Plan Amendment Status Report

DRI Status Report – February 2009
- Briger/Scripps Florida Phase II
- Capron Lakes (formerly known as Indrio)
- Indian Trails Grove
- Indiantown
- Provences
- Quillen
- Stewart Mining Industries
- Verde
- Visions at Indrio

Letter dated January 9, 2009 from Marc Bruner, Solid Waste Authority – Availability of Solid Waste Disposal Capacity

Letter dated January 16, 2009 from Governor Crist – Thank you Council’s 2009 Calendar

Phase 2 Kick-off/Scoping Meetings for the South Florida East Coast Corridor Transit Analysis


Article: Prodded by Tales of Hardship, Palm Beach County OKs Affordable Housing Moves, Tony Doris, Palm Beach Post, January 28, 2009

Article received on January 14, 2009 from Commissioner Doug Smith on the extension of Tri-Rail
MEMORANDUM

To: Council Members
From: Staff
Date: February 20, 2009 Council Meeting
Subject: Plan Amendment Status Report

Plan Amendments Received/Reviewed

Since the last regular Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC) meeting held on December 12, 2008, Council has reviewed the following amendments to local government comprehensive plans:

- 20 Future Land Use Map amendments.
- 454 text amendments.
- Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) amendments from Mangonia Park, Haverhill, Gulf Stream, Wellington, Palm Beach Gardens, Lake Park, Delray Beach, West Palm Beach, and South Palm Beach. These EAR amendments generally include revisions to all elements of the local government’s comprehensive plan.
- Water Supply Facility amendments to the Lake Park, Mangonia Park, Greenacres, Delray Beach, Stuart and West Palm Beach Comprehensive Plans.

The amendments are from 17 different local governments.

DCA Findings on Compliance

Since the last Status Report, Council has received the following Notices of Intent from the Florida Department of Community Affairs regarding compliance for local governments in the region.

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Adopted Amendments

Informational reports on the following adopted amendments can be found on the Council website (www.tcpce.org) under the Agenda for this Council Meeting:

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PROJECT NAME: Briger/Scripps Florida Phase II DRI

LOCATION: South of Donald Ross Road, north of Hood Road and east and west of Interstate 95 and east of Florida’s Turnpike in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

JURISDICTION: Palm Beach Gardens

SIZE: 682 acres

USES:
- Biotech Research and Development 1,600,000 sq. ft.
- Biotechnological/biomedical, pharmaceutical, ancillary office space and other related uses 2,400,000 sq. ft.
- Dwelling Units 2,700
- Commercial Space 500,000 sq. ft.

STATUS:
- Preapplication meeting held on June 24, 2008.
- Expedited Permitting meeting held on October 29, 2008.
- First sufficiency review and comments due out by February 27, 2009.
PROJECT NAME: **Capron Lakes (formerly known as Indrio)**

LOCATION: Located northwest of the intersection of I-95 and Indrio Road in St. Lucie County

JURISDICTION: St. Lucie County

SIZE: 1,938 acres

USES:
- Residential: 3,100 Dwelling Units
- Retail: 200,000 sq. ft.
- Office: 200,000 sq. ft.

STATUS:
- Preapplication meeting held on March 30, 2005.
- Application for Development for Approval submitted on November 18, 2005 and found insufficient on January 11, 2006.
- Letter received on April 29, 2006 asking for an extension to August 9, 2006.
- Supplemental information to the Application for Development Approval submitted on August 3, 2006 and found insufficient on September 12, 2006.
- Supplemental information to the Application for Development Approval submitted on January 8, 2007 and found insufficient on February 7, 2007.
- Supplemental information to the Application for Development Approval submitted on May 25, 2007.
- Council’s DRI Assessment Report scheduled for consideration at the September 21, 2007 Council meeting.
PROJECT NAME: Indian Trails Grove

LOCATION: Located west of Seminole Pratt Whitney Road, and south of Northlake Boulevard

JURISDICTION: Unincorporated Palm Beach County

SIZE: 4,930 acres

USES: Residential 12,325 Dwelling Units
Retail 207,500 sq. ft.
Office 42,500 sq. ft.

