



EARLY

ACTION

ACTIVITY

Early Action Activity

The Early Action Activity is a small-scale, physical improvement project that occurs during the Choice Neighborhoods (CN) planning process. As a requirement of the program, the goals are two-fold; to show how small physical improvements and targeted investments help communities achieve the desired changes; and to address local challenges and needs. Early Action project examples include community gardens, pocket parks, creative signage, murals, or neighborhood broadband / Wi-Fi infrastructure and installation. The project must be permanent, and funds cannot be used for administrative costs or supplement city services.

The Gainesville Housing Authority (GHA) will allocate Early Action Activity funds to a multi-faceted concept that will help residents with their developmental growth and initiate pilot projects for the neighborhood. Partial funds will be utilized to create a plaza area with improved landscaping, creative art, seating, sun protection, and signage. Funds will also support 3 - 5 resident entrepreneurs with training and equipment to help kickoff their ideas. The plaza will be located at Pine Meadows,

complemented by the recently opened ELITE Force Training Center and a fresh market facility that will soon replace a former barbershop building, located next to ELITE Force. Partners such as Santa Fe College are collaborating with GHA to identify funding opportunities. The Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area (GCRA) is also working with GHA to develop an entrepreneurial training program.

The plaza is a catalyst that is beginning to achieve some of the desired outcomes identified in this plan. Some include resident empowerment through skill-building resources, entrepreneurial exploration, additional investment, and working with organizations to spark vitality into the community. A gathering place to interact is another sentiment expressed by residents throughout the engagement process. GHA will also pursue several grant opportunities to provide programming for youth, young professionals, and senior citizens.

The following sections elaborate on how GHA will connect Early Action Activity funds with current and future projects to benefit the neighborhood.

Aerial view of Pine Meadows.



Plaza Concept & Preliminary Budget

A new plaza is being created thanks to the community feedback from residents. Located at Pine Meadows next to the training center, a portion of the Early Action Activity funds, totaling \$100,000, will be used for new amenities such as benches, sun protection, public art, and signage. Improved landscaping will also feature an assortment of native plants and vegetation. The plaza will be a place for everyone to enjoy, including Lake Terrace residents and the East Gainesville neighborhood.

The plaza represents a significant achievement for the community functioning as a vibrant, enhanced space to gather and interact with one another. The plaza will serve as a place to socialize, a dynamic venue for community events, and complement the programming at the training center. Residents advocated for a space that youth, adults, and senior citizens can have access without traveling to offsite locations. Map activities were an essential visual tool for residents to pinpoint what amenities they needed and where to locate them.

We need a space for people and kids to gather without always having to travel far.

Residents identify amenities during a map activity.



If you could make one physical change to the neighborhood right now, what would it be?

22%

Create a farmers market or mobile fresh food market

21%

Repurpose a vacant lot or building for pop-up events and markets

19%

Beautify storefronts and homes

15%

Repurpose vacant land into community gardens or pocket parks

12%

Create public art that highlights the community's history and identity

11%

Create a beautiful branded gateway into the neighborhood

The feedback from the resident and neighborhood surveys were helpful in identifying what the community is interested in doing. They highlighted repurposing vacant buildings, creating a mobile fresh food market, activating vacant lots for pop-up events, and enhancing spaces with public art, lighting, and cultural features. Other engagement activities and events reinforced this shared vision.

The plaza, paired with the towering trees and newly developed buildings that seamlessly integrate with the natural surroundings, helps fulfill some of the prioritized outcomes (goals) identified by residents and stakeholders. A gathering space for the community to access is a key goal the plan highlights, allowing residents to connect with the GHA properties. With the ELITE Force Training Center underway and a fresh market facility that will soon be introduced, the plaza will be a central hub for both residents and building occupants. Residents will witness their feedback and participation rewarded, as physical improvements take shape, inspiring community confidence.

GHA is working to finalize the plaza design adjacent to the new ELITE Force Training Center. The preliminary budget to the right shows some of the landscaping and plaza line items with cost estimates, totaling \$91,542. GHA will also pursue additional grants to promote awareness of the plaza and it's connection to support residents and the East Gainesville neighborhood.

