

**MARION COUNTY COMMUNITY VISIONING  
WORKSHOP  
APRIL 24, 2008**

On April 24,, 2008, the Marion County Planning Department held the second 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 6:08 p.m., by Jimmy Massey, Assistant Planning Director.

Staff present were; Dwight Gano, Planning Director, Jimmy Massey, Assistant Planning Director, Planners Lisa Walsh, Natalia Cox, Justin Ryan, Jo Laurie Penrose, Christopher Rison , Michael Kokosky, and Adm. Staff Assistant Suzanne DiPietro. Marion County Commissioners Barbara Fitos and Charlie Stone were present. County Administrator General Howard was also present. An attendance list for those present from the public showed 55 names and is part of the permanent record of this workshop.

Jimmy Massey introduced the Commissioners and staff to the audience. He stated this is the second meeting of the Community Visioning process. He showed the website address on the projection screen and noted that any presentations given tonight will be put on the Planning Department's website, as will other information as we move through the process.

**OLD BUSINESS**

The last meeting outlined the Community Visioning process. Population projections were discussed at the last meeting. Mr. Massey stated that staff is required to base population projections on the median range provided by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEER). These numbers are used primarily for revenue purposes. We spoke about the possible need to raise density in our land use plan. He displayed a map that was generated by the Water Resources and Assessment Study (WRAMS). This study incorporates the use of a model that basically loads up density on each parcel of property in Marion County and then projects the buildout of the County based on those parcels. Different dots on this map represent different densities of people. Some areas are densely populated. In this model, for instance, the anticipated medium density residential, on the ground development, is shown as 2.8 people per acre. When those parcels that show medium density at 2.8 fill up, the population is spread into the rural areas. We are using this model with different scenarios. This is not a "goal", but a projection that we are working with when it comes to population.

One of the requirements of the Community Visioning process is to establish an Urban Service Boundary. Last meeting we spoke about looking at increasing the size of rural parcels; from 1-10 units per acre to 1-20 or 1-30 units per acre or higher. That also would effect what the WRAMS population model would eventually look like.

Citizens had questions concerning platted lots, already on the books, like those in the Legacy area. Staff is working on an inventory of the lots that already exist in the County and their locations.

Citizens asked how many of the land use amendments approved since the incorporation of the County's Comprehensive Plan, have actually been built, in terms of residential uses. Staff is currently working on that. Since 1992, with those amendments approved, it added about 40,000 units to our inventory. However, over that same period of time, there have been over 50,000 residential building permits issued. In essence our inventory, if just based on the land use amendments approved, has not really increased. We still need to address the platted lots that are still out there.

The BCC has directed staff to look at and possible increase the level of service standards on all the roads in the County. We have already done that on some of the roads in some of our corridor study areas. We will be looking at the rest of the roads throughout the County.

Mr. Massey displayed early Marion County land use maps, done in 1975, 1988 and the current map. Staff believes that we have stayed true to form from 1975 until now. The 1975 map identifies the Ocala National Forest, rural and agricultural areas, transitional agriculture areas and urban development areas. In 1988, it showed some of the same areas. The current map shows rural areas and the Ocala National Forest. The rural transitioning areas have turned out to be our urban reserve area. The decisions that have been made from 1992 to today have been consistent with the earlier thoughts of the development pattern. This is one of the purposes of this Community Visioning. To determine if that development pattern, which was really rural in nature, should continue, change drastically or be stopped. That is to be kept in mind as we go through this process.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Massey mentioned that there is a festival on Saturday, April 26, 2008; the first ever Farmland Preservation Festival, which will be held in Shiloh, off Hwy 320, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. There will also be a treasure hunt and other areas to see, all described on a map provided by Darlene Weesner, who was present in the audience.

Mr. Massey introduced Mr. Neale Stralow, regional planner and manager, for Wilson Miller consultants, out of Tampa, Florida. Also present was Christopher Jones, an integral part of his team. Mr. Jones is President and Chief Economist with the Florida Economic Advisors. Mr. Stralow gave the same presentation at this time that he had given to the BCC previously. This presentation will be posted on the Planning Department's web site. Wilson Miller was selected by the BCC to develop an economic model that would assist in economic sustainability for a County wide plan. They have done about 3 months of production on this project. This is an excel database model which used many variables. Major observations from some of the stakeholder discussions will be included. Wilson Miller proposes that economic sustainability is growth that pays for itself. Growth that promotes business and employment within the community. It assists in providing a reasonable standard of living for the County. There are copies of this presentation available at the Planning Department, as well as having this presentation available for viewing on our Community Visioning web address.

