

COMMUNITY OF ROYAL

Community Heritage Plan 2023



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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

In the summer of 2014, in answer to growing fears regarding our small community, a group of concerned residents began conversations with the Community of Royal, Inc. about developing a community plan to define the boundaries of Royal and to plan for possible future growth. The initial concern for the community's residents was not to be absorbed by encroaching developments. The issues quickly expanded in scope as the community expressed desires and concerns about future land use, coordination with county government, transportation and home improvement.

In collaboration, Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc. agreed to continue their efforts of preserving the community's rich heritage and history with the projected outcome of establishing a National Historic Register listing. YPAs, Inc. had established and offering the Royal Historical Enrichment & Art Program (RHEAP) a historical and educational support program whose mission is to enhance self-worth, build character & self-esteem, develop interest, increase awareness and explore history, arts and culture. The program is located in the Alonzo A. Young, Sr. Enrichment & Historical Center, 9569 County Road 235, Wildwood (Royal), FL 34785 which is a Governor's Point Of Light Project. Also, a state issued historic marker is located at the same site in the Royal Park. YPAs, Inc. was the successor of the community garnering this marker.

In addition, our partner organization, Young Performing Artists, Inc. (YPAs, Inc.), received a 2016 grant from the Florida Department of State Small Matching Grant (Grant S1731) to re-visit the community's plan and complete a cultural resources assessment survey (CRAS) to document and evaluate historic sites and structures within the Royal community and to incorporate the findings of the CRAS into this community plan as well as, incorporate the findings into the National Historic Registry application process. The Community Plan was revised and prepared with the assistance of Wade- Trim, Inc. The CRAS was prepared by the firm Digital Heritage Interactive, LLC under contract to YPAs, Inc. The CRAS was developed consistent with the requirements of Chapter 267 of Florida Statutes, Chapter 1A-46 of the Florida Administrative Code, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Code of Federal Regulations Title 36, Chapter VIII, Part 800.

The following community plan represents the results of the community's work encompassing these issues, giving shape to their vision and helping this vision become a reality. This plan shall be updated every two (2) years.

Introduction/History of the Area

Royal can be described as an unincorporated rural/agricultural area, but it is so much more than that. Royal is a diverse and welcoming community. It has a rich heritage steeped in strong religious and educational roots. The vision for Royal's future is for our community to preserve our way of life. The community was founded in 1865 by former slaves of the Old Green Plantation located on the Withlacoochee River. Royal's first industries were farming, logging and naval stores. According to the book "Long Hammock Memories," the name 'Royal' was decided upon so that future generations would know that the original settlers descended directly from African royalty. In 1874, the community's first school was built. Later, a much larger school was built by the community to better accommodate the growing number of students.

There are numerous historical sites in the community that weave the rich tapestry of Royal's history. The Alonzo A. Young, Sr. center serves as a reminder of the past being renewed and becoming a

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part of the future. The original function of this building was a cafeteria. In its current capacity, it feeds the community in a different way serving as a historical site, an educational center, and a museum of our history. There are other such buildings in the community that could do the same, given time and commitment. The community is currently home to a handful of churches, including two with historical roots.

The conclusion of the cultural resources assessment survey for the Royal community, prepared by Digital Heritage Interactive, LLC in 2016 states:

“...Royal is one of the most compelling examples of a rural, historically African American town found anywhere in the state of Florida, if not the nation...In closing, the community of Royal offers a unique and fascinating example of African American life in Florida. It is representative of agricultural trends beginning during the frontier time of the state’s history and extending into the present. Its existence as a black town is also unique, particularly in the light of the fact that similar towns elsewhere in the state have not survived to the present, or have been greatly altered through violence or development.” (pages 81-83, Community of Royal Cultural Resources Assessment Survey, 2017.)

Reprinted from the United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
Community of Royal Rural Historic District Sumter County, FL
Prepared by Digital Heritage Interactive, LLC in 2022 states:

“The Community of Royal is a nationally unique example of an increasingly rare aspect of African American history; rural, agricultural heritage. The community’s existence for approximately 150 years means it directly intersects several important historical themes in both Florida and the nation.

Royal’s earliest African American settlers were granted land patents in the 1870s (with some likely present prior to this). Over the following century, the town developed into a substantial agricultural community. Today, many of the descendants of these earlier Black agriculturalists continue to occupy the buildings and properties developed by their ancestors.