STATUS: Preapplication meeting held on August 21, 2006.
Application for Development Approval submitted on February 16, 2007 and found insufficient on April 12, 2007.
Letter received from the applicant dated January 11, 2008 requesting that the application status be stayed until such a time as a Comprehensive Plan overlay for the western communities has been formally acted upon by Palm Beach County. Council agreed to a 6-month extension to the review process from February 14, 2008 in order to evaluate the County’s progress in approving the overlay.
PROJECT NAME: **Indiantown**

LOCATION: Located east of Allapattah Road (State Road 609) in Indiantown, Martin County

JURISDICTION: Martin County

SIZE: 804 acres

USES:  
- Residential: 1,650 Dwelling Units
- Commercial: 10,000 sq. ft.
- Office: 20,000 sq. ft.

STATUS: Preapplication meeting held on March 21, 2005.
Application for Development Approval was submitted on September 23, 2005 and found insufficient on November 11, 2005.

Supplemental information to the Application for Development Approval submitted on March 3, 2006 and found insufficient on May 1, 2006.

Supplemental information to the Application for Development Approval submitted on July 11, 2006.

Application for Development Approval was found to have completed the required sufficiency process on August 25, 2006.

Letter received on November 3, 2006 requesting that consideration of Council’s draft DRI assessment report be rescheduled to the December 15, 2006 Council meeting.

Council’s DRI Assessment Report scheduled for consideration at the December 15, 2006 Council meeting.


The DO was rendered to Council and the Department of Community Affairs on April 17, 2008. The DCA determined that the DO was not rendered properly because it did not include a copy of Map H, the master development plan.


Council sent a letter to the Department of Community Affairs on December 23, 2008 stating that the Development Order rendered on December 12, 2008 adequately addressed all regional issues raised in Council’s DRI Assessment Report approved on June 20, 2008.
PROJECT NAME: Provences

LOCATION: Located within the unincorporated boundaries of St. Lucie County, generally to the northwest of the I-95/Midway Road Interchange.

JURISDICTION: Unincorporated St. Lucie County

SIZE: 735 acres

USES:
- Residential 4,443 Dwelling Units
- Retail 1,435,706 sq. ft.
- Office 1,000,000 sq. ft.

STATUS: Preapplication meeting held on January 11, 2005.
Application for Development Approval was submitted on January 27, 2006 and found insufficient on March 2, 2006.
Supplemental information to the Application for Development Approval submitted on June 23, 2006 and found insufficient on July 26, 2006.
Application for Development Approval was found to have completed the required sufficiency process on September 26, 2006.
Letter received on October 4, 2006 requesting the public hearing be delayed until the first week in April 2007.
PROJECT NAME: **Quillen**

LOCATION: Located in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Warfield Boulevard (SR 710) and Allapattah Road (CR 609) in Indiantown, Martin County, Florida

JURISDICTION: Martin County

SIZE: 582 acres

USES: Residential 2,250 Dwelling Units
Retail 150,000 sq. ft.

STATUS: Preapplication meeting held on January 4, 2006.
Application for Development Approval was submitted on April 5, 2006 and found insufficient on May 5, 2006.
Letter received on September 5, 2006 asking for an additional 60-day extension to respond to the May 5, 2006 sufficiency.
Application for Development Approval was found to have completed the required sufficiency process on November 3, 2006.
Council’s DRI Assessment Report scheduled for consideration at the December 15, 2006 Council meeting.
PROJECT NAME: Stewart Mining Industries

LOCATION: State Road 98. The property is located in the Everglades Agricultural Area.

JURISDICTION: Palm Beach County

SIZE: 5,420 acres

USES: Storage reservoirs as part of the surface water management system for the surrounding sugar cane farms owned by U.S. Sugar Corporation

PROJECT NAME: **Verde**

LOCATION: Northeast corner of Clint Moore Road and State Road 7 in Boca Raton, Florida

JURISDICTION: Unincorporated Palm Beach County

SIZE: 37.39 acres

USES: The proposed development is intended to include retail, office, residential, theatre and hotel uses.

