

Naples Park: The People and the Place

Demographics, Land Use, and Existing Physical Conditions

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DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY OF NAPLES PARK

Collier County is transforming from its rural and small-town roots into a continuous mosaic of modern amenity-rich subdivisions that now stretch to the Lee County line.

Naples Park was laid out fairly early in Collier County's history. Growth was slow in the early years of Naples Park, with many streets left unpaved and a location that seemed out-of-the way. As waves of new development filled in Collier's coastline and then moved inland, Naples Park became known for its inexpensive lots in a prime location, increasing the rate of construction. Naples Park is now approaching what planners call "build-out," when nearly all lots have been built on for the first time.

Naples Park was laid out in a simple pattern, with uniform long blocks and home sites in only one size. The lack of internal amenities and a surplus of lots kept prices low for many years, attracting a mixture of retirees and working families. Most homes (77%) are single-family detached units, with 15% of the units in duplexes. The busiest decade for construction in Naples Park was the 1970s (see Figure 2-1).

Once Collier County's urban growth surrounded Naples Park, land values increased dramatically, and as a result the makeup of Naples Park residents is changing. Over 70% of the homes have different residents than they did only 10 years ago.

This section examines data from the 2000 U.S. Census and compares the population of Naples Park with the rest of Collier County and with Florida and the entire country.

The population of Collier County as a whole is summarized in a recent county publication, 2001 Demographic and Economic Profile (a Collier County publication available from www.co.collier.fl.us/planning/comp_plan/2001econ_demographic_profile.htm) The county's dramatic growth rate, combined with an official forecast for the future, is illustrated in Figure 2-2.

Age of Homes in Naples Park

(number of structures built each decade, based on 2000 census data)

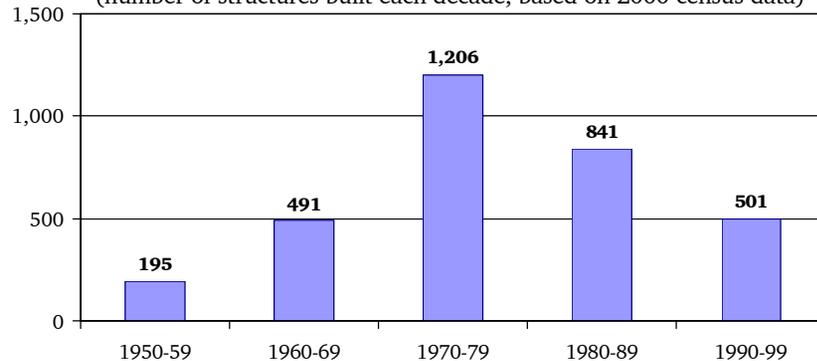


Figure 2-1

Collier County Permanent Population

(historic data, plus forecast for 2020)

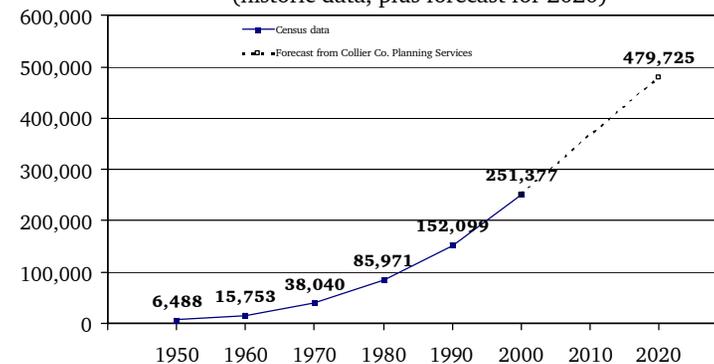


Figure 2-2

Current data specific to Naples Park is now available from the 2000 United States Census. For the first time, Naples Park proper has its own "place" designation, with the area between Vanderbilt Drive, U.S. 41, 111th and 91st Avenues being called the Naples Park "census designated place." This data is easily available to the public at no charge from www.census.gov.¹ A summary of the Naples Park data is presented in Appendix A, with several of the most interesting findings for Naples Park reported below.

