



Major Issues
October 15, 2009
Honoring the Past, Planning the Future

Issue 1: Clarify Activity Center, Mixed-use, and Urban Design Requirements.

Activity centers have been mapped in the Future Land Use Element data and analysis, but an activity centers map has not been adopted in the Comprehensive Plan. This has led to some confusion about when and where to apply the various activity center policies that are referenced throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Activity centers can range in scale from neighborhood-serving retail and services to regional centers that serve multiple communities. With no clear definitions and locations for the different scales of activity centers, the City has had difficulty meeting several stated objectives of the Comprehensive Plan including urban design, the development of more pedestrian, bicycle and transit friendly areas, and an effective mix of land uses.

This leads to the question of how best to mix residential with commercial uses, since few places in Gainesville are dense enough to support vertical mixed-use (residential above retail and offices). Currently a mix of residential and non-residential uses is encouraged, but not required, in mixed-use districts. A major discussion topic in recent months involves whether mixed-use developments should be required to have a certain amount of residential use and what the minimum residential/non-residential mix of uses should be. This topic should be further assessed in the EAR.

New development, whether in activity centers, mixed-use developments or elsewhere, assumes a certain form. Special area plans in the Land Development Code provide regulations that implement the urban design goals of the Comprehensive Plan in those areas. To achieve the type of development that the plan envisions for the rest of the City, it should be determined whether more urban design requirements are needed and whether they should be mandatory or optional. Clarification as to what is urban and what is suburban development is needed in order to guide the creation of appropriate design regulations for activity centers, mixed-use developments and elsewhere in the City.

Issue 2: Establish Policies for the Reduction of Greenhouse Gases within the City.

The Comprehensive Plan has long-standing policies that address issues related to greenhouse gas reduction. These policies include but are not limited to the promotion of transportation choice (including transit, walking, and bicycling), compact development, infill and redevelopment, mixed-use development, higher residential densities and non-residential intensities in and near neighborhood (activity) centers and within transit corridors, and preservation of the urban forest.

Comprehensive energy legislation passed by the state legislature in 2008 requires (among other requirements) that greenhouse gas reduction strategies be included in comprehensive plans. Assessment needs to be made in the EAR as to what comprehensive plan policy amendments and additions are needed regarding greenhouse gas reduction. Gainesville is in the fortuitous position of having both a very successful

mass transit system and electric utility under its ownership and control, which bodes well for the City to be a leader in greenhouse gas reduction.

Issue 3: Encourage Livable Neighborhoods for People of All Ages.

Multi-generational neighborhoods. As a large percentage of the population ages and moves toward retirement, Gainesville finds itself in the position of needing to provide affordable housing that provides convenient access to the needs of everyday life.

Gainesville's current comprehensive plan does not provide the tools to create neighborhoods that allow a multi-generational spectrum of residents to 'age in place'. Access to everyday needs such as shopping, services, and medical facilities as well as libraries, schools, community colleges, churches, museums, civic, social and cultural associations, parks, and the arts attracts young families to needed resources, encourages people to stay in their homes as they age, and helps develop intergenerational neighborhoods.

Affordable Housing. The availability of affordable housing is an ongoing issue for this community. This is not simply about housing for the poor but also about reasonable housing for all income levels in all parts of the community. During the rise in housing prices a few years ago, moderate income households had more difficulty finding the housing that they wanted. The University of Florida has concerns about affordable housing, especially near campus and in particular for UF employees. Higher density areas near campus are attracting more students.

Housing the homeless is an ongoing issue related to affordable housing. At this point in time, a location with housing, camping, and/or a tent area with facilities such as showers and lockers is needed for our homeless population.

Issue 4: Fund Transportation Choice.

The current Comprehensive Plan does not contain adopted level of service (LOS) standards for transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists. As a result, it is difficult to determine at what level the City should be providing those services and whether the City is adequately funding the transportation modifications and operations needed to provide multi-modal transportation choice. According to the Regional Transit System, transit service cannot be expanded in terms of additions of standard buses or articulated buses for bus rapid transit (BRT) without a new bus maintenance facility, which is currently not a fully funded project. At the same time, revenue collections from property taxes, gas taxes and TCEA Agreements are lower than in previous years, which creates challenges to funding transportation choice even at existing levels.

Issue 5: Amend Future Land Use Map as Justified by Data and Analysis.

A recent court case concerning Marion County (Woods & Recio v. Marion County & DCA) and statements from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) emphasize that future land use amendments should be based on a "needs assessment." The needs

assessment determines the appropriate supply of the various land uses to accommodate anticipated demand to avoid over allocation of land uses and urban sprawl.

Land use amendments that over allocate certain categories can result in an over supply of housing or commercial land uses that cause premature conversion of vacant or agricultural lands; inefficient use of infrastructure funds; destruction of sensitive environmental areas; and reduction in redevelopment or infill development potential in targeted areas of the community. Land use amendments have not typically been examined for their impact on redevelopment, which is a key goal for the City.

The needs assessment, according to DCA, also should be based on the time horizon of the comprehensive plan. Gainesville has traditionally used a 10-year horizon for its plan. However, this may be inadequate to assess and analyze larger developments which have recently come forward in the community.

Due to annexations, the City's population largely shifted from the projections established for the 2000 plan. New population projections have not been produced after annexations, which results in an unclear situation for needs assessment, particularly for residential lands.