Mr. Jones, from Wilson Miller, displayed a map showing the state's interstate road system. Our state's interstate system is critical to the sustainability and viability of economic development. Marion County has seen economic growth due in large part to the development of I-75 and because of its geographic position to rapidly growing areas of the state. He mentioned that the WRAMS study projected a long range forecast of approximately 1 million people by around 2050. Marion County is in the middle of a few metropolitan regions; Jacksonville, Orlando and Tampa. The interstate is a conduit of economic growth. Part of their modeling process is to evaluate what these other studies said, including the WRAMS study. He doesn't believe that Marion County will reach 1 million people. Both economic pressures and opportunities are created. Mr. Jones reviewed the statistics displayed, showing that the County's previously large growth group, of 55 years old and over, is now changing and is more balanced with the other age groups. Therefore a wide array of opportunities and planning are needed to create opportunities for each section.

Mr. Jones discussed the housing market, it's boom about 20 years ago, that it has leveled out, and he thinks it's getting back to normal. He reviewed statistical slides with the audience. Household growth has been in the middle income segment. He stated that we need to put the housing market into historical perspective. We won't see any housing price increases like we've seen in the recent past.

If the land use plan here did not change, we see that because of the movement in the baby boom population and the migration, you'll see an increasing share of growth in the 55+ section, but still fairly significant growth in the under 35 and 35 – 54 segments. There will be much more diversity in the population, which will be an influence of what is moving from the other metropolitan areas of our state. Because there has been an economic base created here and because it sits in between areas of significant economic growth, we think the opportunity for household growth at much higher income levels, is going to take shape. They see the County getting wealthier and its people having a better standard of living over all. Employment growth by industry – we see about two out of three new jobs being created in service and government sectors. The service sector growth is fairly consistent with what we see in other urbanizing counties. This particular county has a slightly higher percentage of government employment than many other counties. What we have done with all of these forecasts is develop for the County, an economic and fiscal impact model. This is a working interactive model. It's intent is to be able to use any one of a variety of growth scenarios that we want to assume. We can plug numbers into this model and see what it does to the County. Basically, the model will show, in terms of level of service and the amount of revenue that is generated to the local government relative to the costs of providing services for it, what the direct and indirect impacts are from employment, wages, corporate output and corporate sales. We just completed the economic element of it. The fiscal element has been completed for a while. This is a very large model. He showed the introductory page of this model. He explained that this is an ongoing tool, to give the County and the Planning Department, to use now and also long after the consultants are out of this process, to continue to model varying scenarios as time goes on. This model does come with an instruction manual and some technical support. This model gets into line item details of County budget related items to show how various elements of growth from a revenue and expense standpoint would impact these various segments of local government, agencies and

bureaus. We are at the point now where we will be sitting down with the BCC and County staff very soon to model alternative growth scenarios and see what happens to the output of that model, in terms of revenues versus costs versus the economic impacts, to try to find what is the best balance based on your vision for the community.

Mr. Stralow stated strategies would be considered to address vested properties, where vacant residential and vacant non-residential lands occur today. Strategies for Springs Protection areas will be considered. The corridor studies will be reviewed, the transportation network and possible clusters and improvements will be looked at. Established programs will be reviewed and studied. Through links with graphic programs and analytical programs, data can be tied together to give planners and elected officials quantifiable data, that allows us to run models and make assumptions and then graphically depict them. Changes and strategies will be controlled through the Comprehensive Plan, the infrastructure delivery and the level of service. Ultimately, we would move to a time in our history that implementation occurs with only public and private initiatives in order to see plans out to fruition.

Mr. Stralow mentioned items outside of County boundaries; ie: Central Florida Commuter Rail, the Orlando market and the turning of daylight hours to the commuter rail. That may be up to 8 additional freight movements on the F line which comes through the middle of Marion County during daylight hours. This will be a significant issue, both with pros and cons attached. Also, 5 miles from Dunnellon, is the consideration of nuclear power, in Levy County. A reported 17 billion dollars in infrastructure improvements that could occur 5 miles from Marion County's boundary, would certainly have an effect on this quadrant of Marion County, and possibly Marion County in its' entirety.

Mr. Stralow stated there were three land use scenarios identified in their work contract with Marion County. One is a balance between residential and non-residential, second is very high intensity non-residential- generating a lot of employment, and finally, generating a lot of residential and not a lot of employment. He mentioned that a workshop has been set with the BCC on May 29, 2008.