Seasonal residents

The census distinguishes between housing that is being occupied by "permanent residents" and housing that is either vacant or is used by seasonal residents who have a primary home elsewhere.

Collier County, like much of southwest Florida, has many seasonal residents, thus a fairly low percentage of housing occupied by permanent residents (71% in the year 2000).

In 2000, Naples Parks had a much higher percentage (87%) of its housing occupied by permanent residents. However, this percentage is about the same as the state as a whole, which is slightly lower than the country as a whole (see Figure 2-3).



Figure 2-3

¹ The official census site also provides considerable comparative data from 1990, but note that in 1990, the "Naples Park" place was somewhat larger, extending westward to the Gulf of Mexico. Numbers in this report for 1990 have been adjusted to reflect the 2000 census boundaries.

Rental occupancy

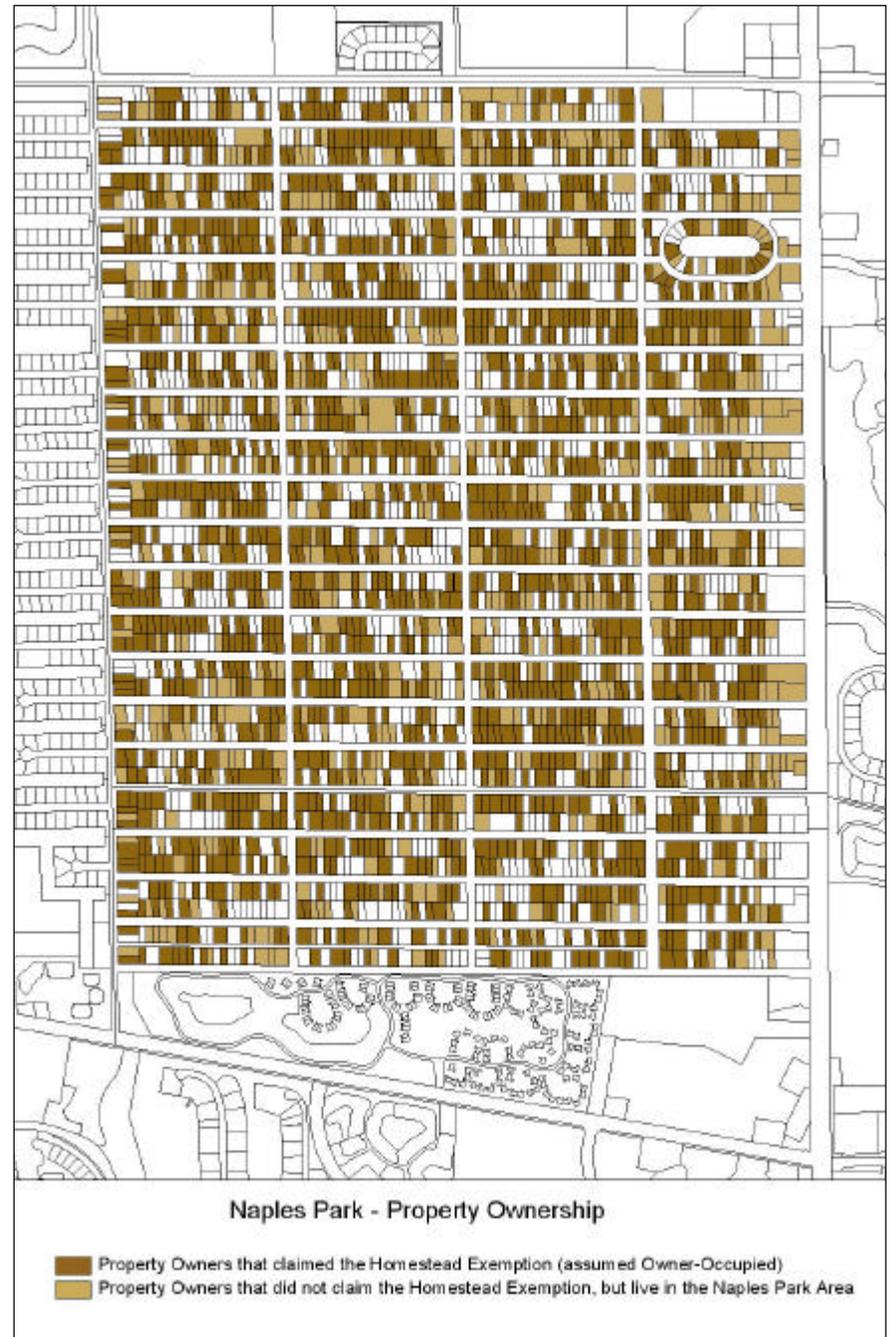
Rental housing is plentiful in Naples Park; 32% of the dwelling units were rented out in the year 2000. This percentage is high for Collier County, but falls midway between the rental percentages in the state of Florida and in the entire country (see comparison in Figure 2-3).

