Martin and St. Lucie Counties
Regional Land Use Study
Phase II - Final Report

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- St. Lucie County
- City of Stuart
- Florida Department of Transportation
- Florida Department of Community Affairs

Other Participating Agencies
- Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council
- City of Port St. Lucie
- City of Fort Pierce
- St. Lucie County
- Community Coach

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MARTIN AND ST. LUCIE COUNTY REGIONAL LAND USE STUDY: PHASE II SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared for:
TREASURE COAST REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................1
   Study Process ............................................................................................................................... 1
   Study Context and Purpose ......................................................................................................... 2
PHASE I OVERVIEW ..........................................................................................................................3
   Community Centers Vision Statement ....................................................................................... 4
PHASE II OVERVIEW ..........................................................................................................................4
   Review of Plans and Regulations ............................................................................................... 5
   National Survey ........................................................................................................................... 6
   Village Green Demonstration Project ......................................................................................... 7
   Community Center Design, Performance and Implementation Guidelines ............................. 7
   Community Center Goals, Objectives and Policies ................................................................. 7
   Multimodal Transportation District ........................................................................................... 8
   Site Plan Review Process .......................................................................................................... 9
SUMMARY .........................................................................................................................................9
INTRODUCTION

This Summary Report provides an overview of Phase II of the Regional Land Use Study for Martin and St. Lucie Counties. The study area extends from the southern end of Fort Pierce in St. Lucie County to south of Port Salerno in Martin County, and includes all land to the western edge of the urban service boundary for both Martin County and St. Lucie County.

The Regional Land Use Study is intended to address some of the major regional growth management issues facing the St. Lucie County and Martin County study area, identify possible courses of action, and set a regional framework for improved coordination of land use and transportation decisions. Phase I of the study was completed in January 2002 and recommended an integrated land use and transportation vision that clusters study area development into transit-oriented and pedestrian friendly Community Centers. Transit stops are the focal point of the centers, with the pedestrian friendly design extending at least a quarter mile from the station.

Phase II of the study was completed in May of 2003 and focused on how Community Centers can be developed in the study area. The implementation tools developed during Phase II are intended to be helpful guides that localities can adapt and use to implement the Community Centers envisioned by the Phase I analysis.

Study Process

The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council coordinated the Regional Land Use Study, with agency funding and participation from Martin County, St. Lucie County, the City of Stuart, the Florida Department of Transportation and the Florida Department of Community Affairs. Other actively participating agencies included the City of Ft. Pierce, the City of Port St. Lucie, and the St. Lucie County Community Coach a public transportation provider.

As noted above, the study was conducted in two phases. The first phase was funded with state and local revenues and recommended an integrated land use and transportation vision for the study area. The second phase was funded through a federal grant, and focuses on the strategies needed to implement the recommended vision.
Throughout both phases of this study, a steering committee of participating local and state agencies met regularly to provide technical and policy guidance and to review draft work products. In addition, Phase I of the study was structured around an active public participation program that included accessible public workshops, newsletters, displays, presentations, a web site and other means of involving citizens and interest groups in the process. Phase II recommendations were reviewed with the real estate roundtable, elected officials, and other active participants in Phase I. The study’s recommendations reflect the technical analysis as enhanced by those public participation opportunities.

Study Context and Purpose

The Regional Land Use Study evaluated the degree to which changes in the area’s land development patterns influence future transportation needs and priorities. One of the primary needs in the study area is addressing congestion on US 1. The Florida Department of Transportation has identified the need to expand the highway to eight lanes in several locations and to construct grade-separated interchanges at Jensen Beach Boulevard and Port St. Lucie Boulevard. These overpasses alone are projected at close to $80 million and are not affordable, compared to more than $1 billion in other transportation projects cumulatively identified in the adopted 2025 Long Range Transportation Plans for the St. Lucie and Martin County Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

Based on an inventory of conditions and discussions with the community during Phase I, other land use and transportation challenges facing the study area are:

- Large areas of platted, undeveloped residential lots in individual ownership, limiting the ability to assemble land for significant development, seen primarily in Port St. Lucie;
- A significant imbalance in the location of housing and jobs, resulting in long work trip commutes and economic inequities between the two counties;
- A predominantly suburban orientation, with relatively few well-defined centers;
- Physical and environmental features that limit roadway connectivity and allow for only a few, increasingly congested, continuous routes serving the area;
- Prevailing market demand in the western portion of the urban services area that results in underutilized and vacant parcels in the older, established commercial core areas; and
- A relative lack of viable alternatives to automobile travel, placing additional pressure on the existing roadway system.
In light of the area’s land use characteristics and transportation prospects, local governments undertook this study to examine alternative land use strategies that would help balance the use of transportation modes, promote economic development, preserve natural resources, and enhance the area’s quality of life.