### **The floor was opened for questions.**

How does the economic model address Tallahassee's constraints on local government financing? That seems to be a real big issue – constraining the ability for government to provide the services that we need to support the kind of growth we are modeling.

Mr. Jones stated that because this model consists of the history of economic, policy and fiscal changes that have helped to stimulate at various points in time or restrict development, we are moving ahead in the model, working with the assumption that anything that we see happening now, if it turns out to be an overly exceptive constraint, with regard to economic development, it is probably going to go away over time. If a change flies in the face of economic expansion in our state, it will only last for so long.

On the BEBR study, did you use the 2007 projection or the last one that came out after the last Community Visioning meeting, which showed that the projection was not as many people as were predicted in 2007 would be moving to Marion County.

Mr. Stralow stated the BEBR median was showing a 600,000 population in the previous dataset over that period and they had compared it with the WRAMS long range which went out to the year 2055. That was the difference. It was the difference between 600,000 to 1,000,000. They do have the new date that has just come out. Mr. Jones added that other information is in the modeling program, like land use and environmental dynamics, that gives a more complete basis to work from.

The stakeholders group that the consultants worked with should have included some participants from environmental groups.

Mr. Stralow stated they looked to agency representatives, staff, and the BCC for guidance. We certainly can add more participants to this process. We were looking for a lay of the land and would be happy to meet with other interested parties.

In the 3 land use scenarios that Wilson Miller is modeling, there is a low residential, high employment, and a mix. Can you relate those land use categories to the rural environment and can the model simulate a rural development scenario that's different than the urban sprawl land use pattern that we've had for the past 40 years in Florida?

There certainly is a difference between rural, urban and ex-urban. Some of the strategies that you have already put in place are attempting to transfer development out of the sending area into the receiving area and really fortify the edge of your urban service area. The model is going to be delivering a Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) based absorption map. Some of what may be happening in the utility update of this program is parcel level data. We are flying at a higher elevation, looking at it. The transportation area zone is a good regional/sub regional distribution. We will look at how much is already in the plan from the vacant lands and how much will that absorb. In the SW quadrant, if you have an economic driver like the Progress Energy project come to fruition, you are going to see people wanting to live there. There will be a ten year construction window.

Does this model have a section wherein, should the citizens decide that they have an area that they would like to see not developed, could you project the economic cost to acquire fee simple or some other development rights method? If the citizens put forth a geographic vision that says we don't want development in this area at all, can you turn the model around and provide output to support that vision as opposed to allowing the input to tell us where development is going to happen?

Mr. Jones stated that in theory, they could run a scenario where 100% of the future growth would be agriculture/residential. The model has that capability and we purposely set it up that way because we can only model a certain number of scenarios within the timeframe of our contract. This is an ongoing tool, so that the citizens, the staff and the

BCC can continue to answer these questions on an ongoing basis, by looking at literally just about any growth alternative you can think of with regard to land use and trends.

Mr. Stralow spoke about vested lots and dealing with them. The ownership pattern is broad. There are some entitlements attached to them. Ultimately, how you deliver services as a community makes that more valuable or less valuable. It may make it more probable to be a housing unit tomorrow or some day in the future. The inputs and some strategies the community has already used assists in protecting the farmland preservation area.

Economic forecasting is great, but there are so many variables in it. The assumption that you could never change a vested lot doesn't ring true.

Mr. Stralow stated there are ways you can change it. It is expensive. If you change the rules of the game it becomes a Burt Harris issue (property rights) and it becomes more expensive. Those lots are out there and have been out there. Antiquated lots have been out there in other Florida communities for a long time. It will take an extreme effort, but a 17 billion dollar infrastructure project on the fringe of that may get there.

What is in this model with regards to building up? It is possible to build up?

Mr. Stralow stated that this model has the capability to make that assumption based upon the land use category. If you build out the plan category to add a higher density, not at 2.8, but at 4, you'll absorb that population, and it will be represented in the model.

Mr. Jones added that it depends on the choices that are made also. He used affordable housing as an example. You will almost never find an affordable housing project that you run through a fiscal impact model by itself that shows it generates more in revenues for the local government than it costs in services to provide. But you need that housing, so your workers don't have to travel 30-40 or even 50 miles to get to work.

The question was raised regarding the Cities annexing County property, and whether these annexations can be included in this model. A map from the Belleview Voice shows the projected population of Belleview quadrupled, from 3000 to 9000, placing the city limit up against the Cross Florida Greenway. How can you develop a strategy in the model to deal with this? Does this model have data on geologic and water resource conditions? Those are the ultimate protections that we need.