STATUS: Preapplication meeting held on July 16, 2007. Letter received on July 8, 2008 asking for an extension to submit the Application for Development Approval. The extension was extended until January 30, 2009.
PROJECT NAME: Visions at Indrio

LOCATION: SE Corner of I-95 and Indrio Road

JURISDICTION: St. Lucie County

SIZE: 780 acres

USES:
- Residential 2605 Dwelling Units
- Retail, Service 750,000 sq. ft.
- Office 250,000 sq. ft.
- Hotel 240 Rooms
- School K-8

STATUS:
- Preapplication meeting held on June 16, 2004.
- Application for Development Approval was submitted on August 20, 2004 and found insufficient on October 18, 2004.
- Supplemental information to the Application for Development Approval submitted on December 28, 2004 and found insufficient on January 21, 2005.
- Letter received on May 19, 2005 asking for an extension to the 120 day sufficiency response period.
- Letter received on November 14, 2005 asking for an extension to December 16, 2005.
- Letter received on November 7, 2005 asking for an extension to May 19, 2006.
- Letter received on May 3, 2006 asking for an extension to July 19, 2006.
- Application for Development Approval was found to have completed the required sufficiency process on August 25, 2006.
- Letter received on October 17, 2006 requesting an extension to the 90-day public hearing.
- Letter received on May 30, 2007 requesting the 90-day public hearing requirement be waived until such time as the related comprehensive plan amendment issues are resolved and the developer and the County can agree to public hearing dates.
January 9, 2009

Mr. Terry Hess  
Planning Director  
Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council  
301 East Ocean Blvd., Suite 300  
Stuart, FL

Subject: Availability of Solid Waste Disposal Capacity

Dear Mr. Hess:

The Solid Waste Authority of Palm Beach County hereby provides certification that the Authority has disposal capacity available to accommodate the solid waste generation for the municipalities and unincorporated county for the coming year of 2009. This letter also constitutes notification of sufficient capacity for concurrency management and comprehensive planning purposes. Capacity is available for both the coming year, and the five and ten year planning periods specified in 9J-5.005(4).

As of September 30, 2008, the Authority's North County Landfills had an estimated 33,115,331 cubic yards of landfill capacity remaining. Based upon the existing Palm Beach County population, the most recently available population growth rates published by the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business and Research (BEBR), medium projection, and projected rates of solid waste generation, waste reduction and recycling, the Solid Waste Authority forecasts that capacity will be available at the existing landfill through approximately the year 2024, assuming the depletion of the Class I and Class III landfills is approximately balanced.

The Board of the Solid Waste Authority authorized the initial design and permitting efforts to develop a new landfill and waste-to-energy facility for the Authority. The capacity of these new facilities will extend the life of the solid waste system well beyond the year 2065.

The Authority continues to pursue options to increase the life of its existing facilities and to provide for all the County's current and future disposal and recycling needs. As part of its responsibility, the Authority will provide an annual statement of disposal capacity, using the most current BEBR projections available. Please provide copies of this letter to your plan review and concurrency management staff. If you have any questions or I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Marc C. Bruner, Ph.D.  
Chief Administrative Officer
January 16, 2009

Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council
421 Southwest Camden Avenue
Stuart, Florida 34994

Dear Friends:

Thank you for sending me the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council 2009 Calendar. It is my pleasure to accept this on behalf of myself and the people of Florida. I appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Serving the people of Florida is a great honor, and I am pleased to have the opportunity of leading the state. Your kind thoughts are appreciated.

Thank you again for your thoughtfulness.

Sincerely,

Charlie Crist

CC/cas/lah
PHASE 2 KICK-OFF/SCOPING MEETINGS

Wednesday, January 21, 2009
6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Jupiter: Jupiter Town Hall Council Chamber

Tuesday, January 27, 2009
4:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Boca Raton: Boca Raton Community Center

Wednesday, February 4, 2009
3:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
West Palm Beach: Cohen Pavilion, Kravis Center

Thursday, February 5, 2009
5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Riviera Beach: City Hall Council Chamber Room C202

Tuesday, Feb 10, 2009
Time to be Announced
Overtown: Greater Bethel AME - RESERVED

Wednesday, February 11, 2009
6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Delray Beach: City Hall