Percent of Housing Occupied By Renters



Figure 2-3

The map at right is a study of property ownership patterns in Naples Park. The purpose of the map is to locate the properties that are owned by people who have a primary residence in the Naples Park area (within the 34108 zip code). These residents would theoretically have the highest level of investment in the neighborhood. The scattered pattern of the shaded properties reveals that owner-occupied units in the Park are well dispersed, and there are not distinct pockets of permanent residents, seasonal residents, or rentals.



Median income

In household income, Naples Park, with a median level of \$41,820, closely resembles the United States as a whole, This figure is considerably less than for Collier County, but still more than for the state of Florida (see Figure 2-5).



Figure 2-5

A household with income at the median level for Naples Park would have been able to afford monthly rent of about \$975 in the year 2000. This figure is calculated using the banking industry’s standard formula that a family should pay no more than 28% of its income for housing. For homeowners, this same amount would be the maximum of monthly payments for a mortgage, taxes, and insurance.

Race and ethnicity

Naples Park differs most from the county, state, and entire country in its racial breakdown. In the year 2000, 93% of the residents of Naples Park described themselves as white (see Figure 2-6).

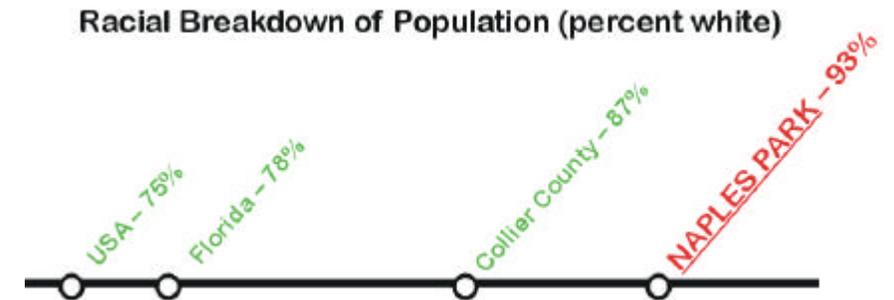


Figure 2-6

The percentage of Naples Park residents who describe themselves as Hispanic is now at 18%. This figure is fairly close to the Hispanic percentages for Collier County and the state (see Figure 2-7 for comparative data). The Census Bureau considers Hispanic background a matter of ethnicity or national origin; all Hispanic residents are also asked to indicate their race.