Oral histories with elderly informants in recent decades suggest the potential that many of these early residents interacted with free African Americans who arrived in previous decades.

Historical documents and archaeological evidence already note the existence of free Blacks in the area during the 1830s. Although the period of significance for the Community of Royal Rural Historical District begins with the 1870s, it is clear the African American history of the area starts much earlier.

Royal’s uniqueness stems in large part from its survival. Throughout the 20th century it became increasingly difficult for African Americans to live in rural locations. The perseverance of Royal’s community is the primary reason it survives in the 21st century. Efforts to commemorate this history, by organizations like Young Performing Artists (YPAs) Inc. also play a significant role.

Royal is a strong, vibrant community that values its history.”

Royal's location may have offered the community a measure of protection in the past. Other locations that did not survive as African American communities, places like Rosewood and Santos – unlike Royal – were both located along railroads. While a lack of rail travel was likely inconvenient for Royal's residents, it may have also served to insulate their community.

Although the area around Royal is good agricultural land, its relative geographical isolation played a role in protecting the community from destruction and development. Today, Royal is no longer isolated, and development represents the primary threat to the community's historical integrity.

In closing, the community of Royal offers a unique and fascinating example of African American life in Florida. It is representative of agricultural trends beginning during the frontier times of the state's history and its development into the mid-20th century. Royal, as one of the only remaining rural African American towns in the state can offer insight into and highlight important historical trends in African American history

Assets and Challenges

Many of the strengths, weaknesses and desires of community members are socially based. While social capital of the neighborhood is strong, there is a community-wide desire for improved communication and neighborhood cohesion.

Community identified assets and challenges are outlined below.

Assets

- Neighborhood/people/family
- Collaboration/social capital
- Neighborhood collective action to combat drug problem, improve/maintain community center and playground, seek street improvements
- Strong neighborhood leadership
- Strong history of education/parent involvement
- Religious network
- Diversity
- Generally safe
- Community Garden
- Skills/talents of community members
- Self-sufficiency thru agriculture
- Entrepreneurship
- Enrichment & historical programs/ activities
- Strong community connections
- Strong sense of community
- Strong passion of community

Challenges

- No central place for information
- Increasing of participation

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- More diverse and not as cohesive as in the past
- Drugs
- Community development & growth
- Roads in need of major repair

Goals

Goal 1: Establish the Community's Boundaries

Currently, there are set boundaries for the community of Royal. In February 2015, the Sumter Board of County Commissioners accepted the identified and established 6 corner boundaries of the community based on the recollection of the community's elders of the location of the original homesteads.

In 2021, the Community via nomination application from Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc., embarked on establishing Royal as a National Rural Historic District. The district/ boundaries were expanded based on actual General Land Office records dating back to 1875. At this time, original land homesteaders that the Elder's did not identify were included in the boundaries of the Community.

Our goal is to set these boundaries to ensure that Royal remains Royal. The overwhelming consensus from the community is that they do not wish to be absorbed by the surrounding developments, instead remain an unincorporated area. The community is not interested in incorporating or becoming part of another city or township.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Royal Rural HD Verbal Boundary Description From the point of beginning (POB) at the NW corner of Parcel C21-005, go east along the parcel line to the SE Corner of parcel C21-025; turn north and follow the parcel line to the NW corner of Parcel C21- 006; turn east and follow the parcel line to I-75; turn SE and continue along the parcel line roughly 1,653 feet; then proceed due east through Parcel C21-024 to the NW corner of Parcel C21-022; continue east along the northern boundary of Parcel C21-022 and adjacent parcels to the NE corner of Parcel C22-082; cross CR 229 to the NW corner of Parcel C23-031; continue east along the northern parcel line of Parcel C23-031 and adjacent parcels to the NE corner of Parcel C23-010; turn south and run along the eastern boundary of Parcel C23-010 and adjacent parcels to the SE corner of Parcel C26-029, cross E CR 462 to the NE corner of Parcel C26-014; run south along the eastern boundary of Parcel C26-014 to the SE corner of the parcel; turn west and run along the southern boundary of Parcel C26-014 and adjacent parcels to the SE corner of Parcel C26-020; turn south and cross CR 228 to the NE corner of Parcel C26- 102; continue south along the eastern boundary of Parcel C26-102 to the NE corner of Parcel C35-003; proceed south along the east parcel line of Parcel C35-003 roughly 1,490 feet; then proceed west through Parcel C35-003 to the NE corner of Parcel C35-004; proceed west to the NE corner of Parcel C35-004 and continue west along the parcel's northern boundary to the NW corner of Parcel C35-004; cross CR 229 to the eastern boundary of Parcel C34-003; turn south and run along the eastern boundary of Parcels C34-003 and C34-056 to the NE corner of parcel C34-065; turn west and follow the northern boundary of C34-065 to the NW corner of C34-065; turn south and follow the parcel line to the SE corner of Parcel C34-056; turn west and follow the parcel line to the SW corner of Parcel C34-056; turn south and follow the western boundaries of Parcels C34-031 and C34-028 to the NE corner of Parcel C34-022; turn west and follow the northern, western, and

