

Issue: Strengthening the Managed Growth Tier System

The County's primary growth management strategy, the Managed Growth Tier System (MGTS), was adopted in 1999 through the establishment of 5 unique Tiers. The MGTS established a series of objectives and policies designed to guide the location, type, intensity and form of development consistent with the characteristics of each Tier. The purpose of the System was to promote sustainable communities by applying smart growth practices that protect the County's natural resources; prevent urban sprawl so that land, facilities and services are used most efficiently; and provide for the appropriate distribution and arrangement of land uses. Several efforts have been undertaken to implement these principles, such as the recently adopted Urban Redevelopment Area provisions, and the adopted and later rescinded Sector Plan process for the Central Western Communities.

The basis for the identification of the Tier boundaries was the County's Urban Service Area Boundary (USAB). The USAB was initially established in 1980 to contain urban growth to promote the efficient and cost effective provision of facilities and services and to protect agricultural lands from urban encroachment. Land within the USAB is allowed to develop with urban densities and intensities, while the land outside the Boundary was limited to exurban and rural densities. The land within the USAB became the land within the Urban/Suburban Tier. Lands within the Rural Service area became the Exurban, Rural, Ag Reserve, and Glades Tiers. The Glades Tier contains both Urban and Rural Service Areas.

The MGTS provisions consist primarily of regulations intended to protect and maintain the status quo for the Tiers. The MGTS regulations have largely succeeded in keeping most of the unincorporated land use pattern the same since 1999. In fact, the bulk of the land development pattern in the coastal area has been set since the 1980 Plan and prior, largely due to the Urban Service Area Boundary. The current land use regulations were designed at a time when there was a great number of very large, undeveloped tracts in the urban area available for development. Today, development opportunities are limited to smaller tracts in largely developed areas.

As the County continues to approach 'build out' into the future, the remaining land to be developed within the coastal area will become scarce. There will be both a greater emphasis on making more efficient use of land that is remaining and pressure to extend urban development west.

How will the County protect the character of areas and enhance sustainability in the next planning period?

Issue: Meeting New State Requirements – Energy Efficiency

In 2008, the state enacted a new law (Laws of Florida Chapter 2008-191; a.k.a. HB 697), amending the Growth Management Act, which requires local governments to revise the basis of their Comprehensive Plans, to add policy language that accounts for energy efficiency and conservation. The Future Land Use Element is now also required to be based upon “energy efficient land use patterns.” It also requires these patterns to account for electric power generation and transmission systems. The Traffic Circulation/ Transportation element(s) must address reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the transportation sector. Also the Housing and Conservation elements are required to address factors that affect energy conservation. DCA has indicated that all EAR-based amendments need to reflect these new statutory requirements. Furthermore, DCA began rulemaking on this item in 2009, but it has not yet finalized the Administrative Code language. To date, the proposed rule contemplates strategies for local governments to evaluate for local use and ultimately implement in their jurisdiction.

How will the County meet these new requirements?

Issue: Shifting from General Planning to Local Solutions

The vast majority of unincorporated County in the coastal area is largely developed, with a limited amount of land remaining for development. Each remaining undeveloped parcel is essentially infill as it is surrounded by existing residents and property owners. No matter how small in size a parcel may be, the impacts of site may be of great concern to the surrounding residents, as seen in several proposed small scale amendments over the past several years. In many cases, other jurisdictions' residents may also be affected.

The Comprehensive Plan and the Unified Land Development Code have numerous requirements and criteria intended to protect adjacent residents and provide opportunities for public input. However, these general requirements cannot fully address the uniqueness and characteristics of each neighborhood. In addition, opportunities for public comment are usually well after a project is conceived and the approval process is underway. The County's Community and Neighborhood Planning program is one tool used to both foster community involvement and to resolve issues between local residents and property owners of developable or re-developable lands.

How can the County best enhance public participation in the land development process?

Issue: Demonstration of Need

According to Rule 9J-5, F.A.C., Comprehensive Plans and subsequent amendments must be based upon analysis of several factors, including the availability of facilities and services, the amount of undeveloped land, the need for redevelopment, and the amount of land needed to accommodate the projected population. An adopted Future Land Use Atlas (FLUA) should represent a balance between need (created by anticipated population) and supply (amount of land use designated) for each future land use designation through the planning horizon.