The rendering below shows a design of the plaza with site improvements. The plaza will be activated with programming that is being proposed by GHA such as food truck socials, stage area for cultural events, and space to interact with one another.

Construction for the plaza is anticipated to start between April and June 2025.

“ It is time to upgrade things around here. ”

Landscape Cost Estimate	
Sod	\$8,388
Installation of Queen Palms	\$1,454
Rain Garden Beds	\$3,372
Garden Beds	\$11,426
Potted Plants	\$3,402
Total	\$28,042

Plaza Cost Estimate	
Concrete Pad (south plaza)	\$17,500
Benches	\$10,000
Sun Shades	\$16,000
Public Art	\$5,000
Signage	\$5,000
Installation Costs	\$10,000
Total	\$63,500

Plaza concept at Pine Meadows. | Source: GHA



ELITE Force Training Center

The Gainesville Housing Authority (GHA) hosted an opening ceremony in March 2025 to unveil the ELITE Force Training Center, a former daycare center located at their Pine Meadows property. ELITE stands for Empowerment, Life Skills, Innovation, Training and Entrepreneurship. The ELITE Force Training Center will serve GHA residents and the Gainesville neighborhood with business development programs and career opportunities in fields such as construction, health services, and accounting. These services promote self-sufficiency and guide residents towards stable employment. The project is a collaboration between the GHA and the Gainesville Housing Development Management Corporation (GHDMC), a 501(c)(3) non-profit arm of GHA and the City of Gainesville.

The balance of the Early Action Activity funds will go toward empowering 3 - 5 entrepreneurs with job guidance and business development programs from the training center, helping them to refine their

We're not going to build our way out of this affordable housing issue we have in our communities. So we have to make sure that there are ways for people to move in, move up, and move out.

- Pamela Davis GHA CEO

business model and bring their products to market. The plaza is part of a larger neighborhood initiative, which will be used to host the entrepreneurs as they develop their ideas into tangible products. After modifying their business model, GHA will guide them to the Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area's (GCRA) Cornerstone Community Market as a launchpad within the neighborhood.

GHA will use Early Action Activity funds to purchase equipment for them such as tables, seating, banners, tents, and cover registration cost / business licenses.

Exterior view of the ELITE Force Training Center at Pine Meadows.



GCRA will provide entrepreneurs with space for three years, with the prospect of moving into a permanent store in the neighborhood. Santa Fe College also agreed to host entrepreneurs at their Center for Innovation and Economic Development (CIED) space located in downtown Gainesville.

The ELITE Force Training Center represents a \$1.7 million investment intended to build up the community and create revitalization efforts in the area. Equipped with certification programs and resources to help kickstart careers for residents, the training center will help create a legacy by equipping them with skills for today, tomorrow, and the future.

GHA will hire a coordinator to manage the training center. This endeavor includes partnerships such as Santa Fe College and The University of Florida Training, Research and Education for Environmental Occupations (UF TREEO). Other individuals and organizations will continue to collaborate with GHA by lending their services to the training center.

The images on the left and below show the renovation of the former daycare center.