To address those challenges, Phase I of the study answered the following key questions:

- Can developable land within the existing urban service area boundaries of both counties fully accommodate projected population and employment growth through 2025?
- Can an alternative land use and transportation development scenario eliminate or at least delay the need to construct major roadway capacity expansions along US 1?
- How can US 1 evolve into a true multi-modal corridor that supports expanded travel choices?

PHASE I OVERVIEW

The future conditions analysis for the study evaluated three distinct land use scenarios:

- A continuation of existing development trends through the year 2025;
- A redirection of future growth into the US 1 corridor to achieve higher population and employment densities, which will allow for rail service and other advanced forms of public transportation; and
- Clustering development in dispersed town centers located throughout the area.

Each scenario included its own unique set of transportation system improvements. The evaluation used the regional travel demand model and other tools to project the impacts of each alternative and to determine the effectiveness of various transportation solutions.

The results of the scenario evaluation concluded that the continuation of existing development trends will result in significant congestion on US 1 and will not promote alternative modes of transportation, which results in negative economic development and environmental impacts. The redirection of growth into the US 1 corridor did increase transit ridership, but the increased development along US 1 also increased congestion to unacceptably high levels. The third scenario, which clusters development in centers throughout the study area, encouraged non-automobile travel and shifted enough traffic from US 1 to eliminate the need for eight lanes and interchanges. The steering committee endorsed the third, Community Center-based scenario, as its land use and transportation vision for the study area.
Community Centers Vision Statement

As a result of the public input, technical analysis, and policy evaluation completed for this project, the following vision statement was crafted to guide subsequent activities and communicate the study’s key recommendations.

Establish geographically dispersed compact, mixed-use community centers that provide for better jobs-housing balance through complementary land uses in closer proximity to residential areas. The intent of creating such activity centers is to preserve environmentally sensitive areas and agricultural resources, and reduce the number and length of inter-county automobile trips through expanded travel choices for residents and employees. In support of these activity centers, the region will:

- Develop US 1 as a multi-modal transportation corridor through quality redevelopment and new development that features transit-supportive and pedestrian-friendly site design and infrastructure;
- Define the scale and develop design guidelines for mixed-use centers that reflect market demand and local character;
- Invest in public transportation strategies that reduce dependence on automobile travel between activity centers in St. Lucie and Martin Counties by providing accessible and convenient premium transit service linking key origins and destinations;
- Create an integrated network of roadways, greenways and bicycle/pedestrian facilities that improve connectivity and accessibility throughout the region; and
- Monitor land use and transportation trends to track the effectiveness of the Community Centers vision in meeting the area’s livability and mobility objectives.

PHASE II OVERVIEW

The purpose of Phase II was to develop a set of tools localities can use to plan for and implement Community Centers in the study area. Phase II began with a review of existing plans and land development regulations to determine the extent to which Community Centers are proposed or can be accommodated in existing plans and regulations. The second task surveyed planning agencies throughout the country to determine best practices and successful implementation strategies for Community Center concepts to serve as a resource or model for local governments.

The third task was a demonstration project, a master plan for a site in the Village Green Community Redevelopment Area in the City of Port St. Lucie. This type of project was
requested by the steering committee to provide a “real world” example of how to develop a walkable, transit-oriented site plan within a Community Center. The steering committee believed that the experience of the demonstration project would be applicable to other Community Centers in the region. Results of the master plan also provided helpful guidance in developing implementation tools each of the localities in the study area can use to promote Community Centers, including a model set of comprehensive plan goals, objectives and policies, design guidelines, multimodal transportation district concurrency guidance, and a site plan review process.

