

# **Tampa Premium Outlets: Convenient or costly?**

By Carisma Briscoe

A Lutz family discusses where to go for dinner.

It's a hard choice because there are so many options just across the street from each other.

A girl who went away for college came back to her hometown to see a plethora of new buildings emerging around what used to be emptiness.

The overdevelopment of an area may look nice on the outside and engaging for tourists, but it could have detrimental effects on the environment.

Michael Troy Salisbury, who has worked for 26 years in both public and private sectors with developers and happens to be a professor of urban planning and sustainability at the University of South Florida, shares his thoughts on safe planning when developing many businesses in one area such as the Tampa Premium outlets.

"You want to minimize the impact as best as you can. Most of the time what happens is, there is something in the land development code that says okay developer, you want to impact this wetland, then you're going to have to mitigate someplace else."

The mitigation process can take a long time to restore what natural wetland or area was lost often leaving the immediate community to process the loss of their natural space. For residents that experience these transformations firsthand, the changes can feel especially personal due to the connection or memories of what that land once was.

Lifelong community member Lanie Swanson shares her experiences growing up in the area and the changes she has noticed within the environment.

"The development has been overwhelming. I grew up with cow pastures and not much else. There have been major effects on the environment. I live in the Quail Hollow area, and there was a time when you would see quail. I haven't seen them in a long time. Wildlife has dwindled, I don't see as many deer or turtles, and the list just goes on."

As more residents like Swanson voice their own concerns for their home's environmental impacts or the developments surrounding them, county officials have taken steps yearly to update their land use codes. These codes are an essential tool used to regulate the expansion of an area such as the Tampa Premium Outlets and are important to utilize during these projects.

Pasco county's land use code consists of their own regulations for safe development practices. The recent amendments for 2025 have been accepted by Florida's governor.

"The Board of County Commissioners of Pasco County, Florida, is authorized under Florida statutes, to enact zoning and other land development regulations to protect the health, safety and

welfare of the citizens of Pasco County. Florida Statutes provides that certain specified and mandated regulations are to be combined and compiled into a single land development code for the jurisdiction. "According to the county.

Not only can this overdevelopment harm the environment or the area's species, but it also takes away from local businesses.

Ines Butler, a local to the area, shares her thoughts on the excessive number of establishments in the Tampa Premium Outlets area.

"There are so many unnecessary additions to the area. While they may be convenient, there are a plethora of plazas with Starbucks, a burger spot, and a grocery store. It's a bit excessive and doesn't allow local businesses to thrive because there are chains everywhere."

A prime example of this is one strip of the outlets where there is an Aldi, Starbucks, Costco, and Culver's side by side with a range of restaurants and stores located just down or across the street.

This multitude of businesses and commercial activity draws a constant stream of commuters, creating congested and extremely high traffic patterns in the area.

Fernando Luis Ortiz-Babilonia feels strongly about the change in traffic.

"There have been noticeable increases in traffic, and sadly, increases in traffic accidents and fatalities. It feels like driving anywhere in Wesley Chapel is chaotic and stressful nowadays. I remember when I drove in 2011, things were much calmer and people weren't in such a rush to get everywhere. Now, every day, I am worried about getting into an accident with reckless and out of control drivers. It feels unsustainable, especially after a horrific rollover crash occurred directly in front of my neighborhood just last week."

The traffic and drivers are out of control along State Roads 54 and 56 past the Outlets while going to their destinations, as well as attempting to get on or off of the I-75 exits just past the businesses. This traffic will often bleed into the Wesley Chapel area in either direction, as Ortiz-Babilonia mentioned.

According to the Florida Department of Transportation, nearly 74,000 drivers took routes through the Tampa premium outlets area down state road 54 in 2024 daily. This is an extremely high volume of drivers on the road and indicates high traffic volume. Not only does this effect travel times, the accumulation of vehicles also harms the environment further because of the emissions released into the air leading to pollution.

The annual average daily traffic number of vehicles has consistently increased yearly since at least 2021. There were around 70,000 reported daily drivers in 2021 in comparison to the previously mentioned 74,000 in 2024, according to the Florida Department of Transportation records.

With over 4,000 more drivers on State Road 54 daily, it is reasonable to assume that the traffic increase is due to the uprising developments in the area of the Tampa premium outlets.

Meanwhile, Pasco county's economic environment budget had been on an opposite trend.

According to the county's fiscal year summary of revenues and appropriations, the budget in 2023 was around \$64.4 million, while the next year the budget dropped to about \$60 million.

However, additional budget efforts were made in 2025 which increased the average back up to around \$65 million, similar to the previous budget in 2023.

This updated budget assists the processes of the most recent developments as support for proper practices of mitigation and planning.

Community member Selena Perez admits there have been noticeable changes to the area but acknowledges the excitement that comes with the expansion of where she calls home.

"The changes are significant. Years ago, there was a small-town feel with fewer amenities. Now, it's a well-developed suburban hub with access to high quality schools, healthcare, shopping and entertainment. The city feels more modern and connected, yet it still maintains pockets of that original charm. It's exciting to see how far we've come, but it's also important to preserve the qualities that made people want to live here in the first place."