The Marion County amendment case that was before the Governor and Cabinet last fall highlighted the issue of the “amount of land needed to accommodate the projected population” and the “need” for proposed amendments. Marion County approved an amendment to increase density on a large parcel outside its Urban Service Area, without demonstrating need based on a professionally accepted methodology. The Department of Community Affairs (DCA), which ultimately found the amendment not in compliance, has indicated that it is applying additional scrutiny because of the large numbers of amendments approved by local governments throughout the state that have added additional capacity well beyond the need associated with their respective projected populations.

DCA is currently developing a new rule to provide guidance to local governments. They have indicated informally that a local government can reasonably approve enough residential land to accommodate 125% of the projected population for the planning period, and that additional residential land may be allocated if needed to achieve legitimate goals of the local Comprehensive Plan. The allocation of non-residential land is also to be consistent with the anticipated growth.

In Palm Beach County, current projections from the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) for the County as a whole show population increasing to 1,549,400 by the year 2030. This is in contrast to the projection made in 2005, when BEBR projected a 2030 population of 1,916,200. The Planning Division projects that the unincorporated portion of population for 2030 will be just under 700,000. The Planning Division also estimates that the build-out population capacity associated with the adopted future land use map for unincorporated Palm Beach County is approximately 1.026 million. Thus, there is more than adequate population capacity to accommodate the projected population through 2030, and there is no need to increase density on the basis of accommodating projected population through the planning period.

Given these data, what are the overriding goals of the Comprehensive Plan which merit approval of additional density?

Issue: Future of the Glades

The Glades Tier region in Palm Beach County has served multiple purposes through the years. This area is primarily agricultural, but includes two distinct planning regions – urban and rural. This region encompasses all of the land west of 20 Mile Bend and combined with conservation lands comprises 80% of the land area of unincorporated Palm Beach County. This area supports multiple and varied uses. Agriculture is a key component utilizing hundreds of thousands of acres mostly on sugar cane and other crops. The region appears to have geology appropriate for rock mining. The EAA is also the subject of billions of dollars in long-term investments to restore the Everglades ecosystem. The Glades urban area, both incorporated and unincorporated, provide the capacity for urban growth, but are in urgent need of revitalization and economic development.

The Urban Service Area of the Glades Tier includes three municipalities and significant acres of unincorporated land. This unincorporated land includes approximately 10,000 residents today but can accommodate upwards of 80,000 homes given the densities and vacant land available. Many local, regional and state facilities have located in the Urban Service Area near or within the cities, including state penitentiaries, government offices, the Belle Glade regional hospital, two local airports and regional water supply facilities.

Since the last EAR, interest in this region and uses has increased. Over 25,000 acres of mines have been approved. Large scale restoration projects have been started or approved, including a State initiative to purchase US Sugar land for Everglades restoration. Finally, efforts to locate an inland logistics center (ILC) in the region have been ongoing, including needed comp-plan amendments. Additional efforts to address economic issues for the Glades communities have been undertaken over many years.

Given the importance of the Glades region for unincorporated County and the Glades communities, and the renewed activity since the last EAR, an assessment of the future of this region initially emerged as one of the potential issues for this EAR. Agricultural activities, the Lake and urban communities around it, rock mining and other activities, and the restoration of the Everglades have evolved in the EAA with no objectives in the Plan balancing trends, needs and constraints in this important region of the County and State,

Since the original assessment of this issue in October 2009, several of the activities and initiatives have been under review by the appropriate agencies and interested parties. Today, some of the most critical ones are moving forward, including the approval by the SFWMD's Governing Board of a reduced purchase of US Sugar lands; mining concerns are being addressed through modifications to the County's Land Development Code (ULDC) with input from stakeholders; and the proposed location of the ILC was moved to a site within the Glades' urban area.

With the relocation of the ILC to a site within the Glades communities, and with the developments on other critical concerns like the review of mining approvals and initial Everglades restoration purchases, the focus of the analysis of the future of this region shifts to the Glades communities. The ILC relocation and the construction of a regional water utility

within the urban Glades could be the catalyst for the long-expected economic growth within the cities.

By focusing on the Urban Service Area of the Glades this issue seeks to address points such as:

1. How can this region become a viable development option for the Glades communities?
2. How can annexation be planned and addressed in a predictable manner?
3. What coordination needs to occur between the County and the municipalities to encourage growth?
4. What does and does not work in the Comprehensive Plan to allow for these to happen?