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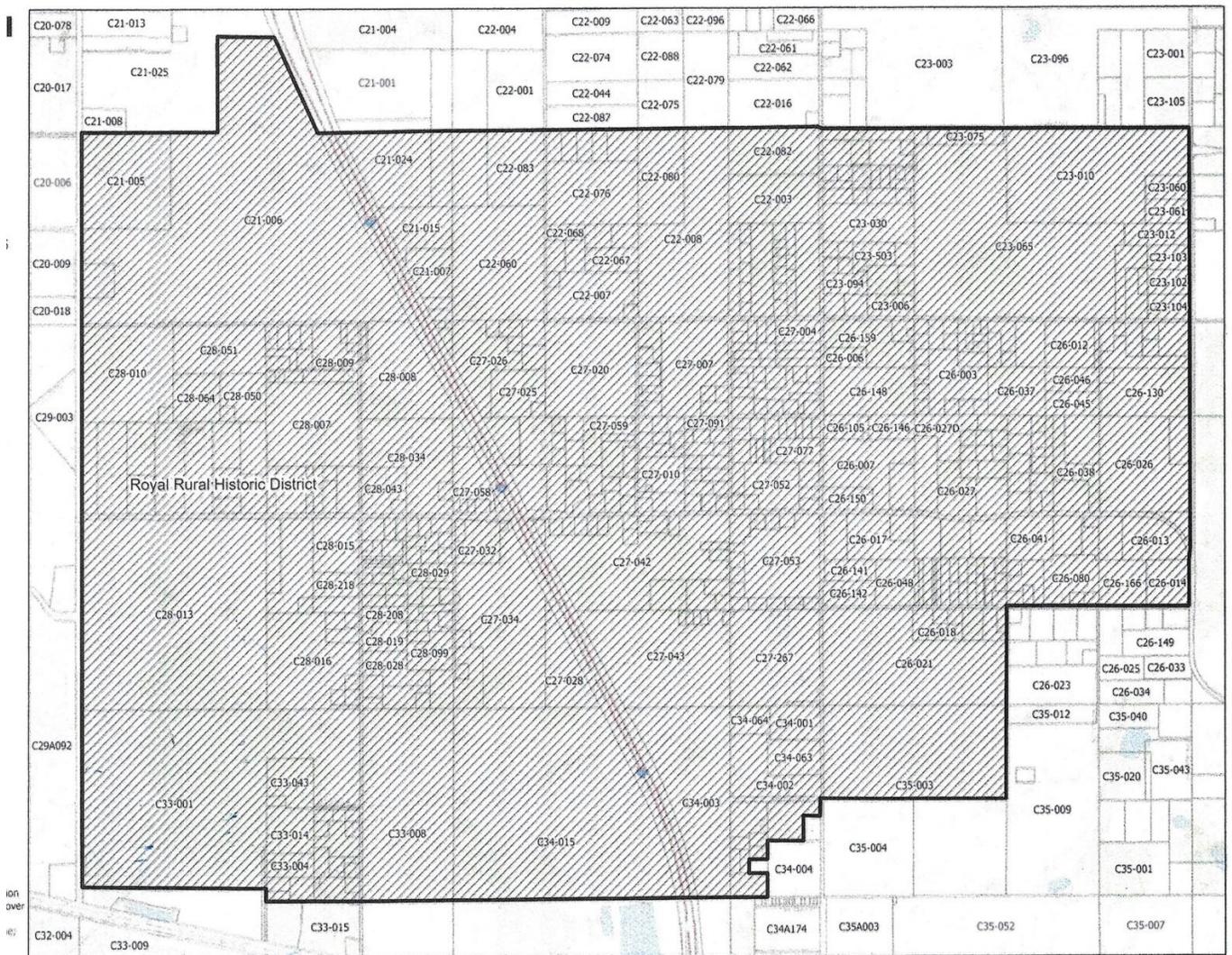
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southern boundary lines of Parcel C34-022 to its SE corner; turn south and follow the eastern boundary of Parcel C34-055 to the SE corner of the parcel; turn west and follow a line along the southern boundary of Parcel C34-055 and cross Parcel C34-003, I-75, and Parcels C34-015 and C33-008 to the SE corner of Parcel C33-006; continue west along the southern boundary of Parcel C33-006 and adjacent parcels to the SW corner of Parcel C33-019; turn north and proceed along the west parcel lines of Parcels C33-019 and C33-018 roughly 203 feet; then proceed west through Parcel C33-001 in a straight line to the western boundary of Parcel C33-001; then turn north and follow the western boundary of Parcel C33-001 and adjacent parcels back to the POB. All parcel data is based upon records available from the Sumter County, Florida, Property Appraiser Office as of November 2022. See the attached boundary map for more information.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary for the Community of Royal Rural Historic Landscape was informed by the community and is drawn to include the majority of the original properties held by the original settlers of Royal: Toney Brooks, David Brooks, William Harley, Lewis Graham, James Mathews, Harriett and Richard J. Johnson, Thomas James, Hampton Anderson, Sandy Robinson, Henry Gattis, Emma Jefferson, Flora James, Jake Susler, Dillie Bryant, Jesse Wilson, Dicey Ludley, and Isaac Hughes. Excluded are portions historically owned by Isaac Hughes and Lewis Graham. Due to modern development and industry along Hwy 44, those areas have lost historical integrity and have not been included.

