

**HERNANDO COUNTY, FLORIDA
EVALUATION & APPRAISAL REPORT (EAR)
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**REPORT ON POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION
RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING**

March 1, 2004

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INTRODUCTION

The Hernando County EAR Policy Advisory Committee was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to provide policy input to Hernando County's EAR (Evaluation and Appraisal Report) process. The EAR report is due at the Florida Department of Community Affairs no later than August 1, 2004. The Committee provided comments and input on a List of Issues to be addressed by the EAR process.

The policy and implementation suggestions and input from the Committee have been compiled in this summary document by the Hernando County Planning Department Staff. In general, the Committee was in agreement on the policy and implementation recommendations in this report. Where differences of opinion were indicated in discussion, the differences have been noted.

The policy and implementation input from the Committee will be utilized by Staff and the County in preparing the Evaluation and Appraisal Report and the EAR-based comprehensive plan amendments that will follow. The input of the Committee is an important part of the EAR process and will be blended with other inputs and components to produce the EAR document.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Growth Rate & Planning Time Horizons

Recommendations: The County should consider the following as indicators of an excessive rate of growth:

- exceeding level of service standards
- water quantity and quality degradation
- accelerated crime statistics
- tax increases
- light, air, and noise pollution
- school overcrowding
- proliferation of chain retail stores
- conflicts over limited resources such as water
- ugly landscapes (poorly maintained and unkempt properties, absence of attractive landscaping)
- excessive rezoning applications
- inadequate social/recreational opportunities
- inadequate social infrastructure such as health and day care facilities
- inability to finance infrastructure
- demand for services exceeds funding availability

Distribution and Intensity of Land Uses and Future Land Use Map Categories with Permitted Uses

With respect to residential densities for future development there were significant differences of opinion among committee members. A majority of members supported designating areas for “villages” or town centers where higher density could support a broader mix of uses and alternate transportation (bike and pedestrian) modes, while a minority of members preferred a continuation of the current trend of low density, single family residential development separated by zoning from commercial and other land uses. There was general agreement that the Comprehensive Plan needs modification in the way it addresses density, possibly with minimum densities in areas designated for urban development, and/or designated areas for higher density population centers. The committee agreed that the rural areas should remain rural with low population densities, and new development should occur in the areas designated for urban growth on the Future Land Use Map.

Recommendations:

Develop components of the Comprehensive Plan to direct growth into designated locations within defined time periods in order to influence the County’s rate of growth.

Define Future Land Use Map boundaries between land uses so that all entities can determine where the boundary lies without the necessity of a development application (rezoning or other process).

Direct future urban growth to occur within the urban growth areas currently delineated in the Comprehensive Plan, or as located by the development of planning horizons. Limit all future urban growth to the designated growth areas until such time as those areas are predominantly developed and population projections indicate a need for additional urban development areas.

Utilize the commercial node system for highway-dependent and most other intense commercial development, while limiting commercial development in the residential land use category to internal neighborhood commercial within residential developments, and commercial included as an integral component of high intensity residential, commercial, office, and multi-use development centers.

Future Uses of Mined Areas

Recommendations:

Develop guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan for transition of mining lands to other land uses, with limitations on land uses to protect groundwater resources, and emphasis on protecting existing and potential public benefits in wildlife

habitat and movement corridors, and open space.

Future uses which keep mining lands on the tax rolls are desirable.

Allow suitable recreational uses of mined lands that would not adversely affect groundwater.

Impose shorter time limits in restoration endeavors.

Consider aquaculture as a possible future use while being careful to protect groundwater quality.

School and Public Facility Siting Criteria

Recommendations:

School capacity should be considered in development approvals.

Set aside a percentage of funds for parks to be utilized for co-locating parks with schools for joint use.

Establish neighborhood school siting standards.

Neighborhood schools should be joint use facilities, including educational, recreational, and/or community service functions.

Schools and parks should be located in close proximity to each other.