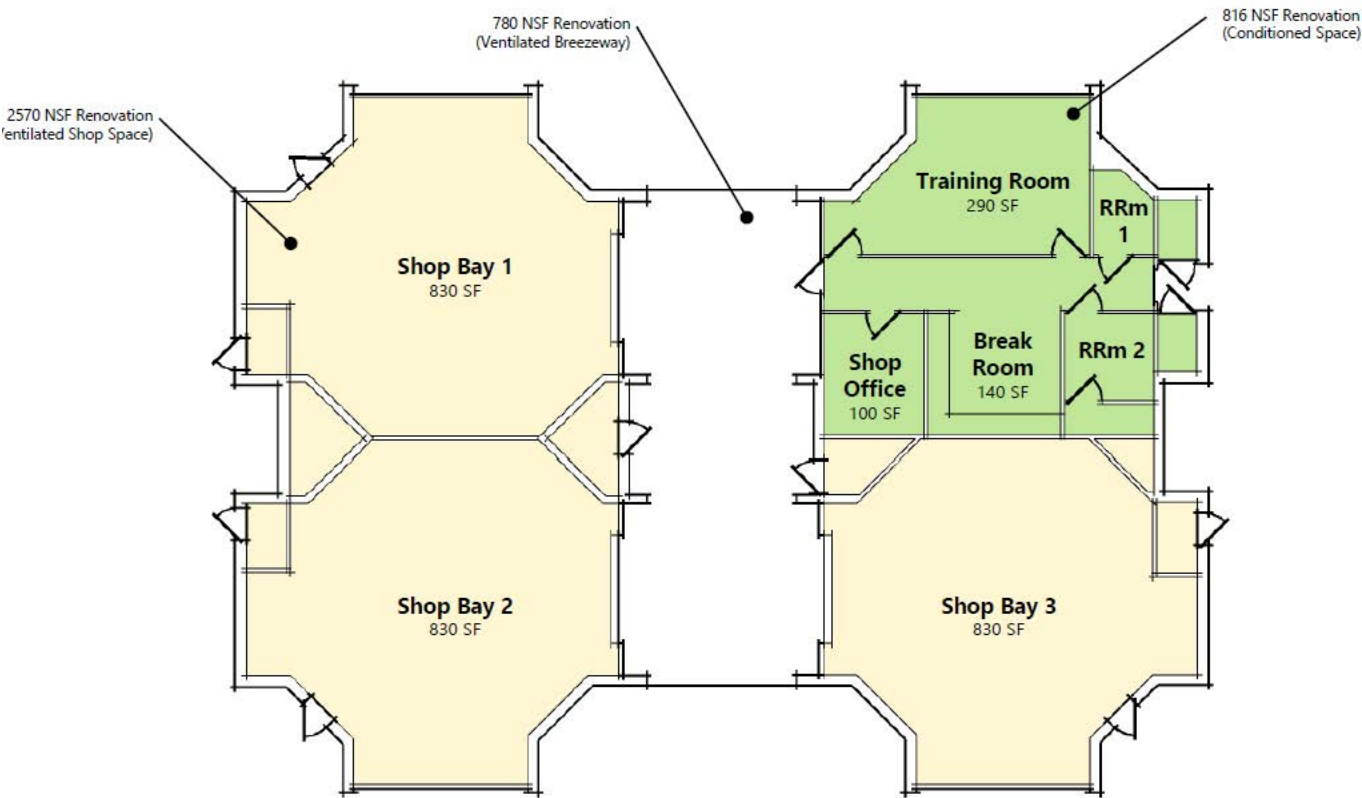
Front entrance to the ELITE Force Training Center



One of several meeting rooms within the building.



A floor plan belows shows the layout of the of the training center. | Images & Floor Plan Source: GHA



Urban Farm Market

During the engagement process, residents advocated and emphasized the urgent need for a conveniently located grocery or fresh food market within their community. They highlighted the essential nature of food access and the role it plays in community health and well-being. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and local advocates have labeled the area as a “food desert,” which means residents live more than 1 mile from the nearest supermarket or grocery store. Food insecurity and significant health disparities have emerged as a result in East Gainesville. To address these long-standing concerns, GHA has taken decisive steps to propose the renovation of an existing building at Pine Meadows to bring a small, accessible fresh food market to the heart of the neighborhood.