Each of the steps taken and tools developed during the Phase II effort are summarized in the following sections. Details are provided in the various Technical Memoranda that comprise this report.

**Review of Plans and Regulations**

Phase II began with a review of existing plans and land development regulations to determine the extent to which Community Centers are proposed or can be accommodated in existing plans and regulations. Results of the reviews indicated that the land use and transportation plans of the five localities generally are supportive of the principles of Community Centers. However, a high level of support has occurred only recently, so many of the supportive policies indicate commitments to exploring or developing planning or implementation tools. None of the plans have goals or policies specific to Community Centers.

The level to which land development regulations support Community Center concepts varies widely among the localities. All the regulations provide for some mix of land uses in or adjacent to residential areas, as well as a range of housing densities and types. None of the ordinances appear to have major conflicts with the plans or the vision from the Phase I study, but some have greater support of walkable, mixed use development areas and affordable housing. Like the land use and transportation plans, none of the ordinances specifically address Community Centers. Details of the reviews are provided in Technical Memorandum 6: Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Regulation Review.
National Survey

The second task surveyed regions across the country to learn how others have implemented Community Centers. The ideas and opinions collected were to help the TCRPC identify policies, regulations, and tools that will support the Community Center recommendations from Phase I. A total of 48 people responded to the survey, which was conducted online through a Web site and advertised through planning-related listservs and online newsletters. Respondents hailed from 21 states and one Canadian province and represented a variety of local, regional, and state agencies. Responses also were received from a private non-profit group and two consultants, one of which staffed a transit authority. The population sizes of the agencies represented ranged from small (less than 5,000) to very large (over five million).

Respondents in all regions indicated that growth still is spreading into suburban greenfields and rural areas, with emerging efforts to redirect that growth using smart growth strategies, like Community Centers. Survey results indicated the most prevalent smart growth activities were community collaboration and creating walkable neighborhoods. Other frequently used strategies were preserving open space and fostering distinctive communities, followed by strategies supporting compact design. Strategies that supported transportation choices and mixed land use were applied less frequently. The least prevalent strategies were those that targeted development toward existing communities, created housing choices, and made the development process fair and predictable. Specific suggestions from respondents for promoting Community Centers included:

- Using a rating system to evaluate development proposals, much like the American Planning Association’s Smart Growth Audit;
- Using transportation investments, particularly transit, to help target growth;
- Targeting public investments in redevelopment areas;
- Updating land development codes to encourage flexibility and innovation; and
- Making land development codes simpler to understand and enforce.

Details of the survey are provided in Technical Memorandum 7: National Survey.
Village Green Demonstration Project

During the scooping of the Phase II work, the steering committee agreed it would be helpful to create a master plan for a site in one of the Community Centers identified in Phase I – the Village Green Community Redevelopment Area designated by the City of Port St. Lucie. The City of Port St. Lucie is interested in transforming the site into a downtown with the design features of a Community Center envisioned by the Phase I study. Also, a developer is interested in the site and in working with the city to create a downtown area.

The master planning process was led by TCRPC staff and began with a series of interviews with the developer and other stakeholders. A design charrette with the stakeholders defined initial concepts, which then were finalized into a master plan. The master plan includes a street and building plan for the site, perspective sketches of various places within the site, and a phasing strategy. A summary of the master plan is provided in Technical Memorandum 2: Village Green Master Plan, and a Power Point presentation about the project is available from the TCRPC.

Community Center Design, Performance and Implementation Guidelines

Results from the master plan were used to develop a set of Community Center Design, Performance and Implementation Guidelines. The document is intended to provide help to local planners and developers regarding expectations for development patterns within Community Centers and also provide information needed by localities to incorporate Community Centers into land development codes. The Guidelines present detailed information on the layout of the street network and buildings, building massing and density, street cross-sections by type, building frontages by type, open space types and characteristics, and parking types and needs. The Guidelines also provide an overview of potential phasing strategies for grayfield sites. The Guidelines are presented in the Community Center Design, Performance and Implementation Guidelines document.

Community Center Goals, Objectives and Policies

The work completed on the Village Green Master Plan and Design Guidelines helped craft a set of goals, objectives and policies targeted to the designation and development of Community
Centers. The model policies are intended as a resource for localities to adapt to the unique nature of each locality’s plan and planning process. The goals, objectives and policies begin with the intent of Community Centers, include design and development expectations, and conclude with implementation strategies.