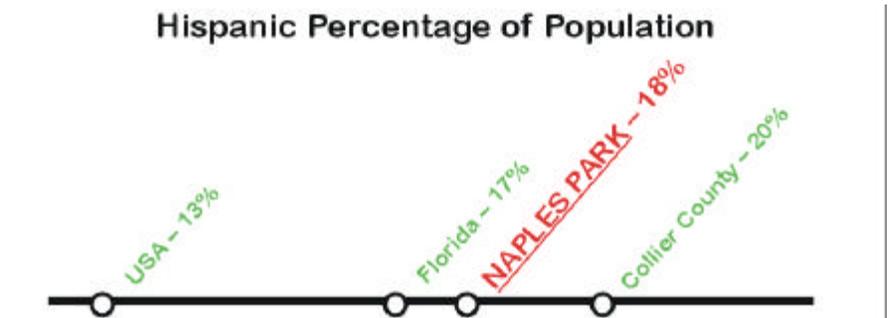


Figure 2-7

DRAFT- MARCH 2003**Age of population**

Seasonal residents tends to be older because at that stage of their lives, they can afford to own or rent a second home. Even the permanent residents of Collier County are, on the average, older than the state or country because of the retirees who have moved here permanently and because most of the new housing is too expensive for younger people to afford.

The median age of Collier County permanent residents was 44 in the year 2000. In Naples Park, the median age was only 37 years. This is even lower than the state average of 39 years, though higher than the national average (see Figure 2-8).

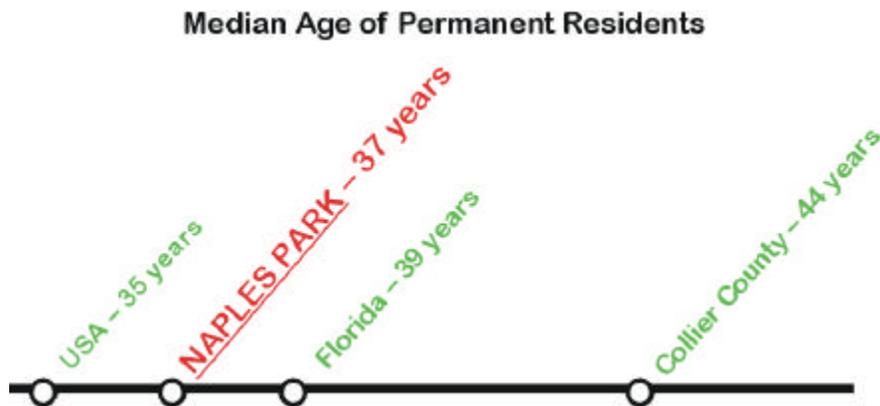


Figure 2-8

"Median age" is a common indicator of average age of a population but it can be quite misleading, as "median" merely means that half the population is younger and the other half is older. The actual population has two or three major peaks. The first is the baby-boom generation, born from 1948 through 1964, and the second is their children. Collier County has a third peak, the retirees who have moved here. Thus an influx of retirees and a equal number of newly born children will have no effect on the median age, but the character of the community will be quite different.

A better way to understand the age of a community is to examine a profile (or cross-section) that illustrates and quantifies the population peaks. Figure 2-9 shows the age profile for Naples Park in the year 2000; it contains only two peaks, the baby-boom generation in the center and their children to the left.

Figure 2-10 shows a similar profile for Naples Park in 1990. Note that in 1990, the age profile shows a third peak, the retiree population. This third peak has all but disappeared from Naples Park in the past decade.

