



EAST CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

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Philip Laurien, AICP
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

To: D. Ray Eubanks, DCA Community Program Administrator
James Stansbury, DCA Regional Planning Administrator

From: Phil Laurien, AICP, Executive Director

Date: April 1, 2010

Subject: Evaluation and Appraisal Report

Local Government: City of New Smyrna Beach

Council staff has completed a technical review of the City of New Smyrna Beach's proposed Evaluation and Appraisal Report. Staff comments are indicated below in *italics*.

The review was conducted in accordance with the provisions of the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council's current contract with the Florida Department of Community Affairs for Plan and Plan Amendment Reviews.

The City began its EAR process by coordinating efforts between City staff, elected officials, and other members of the community. Through this effort, five issues were identified and recommendations to address these issues were made. The Regional Planning Council staff has reviewed the EAR. Council staff has general comments, as well as those associated with each identified issue which are listed below.

The RPC is finalizing its draft Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP) known as the East Central Florida 2060 Plan. The SRPP is based on the region-wide "How Shall We Grow" study coordinated by myregion.org. The results of this study generated the concept of the Regional Vision. The Regional Vision concepts are being implemented with the proposed SRPP. A draft version of this plan can be seen at the RPC's website: <http://www.ecfrpc.org/Home.aspx>.

Major Issues

The City has identified ten (10) major community issues to address in the EAR.

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1. Parking

The City seeks to address parking problems, both perceived and real, in the downtown areas of Canal Street and Flagler Avenue, near the boat ramps on the North Causeway, and in proximity to the beach.

The City was developed before the automobile was the primary means of transportation and thus, inadequate parking exists. In addition, driving and parking on the beach has become more limited in recent years due to a number of environmental constraints and residents' concerns. According to the EAR, "The constant efforts by certain groups to eliminate beach parking from the beach entirely, citing environmental reasons for doing so could damage the local economy significantly. The possible removal of driving and parking on the beach needs to be considered."

Another issue to consider when discussing beach parking and driving is public safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, sunbathers, and children. A new system to distinguish travel lanes from areas designated for these other beach user groups would be beneficial. Council staff suggests that the City consider opportunities to address beach parking and driving concerns in their EAR-based amendments.

The City also has parking problems downtown. Better signage to alert drivers to existing parking combined with the construction of new parking facilities and the redesign of existing facilities can help address this issue. However, no significant policy change recommendations were provided in the EAR to implement these strategies.

2. Annexation

Annexations during the 1990s doubled the City's size. The City hopes to annex areas between Interstate 95 and the traditional City area to provide more efficient public services and facilities. The City also will consider whether further annexation west and south on the barrier island is desired.

The City recommends that it enter into an interlocal agreement with Volusia County to better coordinate annexations. Council staff cautions the City from allowing annexations that result in a fragmented development pattern, as this can result in rapid consumption of natural resources, traffic congestion, and an inefficient use of urban infrastructure. As annexations occur, a gridded street network should be required to more efficiently accommodate traffic.

ECFRPC staff would also like to see additional clarity on how new development will be handled to discourage sprawl. The Florida legislative definition of sprawl includes "promot[ing], allow[ing] or designat[ing] for substantial areas of the jurisdiction to develop as low-intensity, low-density or single-use development, fail[ing] to encourage an attractive and functional mix of uses," and development that "results in poor accessibility among linked or related land uses." To ensure that annexed lands develop in a manner that discourages sprawl, it is important that mixed-use and compact development patterns are allowed by right. ECFRPC staff would like to see greater alignment with the policies of Chapter 10 of the proposed 2060 Plan, and therefore recommends requiring interlocal agreements with the county and neighboring jurisdictions for Joint Planning Areas to guide annexations as part of the EAR-based amendment process.

3. Economic Development

Currently the City's tax base is overwhelmingly reliant on residential property and the service industry. The City seeks to diversify employment opportunities and encourage non-residential

development to alleviate some of the burden on residents. An Activity Center is planned for the intersection of I-95 and S.R. 44. The City hopes to establish an employment center within the Activity Center.

The City plans to add an Economic Development Element to the comprehensive plan as part of the EAR update. This will include numerous public meetings to seek community feedback on strategies to attract new businesses to the City.

Council staff encourages the City to study the Economic Development background and policies of the proposed ECFRPC 2060 Plan (SRPP) for suggestions as this new element is developed.