**Multimodal Transportation District**

The State of Florida enables localities to create Multimodal Transportation Districts (MTDs) in places where multimodal transportation is encouraged and concurrency requirements are modified to support non-automobile travel. To create a MTD, localities must:

- Inventory existing transportation conditions and determine existing levels of service for all transportation modes, including roads, sidewalks and bike paths;
- Forecast future conditions and determine the improvements needed within the district to improve all forms of travel; and
- Re-evaluate the modal levels of service, assuming future demand and improvements, and set a level of service standard.

Community Centers are intended to focus around transit stops and encourage walking and bicycling within at least a quarter mile of the station, clearly indicating a multimodal emphasis. As such, creating a MTD is an obvious, but not necessary, implementation strategy for each Center. Technical Memoranda 3 and 4: Multimodal Transportation District Existing and Future Analysis detail the steps taken to create a MTD in the Village Green CRA, including a multimodal improvement plan for the CRA and level of service standards for bicycling and walking based on those improvements.

While the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has provided procedural and technical guidance in designating a MTD, localities have the ability to enhance or modify these measures. As urban design has a significant influence on walking and transit use, the FDOT process was enhanced for the Village Green MTD by including measures of density, diversity and design. The measures quantify how well a site meets these conditions, much like a smart growth audit indicates the attainment of objectives. These measures also are useful in the site plan review process. At the request of the steering committee, these measures were incorporated
into a spreadsheet that can be used by plan reviewers to determine how well site plans meet Community Center design characteristics.

**Site Plan Review Process**

A site development review worksheet requested by the project steering committee was developed as a tool for site plan reviewers to review plans submitted within Community Centers. The worksheet is in Microsoft Excel format. Users input information that is readily available from a site plan, and the worksheet calculates the extent to which the plan incorporates density, diversity and design factors in the Community Center Design Guidelines.

Technical Memorandum 5: Development Review Interactive Worksheet provides an overview and instructions for using the worksheet. It also includes discussion of technical issues and practical considerations that may be encountered in the review of site plans for density, diversity and design factors assisted by the worksheet.

**SUMMARY**

The Martin and St. Lucie County Regional Land Use Study began with the definition of land use and transportation scenarios for a study area that extends from Fort Pierce to south of Stuart and from east of US 1 to the western urban service boundaries near I-95, with the goal of finding a solution that promoted economic development, minimized environmental impacts, and balanced travel among travel modes. The evaluation resulted in the endorsement of the Community Centers scenario, which proposes clustered, mixed-use, transit-oriented, and walkable developments in key locations in the study area and which recommends the eventuality of bus rapid transit along US 1 and additional east-west road connections.

The study process also involved the development of implementation policies and tools that localities can use to promote the Community Centers. This second phase of the study began with a review of existing plans and land development regulations to determine existing support for Community Centers. The review found emerging support, with most policies advocating additional development of policies and tools. The Phase II work provides such support. The second step involved a survey of other planning agencies across the country. Survey results
found the same emerging support for Community Center concepts, but no model jurisdiction was found.

The remaining tasks focused on building a set of Community Center implementation tools that localities could use as guides to update their plans, regulations, and review processes. The Village Green demonstration project provided a practical example of how a master plan can be created within a short time frame for Community Centers. The Village Green Master Plan provided much needed information for the Community Centers Design, Performance and Implementation Guidelines, which are intended to set expectations for Community Center development patterns and provide details needed to update land development regulations. The Master Plan and Guidelines were helpful in creating a model set of goals, objectives and policies oriented specifically to Community Centers. They were also helpful in the analysis required to establish a Multimodal Transportation District, a complementary concurrency option for localities to consider, and in developing a site plan review process localities can use to evaluate how development and redevelopment proposals meet expectations for Community Centers.

This tool set is intended as a resource to be modified to fit the unique plans and planning processes of each locality. Additional tools also likely will be needed, such as zoning and land development regulations oriented to Community Centers. Furthermore, master plans for each of the Community Centers are recommended to create relevant and clear expectations for each unique Center.