

**MARION COUNTY COMMUNITY VISIONING
WORKSHOP
MARCH 27, 2008**

On March 27, 2008, the Marion County Planning Department held the first workshop on Community Visioning in the Growth Management Training Room, located at 2710 East Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala, FL, 34470. The workshop was called to order at 6:10 p.m., by Jimmy Massey, Assistant Planning Director.

Staff present were; Michael May, Growth Mgmt. Bureau Chief/Zoning Director, Dwight Gano, Planning Director, Jimmy Massey, Assistant Planning Director, Planners Lisa Walsh, Natalia Cox, Justin Ryan, Jo Laurie Penrose, Bill Kinser, Christopher Rison and Adm. Staff Assistant Suzanne DiPietro. Marion County Commissioners Barbara Fitos, Charlie Stone and Andy Kesselring were present. An attendance list for those present from the public showed 42 names and is part of the permanent record of this workshop.

Jimmy Massey introduced the Commissioners and staff to the audience. This is the first of a number of meetings for Community Visioning. He asked the public to pick a staff planner, get a business card and call them with any questions they may have after this workshop.

Mr. Massey displayed the website that was created for Community Visioning, and explained how to use it and what will be displayed there. The web address for this site is:
http://www.marioncountyfl.org/PL271/PL_CommunityVision.htm .

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) has charged the Planning Department with updating and revamping the Comprehensive Plan. Staff has had workshops with the BCC and received directions on issues to explore. Staff has elected to use the community visioning process to do so. Hopefully, this course of action will prove Marion County's sustainability with future development, which could remove the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) from the review of comprehensive plan amendments. This would require drawing urban service boundaries and updating the Capital Improvements Plan to direct growth to go within those boundaries.

For this effort, the planning staff will hold workshops for discussion on specific subjects and ultimately, public hearings. The workshops and public hearings are scheduled through September 2008. The schedule was discussed and can be found on the Community Visioning website.

A critical component for Community Visioning is infrastructure planning. The main objective is to put in place a 10 year financially feasible, economically and environmentally sustainable plan that accurately reflects anticipated growth and development of Marion County. The County and Planning Staff have done a number of corridor studies to date and these were displayed for the public present. These studies included Hwy 441, SR 200, US27, SR326, the Greenway, US 41 and will soon include SR 40.

Staff wants to get from the Existing Land Use Map to the conceptual long term map. Staff is looking at a 10 year Capital Improvements Schedule, the Urban Service Boundary and raising the minimum acreage size for agricultural properties. The BCC has directed staff to show areas on a new map of what exists on the ground. Staff has discussed getting the municipalities into the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program. Staff received direction to eliminate the

Urban Reserve Area. Specific densities will be established for these areas. Direction was also given to examine raising the Level of Service (LOS) for all roads in the county.

Charts on population were shown. The population age group from 65 – 79 will be 18% of our population by 2015. Questions regarding how to accommodate the elderly population and their desire for smaller properties as they grow older were discussed. This community, currently, is a low density community. It is difficult to get small lots next to large lots. Current development is now pushing our population to rural areas.

Public comments included concern that our population figures are two years out of date and they don't take into consideration actuals over the last two years; only 34000 people came to Florida last year, which would make this chart inaccurate; and the need of input from developers for a more accurate position of the future. Mr. Massey explained we use the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) information that is already one year old. Staff's plan is to present answers to these questions at future meetings.

Public comments also inquired as to who determines the size of the population we want to get to and asked about the development strategies. Mr. Massey advised that Florida Statutes requires staff to base the Comprehensive Plan on median projections. Consultants, Wilson Miller is doing an economic modeling to give an indication of what our sustainability is.

Public comments asked if the current plan calls for downtown development. Mr. Massey stated that it did not because it's in the city, where the County has no jurisdiction. He noted that the City of Ocala's Medium Density Residential land use designation allowance is probably double that allowed in the County. Getting the City involved in the TDR program could increase densities in City. Staff hopes to explore this further.

Staff had displayed several large maps along the walls of this meeting room for the public's review. Mr. Massey went over the Existing Land Use Map showing the Farmland Preservation Area, cities, and urban land use in and around the County. He noted the Urban Reserve area is small. It will need to increase or put real densities there to reflect what will happen. The commercial aspects were reviewed and were noted to be in a radial development pattern. There are not a lot of commercial areas. There are small commercial areas along our arterials. These need to be internalized away from these arterial roadways. The worst road in Marion County could be parts of SR 40. By worst we mean the volume of cars versus the road's capacity. We don't have a lot exceeding the volume to capacity ratio. A lot of curb cuts is a problem.

A map depicting Development of Regional Impact (DRI) developments was discussed. The DRI's threshold (how many units it takes to be considered a DRI) is based on population. For residential DRI's, the threshold is 2000 units. These are standards given to us from the DCA.