Age of 6,781 Permanent Residents of Naples Park
Year 2000, by Age Ranges

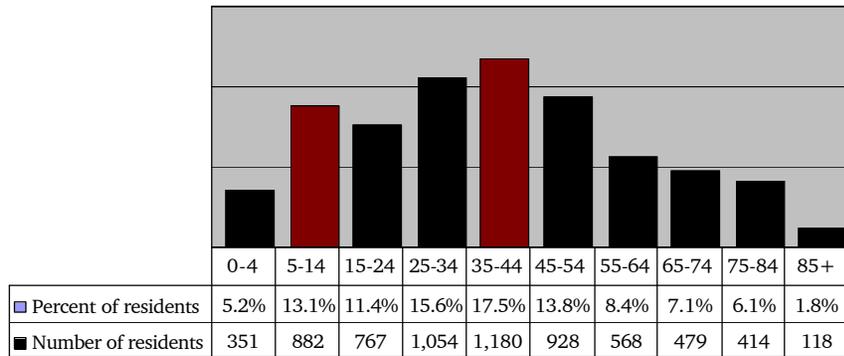


Figure 2-9

Age of 6,350 Permanent Residents of Naples Park
Year 1990, by Age Ranges

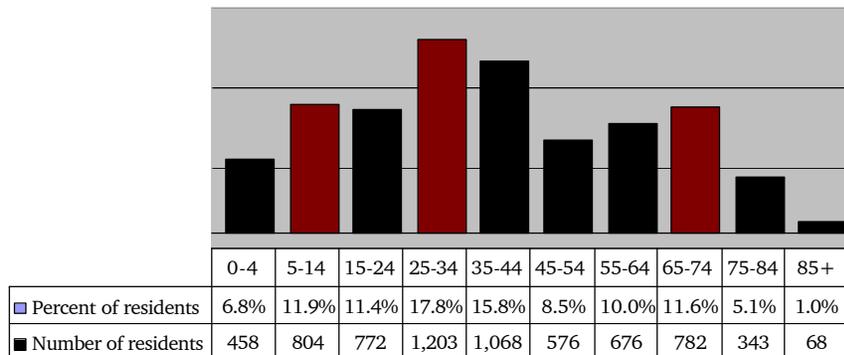


Figure 2-10

Conclusion

Naples Park is known as an enclave of affordable homes in a surprisingly good location within an expensive county.

Census data for 2000 portrays a community that is much more similar to the rest of Florida and the United States than it is to Collier County. Race is the single exception, where Naples Park is more like Collier County than Florida or the U.S.

The major changes in Naples Park during the 1990s were rapidly rising property values and the reduced prominence of retirees. Property values should be expected to continue rising due to economic forces throughout Southwest Florida, even in the absence of value-enhancing internal improvements such as those proposed in this plan.

In the past, a large retiree population in Florida often meant that many residents had fixed incomes and limited means, which severely limited the potential for community upgrades. This factor is becoming less important as Collier County has changed from a moderate-cost retirement haven to a culturally rich and much more expensive destination.

Many retirees now moving to the area have means well beyond those of many existing residents of Naples Park. Thus, even if a new retiree population rediscovers Naples Park, it should not be assumed that they would be unable to afford the costs of upgrades. In addition, Florida's "save our homes" program now limits property tax increases for homeowners to 3% annually, precluding fears that community upgrades will force out existing homeowners due to increased taxes.

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EXISTING PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

Naples Park, established in the 1950s, is one of several maturing neighborhoods located in Collier County. Positioned along the US 41 corridor, just north of the city of Naples, it clearly stands out when compared to the newer, planned-unit developments that surround it. Originally established as a trailer park, the neighborhood is comprised of long, narrow lots (approximately 50'x135'). The compact lot sizes, and interconnected network of streets, are similar to those found in many "New Urbanist" developments that have proven to be very marketable throughout the country. These characteristics are also similar to many of the older cities across the US that have been rediscovered by home buyers over the past twenty years, and now sell for higher prices than new, sprawling developments. However, there are several inherent neighborhood characteristics, such as a lack of open space, and the omission of an alley system, that are not conducive for creating a walkable, livable neighborhood. The following section describes these physical qualities of Naples Park.

Land Use

The study area for the Naples Park Community Plan consists of the land bounded by US 41 to the east, Vanderbilt Drive to the west, 111th Avenue to the north, and 91st Avenue to the south. This area is composed primarily of residential development. The County designated existing land use for the neighborhood is residential high density, although most of the housing stock is comprised of single-family residences. There is a strip of commercial development that runs parallel to US 41, along the eastern boundary of the neighborhood. There are planned-unit developments located to the north, east, and south of the neighborhood. Naples Park Elementary School is located at the northern edge of the study area, just north of 111th Avenue.



Naples Park, existing land use, 2001.