Thursday, February 12, 2009
Time to be Announced
Miami Shores: Miami Shores Country Club

Tuesday, Feb 17, 2009T
Time to be Announced
Hollywood: Hollywood Center for Performing Arts

Wednesday, February 18, 2009
Time to be Announced
Pompano Beach: E. Pat Larkins Community Center

Wednesday, February 25, 2009
Time to be Announced
Fort Lauderdale: African American Research Library
GROWTH MANAGEMENT – STAT[E]ING THE CASE

Special to Florida Planning
by Robert M. Rhodes

Question: Has the state growth management program made a difference? Has it produced better development patterns and projects?
Answer: The program absolutely has made a difference, primarily by granting local governments policy context, processes and tools and sometimes political power to make better decisions, and to ensure these decisions are more transparent and accountable to the public. Of course, sound decisions can’t be legislatively mandated. And the quality of decisions will largely depend on the commitment, ability and good sense of locally elected and appointed officials and an engaged public. But all told, a state program can set the contextual tone and substantive and procedural tables for better local decision making and I believe Florida's program has done so.

Consider that in 1972, when the first growth management legislation was enacted, 28 of Florida's 67 counties lacked minimum zoning or subdivision regulation and 50% or more of the state's land area was not subject to a local comprehensive plan.

Today, all local governments have adopted plans to guide growth management decisions and some form of development regulations to carry forward their plans. And local plan decisions are subject to state oversight and citizen participation and enforcement.

State oversight is critical to Florida’s growth management program.

Like many southern states, Florida has a strong local home rule tradition. True to this legacy, Florida cities and counties enjoyed broad discretion to adopt local plans and regulations, and if they did, determine their character and legal status.

Continued on page 4

What is Active Living by Design?

The Orlando Initiative and Lessons Learned
by Malisa McCready, AICP

Active Living by Design (ALbD), an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, was established to encourage changes in environment, design, and transportation; as well as policies that cultivate and support active living. The message of ALbD is to incorporate at least 30 minutes of physical activity into daily life for better health.

The Orlando initiative, Get Active Orlando (GAO) is one of 25 cities

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Nonetheless, in the mid-70's, Florida joined what
Fred Bosselman and David Callies called "The Quiet
Revolution in Land Use Control" by enacting the
state's first mandatory local planning legislation.

By joining "the Revolution," the state re-couped
some of the power previously explicitly or implicitly
delегated to locals to plan and regulate land use.

The Local Government Comprehensive Planning
Act was developed by the first of several state blue
ribbon commissions, the First Environmental Land
Management Study Committee (ELMS I). This legis-
lation was an important milestone that blazed a path
for later legislation, but was not a startling success.

Working with a broadly worded state mandate
to produce local comprehensive plans with minimal
state policy guidance, little technical and financial as-
sistance, and no penalties for non-compliance, many
local governments adopted loosely worded internally
inconsistent, advisory plans.

Future land use maps were optional and often too
politically sensitive to produce.

And although state policy required consistency
between local plans and development approvals, this
policy was largely ignored.

As a result, the first planning act produced more
local plans, but no significant improvement in plan-
ning and growth management practice.

Concern in the mid-80's about the ineffectiveness
of the initial program prompted Governor Bob
Graham, a prime legislative sponsor of the first state
growth management legislation, to appoint another
committee, the Second Environmental Land Man-
agement Study Committee (ELMS II), to assess the
state's growth management effort.

ELMS II reviewed the state's programs and con-
cluded: if Florida wants effective growth management,
the state must actively take the lead, chart a policy
course, and then actively administer its programs.

Plainly stated: state government needed to en-
gage.

The Governor and Legislature agreed, and legisla-
tion was enacted over a two-year period that directed
the Governor to produce and the Legislature to adopt
a State Comprehensive Plan and statutory guidelines
for regional planning councils to develop regional
policy plans.

These plans would pour the foundation for Florida's
Local Government Comprehensive Planning and
Development Regulation Act, popularly termed the
Growth Management Act. Among other action, the
GMA called for 1) minimum state standards for local
plans and plan amendments, 2) state review of lo-
cal plans and amendments for compliance with state
standards, and 3) available state sanctions for non-
complying localities.