The boundary also includes the area to the west of those original properties, to capture properties associated with descendants. The majority of the parcels within the landscape boundary are still owned by descendants and continue to be used for agricultural and residential purposes.



The map encompasses land historically owned by African-American families in the community.

The community accepts the above boundaries set forth by the National Rural Registry nomination and agrees to work closely with Sumter County and our community’s County Commission representative and Sumter County Development Services, to maintain Royal’s boundaries. Tentative plans have been made to improve signage to clearly indicate Royal’s location.

The five-year goal for the community to become a registered historic community by the State and receive federal designation’s nomination is in the final stages of completion. The Community of Royal, Inc., Royal’s residents and Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc. worked together to make this goal a reality. The nomination was adverted in November 2022 due to Hurricane Nicole and delayed until mid to late January 2023.

The preparation of the cultural resources assessment survey for the Royal community, by Digital Heritage Interactive, LLC under the leadership of Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc. in 2016, was the first critical step in achieving the goal. The Community of Royal, Inc., adopts by reference the 2017 “Community of Royal Cultural Resources Assessment Survey” and 2022 United States Department of the Interior National Park Service Community of Royal Rural Historic District’s nomination prepared by Digital Heritage Interactive, LLC, under the leadership of Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc., as the guiding documents to identify, document, and preserve the rich cultural history of the Royal community. The identified cultural resources were developed consistent with the requirements of Chapter 267 of Florida Statutes, Chapter 1A-46 of the Florida Administrative Code, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Code of Federal Regulations Title 36, Chapter VIII, Part 800.

The cultural resources assessment survey makes three recommendations for additional work:

1. The creation of a community archaeology program to reveal aspects of African American life between the 19th and 21st centuries. The archaeological exploration would provide an opportunity to further investigate the historical culture of the Royal community.
2. The implementation of a dedicated oral history project to collect stories from the residents of Royal. The Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc. has begun the project with the assistance of 1000 Friends Of Florida’s Summer 2022 Internship Program. The project may be expanded to include work other Oral History Programs.; and
3. Pursuit of a Rural Historic Landscapes designation for Royal through the National Register of Historic Places.

