



A Resident-Focused Housing Stability and Smart Growth Plan for District 8

By Isaiah Anderson

Orange County is growing fast. District 8 is growing even faster. Communities like Lake Nona, Moss Park, Hunters Creek, Southchase, Meadow Woods, Sawgrass, and Wyndham Lakes are seeing explosive development, rising property values, and increasing economic pressure on longtime residents. The issue is not growth itself. Growth is inevitable. The issue is whether growth benefits the people already living here or whether it slowly pushes them out. Right now, too many residents feel like they are being forced to compete against their own county just to remain in the communities they helped build. Teachers cannot afford to live near the schools they teach in. First responders are commuting farther away from the districts they protect. Young families are delaying homeownership entirely. Seniors living on fixed incomes are watching rent and insurance costs rise faster than their income. At the same time, Orange County continues approving large-scale developments that often prioritize maximum profit over long-term community stability. This plan focuses on restoring balance. Not anti-growth. Not anti-business. Not anti-development. This is pro-resident growth.

“The only path that truly moves a community forward is the right path.”

The Current Reality Facing District 8

According to the Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse, Orange County has only about 12 affordable rental units available for every 100 extremely low-income renters. According to HUD's Orlando Housing Market Analysis, Orlando-area home prices climbed near \$450,000 in recent years. Rental rates surged across nearly every housing category, and population growth continues to outpace affordable housing production. Meanwhile, areas surrounding Lake Nona and the southern corridor continue attracting large-scale investment due to Medical City expansion, tourism industry employment, logistics and warehousing growth, transportation expansion, and corporate relocation. While investment is important, residents are beginning to feel the side effects through higher rents, displacement pressure, worsening traffic, overcrowded schools, and increasing economic separation between communities. The truth is simple. If growth only works for people moving into District 8, but not the people already here, then we are not building a stronger community. We are replacing one.

Existing Efforts Already Helping

I believe in acknowledging what is already working before proposing improvements. Orange County has already begun investing in affordable housing initiatives through the Housing Trust Fund and partnerships with nonprofit housing organizations. These programs help preserve affordable units, support rental assistance, and encourage workforce housing development. That is a strong starting point, but the scale of the crisis now requires larger and more targeted solutions. Efforts to improve regional transportation are also important because transportation and housing affordability are directly connected. When workers are forced farther from their jobs due to rent increases, traffic worsens, commute costs rise, and quality of life declines. Transportation planning must now be tied directly to housing planning. Several Florida communities have also begun exploring Community Land Trust models to stabilize neighborhoods and preserve affordability long term. These models are successful because they remove land from speculative pricing cycles while still allowing residents to build equity and ownership. District 8 should become a leader in this effort rather than waiting until displacement becomes irreversible.

My Plan for Housing Stability and Smart Growth in District 8

The first thing I want to establish is what I call Workforce Housing Guarantee Zones. If a developer wants major rezoning approvals, increased density allowances, tax incentives, or public infrastructure support, then a meaningful portion of that project must directly serve the workforce already living and working in Orange County. Not symbolic affordability. Real affordability. That includes teachers, nurses, county employees, hospitality workers, construction workers, law enforcement, firefighters, and working families. Too often, developments advertise affordable housing while pricing units far above what actual residents can realistically afford. That needs to change. Under this plan, 20 to 25 percent of units in qualifying developments would remain workforce-affordable long term. Priority access would go to Orange County residents and workers, and affordability agreements would last decades, not just a few years. This creates mixed-income communities instead of economically segregated neighborhoods. Most importantly, it allows growth without displacement.

Community Ownership and Anti-Displacement Initiative

One of the biggest fears I hear from residents is, “We’re eventually going to get pushed out.” Honestly, people are not imagining that fear. We have seen this happen across the country. Property values spike, investors move in, taxes and rents rise, and longtime residents slowly disappear from the communities they built. That is why I want District 8 to launch a Community Ownership and Anti-Displacement Initiative. This initiative would partner with nonprofits, acquire strategic land early, preserve affordable housing, and create pathways to ownership for working families. One major tool would be Community Land Trusts. Under this model, families own the home, but the land remains protected in trust for the community. That keeps homes permanently affordable while still allowing residents to build generational wealth. I specifically believe areas like Meadow Woods, Southchase, and parts of Sawgrass could benefit tremendously from early stabilization efforts before speculative pressure worsens further.

Smart Growth Infrastructure Accountability

Growth cannot continue operating independently from infrastructure. Right now, many residents feel like development approvals happen first while schools, roads, flooding concerns, and traffic mitigation become afterthoughts. That model is unsustainable. Under my plan, major developments would be evaluated using a Smart Growth Accountability Standard.

Before approval, developers must clearly demonstrate how projects will impact traffic, school capacity, drainage, environmental preservation, emergency services, and affordability. If infrastructure cannot support the project responsibly, adjustments must be made before approval, not years afterward when residents are already dealing with the consequences. For communities like Lake Nona, Moss Park, and Wyndham Lakes, this becomes especially important due to rapid corridor expansion. We cannot allow infrastructure to permanently lag behind growth.

Resident Priority Housing Program

One issue nobody talks about enough is that many residents who grew up here are now competing against outside investment at a completely different financial level. Young adults born and raised in Orange County should not feel forced to leave the county just to achieve homeownership. That is why I support creating down payment assistance programs, workforce homebuyer grants, and resident-priority housing opportunities, especially for first-time homebuyers, public service workers, and longtime Orange County residents. Growth should create opportunity for residents first, not just investors.

Transparent Development Scorecards

I also want residents to clearly see what developments are actually providing back to the community. Every major development proposal should publicly disclose affordable housing contributions, traffic impact, environmental impact, infrastructure investment, projected rent ranges, and community benefits. Residents deserve transparency before projects are approved, not after. This creates accountability while also improving trust between the county, developers, and residents.

Why This Plan Matters

I do not believe the solution is to stop growth. That is unrealistic. But I also do not believe we should blindly approve growth without asking who benefits, who gets displaced, who gets left behind, and what kind of county we are building long term. District 8 should become a model for balanced development, where economic growth and community stability exist together. Because the people who built these communities should not become strangers in them. That includes the family renting in Meadow Woods, the teacher commuting into Lake Nona, the

senior homeowner in Southchase, the first responder in Hunters Creek, and the young couple in Sawgrass trying to buy their first home. Growth should strengthen communities, not replace them. And if we plan correctly now, District 8 has the opportunity to lead Orange County in proving that responsible development and resident protection can absolutely coexist.

THIS IS OUR PATH FORWARD.

Sources and Research

- Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse
- HUD Orlando Housing Market Analysis
- Orange County Housing and Community Development Division
- Orange County Housing Trust Fund Information
- New America, Displacement in Sun Belt Communities