A typical avenue in Naples Park



An open drainage swale

Streets and Avenues

As mentioned previously, the interconnected network of streets in Naples Park is a real asset; many newer developments do not have a gridded street system, and suffer from congestion as a result. There are three north-south corridors in the neighborhood (6th, 7th, and 8th Streets), and a series of avenues that run east to west. While the basic structure of gridded roadways to allow for interconnectivity is present, the large size of blocks in the east-west direction (approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile long) hinders pedestrian activity, and permits automobiles to speed through the neighborhood unimpeded between blocks. Several streets have four-way stops at their intersections, but in many instances these traffic calming measures are located too far apart to have the desired effect of slowing cars.

The streets and avenues are lacking many elements that would provide them with a pedestrian-friendly character. The rights-of-way in Naples Park are 50' wide, but the actual pavement width is approximately 18' wide. There are no curbs along the edges of the roadways; stormwater is contained in open drainage swales that run along either side of the street. These swales currently prevent the existence of street trees and sidewalks in the majority of the neighborhood. This leaves pedestrians to share the narrow pavement width with automobiles. There are also few streetlights present, which deters pedestrian activity at night, and is a potential safety problem for the neighborhood.

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Single family homes in Naples Park



An example of a new home under construction in Naples Park

Housing

The existing housing stock in Naples Park is primarily comprised of modest, single-story homes. These homes are located close together, due to the narrow lot sizes in the neighborhood. Traditionally, these homes have been small, as they were constrained by the compact lot size. In recent years, as property values have soared in the neighborhood, there has been a desire to construct larger homes. This has created some conflict among neighbors; the larger houses cover more square footage than their predecessors, and the loss of uncovered area aggravates the drainage situation. Another trend has been to combine two or three lots together when constructing a new home. Although this does solve the previous problem, this is not a promising trend, as it signals the un-densification of the neighborhood. Maintaining the existing density of this neighborhood should be a high priority, due to its western location, and the lack of available land for development in southwest Florida.

Most of the homes in Naples Park are single-family residences, although there are several duplexes and triplexes scattered throughout the neighborhood. Parking is an issue for the multi-family residences.

Most of these structures do not have a garage area; instead, these are large paved areas in front of the house where residents park. The houses that do contain garages have located the structure along the primary facade of the building. The lack of an alley system prohibits rear access for automobiles into the existing lots. The emphasis on the car along the streetscape detracts from pedestrian experience in the neighborhood.

Commercial Area

The commercial area in Naples Park, mainly in the form of strip developments, is located along the eastern edge of the neighborhood. These commercial establishments, along with the stores located at the Pavilion shopping center to the south at the intersection of US 41 and Vanderbilt Beach Road, provide area residents with many neighborhood services. In many locations, the pedestrian access to the commercial areas is limited, as businesses are oriented toward US 41.

There is a sharp transition between commercial and residential along



The commercial area of Naples Park, along US 41



Walking trail through Wiggins Park, leading toward the beach.

the eastern portion of the neighborhood. Existing businesses have their backs turned to the side yard of existing residences, with no transitional alley or barrier. Commercial traffic is especially heavy along the eastern blocks of the neighborhood, as delivery trucks and patrons from outside Naples Park have to circulate around to 8th Street before exiting the neighborhood.

There are new commercial developments that are occurring just outside the neighborhood, east of US 41. These have already had an impact on Naples Park, as two streets (107th Avenue and 108th Avenue) petitioned the County to install street closings, to ensure that traffic did not cut through the neighborhood to get to or from these establishments. These road closings do serve the purpose of preventing additional traffic from accessing the neighborhood; however, they also have caused circulation concerns for the Naples Park businesses that are located nearby.

(For further analysis of the commercial area of Naples Park, refer to Chapter 5, US 41 Business District, and Appendix B)

Community Facilities

Naples Park has several community facilities that add value to the neighborhood. The Gulf, located within walking distance, is a tremendous amenity for residents. Wiggins Park, located west of the neighborhood, provides a pedestrian path parallel to 111th Avenue, leading toward the beach. Naples Park Elementary School is to the north, near the intersection of 7th Street and 111th Avenue; the nearby location of the school allows neighborhood children to walk or ride their bikes to school. The Naples Park Area Association Community Center, founded in 1957, offers memberships to all who reside within the neighborhood.