The Community of Royal, Inc. supports the three recommendations for additional work from the cultural resources assessment survey and having an understanding that Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc., the originator of the survey, will conduct this work. YPAs, Inc began Royal’s historical project as part of their Royal Historical Enrichment & Art Program (RHEAP) in 2010 with the installation of the State-issued Historic Site Marker at the Alonzo A. Young, Sr. Enrichment & Historical Center/ Royal Park which is the original site of the community’s segregated school that closed after the 1969-70 school year due to mandatory integration.

Goal 2: Community Organization and Activities

Organization:

There are several organizations in the Royal community. Each has a different focus but addresses one or more of the community’s improvements and enrichment of its residents. Whether the focus is civic, educational, service or outreach, we all agree that Royal has many talented residents who are interested in community improvement and are willing to go the extra mile to make sure the needs of the community are met. It is the goal of this plan that we as a community achieve a higher level of cohesion and communication.

The Community of Royal, Inc. has plans to establish some type of community information distribution system so that information regarding, and for, the community can be displayed in a prominent place instead of partially dispersed.

Activities:

2022 marks the 157th anniversary of the Community and the 57th anniversary of the Royal Homecoming. The Royal Homecoming is a significant event for the Community with its purpose to annually invite the ones that left the community for various reasoning to return home to their roots/ family/ community. The community would like to focus on the original intent of the event and organize some sort of festivity. Since 2007, YPAs, Inc. via their Royal Historical Enrichment & Art Program (RHEAP) has offered community and county-wide enrichment, historical, art programming.

More events/ activities are needed especially ones that will address social & charity inspirations, political aspirations, community enhancement, etc. Residents will be encouraged to establish said activities.

Goal 3: Coordination with Sumter County Government

It is the desires of this Community to have this plan adopted and included in the Sumter County Comprehensive Plan within the next year.

In conjunction with designating the boundaries of Royal, the community would also like to form an inter-local agreement with Sumter County. It is our goal to preserve as many historic landmarks as possible. The sites of the old gas station, post office and numerous tobacco barns have sat untouched since closing. We as a community would like to preserve these sites as they are until a time comes when funding is sought and found to repair and/or restore them. An agreement is being sought so that the county will continue to take no action with our historical sites. The Community of Royal, Inc., adopts by reference the “Community of Royal Cultural Resources Assessment Survey” prepared by Digital Heritage Interactive, LLC, in 2017, as the guiding document to identify, document, and preserve the rich cultural history of the Royal community.

Another aspect of this goal is for our community to become more active in county government. Over the next five years, we plan to increase attendance at more county meetings. We want to make sure our voices are heard, and our issues are not overlooked. As the county grows, we do not want to get lost in the shuffle. The community wants to stay abreast of any county business that affects its residents. One objective is to get members of Royal appointed to different county, regional, or state advisory boards. One goal is to increase visibility and communication with the county.

This goal will help us to establish and maintain viable mechanisms and processes among the governmental, public, and private entities to assure awareness and coordination of development activities to maintain Royal’s historic value and characteristics while providing the best utilization of public infrastructure, resources, and services to enhance the quality of life for present and future Royal generations.

Goal 4: Land Use

We as a community would like to maintain our agricultural use of the land we have. Also, the Community of Royal, Inc. acknowledges the Florida Constitution and its protection of private property rights and will ensure that Royal resident’s private property owners rights are considered in local decision-making.

The Community of Royal has been actively seeking compatible, small-scale agribusiness growth for this area because it is within the Economic Activity Center as designated on the Future Land Use Map. The county's Comprehensive Plan encourages cottage industries and similar type businesses that complement the rural character of this agricultural area.

Plus, Royal would be an ideal location for 'Social Enterprise' - a new and innovative means of addressing the world's humanity challenges.

The fear of many residents is that surrounding developments have continued to expand and has attempted to encroach on our community. Defining and maintaining our boundaries would ensure that we don't have to worry about not being able to farm the land we've farmed for decades.

It is the five-year goal of the community to designate areas for 'major development'. 'Major development' in our community would involve private landowners' use of neighborhood commercial zoning. The Community of Royal, Inc. is taking the lead in organizing the subsequent meetings that will have to take place for these decisions.

