

To: CSAC Horizon 2035 Working Group
From: BikeWalkLee
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Overall, the Land Use Element is a good start on rethinking the land use pattern in Lee County. It is clearly a difficult problem, due to the need to retain property rights while incentivizing compact infill and redevelopment. Lee County, like many other areas in Florida, has relatively few disincentives to sprawl, so we have to rely on incentives to achieve a land use pattern that is efficient and embraces all functional forms of transportation (biking, walking, transit, etc.).

Given that, there are several positives in the Land Use Element

- Introduction of higher density nodes. This is a key feature of the Land Use Element that could have the advantage of developing centers of activity that could potentially be connected by transit and would have internal walking and biking features.
- One of the more important aspects of these higher density nodes is the emphasis on walkability and bikeability, especially in the design of parking lots and on-street parking.

However, there are several lost opportunities in the current element that should be addressed.

Density

The density chart is not clear. There is little meaningful distinction between base and standard density. This becomes more problematic as one tries to apply the incentives (Policy 1.1.6). The incentive programs needs to be more clear, e.g., include examples of how one could get more density. A statement such as the following would help to clarify, "provision of public infrastructure, such as transit stops, transit operational funding support, etc. This would provide direction as to what the staff is actually looking for. The way it now reads a developer could widen a road and get incentives.

Land Use Categories and Policies

Policy 1.4.2 Industrial/Research Development.

In the urban areas, if this policy pertains to heavy industrial or light industrial requiring separation beyond substantial buffering from residential within an urban area, then it should be specified. R & D and light industrial should not be lumped together with heavy industrial as this policy implies. In general, urban areas of all types cannot survive off of a tax base solely of retail and service-related businesses. R&D is generally professional office or light industrial and entirely appropriate within urban areas with other professional office based activities. These activities and functions can take place adjacent to neighborhoods if adequate buffering, as determined necessary, is installed and well maintained.

R&D and light industrial land uses have special intensities and needs for access to infrastructure. However, “special locational needs” is not sufficiently clear. Further, all but heavy industrial uses must be brought back into the urban areas to support the intensified infrastructure costs. Many newly thriving urban areas are benefiting from professional divisions moving out of suburban R & D/Office parks and back into downtowns. The key to success for compact areas is to encourage a wide diversity of economic activity. It is not without potential conflicts, however, and protections for these light industrial areas should be anticipated, as expanding residential development can pressure their closure.

From the walkability perspective, by deleting the ‘locations convenient for employees’ to reach employment and requiring instead that locations be ‘accessible to employees’, we have lowered the bar and opened the door to allowing greenfield R & D Parks.

Land Use Map

Health Park.

Further, it seems as if there are a few opportunities lost on the land use map to identify important higher density areas that can capture existing and potential development in the area. Specifically, the staff should reconsider the areas around Health Park (Summerlin Road from Health Park to Gladiolus) to be a mixed use Urban Place.

Lehigh.

The land use map reflecting Lehigh is problematic in that it does not support previous planning efforts that identified areas that would be unlikely to develop. While we realize that this may be handled in an overlay, it is more effective to make this approach explicit in the FLUM. Further, some of the areas have very low density, lower than what is now allowed. The FLUM should give more direction to developers about where the county wants development, rather than having to consult an overlay as well.

Interchange Land Use Category.

This category and accompanying policies is too broad to provide any meaningful distinctions among the different kinds of interchange areas the county anticipates. Further in some sections the interchange area is too large (e.g., Luckett). There should be more specific guidance as to those that serve truck and industrial traffic versus tourist facilities. Interchanges that serve travelers should be designed to be walkable. For example, where there are tourist facilities, hotels, restaurants, and gas stations the interchange must be designed to accommodate pedestrian traffic. The purpose of this of course, is to not have big urban centers in the interchange areas that develop absent any meaningful form. For example, is the existing development around Colonial and I-75 desired? Without clear direction for the interchange areas, variations of that area will likely be the default form of growth.

An example may be the Billy's Creek Industrial Park at the Lockett Road interchange. It may be more valuable to further specify unique interchanges as Industrial or Industrial R&D if that is the desired land use form. This would distinguish it from other interchanges that provide services to travelers.

Rail.

It is important to consider that the MPO Rail Feasibility Study is coming out within several months of the plan adoption. We should be leaving the opportunity open in terms of land use. Our specific recommendations:

- Designate a FLUM category for rail throughout the entire corridor, from the Charlotte to Collier County lines. Alternatively, the public transit portion could be shown on the mixed-use overlay map. Though the corridor is already shown on Transportation Map 3E, it lacks any real meaning.
- Develop a policy that designates the corridor as a “strategic regional transportation corridor,” followed by actions such as:
 - The county would explore methods for enhancing freight capability for the corridor while adding capability for light rail and/or bus rapid transit service. Important early steps would be to purchase the real estate from CSX and begin negotiating with the long-term lessee (Seminole Gulf) for joint use of the corridor.
 - The county would oppose any attempts by the railroad to abandon rail service on the corridor. The county would support use of federal rails-to-trails authority to railbank the corridor if abandonment ever succeeds, in order to preserve the corridor for possible future rail service while allowing interim trail use.
 - The county would begin a land-use planning process for transit-oriented development around future transit stations along the rail line upon acceptance or adoption of the Rail Feasibility Study.