The GMA energized the state program and ulti-
mately produced workable and moderately effective
growth management.

But because growth management policy is rela-
tively new and organic, the state program was reas-
essed in the early '90's.

Another study commission, ELMS III, recommend-
ed and the Governor and Legislature later enacted
several changes to refine the GMA.

The state's oversight role was loosened and certain
small-scale plan amendments were exempted from
state review. And local governments were granted
some flexibility to vary from uniform state standards so
their plans could better reflect local circumstances and
preferences.

This brief historic snapshot shows how over the
years the state's role in growth management has shift-
ed.

In the '70's, the state role was relatively weak. In the '80's, the state role
was strengthened and then moderately reduced in
the '90's.

But all considered, Florida's growth management
programs could not have achieved much success
without a relatively strong state supervisory and
oversight role.

That said, I'm not suggesting the state's present
role or policies be forever fixed.

Just as the state role was appropriately expanded in
the '80's and adjusted in the '90's, it should be periodi-
cally appraised against current growth management
goals, past performance, local government capability,
and, if appropriate, modified and refreshed.

I believe such an assessment will and should con-
clude the state must preserve a meaningful oversight
role. This role can be more limited and less prescrip-
tive. It should identify and focus on protecting and
promoting important state interests particularly in
rural and growing areas and offer greater technical
assistance to localities.

Additionally, state responsibility for reviewing all
local plan amendments for compliance with state stan-
dards can be reduced and regional planning councils
can be delegated new authority to review certain
plan amendments. The state planning agency should
continue to review amendments that significantly and
directly impact important state interests, relate to DRI

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or similar large scale projects, EAR updates, or that implement new state planning requirements.

If initial delegation of plan reviews to regional councils is effective, additional delegation should be considered with appropriate state oversight.

However, any delegation of state oversight authority should be preconditioned on the regional councils re-adopting their strategic regional policy plans to reflect an expanded local plan review role. And importantly, the councils’ organization, membership and funding should be reviewed and restructured to support their new role.

The state’s role must be implemented by a state agency focused and equipped to make growth management it’s program priority. There are periodic calls to terminate the state land planning agency, the Department of Community Affairs, and transfer its functions to another state agency. Such proposals are stimulated by purported aims to shrink state government, promote greater operational efficiency and reduce regulatory overlap, or sometimes simply by opposition to DCA policy or personnel. Since Florida citizens consistently show support for the state’s growth management program, indeed demand stronger programs and enforcement and implementation, these efforts have been defeated rather easily. But a current legislative review of DCA may rekindle past efforts to significantly change its mission or even terminate the agency. What factors should this review consider?

Any proposal to terminate DCA and merge it’s growth management programs with another state agency must be carefully analyzed against several criteria, including:

- Whether agency missions and programs are complementary or at least compatible;
- Whether the merger will result in more effective agency operations and management; and
- Whether DCA’s present growth management programs can be expected to receive priority management attention in the new agency.

Let’s test some merger scenarios against these criteria.

A proposal recently surfaced to merge DCA with the Secretary of State’s office. The underlying rationale for this concept may have been two fold: first, the proposal emerged from an administration that clearly did not support a strong state role in growth management and second, the then serving Secretary of State was a highly respected former local official who many growth management stakeholders believed would be an excellent DCA secretary.

Applying merger analytics to this scenario, the two agencies missions and programs are not complementary. The Secretary of State is responsible for supervising the state elections process, regulating corporations, and historic preservation. With the exception of some overlap of the historic preservation function, these programs have nothing in common with DCA’s growth management, emergency management and local government technical assistance, grant and Florida Community Trust programs.

This merger would not capitalize on personnel who could perform work for both agencies since required expertise is different. Consequently, there would be no personnel cost saving.

Finally, DCA’s primary program missions would likely be diluted if it merged with an agency primarily tasked to manage the state’s high profile elections process.

Another alternative is to merge DCA into the Florida Department of Transportation. FDOT and DCA share functional planning missions and state transportation and growth management policy should be complementary or at least compatible. However, unlike DCA which develops state planning and growth management policies that are applied by regional and local agencies, FDOT actually develops; it implements its plans by planning, designing and constructing transportation facilities.