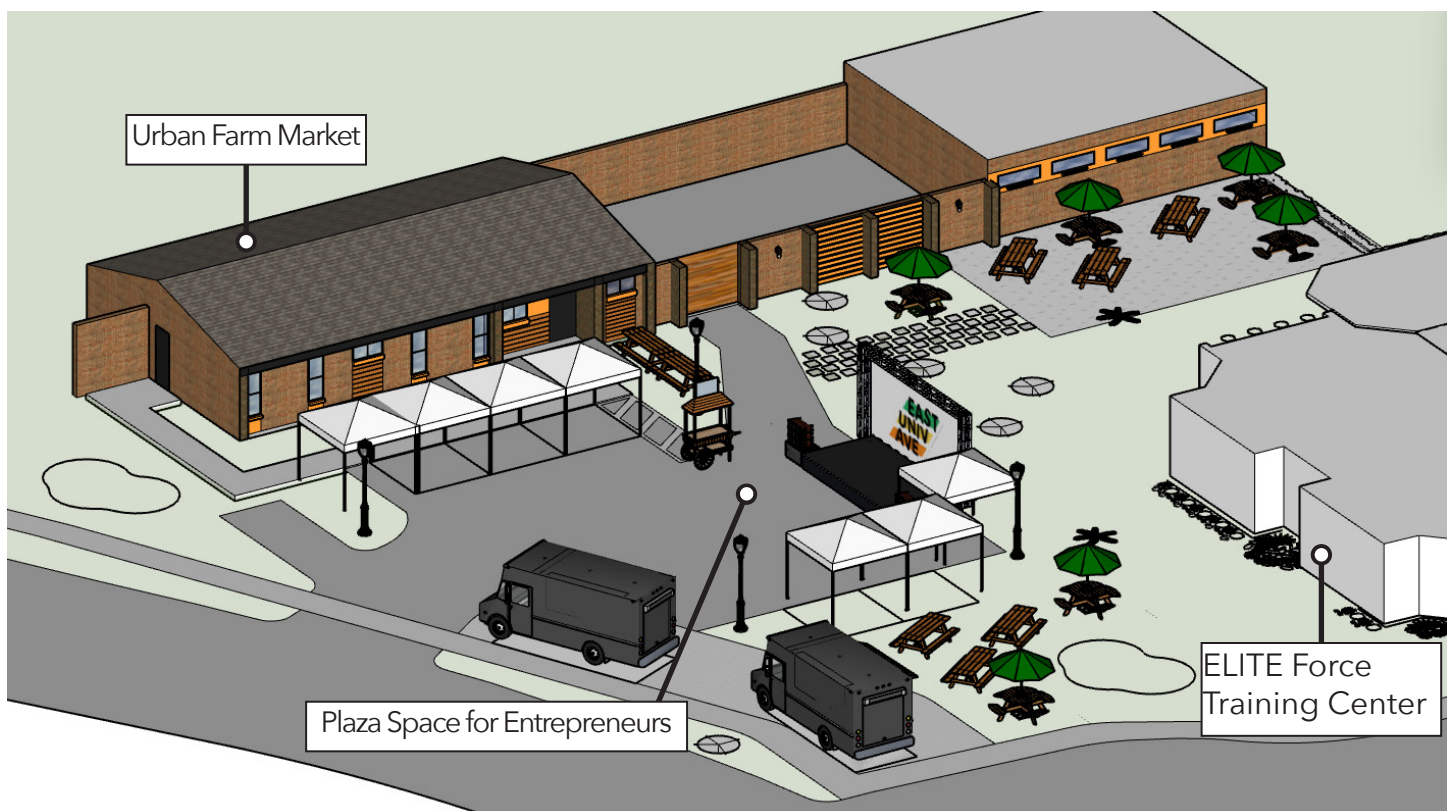
GHA is reimagining a former barber shop building into an Urban Farm Market, a vibrant and functional retail space that will provide residents with fresh, affordable food options. Located adjacent to the plaza space and the ELITE Force Training Center, the building will undergo structural improvements necessary to support modern business activities. The building’s exterior will be revitalized with a bold, new facade and roof, enhancing its overall presence. New refrigeration units, shelving, and other interior

features will be installed to ensure the market provides a welcoming shopping experience and a reliable source of healthy food.

GHA recognizes the importance of the market’s operation and long term sustainability. To ensure success, they are engaging local partners to identify an experienced and mission-aligned operator for the market. Organizations such as Grace Grows, which have a deep track record in community empowerment and food justice, is one option that is being explored. GHA will also reach out to local farms and agricultural producers. Partnerships will help ensure the market is responsive to the specific needs of GHA residents, strengthen its ties to ongoing local food system improvements, and broaden community development efforts. By involving community-focused partners, the initiative aims to foster local ownership and maximize the market’s social, economic, and health impacts.

The market, plaza, and training center reinforce the vision of these investments as an interconnected community hub. Food access, job training, and welcoming public spaces together can improve the quality of life for residents, building a stronger sense of community, opportunity and belonging.