Underlying nonconforming uses, known as Policy 1.20 uses, were reviewed. These are mostly viable uses, but may be in the wrong place to be designated urban. They may need to be designated conforming. Some of these uses are in the right place. Establishing viable commercial nodes was discussed.

Map 6 was reviewed, which shows where all the subdivisions recorded by the Property Appraisers office are located.

Another map showing existing densities on the ground was reviewed. The only places 4+ units per acre shows up is On Top Of The World, Ocala Palms, Oak Run, etc. These developments push the population to the edges of the County without infrastructure to serve them.

A map of all the approved comprehensive plan amendments was reviewed. Development is still focused in some areas. There is not much in the outlying areas and this is a positive indication.

A map combining the urban land uses and urban, residential, and DRI's was reviewed. This is a logical reflection of what is out there. Staff believes this is a good place to start.

A map that adds subdivisions and Policy 1.20's to the previous map was discussed. Staff will look closely at what subdivisions they will color in as an existing density.

The Corridor Study Compilation Map was reviewed. This map was created to show subdivisions as they exist on the ground and areas that need to be filled in. It indicated little need to fill in gaps.

Public comment inquired if the Farmland Preservation program was still in place. Mr. Massey confirmed it was. When this is done, does the decision go to the BCC or the electorate? The BCC will approve or not, just like a comprehensive plan amendment. Afterward, the DCA will review for their approval. The public asked if scenic road designations will be maintained? Yes. Does this process have to meet a financial feasibility test? Yes. In addition, staff has to set up a 10 year financial feasibility Capital Improvements Plan. Will there be an effort to buffer the greenway? Mr. Massey stated that these type of questions are the purpose of these meetings. He again asked the audience to utilize the website and also to contact our Planners to offer their suggestions of what to look at, study and discuss.

Mr. Massey noted it may be feasible to raise minimum lot sizes for the unincorporated parcels of 10 acres or larger. With parcels of 20 acres or larger, it starts to thin out just a little. Parcels of 30 acres or larger don't show very much difference. Staff concludes, at least for now, that changing that minimum lot size will not relatively effect a large number of parcels, but will prevent breaking 30 acres parcels down into 10 acre parcels. There is a need for a mechanism to minimize population in rural areas and encourage population where the infrastructure is. Does Planning feel the County will become 10 acre parcels? No. Public comment stated the problem is that 20 acres doesn't provide much unused land to help with water recharge. Bigger pieces will provide more. Family subdivisions are a bigger danger. We may need a suburban category to cover that 20-30 acre range that we don't have now. Mr. Massey noted that one mechanism for higher density is to raise the bottom level of the density category. He posed the question, "should our low density residential be 1 unit per acre or 3 units per acre?" Staff is exploring a further breakdown of our land use categories.

When asked whether the City would be part of this effort, Mr. Massey confirmed that there was a City Planner in the audience tonight. There will be the establishment of an urban service boundary and the utility service area of the City will be re-examined to make the new urban service boundary. The City of Ocala and Marion County, and perhaps other entities will enter into agreements for this part of the effort.

The public suggested a mechanism to accomplish the issue of densities spreading by creating a threshold to mandate raising densities if you develop in a certain area. They commented on the need for mixed uses and driving densities further in to take the pressure off the rural areas. They mentioned the need to force higher densities for more compatibility with neighbors. Mr. Massey stated staff has started in that direction with the corridor studies; ie. mixed used categories in the Greenway Corridor study. The public asked why do we need more population projections? Mr. Massey stated some lots are in places we don't want further development. Staff has to develop a methodology for absorption. We need to establish urban service boundaries, population projections and absorption of units to accommodate the population. The concurrency process really determines if someone can put in a new subdivision. If there is no capacity, they will not get a permit.

Mr. Massey stated that we are limited on what is already on the ground. New development that has not been platted - we can do more with. What has been driving the non-development of a lot of them is the lack of facilities and services. We need to be careful when putting together a map and acknowledging subdivisions at an urban category. Some may be urban, but some, because of location, should not be shown under an urban land use. When asked, of the estimated 90 thousand platted lots, how many would be in the urban area, Mr. Massey stated approximately 45,000.

The public commented that the zoning we have in place doesn't always match the land use category; there are issues with wells and septic tanks in Legacy lots; and the need to provide services. Mr. Massey stated we will need to change zoning and update the Land Development Code to accommodate a new land use plan. The BCC adopted a policy that allows some folks who own Legacy lots to transfer densities to other places. We have started that process.

Mr. Massey noted staff had struggled whether or not to have a structured format for this meeting. The intent tonight was to provide a general outline of the Community Visioning process. Future meetings will get more specific. The second meeting, scheduled for April 24, 2008, will focus on economic development and preliminary findings. Answers to questions and concerns in this meeting will be addressed at the beginning of the next meeting.

Mr. Massey again invited the audience to view the maps posted throughout the room, to speak with staff and obtain their business cards. He asked them to go to the Community Visioning webpage and email staff any questions or suggestions they may have. He thanked everyone for coming and concluded this workshop at 7:10 p.m.