FDOT projects often are integrally involved in DCA scale projects and local government plan amendments and development orders, which DCA must review and act on as part of its oversight role.

Consequently, DCA and FDOT missions are not compatible and frequently would place a merged FDOT/DCA in an uncomfortable conflict position having to choose between promoting transportation projects and applying state growth management policy.

And similar to a merger with the Secretary of State’s office, transferring the state planning and growth management programs to FDOT would dilute their public and internal government prominence and probably subordinate growth management to FDOT’s primary mission to develop transportation facilities.

Another alternative is to merge DCA with the Florida Department of Environmental Regulation. FDEP does prepare plans, but it’s primary mission is to administer state environmental permitting programs and to generally supervise the regional water management districts.

The key issue here is whether to join the state’s chief planning agency with the state’s chief environmental permitting agency. This raises the ever-present debate about the similarities and differences between planning and permitting practice and culture.

I will not summarize the respective positions, but there is no consensus whether planning and permitting missions are complementary or even consistent.

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DCA planning provides larger scale, multi-subject, future oriented goals, objectives and policies. FDEP environmental permitting determines whether a site specific project satisfies narrower planning policies as well as many more specific regulatory standards, whether project impacts can and should be mitigated, and if so, the amount of mitigation.

DCA planners arguably could assist with FDEP planning and provide some possible personnel savings. But my concern about a FDEP/DCA merger is this: at a time when many believe that DCA’s growth management planning and local plan amendment oversight role should focus more on encouraging sound large scale planning practice and should defer site specific impact analysis to the local permitting process and state and regional regulatory agencies, FDEP’s primary permitting function would naturally pressure DCA to become more oriented to impact assessment and mitigation.

This would sacrifice important state planning policy and also result in redundant permitting programs.

Bottom line – none of the merger alternatives discussed satisfy the suggested merger analytics of complementary mission, more effective operations and retaining program visibility and priority. And until and unless a merger plan can meet these objectives, DCA should continue to administer the growth management programs.

State agency action must be directed by realistic, implementable policies. Recall that Florida’s program is supposed to be driven by a state comprehensive plan.

Unfortunately, the existing plan is a fuzzily worded collection of feel good statements. The plan’s 25 equally weighted goals and 300 plus policies are not connected or consistent. It lacks an implementation strategy and updated performance criteria. Although constitutionally mandated and legislatively approved, the state comprehensive plan largely is ignored by both the executive and legislative branches.

Dick RuBino and Earl Starnes in Lessons Learned said it well: the state comprehensive plan is too comprehensive and consequently rudderless. This plan needs an overhaul. Indeed, this state policy vehicle should be traded in for a limited number of clear, concise, performance based planning policies and goals to be adopted by the state’s chief planning officer, the Governor, that would promote and protect important state interests.

The revised policies and goals should define, circumscribe and provide benchmarks for driving, administering, and assessing the state growth management programs.

Finally, I believe one of Henry Adam’s adages applies to public policy: “All experience is an arch, to build upon.”

Florida’s intergovernmental growth management program embodies almost four decades of policy development – with demonstratable benefits. But all programs have components that outlive their usefulness, deliver unintended consequences, or just don’t work.

Another review of our growth management program is underway. Yes, many goals have not been attained. And yes, the state’s role can be limited, sharpened and partially delegated to regional councils with appropriate conditions and oversight. But let’s be careful not to automatically equate less than desirable implementation with poor policy. Program reviewers must focus first on goals to be accomplished. If a new program or major amendments to present programs can better accomplish the goal... fine, as long as any major new policy is first pilot tested and performance assessed before it is applied statewide.

But if the desired goal can be accomplished by different or better implementation of existing programs... even better. Starting new programs is expensive; building on existing programs that can accomplish the goal is more efficient.

With these thoughts in mind, I hope the next review of growth management will continue to build our experience arch, fix what is broken, but not break what is working.