Issue 6: Encourage Infill and Redevelopment in Central and East Gainesville.

The 1991 and 2000 Comprehensive Plans recognized that Gainesville was largely characterized by existing low density and intensity development with few large parcels of vacant land. Recent analyses indicate that East Gainesville and central portions of Gainesville have lost population over the past twenty to thirty years as population shifted westward (including to areas in western, unincorporated Alachua County).

While several redevelopment and infill policies were included in the 2000 Plan and there have been notable successes near the UF Campus in College Park and University Heights, Gainesville still has not redeveloped to its full potential, and East Gainesville lags in development and redevelopment. Several prominent redevelopment attempts (including University Corners, Gainesville Greens, and Stadium Club) have stalled or failed in the last three years due to the economy. The economic downturn has resulted in fewer redevelopment projects coming forward and an increased number of vacant buildings and closed businesses. Even in the economic boom times, there were redevelopment areas that did not see significant activity.

The most notable redevelopment incentives in the current comprehensive plan are related to the Transportation Concurrency Exception Area (TCEA), which provides redevelopment trip credits and minimizes requirements in Zone A (which includes East Gainesville and the area around the University of Florida campus). The 2000-2010 Comprehensive Plan also increased residential densities in redevelopment areas and thus encouraged the redevelopment of underutilized parcels. However, Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) staff has pointed out that confusion about special area plans and the lack of greater incentives in the redevelopment areas may hamper redevelopment efforts. Further, CRA staff indicates that inadequate infrastructure (primarily water/wastewater lines) limits redevelopment and development potential in central and East Gainesville.

Issue 7: Navigate the New Economy.

The recent financial crisis in the US points to a new economy for the future. Growth in Florida's population and development has diminished, which has led to unemployment, foreclosures, vacant buildings, and a reduction in property and sales tax revenues. The upheaval in the financial markets has limited financing for projects. While Gainesville has not suffered from the extreme economic downturn that most other Florida cities have experienced, there are pockets of overbuilding (the multi-family market), vacant buildings, and closed businesses in the city. One example is along North Main Street where several automobile dealerships have gone out of business or consolidated with other dealerships, leaving behind large buildings and vacant parking lots where cars used to be. These buildings and sites have limited utility for other uses (related to the infill/redevelopment major issue).

At the same time, the new economy offers opportunities for green developments, green technologies, and green employment that will make the community more sustainable and aid the local economy. It is unclear whether the current Comprehensive Plan has broad enough categories and designated areas on the Future Land Use Map to allow for these new industries or technologies such as solar generation stations.

In 2007 the City adopted a new objective and policies (Objective 1.7) in the Intergovernmental Coordination Element that included a map of the Innovation Zone. With amendments processed for a new business/industrial park near the airport and also in the Southwest area (west of SW 34th Street), the map may not adequately depict all of the areas targeted for innovation and new economy-type businesses. An inventory of infrastructure in the Innovation Zone has not been completed (Policy 1.7.3), which means there is incomplete information to provide economic development assistance.

There are questions about whether there are compromises the City should make to compete for innovative "new economy" development and redevelopment projects while maintaining our vision for the future.

Issue 8: Strengthen Natural Resource Protection.

The Comprehensive Plan includes numerous policies with respect to the protection of natural resources, but the Uplands map in the Environmentally Significant Land & Resources map series merits review for inclusion of additional significant uplands. Assessment should be made in the EAR regarding the need for comprehensive plan amendments pertaining to the protection of other natural resources, particularly considering that additional environmental protections have been proposed for the City's land development regulations. Similarly, determination should be made in the EAR as to the need to amend the comprehensive plan to provide protection for annexed land with Alachua County as Strategic Ecosystem designation.

There is considerable concern about the long-term water supply for our region. The St. Johns River Water Management District conducts water supply assessments to identify areas where projected future uses cannot be sustained by proposed water resources

without unacceptable impacts to water resources and related natural systems of the region. Such areas are designated as Priority Water Resource Caution Areas (PWRCA).

Prior to the Water Management District's draft 2008 Water Supply Assessment (WSA), the City and Alachua County were not identified as a Priority Water Resource Caution Areas. However, the draft WSA identifies most of the District, including the Gainesville area, as a *Potential* PWRCA. As of September 2009 the District was continuing to refine the groundwater flow simulation models used in the WSA. Once model review/refinement model is complete, the District will publish the final 2008 WSA, which will include PWRCA designations. It is not certain at this time whether or not the Gainesville area will be in a PWRCA, but the determination is expected to be made. The PWRCA designation would require amendments to Gainesville's comprehensive plan within 18 months after the District approves (expected in December 2010) the 2010 Water Supply Plan. Such amendments could include increased water conservation measures, greater expansion of reclaimed water service, and possibly development of alternative water supplies.

Whether or not the City is designated as a Priority Water Resource Caution Area, assessment should be made in the EAR as to whether current policies in the Comprehensive Plan need to be amended to meet updated statutory requirements pertaining to water supply. In addition, assessment should be made in the EAR as to whether current comprehensive plan policies need to be updated regarding water conservation, including the use of reclaimed water. Assessment should also be made in the EAR as to whether the comprehensive plan should address Low-impact development (LID), which is a set of stormwater management features and practices that mimic natural hydrologic functions on developed land and that are intended to conserve natural systems. LID addresses both water quantity and water quality.