families with children ages 0 to 5, with follow up leading to setting of goals and taking steps to reach them. This is to include linkages to health and other services as indicated, and to be coordinated with Family Continuity.
3. Develop job skills training and job development activities for all neighborhood residents.
4. Provide job posting board for local community businesses including Albertsons, Target, Olive Garden, Red Lobster, etc. who have agreed to partner with GRA in providing regular up-to-date listings of available jobs.
5. Provide computer classes, to be coordinated with the Ridge Center, which has computers.
6. Partner with Family Service Centers to provide educational and developmental activities for children and youth.
7. Develop a Youth Advisory Council, to assure that such activities will be relevant to and participated in by the youth.
8. Provide after-school tutoring at the NFC, and coordinate with the Omni and Ridge Centers.
9. Organize a monthly activity; the first will be the grand opening of the center; others could be movie nights, barbecues, Young Life performances, concerts, and talent shows.
10. Provide child care for parents participating in center activities. This will be coordinated with Ridgecrest Day Care and the OMNI Center.
11. Organize a men's support/mentoring group, "Brothers Helping Others," to be coordinated with Young Life.

Youth Development:

Objectives:

1. Provide for the survival and growth of youth.
2. Increase public interest in the need for youth development.
3. Strengthen the role of youth serving the community by involving the youth in the neighborhood development.

Strategies:

1. Generate positive youth development programs that meet the key developmental needs of youth 10-17 years of age.
2. Provide evening, after school and weekend programs that are community and neighborhood based.
3. Provide opportunities for youth to participate in leadership programs.
4. Provide opportunities for youth to participate in the cultural arts (drama, dance, art, and music).
5. Provide other opportunities and avenues for growth: mentoring programs, tutoring, family counseling, job skills, employment, drug/alcohol counseling, intergenerational programs, and projects that promote youth entrepreneurship.
6. Develop a Youth Advisory Council, to assure that youth activities will be relevant to and participated in by the youth. (NFC)
7. Organize a men's support/mentoring group, "Brothers Helping Others," to be coordinated with Young Life. (NFC)

Community Based Partnerships

On April 26, 1997, over 400 residents met with representatives of Pinellas County Government, United Way, Juvenile Welfare Board, and Florida Department of Children and Families to provide the opportunity for community residents to address issues and concern about their neighborhoods. Many needs were brought up and discussed, and commitments were made to initiate and support a grass roots efforts to develop a comprehensive plan of improvements for the area. The Greater Ridgecrest Area Board of Directors was formed as a non-profit to lead this effort in the community. GRA was formally established on August 5, 1997, and hired an Executive Director in 1998. Citizen committees were formed around issues important to the community, surveys and other research were conducted, and goals, objectives and strategies were formulated. These citizen efforts were supported primarily by the Juvenile Welfare Board, Pinellas County Community Development, and Family Preservation and Support.

Many partners were identified throughout the planning process, and continued and new partnerships are anticipated as the implementation process gets further along:

Partners within the Community

- Greater Ridgecrest Board of Directors
- Local churches
- Friends of Ridgecrest
- Ridgecrest Community Services, Inc.
- Pinellas County Housing Authority
- Young Life

Private and non-profit organizations

- Neighborly Senior Services
- Gulf Coast Museum of Art
- Girls, Inc.
- Head Start
- Florida First Start
- Pinellas County Urban League
- Suncoast Family YMCAs

State and Local Government

- Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners
- Pinellas County Community Development
- Juvenile Welfare Board
- Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Service - Four H, Botanical Gardens
- Pinellas County Parks Department
- Largo Fire Station No. 39
- Pinellas County Health Department
- Florida Family Preservation and Support

Benchmarks

The strategies identified above will produce measurable outcomes. Several of the indices are listed below:

- Linear feet of infrastructure improvements
- Housing conditions
- Consistency of code enforcement
- Property values
- Drug activity
- Youth recreational activities
- Adult recreational activities