Mr. Jones stated that other areas, like Orlando, do a great deal of annexing, but they can show the financial ability to extend the services to the property they are annexing. Right now, the County financially supports a lot of this activity that goes on with various service agreements that they have between jurisdictions. He is very suspect, just from a fiscal standpoint, of these jurisdictions being able to continue to grow and expand without the revenue base and the capacity that the government could provide. Mr. Stralow stated

that this would be part of this programs' considerations, along with Springs Protection and the WRAMS study, etc.

Mr. Massey summarized saying these consultants are developing a model that we can use to implement whatever land use path, whatever densities, whatever growth rate that comes out of these meetings. He reminded the audience that part of staff's direction was to draw an urban service boundary and to help direct the majority of the County's financial investments to properties within those Urban Service Boundaries. Staff is working on an inventory of subdivisions, trying to ascertain growth rates of those subdivisions. These are the types of input coming from these meetings that we can discuss with our consultants for consideration and/or inclusion in the model.

Concerns were voiced that this model would end up homogenizing Marion County rather than allowing individual neighborhoods and other areas to reserve some unique characteristics; that determinations will be made about densities in the urban service areas, regardless of the specific neighborhoods. Is there anything being done in this process that would give neighborhoods a voice in how they and the areas around them are developed?

Mr. Massey stated that one of the components being plugged into the model are the corridor studies. There were a number of community meetings that went along with putting those corridor studies in place. We were instructed by the BCC to go from our existing land use map to something that is specifically geared toward the corridor studies. This process would be the second opportunity for the community to have input on their land uses.

Mr. Pete Tesch, President of the Ocala/Marion County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) gave a presentation on economic and demographic trends. In the slide presentation, he covered statistics on the County's economic quality of life, education and training. The EDC has utilized a series of studies in embarking upon job creation. The creation of quality job opportunities for Marion County is their mission. Over a 20 year period, it is their goal to try to increase the number of high wage, high skilled jobs. Their 5 year goal is to assist in the creation of 2947 high wage jobs. That would be about 115 to 120% of the average earnings per worker in Marion County – around \$30,000 per worker. We believe that economic opportunity and environmental sustainability can be compatible. The current unemployment statistics were displayed. Marion County is a collector and has strong migration patterns of people moving into the community. We are seeing some growth here that we believe is attributable to the diversity of our economy and the creation of other high wage, high skilled jobs. Mr. Tesch stated that if we are going to be competitors in the global economy and if we are going to sustain high wage job creation in our community, we need to figure in strategic efforts with economic development and education. He believes that we will see higher inflation for a while, which will impact our families. The housing market is still in the doldrums; still looking at 18 – 24 months to start to turn around. It is possible that property tax reform and its' impact on governmental revenues and its' ability to provide services could have a negative impact on our economy. Mr. Tesch noted the need for more business parks for the future vitality of Marion County. If we are able to attract and retain other types of quality businesses, we do need to have more industrial

property. We saw significant absorption of industrial property in the last five years. Our established industrial parks are filled up and we need to have other properties for new employment centers. The BCC is looking at a variety of partnerships to accomplish going forward from here. How do we do this with both the private and public sector and how do we work through the regulatory and permitting issues to make it economically viable for private sector developers to make this a reality? Also, how do you go about assembling the property in a fiscal, responsible and environmentally sustainable manner. How do we pay for the infrastructure given the current situation that we are in. We will need to strengthen and broaden our business attraction efforts. There is a lot of opportunity in new industry sectors, namely Allied health sciences, biotechnology, aviation and aerospace and working with Enterprise Florida, our state economic development agency and other groups, the City of Ocala, and the Marion County Commission. This is one area that we really need to focus upon.

Whether or not there is air access, industry presence (critical mass), work force and education and training, and the overall cost, are critical factors in whether or not a business is going to relocate and expand, in this case, in our area. These are the core issues that we really need to look at. Many companies cross us off the list because we don't have adequate air access.

There is a tremendous amount of technology transfer coming out of major universities. We believe that these industry sectors are going to be the economic engines of the future. How do we take advantage of that here in Marion County and make the opportunity available to our people in these exciting new industry sectors? Mr. Tesch spoke about businesses that had moved into our County, as well as the Emergency One issue. Cheney Brothers, Custom Window Systems and Cardinal Glass are a few examples of high wage high skilled opportunities recently established in Marion County.