The County, the City of Brooksville, and the School District should utilize the framework of the new interlocal agreement to address school siting, compatibility with residential communities, and multi-use facility planning.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Groundwater Quality Protection

Recommendations:

To reduce groundwater contamination from fertilizers, Hernando County should reduce the amount of turf and landscaping, reduce the use of polluting fertilizers, reduce irrigation, increase the use of native plants in turf and landscaping, and promote water conservation. Buffer strips should be encouraged between wetlands and landscaped areas.

Responsible parties should be responsible for groundwater pollution cleanup.

Government should pay for large groundwater protection projects affecting a large number of properties.

Public education should be an important part of Hernando County's groundwater protection efforts.

Continue current implementation processes.

Consider regulating the use of polluting fertilizers, taxes on polluting fertilizers, and incentives for the use of less-polluting fertilizers as ways to reduce the use of polluting fertilizers.

The County should require buffer strips adjacent to wetlands and water bodies to filter runoff before it enters the water body/wetland and potentially recharges the aquifer.

Agricultural lands should be considered as potential buffers for conservation lands.

Identify critical wildlife habitats on individual parcels proposed for development and conserve critical habitats on-site.

Groundwater Quantity

Recommendations:

Promote potable water conservation to reduce demand on potable water supplies.

Hernando County should support Local Sources First, and cooperate with other local and regional governments to counter the influences of large populated areas.

Hernando County should plan to provide adequate groundwater supplies to meet the present and future needs of the County.

Hernando County should plan and build water reuse facilities as part of its water and sewer system infrastructure to reduce non-potable demands on potable water supplies.

Consider linear well fields in developing water production wells with adequate protective buffers.

Water Use Patterns

Recommendations:

Hernando County should require the use of native vegetation in landscaping to reduce landscape irrigation.

Hernando County should promote efficient water use and reuse.

Hernando County should plan and build water reuse facilities as part of its water and sewer system infrastructure to reduce non-potable demands on potable water supplies.

Develop a retrofit program for older sprinkler systems to incorporate rain sensors.

Seek better low-flow toilets.

Encourage cisterns in new construction.

Potable Water Level of Service (LOS)

Recommendations:

Hernando County should develop a residential LOS standard separate from the nonresidential component (both residential and nonresidential components are presently combined in one LOS standard).

Hernando County should place more emphasis on reuse of water in large developments.

Non-potable water should be utilized for landscape irrigation to the greatest extent practical, and the County should strive to minimize the use of potable water for landscape irrigation.

SWFWMD's Minimum Flows and Levels

Recommendations:

Hernando County should encourage SWFWMD to set MFLs for water bodies in Hernando County as soon as possible.

Hernando County should set an example by setting its own triggers that are more restrictive (more protective of water resources) than those established by MFLs.

Development in Closed Drainage Basins

Recommendations:

Add policy(ies) to address controlling agricultural runoff.

Regulate land uses to protect groundwater quality.

Evaluate lower density development in closed drainage basins.

Create varying standards for different types of closed basins.

Strictly enforce implementation ordinances.

Avoid duplicating efforts of SWFWMD and other agencies.

Consider a water quality ordinance.

Minimize impervious surfaces in closed basins.

Designate storm water special protection areas.

Encourage dispersed treatment systems or low impact storm water management systems (retaining runoff on-site).

Development in Karst Areas (areas affected by limestone dissolution and/or collapse)

Recommendations:

The County should require geophysical investigations before construction of infrastructure to be dedicated to the public, and developers should be required to hold the County harmless for a defined time period should sinkholes or other karst activity later cause damage to the dedicated infrastructure.

The County should not require geophysical testing prior to construction for individual residential lot development because such testing could adversely affect the property's private interests.

Consider potential differences in karst probabilities for different geographic areas.

Evaluate lower residential densities and development intensities in karst prone areas.

Integrity of Wildlife Habitats and Natural Communities

Recommendations:

Regulate land uses to minimize land use conflicts between conservation lands and surrounding land uses.

Conservation acquisitions should be large enough to include their own buffers.

Development adjacent to conservation lands should use clustering of uses with open space adjacent to conservation lands to improve compatibility.