Goal 5: Transportation

In January 2022, Royal established a line of communication with Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) during their legislative supported plan to extend the Florida Turnpike with four (4) proposed routes through the heart of Royal. In August 2022 and after much open dialog with FDOT, the plan was sent back to the drawing board with a top priority to 'avoid Royal' as a historic community. This priority was based on FDOT's established Avoidance Areas policy which includes Managed areas, State Parks, Conservation Easements, Military Lands, Mitigation Banks, Native American Lands, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) National Register of Historic Places potentially eligible or eligible sites and resource groups. The Community will continue to closely coordinate with FDOT.

The community has many residents without transportation. As our five-year goal, we would like to coordinate with the county and transit to establish a route or stop in our community. The Community Of Royal, Inc. wants the County to provide Royal residents safe, convenient and efficient road transportation systems that supports maintaining the historic characteristics. In other words, no major highways, byways, throughways, etc. dissecting Royal.

Also, ensure that Sumter Public Transportation is extended for the benefits of Royal residents. There was a stop at the Royal park years ago but was discontinued due to a lack of usage. It is our belief that a brief route through the community would better serve the needs of our residents.

Goal 6: Parks and Recreation

The community would like to work with the county to return ownership of community property back to the community as a five-year goal.

The community request the County to help establish a larger Park/ Event Site with a small amphitheater, food service area, playground, etc. to accommodate our larger community events i.e. the Royal Homecoming.

Goal 7: Housing

The community would like to coordinate with Helping Hands and similar organizations to improve the needs in the community. We are currently considering the qualifications of the different

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organizations so that we can get that information out to those who need it. Eventually, we would like to be able to help those in need without looking to outside sources.

The community will encourage and promote the availability of adequate and affordable housing opportunities for their residents via County's resources.

Goal 8: Education

To grow, we must educate ourselves. The community is considering helping expand YPAs, Inc. efforts and collaborating with existing organizations to better us. We want to increase our resident's knowledge about health-related matters and, in doing so, renew our vitality and longevity. We are reaching out to organizations such as the Health Department and Red Cross to sponsor events that will educate and invigorate our community.

The five-year goal is to sponsor a tutoring and/or afterschool program to assist our youth in exceling academically. They have the potential; we just must nurture it and watch it grow. There are also plans for developing an adult literacy and career improvement program.

Under this goal, we will include educating the residents on Drug Awareness, Health Education, Parenting Skills, Finance Management, etc. We are pursuing programs and services to increase the probability of full physical and mental aptitude and longevity of the residents.

Goal 9: Law Enforcement

A major goal the community is to improve our relationship with the Sumter County Sheriff's Department. There were many anecdotes relating to perceived mistreatment regarding the Sheriff's deputies. It was the consensus that we as a community need more engagement with the Sheriff's Department. As the five-year goal, we would like to coordinate with the Sheriff's Department to plan positive events that involve our community and law enforcement.

Goal 10: Historic Preservation

It is an immediate and ongoing goal to support Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc. in its initiative to maintain Royal's historic value/ characteristics and its historic designation and integrity.

Especially, their continued move to have Royal listed as an Avoidance Area within Sumter County and throughout the State of Florida's Departments which includes managed areas, State Parks, County Parks, Conservation Easements, Military Lands, Mitigation Banks, Native American Lands, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) National Register of Historic Places potentially eligible or eligible sites and resource groups.

Also, support YPAs, Inc. efforts to identify other means of preservation for Royal i.e., TDR's, conservation easements, overlay zoning with outer buffer overlay, rural & family land protection programs, etc.

We adopt YPAs, Inc. initiative processes and strategies moving forward.

Goal 11: Economic Advancement

Royal desires to help develop, encourage, facilitate and participate in programs, plans, processes and activities that result in quality, compatible development and redevelopment. Royal will focus on cooperative efforts with Sumter County and the private sector to achieve this goal while generating necessary revenue for Royal residents and preserving quality of life for its citizens.

