

GAINESVILLE NEIGHBORHOODS UNITED

Gainesville's geography and urban history: A primer

Gainesville's landforms—its low, water-filled areas and its higher, drier areas—and Gainesville's urban evolution, contribute to the locations and character of Gainesville's neighborhoods.

Natural Features

Central Gainesville's defining feature is Hogtown Creek and its many tributaries. These creeks serve as natural borders for some neighborhoods and as their central features in others. Higher areas are suitable building sites, because they are less likely to flood. The city's hydrology also limits the number of major east-west and north-south roads, because it is expensive and unwise to build roads in flood prone areas. To the south, Paynes Prairie limits growth. Eastern Alachua County is relatively low lying and wetter while an ancient geologic formation runs along west central Florida, including west central Alachua County. I-75 runs along this ridge for the length of the western part of the Florida peninsula.

Settlement Patterns

Gainesville was founded in 1854, about halfway along a rail line that ran between Fernandina Beach and Cedar Key. That railway is still visible as rail trails along Waldo Road, Depot Road, and Archer Road in central Gainesville. Bouleware Springs, just north of the Alachua Sink on Paynes Prairie, provided the City's first municipal water source. For our first 50 years, Gainesville's development occurred equally east and west of the town's center, defined by Main Street and East First Street. Neighborhoods of this era included the Duck Pond, Pleasant Street, Porters Quarters, and the Southeast Historic District.

In 1905 the University of Florida was offered land just west of today's SW 13th Street, which began Gainesville's westward growth. In 1926 a second grant extended the University campus to today's SW 34th Street. Neighborhoods around the University, and elsewhere, developed during this period,

including today's College Park, Duval, Fifth Avenue Neighborhood, Golfview, Grove Street, Hibiscus Park, Oak View, Springhill, University Heights, and others.

After the end of World War II, when veterans returned from combat, many sought college educations, including at the University of Florida. (UF admitted only white, male students until 1947, when the university began admitting white women. UF admitted its first black student in 1958.) As the University grew, mid-century neighborhoods developed, including Florida Park, Lincoln Estates, Sugarfoot, University Park, and others.

As in many parts of the country, desegregation led to the creation of new schools, new neighborhoods, and some local population redistribution. In Gainesville schools were desegregated in the late 1960s.

Interstate Highway I-75 was built in the 1970s, and The Oaks Mall, Butler Plaza, North Florida Regional Medical Center, and Santa Fe Community College were among the major developments to take advantage of this new transportation corridor. In addition, Archer Road and Newberry Road provided the only two primary routes across the low-lying Hogtown Creek watershed in this part of Gainesville. New neighborhoods increasingly moved north and west, partly because of increased access to shopping and amenities, partly because of available, dry, agricultural land ripe for development and, some argue, because of reduced regulatory burdens and/or racial prejudice.

Since the 1970s, Gainesville has continued to develop to the west, leading to disproportionate challenges in the central and eastern parts of the city. These include older, sometimes inadequate or failing infrastructure, underfunded schools, and the challenges of older housing stock. Because these neighborhoods surround the downtown area and the University of Florida, their locations are seen as highly desirable, while their building stock is older and their residents are often challenged to keep up with repairs and conflicting uses.

Summary: Western expansion, eastern neglect

Over the past 150 years Gainesville has grown westward, towards new enterprises such as the University of Florida, The Oaks Mall, North Florida Regional Medical Center, Butler Plaza, and I-75. In the process, historic inner-city neighborhoods, while in newly-desirable locations, have suffered from civic neglect. Instead, they have been maintained by residents who have persevered, sometimes for generations, in protecting and preserving their neighborhoods despite the odds.

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