Land uses adjacent to conservation lands should include buffers to protect the conservation lands from land use conflicts.

The County should protect the valuable conservation land management tool of prescribe burning by restricting smoke-sensitive land uses around conservation lands.

The County should require low residential densities around conservation lands.

The County should strive to connect all critical habitats with corridors.

Require more detailed identification of sensitive habitats and threatened and endangered species before development begins.

The County should continue its environmentally sensitive lands acquisition programs.

Acquire buffer properties around conservation lands.

Use educational programs promoting integrity of wildlife habitats & natural communities.

The County should consider property purchase notifications to advise purchasers of periodic smoke episodes due to prescribe burning of nearby conservation lands.

Agricultural land uses should be considered as potential buffers for conservation lands.

Identify critical habits on parcels proposed for development and require conservation of critical habitats and connecting corridors on-site.

Air Quality

Recommendations:

Encourage efficient design, such as cluster development to reduce vehicle mileage and emissions.

Protect trees to maintain their air cleansing functions.

Promote energy conservation.

Recruit clean industries and discourage polluting industries.

Employ dust control measures.

Consider an air quality ordinance.

Insist on best available technologies for point sources of air pollution.

Light Pollution

Recommendations:

Try to limit light escaping from premises in all land use categories with consideration of cost and security issues.

Develop standards to reduce after-hours lighting for non-residential uses.

Develop standards to reduce lighting of residential areas.

Noise Pollution

Recommendations:

Strictly enforce current regulations for buffers between commercial and residential land uses and adjacent to conservation areas.

Strictly enforce existing noise ordinances.

Continue to regulate noise with varying standards based on hours of operation.

Urban Vegetation

Recommendations:

Develop performance standards for landscaping, water use, shade provided, and aquifer recharge related to urban vegetation.

Reduce turf coverage.

Prohibit the use of invasive plant species in landscaping.

Encourage treescaping of roadways.

Require treescaping of buffers between commercial land uses and buildings.

Increase list of identified canopy road designations.

Enhance public education on urban vegetation.

Level of Service Standards for Floodplains

Recommendations:

Use the provision or denial of urban services to influence new development in floodplains.

The comprehensive plan should provide policies to guide the intensity of development in floodplains.

Purchase floodplains.

Educate citizens about flooding, floodplains, and floodplain management regulations.

CULTURE AND THE ARTS ISSUES

Recommendations:

The County should aggressively support, and provide incentives and encouragement for culture and the arts as an important component of the community.

The County should embrace all ages when investing in culture as an effort to decrease social ills.

The community should encourage a well-rounded program of cultural activities.

The County should cooperate with community colleges and other educational facilities in support of culture and the arts.

Culture and the arts should be encouraged, supported, and provided with incentives by the County, while primary funding should come from the private sector with minimal public funding.

Provide for multi-uses which include arts and cultural areas for outdoor performances.

Encourage the display of art in and around public buildings.

Facilities co-location (example: schools, parks, libraries, and event facilities) should be a technique used to support culture and the arts.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION ISSUES

Recommendations:

Establish a program of ongoing coordination between Hernando County and other applicable levels of government.

Maintain coordination and cooperation mechanisms through contracts, memoranda of understanding, formal resolution, interlocal agreements, or other means with state and federal agencies whose activities directly affect Hernando County.

Continue to review existing intergovernmental coordination with the Cities of Brooksville and Weeki Wachee and, where necessary to facilitate improved coordination, amend existing agreements and/or establish new agreements.

Maintain formal notification and review procedures to assure compatible land use development along common boundaries with adjacent counties.

Maintain formal coordination mechanisms with the Hernando County School Board, SWFWMD, and other agencies. Quarterly meetings, processes for welcoming new agency leaders, joint purchasing mechanisms, and improved public communications are worthy considerations.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Revenues and Expenses of Various Types and Intensities of Land Uses

Recommendations:

The County should develop economic development strategies to create a mixture of development which is financially sustainable for the long term.