This thoughtful opinion piece was prepared by Bob Rhodes for Florida Planning. Mr. Rhodes is Of Counsel to Foley & Lardner LLP in Jacksonville. He chaired the State of Florida ELMS II Committee and the Jacksonville Downtown Development Authority, Economic Development Commission and the Mayor of Jacksonville’s Growth Management Task Force. Mr. Rhodes held senior executive positions with The St. Joe Company, Disney Development Company and Arvida Corporation. He presently is Practitioner in Residence at Georgia State College of Law.
Prodded by tales of hardship, Palm Beach County OKs affordable housing moves

By TONY DORIS
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

WEST PALM BEACH — One by one, the stories of hardship spilled out before the Palm Beach County commissioners, as community leaders and church officials urged attention to the need for affordable homes.

"If any of your windows face east, you must see people lined up, coming to us for a bag of groceries," Sister Mary Oliver Hudon of St. Ann Catholic Church told the board this morning at a workshop meeting on affordable housing.

The church has seen thousands of people come through its doors over the past year who are homeless, working full- or part-time or living on disability checks, she said - people who cannot afford a place to live. "They're people who are trying their best and they cannot make it."

The board instructed county staff to move forward with Affordable Housing Advisory Committee recommendations to speed development of housing for rental and ownership. Commissioners also told their employees to work toward building a trust fund that would supply local money required to receive matching housing funds from the state and federal governments.

Commissioner Burt Aaronson urged staff to move fast and look for ways to use land owned by the county for affordable housing development.

"Otherwise, with the price of land, I don't know how builders can do it, even if you waive impact fees," he said.

Developers in the audience urged commissioners to exempt or reduce impact fees for workforce housing, and to
streamline or remove county requirements that make it hard to build houses at prices that the salespeople, cashiers, office clerks and others who make up much of the county's workforce can afford.

Commissioner Jeff Koons said the housing shortage is urgent despite the fact that the recession has put large numbers of homes on the market. The county lost more than 15,000 rental units over the past seven years due to condo conversions, he noted, citing a report from the Regional Business Alliance.

The auditorium and hallways were packed with more than 150 people for the session in the county's downtown headquarters, many of them from a multi-denominational group called PEACE, for People Engaged in Active Community Effort.

Some told the board about children forced to spend the night with friends because parents had no place to house them. Others spoke of cramped quarters and increasing marital stress and family violence among parishioners coming undone by housing costs.

"When you've got 130 people in line for breakfast during the week and they're not at work, you've got a tremendous problem," Bishop Randy Hightower told commissioners. "They need to be able to afford a home, even when they're making $40,000 a year."

Find this article at:

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Mike,

We have included this expansion of Tri Rail in our formal legislative request for Washington for stimulus work. We will be trying to encourage others to sign on with us.
Martin MPO asks state to study extension of Tri-Rail

Long standing plans to extend Tri-Rail north from Palm Beach County to the Martin County communities of Stuart and Indiantown got a boost from the Martin MPO in August when the MPO asked FDOT to study the extension north next fiscal year.

"Gas prices are a factor. There has been talk of expanding Tri-Rail for years but the gasoline crisis makes it even more urgent for our commuters," said Jerry Bryan, a senior transit planner with the Martin MPO. "There are advantages for commuters to having the rail line extended," he said.

Bryan said the recent upswing in fuel costs is creating more interest in public transit. "Gas prices are a factor. There has been talk of expanding Tri-Rail for years but the gasoline crisis makes it even more urgent for our commuters," he said.

Martin MPO Administrator Ann Persatte said growth in South Florida requires planners to consider options.

"We need to explore alternative modes of transportation to the automobile to accommodate the growth that's occurring in this region. FDOT will now be asked to study whether fixed rail service can be included as one alternative," she said.

Andrea Reiter, a spokesperson for Tri-Rail, said her agency would support findings from an FDOT study.

"If expansion is based on FDOT's study, we would be in favor of it," she said.

The preliminary engineering and environmental study will identify station locations, construction costs and right of way acquisition, if needed. A looming obstacle for Tri-Rail expansion will be joint use of the FEC rail tracks, now used exclusively for freight traffic.

Tri-Rail, which currently runs from Miami to Palm Beach County runs on CSX tracks. Tri-Rail recently completed a major double-tracking project.