We are trying to transcend "commodity Florida", which is cheap labor and cheap land. How do we take these issues and keep our community vital and prosperous? Workforce availability, affordable workforce housing, getting the grip on management and our transportation and the overall cost of doing business here in the heart of Florida.

A question was asked of Mr. Tesch on whether he has any numbers on the percentage of the private workforce that is covered by employer provided health insurance. Mr. Tech does have rough estimates of that, but not with him and not on his website. He provided the questioner with his card for future contact. The EDC's website address is [www.ocalaedc.org](http://www.ocalaedc.org)

Mr. Massey stated that there were a lot of moving pieces to this community visioning process. The Florida Statutes requires we discuss specific topics as we go. Economic development and strategies for addressing economic development are one of those topics. This process will ultimately come back to developing a Future Land Use Map, developing Goals, Objectives and Policies to implement that map, drawing an Urban Service Boundary and determining just what we want to happen within that boundary – types of development.

*The next Community Visioning meeting will be on May 22, 2008, where we will discuss agriculture and open space and what strategies we should employ to preserve them. (Postscript:*

*The location for the 5/22/08 meeting has been changed to The Queen of Peace Church Parish Hall, 6455 SW SR 200, Ocala, FL).* Staff has been directed by the BCC to start with the existing corridor study maps that have been produced. At this meeting, these maps will be utilized to start to come to some consensus on a land use map.

Mr. Massey noted that on the Planning Department's website there is a full copy of the County's Comprehensive Plan Goals, Objectives and Policies. We welcome you to visit the site and look at the different policies. Those are the policies that will guide the Community Vision decisions. They are not taken for granted. If you would like to propose changes to policies, please forward your suggestions.

Some concerns were voiced that many citizens of the County would not have the opportunity to provide input into this process. A survey of some type was suggested.

Mr. Massey noted that the first two meetings have shown existing conditions. Staff is now moving into the more intensive public input portion of the Community Visioning process.

Others say this process seems to be more "top-down" than "bottom-up". It was suggested that multiple community meetings be set up to ask residents why they moved to their location and what they would like to see happen in their area. Other suggestions were to have private citizens, trained, to do visioning processes in their areas, not incurring any costs to the County. This would give more citizens a "buy-in" when it comes to adoption.

Mr. Massey stated that staff may not have time to do that on a large scale. Staff has done neighborhood meetings throughout all the corridor studies. We can tweek what we're doing now. We can expand our mailings to community groups, agencies and neighborhood associations, and try to have meetings in different areas. Those who are interested will show and those who are not won't.

Comments were that people feel left out of the process unless they can play a roll in it. The opinion survey was again suggested. Asking the neighbors to come together and then build a planning system or dialog that gives those communities an ongoing say in what's going to happen to them.

Mr. Massey stated this Community Visioning is the mechanism to that process and he is asking for everyone's input.

Other comments were that this is a good process. That people are personally responsible to come out and speak their piece. This speaker felt the BCC has always been accessible as well as County staff. This is an adequate system - my voice is heard. Some felt that this process falls short from the beginning, because this notice was not sent to who it says. Others noted that it was advertised in the paper. Some felt notices should be mailed to each person in Marion County; that so many citizens didn't know about this.

Comments noted that the majority of people do follow the issues in Marion County, through many different entities. This is an involved community. They all have their own lives in addition to that. The turnout has been commensurate to the energy that the community typically puts into this. A suggestion was made to utilize the electric companies for meeting notices; where a meeting notice for Community Visioning could be added to monthly bills to alert more people to this process.

Others thought that there was plenty of opportunity for citizens to have input into many of the programs that are going on in our community.

Mr. Massey stated that staff will show what's out there now, then we, together, will create a new map, with increased participation in this process. Please attend all the meetings. This is the first time this has been done since the comprehensive plan was approved.

The Community Visioning website location was mentioned again, at [http://www.marioncountyfl.org/PL271/PL\\_CommunityVision.htm](http://www.marioncountyfl.org/PL271/PL_CommunityVision.htm) . Attendees were asked to sign up on the sign up sheet at the entrance door to this meeting room. All information, draft minutes, etc. will be available on this web site. The Planning Department welcomes any suggestions, criticisms, discussions, etc. Staff is working for you and we are excited about the process.

The next meeting will be held on May 22, 2008, at 6:00 p.m., at The Queen of Peace Church Parish Hall, 6455 SW SR 200, Ocala, FL

With no further discussion the meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.