The County should strive to determine the relative revenues and service costs of various land uses and intensities. A Fiscal Impact Analysis Model or similar approach should be investigated as a means of evaluating costs and revenues and for ensuring that new development pays for its own capital costs.

Educate the citizens on the cost and revenues of different types of development and community economics.

Seek revenue sources in addition to growth revenues.

Economic and Tourism Development

Recommendations:

The County should support economic development.

Develop a vision of a balanced economy for Hernando County, with diverse components to provide stability through economic fluctuations.

Develop an economic development plan (separate from the Comprehensive Plan) with specific economic goals, objectives, and recommendations for specific implementation strategies to encourage a diverse, stable, balanced, and sustainable economy.

Target to attract and retain new businesses that pay higher than average wages and hire employees from among the County's existing labor pool.

Develop partnerships between government educational institutions, and the private sector to monitor and produce the skills, education, and training needed in the labor force to meet the needs of targeted businesses and industry sectors.

Create an annual economic development fund for special tourism projects.

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

Adequacy of the Functionally Classified Network

The Committee generally agreed that the County should plan for a well-connected, multi-modal transportation network of roads, bike paths, sidewalks, and perhaps rails in the long term, to meet the needs of planned growth in the areas designated for future growth by the Comprehensive Plan. The Committee indicated the County should plan for future rights of way and the capital costs should generally be borne by those who will primarily benefit, with capital infrastructure provided by development which will benefit from it, where practical. The Committee also agreed that the Comprehensive Plan should provide better guidance for planned densities to allow better projections of transportation needs at build out within the urban growth areas.

Recommendations:

Plan to develop a well-connected network of motor vehicle, bike, and pedestrian travel corridors to allow multiple travel path choices and multiple mode choices, with benefits for emergency service access and disaster evacuation planning.

Modify the Comprehensive Plan to provide density targets for better local area population projections for build out, better projections of build out transportation

needs, and infrastructure planning based upon planned growth.

Develop a set of strategies for acquiring, reserving, or providing for rights of way needed to develop the planned transportation network.

Defining Characteristics of Roads which are not Functionally Classified

The Committee generally agreed that the County should develop a system for classifying major local roads (such as those below collector status which perform limited collector functions and frontage roads), for integrating them into the network, and for planning and programming their improvements as growth occurs and their functions become more important.

Recommendations:

Recognize in the Comprehensive Plan the function of major local roads as components of the larger network and provide for mechanisms to address their issues.

Develop a classification system for major local roads, defining their function, capacities, and characteristics.

Develop a mechanism for anticipating needed improvements and for programming improvements to major local roads and frontage roads when needed.

Airport

No policy or implementation recommendations were made by the Committee.

Boat Ramps

No policy or implementation recommendations were made by the Committee.

Railroads

Recommendations:

The CSX Railroad connection to Tampa and the national rail network should be considered a transportation asset as well as an industrial and commercial asset to the County, and should be recognized for its future potential to provide commuter rail connections to the south.

The County should coordinate with the MPO to include railroads in transportation planning.

Mass Transit

A majority of the Committee members supported the position that the County should endeavor to provide public transportation for those segments of the populace that cannot provide their own transportation, and as an alternative to individual automobile travel. A minority of members supported the position that the County should not endeavor to provide mass transit to its citizens.

Recommendations:

Where provided, mass transit needs to be accessible to the people who will use it.

Bike and Pedestrian Facilities and Access

Recommendations:

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be included as part of a well developed County transportation network, and should be designed to provide functional connections to destinations for work, business, shopping, and other purposes in addition to serving as recreation facilities.

The County should require better bike and pedestrian connectivity between adjacent land uses (commercial properties, schools, residential neighborhoods, governments facilities, etc.) and from such land uses to nearby bike and pedestrian facilities.

The County should require sidewalks along commercial road frontages and bike and pedestrian access between commercial and other developments where bike and pedestrian access is desirable.

Most new residential and commercial developments (excluding only the largest single family lots) should be required to install sidewalks as a condition of development.

Major roads should have either sidewalks or bicycle facilities.