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Wes Hinton
Vice president of Wildlight



BOOMING WILDLIGHT

ABOVE: Storefronts open regularly in Wildlight, like this one that was set to house Foxtail Coffee in late 2024 at the Crossings at Wildlight.

Nassau County town of 2,000 seeing robust growth, set to expand with new district

Alexandria Mansfield Jacksonville Florida Times-Union | USA TODAY NETWORK

Ten years ago, driving through Nassau County most likely meant a long stretch of pine forest and “just passing through.”

- Few thought of this area as a destination until the first shovel turned over the dirt of what would become Wildlight.
- Today, the pine trees still rise tall, but between them are trails, homes, schools and storefronts. There’s a Publix and a state-of-the-art UF Health facility in what was once an anonymous stretch of land.
- Over the last near-decade, Wildlight has become one of the most ambitious and thoughtfully executed developments in the Southeast, according to Wes Hinton, vice president of Wildlight.
- “We’ve been focused on building community and all the things that that means,” he said.

A town in the making

Spanning 24,000 acres in Nassau County — about 25 minutes north of Jacksonville and just south of the Georgia border — Wildlight was never intended to be a typical subdivision.

From the start, the vision was bigger: a place where neighborhoods nestle into preserved woodlands, where families can walk to school and where every decision, from road layout to retail partnerships, supports a sense of connection.

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BELOW: Rita’s Italian Ice is one of the many stores at the Crossings at Wildlight.

PHOTOS BY COREY PERRINE/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION



Wildlight

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And the results speak for themselves, Hinton said. Today, Wildlight is home to an estimated 2,000 residents and offers an array of housing types — from stylish apartments and townhomes to active adult villas and assisted living.

The addition of Wildlight Elementary School was a major turning point for the area in 2017, truly solidifying it as its own community.

“We have a little something for everybody,” Hinton said. “That’s what makes it work.”

Most neighborhoods in the original phase have sold out, with the exception of Del Webb Wildlight, a 55-plus community that is now about 60% built out. But Wildlight is far from finished.

The newest district

To better organize growth, Wildlight recently introduced the concept of “districts,” with the first completed one many residents now call home the “Town District.”

The vibrant, mixed-use core where Wildlight first took root is “downtown”

for the community, Hinton said, though it will “eventually be our historic district — because this is where it all started.”

As the Town District continues to evolve, a new neighborhood, Westerly Park, is also underway. Tucked into the southwest corner of the district, Westerly Park will feature a range of housing types, from townhomes to single-family homes, on varying lot sizes.

Models are currently under construction and are expected to open in early 2026, with the first homes available for sale as early as fall 2025.

These will be the last residential units in the Town District, Hinton noted, before the next phase of Wildlight is fully underway.

Retail and entertainment will soon follow — though Hinton emphasized they aren’t looking to replicate the typical strip mall formula. Instead, they are looking for uses “that serve the community” and give experiences to the families who live there and in the surrounding areas.

“We’ve built something special, and we want the next chapter to reflect that,” he said.

As the Town District nears completion, Wildlight is preparing to break ground on a new area with an entirely different feel. Located about seven miles east of the original project near

Chester Road, the Garden District will offer a more nature-focused lifestyle.

Where the Town District is more vibrant and commercial, the Garden District will be quieter and greener, Hinton said.

“The existing environment is already so beautiful,” he said. “We’re designing the community to fit into it, not the other way around.”

While specific details are still under wraps, the Garden District will eventually stretch toward the St. Mary’s River and Bells River, offering views and access to some of the most scenic waterways in the region.

An official announcement about this next phase is expected in the coming months.

‘Thoughtful expansion’

Wildlight is growing — and fast — but not recklessly. The post-pandemic housing boom brought an influx of new interest to Northeast Florida, and Wildlight was uniquely positioned to meet that demand, Hinton said, but the team isn’t in a rush.

“It would be easy to build something that looks the same everywhere,” he said, “but we don’t want that. We don’t want Wildlight to feel homogenous. Each neighborhood should have its own

identity. We want to take the best parts of how real communities grow and help guide that process, not force it.”

That means careful planning, long timelines and occasionally telling investors or developers “not yet.”

“Sometimes the hardest part is being patient,” Hinton admits. “But we’re focused on the quality. It’s not about how fast we go — it’s about making something that’s really special.”

With tens of thousands of acres still to be developed, Wildlight’s future is expansive.

Full buildout could someday support 50,000 to 60,000 residents, Hinton said, a true town by any standards.

But that growth will come in chapters with a focus on the values that launched Wildlight: thoughtful design, environmental stewardship and a commitment to real community.

“We want this to be a place people are proud to live,” Hinton says. “Proud to raise their kids here. Proud to grow old here. That’s what keeps us going.”

Nearly 10 years in, Wildlight has already transformed the landscape of Nassau County, and it promises to be more than just a neighborhood in Northeast Florida as leaders set their sights on a lasting legacy.