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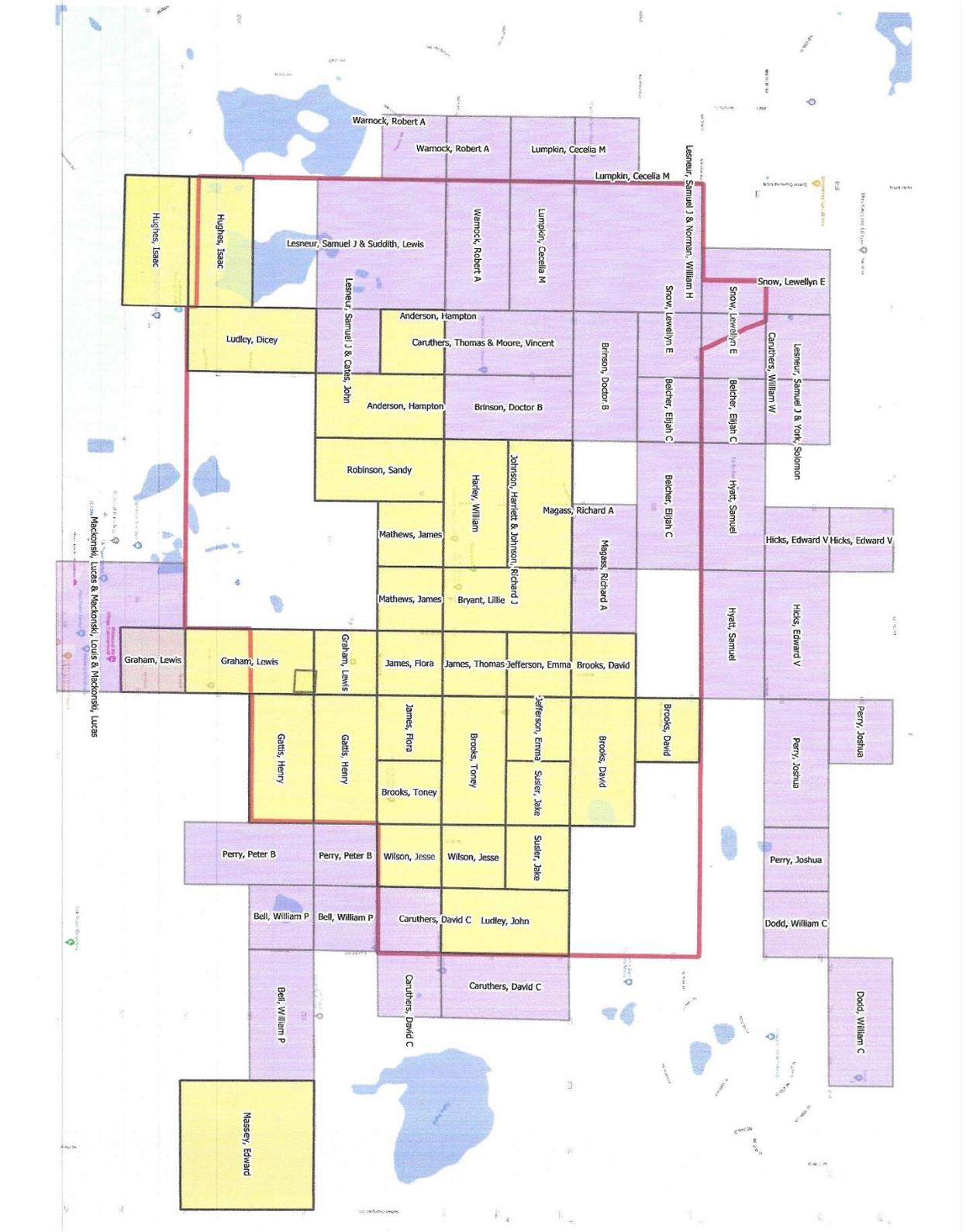
The Community desires to create opportunities for small businesses to be established throughout the community, as well as, focused around the historic school site, to provide economic opportunity to the residents.