4. Neighborhood Plans

The City intends to develop neighborhood plans for each neighborhood in New Smyrna Beach. The residents are interested in creating a “Bill of Rights” for each neighborhood. This may include requirements for prompt, courteous responses to residents’ questions, notification of upcoming projects that affect area residents, and the ability to provide neighborhood input on zoning and future land uses in each area.

Objective 10, Policy a of the Future Land Use Element states that, “By November 1990, the City will identify and prioritize individual neighborhoods, which require neighborhood level plans. This should be done through a thorough analysis of each neighborhood and include information on the compatibility of land uses and building types.” This has not been accomplished, and the City recommends that this policy be reviewed to see if it is still a policy the City wants to pursue. Since this has been selected as a major community issue by the public, and because of the significant interests in this topic from residents, Council staff recommends that this policy be retained, with a new target date established at the end of 2011.

5. Design Guidelines

The City is considering whether and where design guidelines are appropriate in the City. This is closely related to the previous issue regarding neighborhood plans. If new guidelines are developed, Council staff suggests that the City conduct community visioning workshops to determine how residents wish the City to look at build-out. This should include a visual preference survey and a neighborhood intensity analysis to aid the discussion and to help educate the community about appropriate densities and intensities to support pedestrian and multimodal activity. This is particularly important in New Smyrna Beach where large tourist and elderly populations are served.

6. Workforce/Affordable Housing

Affordable housing has increased due to the economic downturn, but the City anticipates that this trend will likely change in the future. The City recognizes the need to provide housing for all future income ranges to avoid social and economic problems associated with housing. At a minimum, accessory dwelling units should be allowed by right.

The City enacted a workforce housing ordinance in 2006 to create housing for workers earning from 80 percent to 120 percent of the median Volusia County income. This ordinance sunset after two years and there is no perceived need for this type of ordinance in the near future due to the economic downturn.

Council staff suggests that the City instead focus on providing adequate housing for low and very low income residents. It is the responsibility of each local government to address the

affordable housing needs of the region.

7. Transportation Alternatives

The transportation system in the City is “relatively acceptable”, but relies predominantly on the automobile. Residents are interested in making the community friendlier to alternative transportation modes. The City plans to enhance pedestrian access in the downtown and beach areas and at intersections throughout the City.

Much of the language describing this issue is focused on the automobile and roadway level of service. Council staff cautions the City from fixating on roadway capacity and respectfully suggests that it consider multimodal mobility instead. The ECFRPC 2060 Plan offers examples of communities that have developed goal based measurement systems that take into account accessibility, cost, user benefits, environmental impacts, and social equity. (Please reference Chapter 5 – Transportation and proposed Policy 5.9) Additionally, a gridded street network should be required for undeveloped land.

8. Promotion of the Built and Natural Environment

Protection of the natural environment is of utmost importance to residents. The City is a thriving arts community. Residents are interested in developing new strategies to market the City’s unique character. The City plans to promote ecotourism and strengthen the City’s reputation as an arts community.

9. Conservation

The City plans to encourage native landscape plantings that are drought tolerant in order to conserve potable water wasted on lawn irrigation. The City also wishes to promote conservation through green design and building and by talking part in programs such as Energy Star and FDEP’s Solar Energy Incentives.

10. Disaster Planning

The City wishes to address how it will handle displaced property owners in the event of a natural disaster. Specifically, the City is interested in establishing protocols for cases where residents’ homes are damaged but their property is still habitable. The City will consider whether it is appropriate to allow mobile homes or tents on these sites indefinitely. Council staff suggests that if the City permits this type of temporary housing that it establish appropriate time limits for site redevelopment, after which mobile homes and tents would no longer be permitted.

Finally, the City has lowered the level of service for residential potable water use from 300 gallons per unit per day to 240 gallons per unit per day. This is consistent with the proposed objective of the ECFRPC 2060 Plan (SRPP) to reduce potable water consumption to an average of 90 gallons per person per day. Council staff commends the City for this reduction in use that complements the City’s other important conservation efforts.

Council staff is available to assist in the resolution of any issue that should arise in the course of your review. If you should have any questions, please contact Andrew Landis at andrew@ecfrpc.org or by phone at (407) 262-7772 ext. 310. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Philip Laurien, AICP