

# Uptown plans envision a village



Microsoft Latin America's headquarters is situated in Fort Lauderdale's uptown and employs about 400 people. Envision Uptown is looking for ways to bring more businesses into uptown, and add more housing and retail stores to give uptown more of a village atmosphere. (Susan Stocker / Sun Sentinel)

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**A**s plans move forward for uptown Fort Lauderdale's future, it's cars that are taking a back seat and pedestrians who are doing the driving.

A new Urban Land Institute study says uptown's success depends on transforming the car-dependent employment center around Cypress Creek Road near Interstate 95 into a progressive urban village where people live, work and play and rely on their feet, bikes or public transportation to get around.

"We need to create a sense of place," said Cary Goldberg, president of Envision Uptown, a nonprofit group of business, education and government leaders mapping out a strategy for the area. "A place where you literally never get into a car."

Uptown already has the most significant concentration of workers in **Broward County**, with about 70,000 people going to jobs there. Major uptown employers include Microsoft and Citrix, and there are at least five colleges in the area.

"It is the only place in **Broward County** where as soon as you get off the major highway, you are in the major place

of employment," Goldberg said.

And besides driving in on I-95, a commuter could easily arrive at the nearby Tri-Rail station or ride in on a county bus, while a business executive could touch down at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport.

The area has recreational opportunities, too. The planned Schlitterbahn water park will bring a tourist resort in addition to Lockhart Stadium where the Fort Lauderdale Strikers play.

"We're trying to work with Major League Soccer to create a full-scale soccer facility for youth," Goldberg said.

The overall uptown area around the executive airport extends generally from McNab Road south to Commercial Boulevard, from Interstate 95 west to Northwest 31st Avenue.

But the future is expected to start at the part east of I-95 at Cypress Creek Road and Andrews Avenue, leaders say.

That intersection has a park-and-ride lot that officials say is primed for redevelopment, potentially a mixed-use project that could include apartments, offices, stores — even a business hotel or upscale movie theater.

If done right, the project could have street-front homes and businesses more conducive to pedestrians than uptown's disconnected, old-style executive office buildings surrounded by seas of parking.

"We're looking at a 50-year kind of vision-plan to transform the uptown area into a more livable, walkable, pedestrian friendly, economic development area," said Dana Pollitt, managing partner of Adept Strategy and Public Relations, who is also a member of Envision Uptown.

Uptown's major roads themselves are the largest obstacle to reinventing the area, according to the urban land study that will be presented to city commissioners Tuesday. They were built to move county traffic as fast as possible from homes in the west to jobs in the east and back again, not to accommodate pedestrians or create a village atmosphere.

"It's a very intimidating area, whether you're a worker coming out of a building or a mom pushing a stroller," Pollitt said.

You "cross eight lanes of traffic and feel like you're playing Frogger to get to a restaurant," he said.

The goal is to make Cypress Creek "a multi-way urban boulevard," the urban land report says, with divided, tree-lined sections for bicyclists, local traffic and commuters. The area can use more trees, canopies and other coverings so walkers don't wilt in oppressive heat, the report said.

One current solution to lessen the area's dependence on cars is the Uptown Link, started earlier this year, that offers free weekday bus rides around uptown between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Officials hope to encourage workers to use the "trolley" as an easy way to leave their offices for lunch — and it also provides transportation to Tri-Rail and other commuter spots for the area's college students.

As for uptown's future as an urban hub rivaling downtown, the urban land report says it's a good location for future development. It's well-situated to deal with any effects of climate change because of its higher elevations that will protect against rising sea levels, the report said.

Commissioner Bruce Roberts, who represents the area, supports the redevelopment efforts.

"We need to get together with a public-private partnership to create a business neighborhood," Roberts said.

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