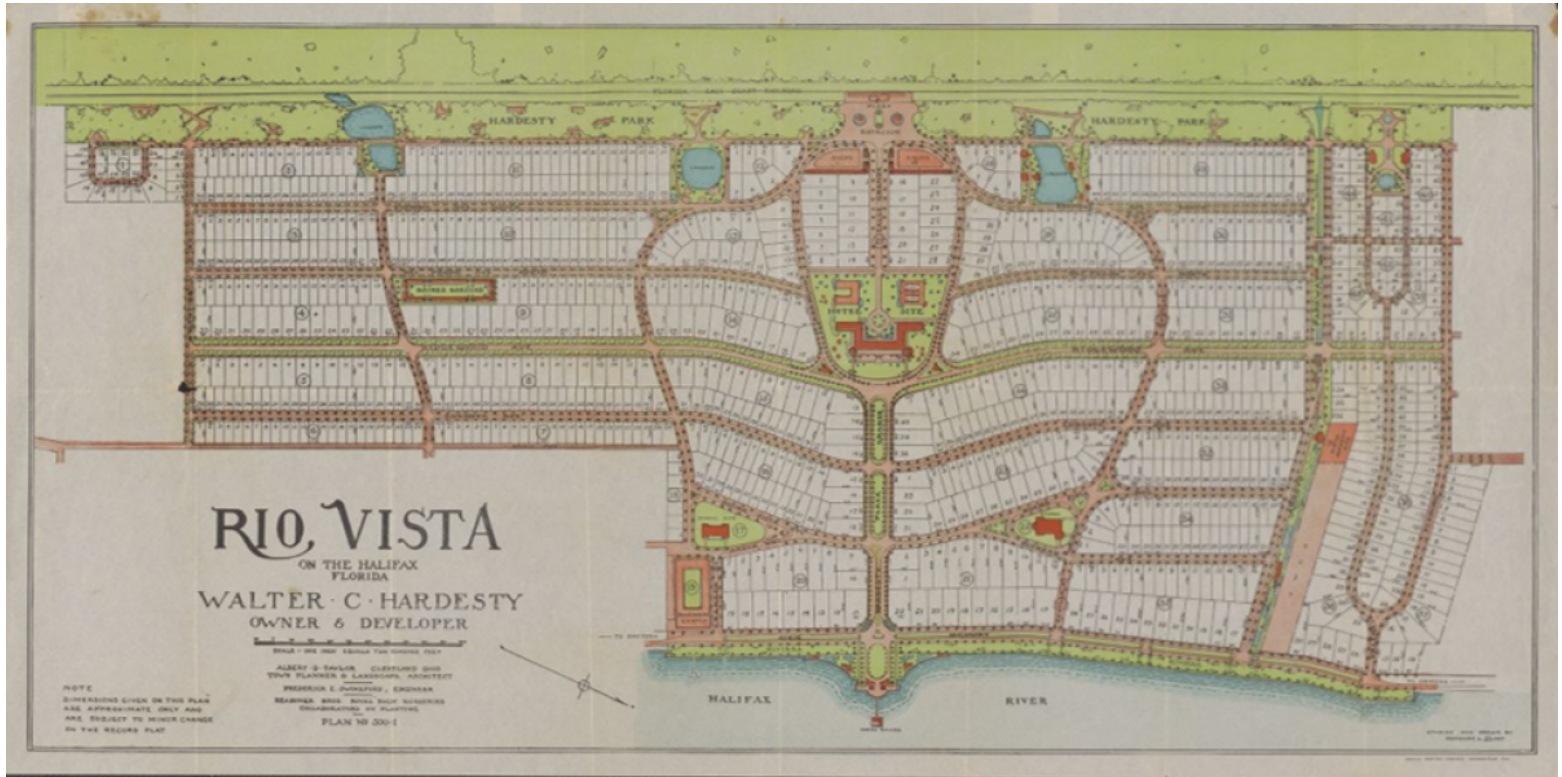


## Rio Vista on the Halifax and the Riviera Hotel



A proposed development called Rio-Vista-on-the-Halifax was the dream of William Collins Hardesty, an Ohio developer and furniture manufacturer who laid out plans for his grand community during Florida's land boom of the 1920s.

The development would have included small winter cottages,, a grand hotel, zoo, casino, a boat and canoe club, a riding academy, a polo club and a hunting club. The Riviera Hotel, On The Halifax was billed as old world charm with new world comfort.

To plan the Rio Vista development, Hardesty consulted with Cleveland landscape architect and town planner Albert D. Taylor and engineer Frederick Swineford, who designed curvilinear roads, irregular lots, lagoons, parks, plazas with monuments and commercial shops, and church, hotel, and school sites. Construction began in February 1923.

Plans also included a golf course. In February 1926, under the supervision of prominent Chicago golf course architect W.D. Clark, workmen began construction. By 1927 the development contained 3,600 lots and a 1,200 acre hotel, 38 homes and more than 15 miles of paved roads had been developed. But this all came to a halt with the onset of the Great Depression.

A canal dug for canoes and gondolas was located along what is now the the B-29 Drainage Canal off of Calle Grande. Here a set of archways and Romanesque columns which were built as a replica of Roman ruins, which ironically have tuned in to ruins after years of neglect. The

concrete pillars were painted to look like marble, and friezes depicting charioteers and a toga-clad statesman were built above the arches, along with a Cypress Trellis. This was originally built as the entrance to a proposed riverfront development in 1924 for a cost of \$50,000. The arches that once marked the entrance to Rio Vista on the Halifax are among the few remaining structures from the development.

After the stock market crash and a devastating hurricane in the 1920s, Hardesty had a hard time selling people on the idea of moving to his resort in Florida. The hotel folded. The hotel was annexed into Holly Hill in 1998. It was bought and refurbished for HCM properties and now operates as a 77 unit assisted living facility. It is one of only a few of the large grand hotels to survive in the Halifax area.

In 1953, the Meyers family acquired the Rio Vista nine-hole golf course from the Hardesty estate. Creating the Riviera Country Club, the Meyers reorganized the nine holes in 1960 and then added nine additional holes in 1967.