Site rendering of the Urban Farm Market with the plaza space and ELITE Force Training Center. | Source: GHA



Cornerstone Community Market

The Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area (GCRA) is undergoing a full-scale redevelopment of its mixed-use community hub, Cornerstone Campus. GCRA is re-envisioning the site as a shared-use space to create the Cornerstone Community Market, which will host local artisans, entrepreneurs, and growers. The site will also include infrastructure to attract more businesses and include programming such as food truck days. The market will be an accessible, welcoming place for the surrounding neighborhood, bringing together residents to celebrate the local culture.

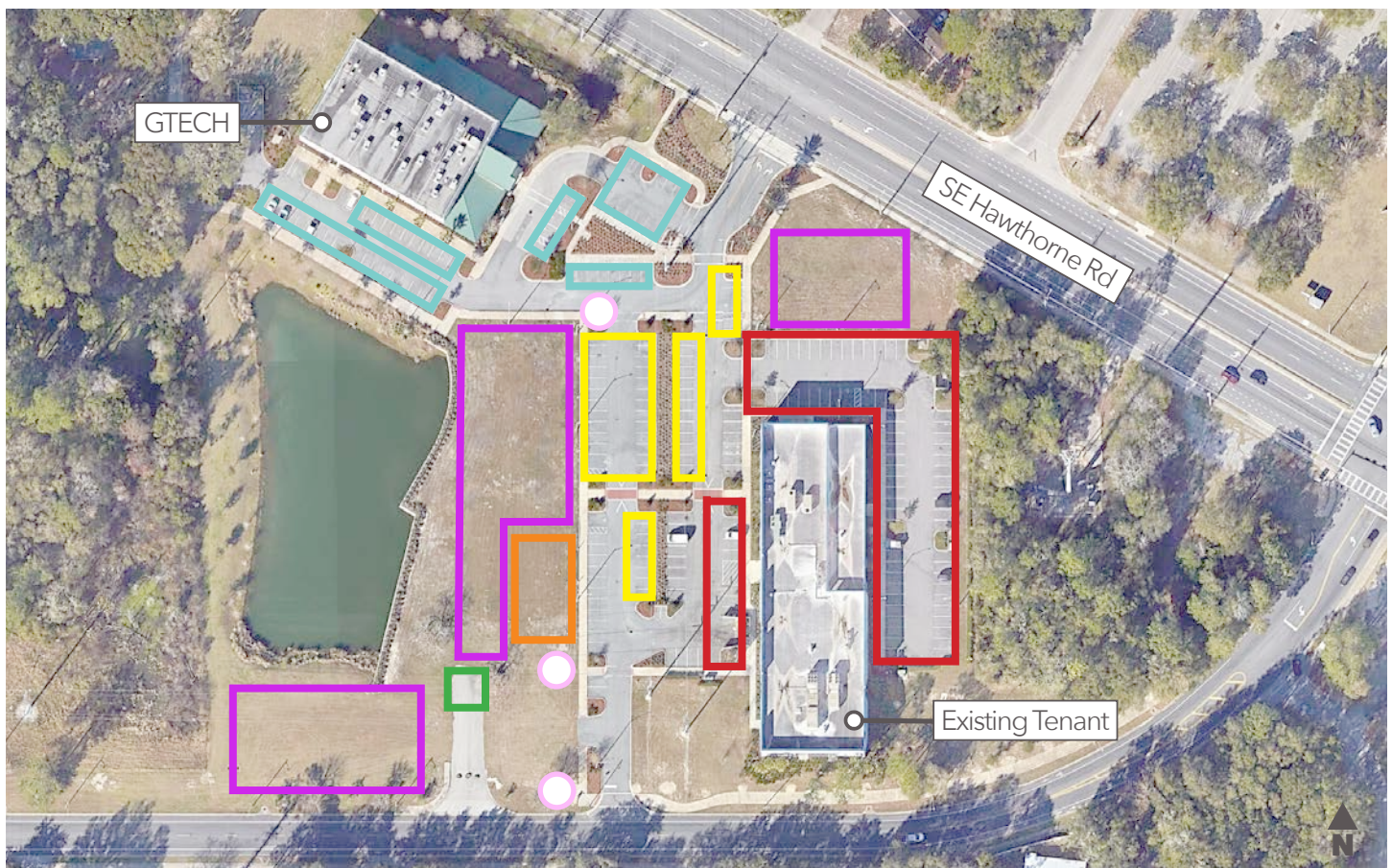
As entrepreneurs complete their business model, they will start their transition process and relocate from Pine Meadows to the Cornerstone Community Market with assistance from GHA and GCRA. The remainder of the Early Action Activity funds will cover the costs of furnishings and equipment such as tables, chairs, signage, banners, and tents. This also includes administrative and business license