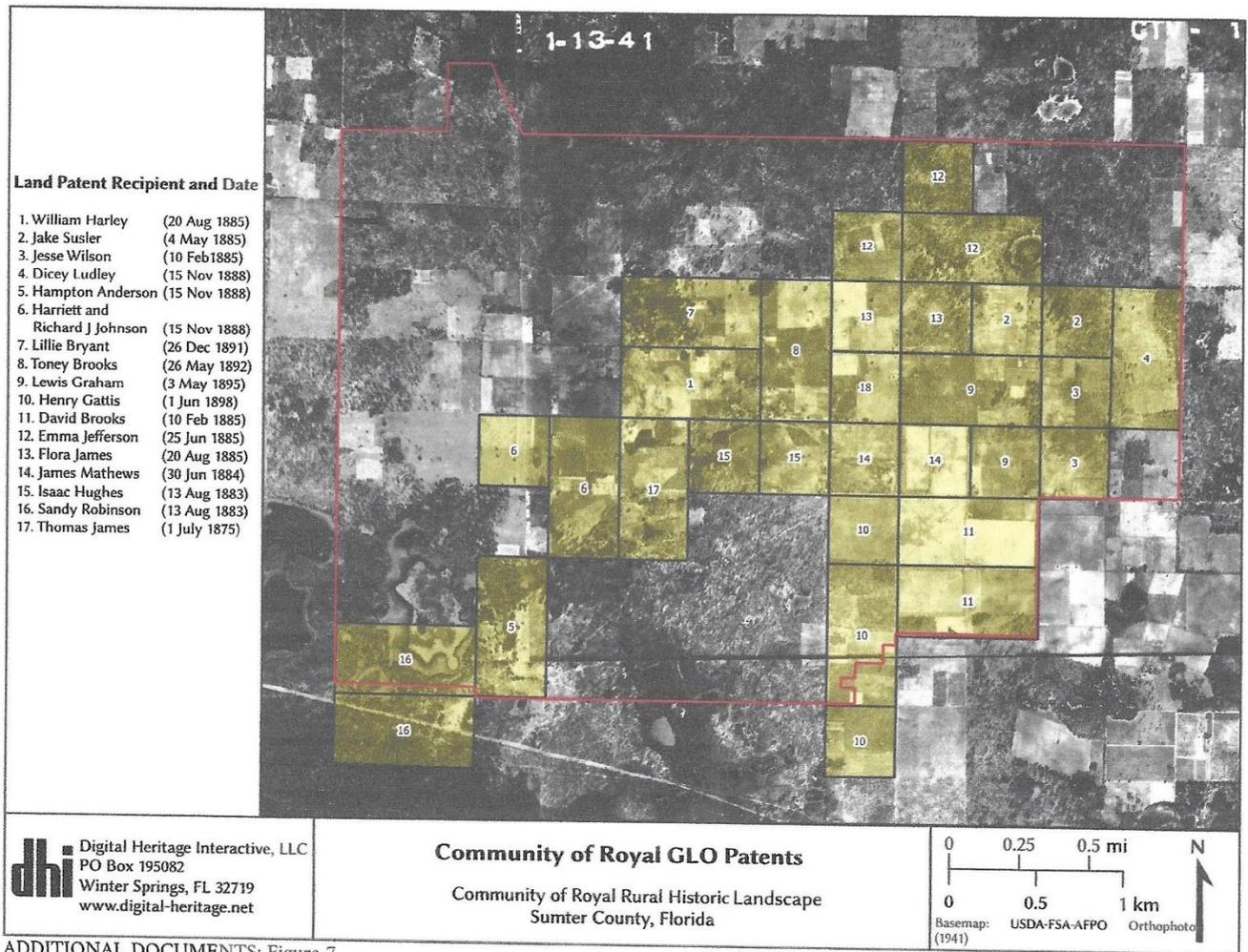
Conclusion and Next Steps

The Royal Community Plan is a tool for the community to use as it continues to move forward on a path of improvement and empowerment. Equipped with established goals and strategies to achieve these goals, the community can now develop specific projects to put the plan into action. The Community of Royal, Inc. will serve as a resource for the Royal community in implementing the plan's strategies and projects.

Developing and implementing specific projects in pursuit of the community goals will involve a series of steps. Goals, strategies, and then specific projects must be prioritized by considering community needs and available resources. The Royal community has established an internal process for decision-making that will take into consideration the input and concerns of the entire community. Once this decision-making process is put into action, the community can confidently move forward with high-priority projects while low-priority projects continue to ripen.

Most projects will require partnerships with other organizations, individuals and/or County departments. The Community of Royal, Inc. will help identify these potential partners and build relationships necessary for successful collaboration. Community members should also be aware of existing relationships within the community that will promote project development. The Royal community is eager to take ownership of its future. Through collective advocacy and cooperation, Royal has won many battles to preserve its character and support much needed changes. Royal's participation in this community planning initiative is simply another example of the community's advocacy. The Royal Community Plan is a new tool for this community to use in its continued efforts toward a vision of a stronger, more cohesive, vital and resilient neighborhood.





ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS: Figure 7