fees. A rough timeline, on the following page, shows a general path of their journey, beginning with the onboarding process at the ELITE Force Training Center. Entrepreneurs will refine their business model at the plaza in Pine Meadows, graduate to the Cornerstone Community Market, acquire new skills at GTECH, and potentially establish themselves at a storefront within the neighborhood. This approach will open stations at the market for new residents and potentially continue to create new economic development opportunities within the area.

The map below shows GCRA's preliminary layout of the site to optimize the area as a flex-space. Signage and other modifications will be included

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Market Stalls |  Event Parking |
|  Seating Area |  GTEC Parking |
|  Signage |  Existing Tenant Parking |
|  Restroom | |

Conceptual layout view of the Cornerstone Campus



to direct residents and the surrounding community throughout the space. Infrastructure improvements are planned as part of the City of Gainesville 2045 Mobility Plan to help residents from the housing sites access Cornerstone Campus.

Located along SE Hawthorne Road and SE 24th Street, near the Lake Terrace housing site, the interior and outdoor areas of the Gainesville Technology Entrepreneurship Center (GTEC), GCRA's onsite facility, will also be renovated as a dynamic community space. This will include smaller office space, event venues, and an outdoor pavilion.

As GCRA continues to gather partners to launch the Cornerstone Community Market, they will also explore opportunities to complement this effort by adding distinct features such as art, community traditions, and historical elements that reflect the local culture. This will cultivate a sense of community ownership, inclusion, and belonging with the Cornerstone site and activities.

**"I'm new to the area,
just looking forward
to seeing new things."**

General timeline of entrepreneurs growing their businesses.



Conceptual layout of the Cornerstone Community Market



The image above shows a rendering of where prospective entrepreneurs could be located on the Cornerstone Campus. The concept shows market stalls or tents set up next to a seating area, food truck vendors, and a potential stage area for performances.

Initial sketches on the right show the different areas of the market. The top visual shows space for food trucks to line up in the parking area next to seating and tables. The rendering below provides an eye-level view as people navigate the market. Space is provided for people to maneuver easily. GCRA is currently working to make final modifications to the layout concept.

Preliminary renderings of the Cornerstone Community Market



GHA has created an initial cost estimate for the Community Market as well as budget. Early Action project funds will be used for equipment such as tables, chairs, banners, and administrative costs. They are also securing other funding sources to help with the costs. The approximate total to support resident entrepreneurs is \$8,458.

Together, the cost estimate totals for the ELITE Force Training Center landscaping, plaza space, and Community Market comes to \$100,000.

The projected timeline below shows the events that will occur over the next few months at Pine Meadows and Cornerstone Campus. GHA and GCRA are working to complete the necessary processes. The ELITE Force Training Center opened in March of 2025. Construction on the plaza is scheduled to start in the spring / summer of 2025, with completion anticipated in the fall. GHA will also coordinate additional events that coincide with the plaza’s opening as promotional strategies. This will lead to the market potentially launching in late summer.

Community Market Cost Estimate	
Tables	\$1,000
Chairs	\$500
Signage	\$2,000
Shelving	\$1,000
Banners	\$1,458
Tents	\$1,500
Registration Cost/ Business Licenses	\$1,000
Total	\$8,458

Full Early Action Project Costs	
Landscaping	\$28,042
Plaza features	\$63,500
Community Market Features	\$8,458
Total	\$100,000

