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This EAR provides the required review and analysis of the Lee County Comprehensive Plan (Lee Plan) necessary to ensure that it reflects the community’s vision for the future. Following its adoption, the EAR will be used as a foundation for subsequent amendments to the Lee Plan. This section of the EAR provides an overview of Lee County, describes the process that was followed to prepare this EAR, and identifies the report’s key findings and recommendations.

Lee County: A Development History

Lee County is located on Florida’s Gulf Coast – approximately 100 miles south of Tampa and 130 miles north of Key West. It encompasses 1,212 square miles, 66.3% is land and 33.7% is water. The county makes up the entirety of the Cape Coral-Fort Myers Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and is the most populous county in the Southwest Florida region which stretches from Sarasota County south to Collier County.

The City of Fort Myers, which was established as a military outpost in 1850 during the Seminole Wars was the first city in the county. Lee County was established a few decades later in 1887. Other early settlements included Alva, Olga, and Survey, now known as the City of Bonita Springs.

During these early years the economy centered around agriculture, cattle, fishing, shipping, timber, and trade. In the early 20th Century the economy started to expand as the area became recognized as a winter resort and sports paradise which attracted luminaries such as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. The construction of the Tamiami Trail Bridge across the Caloosahatchee River in 1924 brought the automobile, a real estate boom, and the development of subdivisions around the City of Fort Myers. Housing construction and supporting commercial services began to emerge as an economic generator

Compliance with State Statutes

In accordance with Section 163.3191 of the Florida State Statutes, each local government must adopt an Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) once every seven years that assesses the progress in implementing its comprehensive plan. The EAR is the principal process for updating local comprehensive plans to reflect changes in local conditions and state policy on planning and growth management. Through the EAR process, each community evaluates how successful it has been in addressing critical community issues through implementation of its comprehensive plan. Based on this evaluation, the EAR suggests how the comprehensive plan should be revised to better address the community’s vision, changing conditions and trends affecting the community, and changes in state requirements.

driven by an undercurrent of tourism; people would vacation or visit and later come back to live and retire.

Lee County’s Municipalities

In addition to the City of Fort Myers, there are four other incorporated municipalities within Lee County – Cape Coral, Sanibel, Ft Myers Beach, and Bonita Springs. A summary of the county’s municipalities is as follows:

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- **City of Fort Myers**—Fort Myers is the county’s oldest municipality – having been incorporated in 1886 a years before the county charter. While much development has occurred around the city in unincorporated Lee County and the other three municipalities, Ft Myers continues to be the geographic and cultural heart of the region. According to the 2010 BEBR estimates, the City of Ft Myers has 68,190 residents.
- **City of Cape Coral**—Cape Coral is Lee County’s largest city, with an area of 103 square miles and estimated population of 162,500. Located along the northern side of the Caloosahatchee River, Cape Coral was founded in 1957 and incorporated in 1970. With over 400 miles of canals, many of which are navigable and some of which have access to the river and the Gulf, Cape Coral has more miles of canals than any other city on earth. In 2009, Cape Coral was the 9th largest city in Florida by population and the 3rd largest in area.
- **City of Sanibel**—Sanibel was a barrier island accessible only by water until the construction of a bridge and causeway system in 1963. The city was incorporated in 1974 and encompasses 33.16 square miles, 17.2 of which are land and 16 of which are water. According to the 2000 census, there were approximately 6,000 people residing in the city
- **Town of Fort Myers Beach**—Fort Myers Beach, located entirely on Estero Island, was incorporated in 1995. The town is linked to the mainland by two bridges, the Sky Bridge to the north, which connects the island to the San Carlos and Iona areas of Lee County, and the southern Big Carlos Pass bridge, which links the town to the City of Bonita Springs. According to 2009 census estimates, the city had 6,325 residents, which represents a 3.6% increase from 2000.
- **City of Bonita Springs**—Bonita Springs dates back to the late 1800s when early residents were attracted to the area’s mineral

springs and agricultural lands. In 1912, 2,400 acres in the area were surveyed and laid out as a small town, and the community was renamed from Survey to Bonita Springs to attract out-of-state lot purchasers. By the 1920s, both the railroad and the Tamiami Trail were extended to Bonita Springs, bringing a land boom to the area. Bonita Springs was briefly incorporated in the 1920s, but the charter was later dissolved until 2000 when the city incorporated 41 square miles from mid southeast Lee County to the Gulf of Mexico. The city is comprised of 86% land and 14% water.

Planning and Development in Lee County

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Development that occurs outside the county’s five incorporated municipalities is managed by Lee County. Lee County first became actively involved in land planning, zoning, and management after the development boom of the mid 20th Century. Land development at that time was propelled by high land sales, construction of roadways and infrastructure systems, and the dredging and filling of swamp lands. Platting of lands took place without consideration for natural resources, service needs, community development interests, or balance of uses.

In order to address these needs, Lee County determined that it was necessary to establish land development regulations and other planning tools. The first zoning ordinance for unincorporated Lee County was adopted in 1962. A decade later in 1973 Lee County adopted a set of subdivision regulations, followed a by a development services ordinance in 1982. The zoning and development services ordinances along with other supporting land development regulations were later unified in the county’s Land Development Code (LDC). The Lee Plan, the county’s

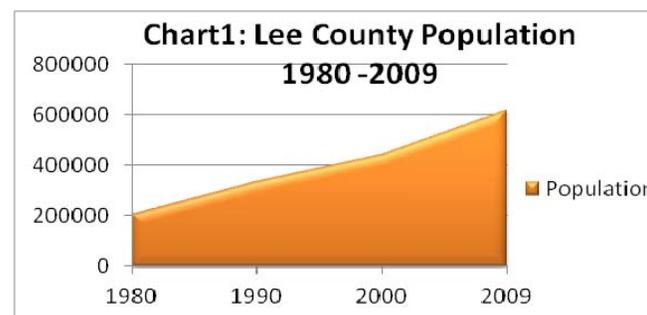
comprehensive plan, was first adopted in 1984. Both the LDC and the Lee Plan have been amended regularly from time to time in response to changing conditions, technological innovations, development pressures, and community preferences.

SUCCESSSES OF THE LEE PLAN

Since first adopting the Lee Plan and LDC twenty-five years ago, the county has had a number of successful land use management results including:

- Protection of vital **environmental resources** and **conservation of lands** including mangroves, pine forests, and waterways.
- Establishment of a **community planning** program through which the county has adopted or is in the process of adopting 14 unique community plans.
- Development of well designed **landscaping requirements** which provide for a pleasing built environment
- Development of an array of **different neighborhoods** with unique design features and neighborhood resources.
- Provision of high level **public services and transportation roadways** systems.

These successes show the viability of the county's planning efforts, as they have occurred during a period of steady and high population growth. In the last 3 decades, Lee County's population rose by more than 400,000 persons from 205,266 in 1980 to 615,124 in 2009, an overall increase of almost 200% (Chart 1).



Source: US Census Bureau

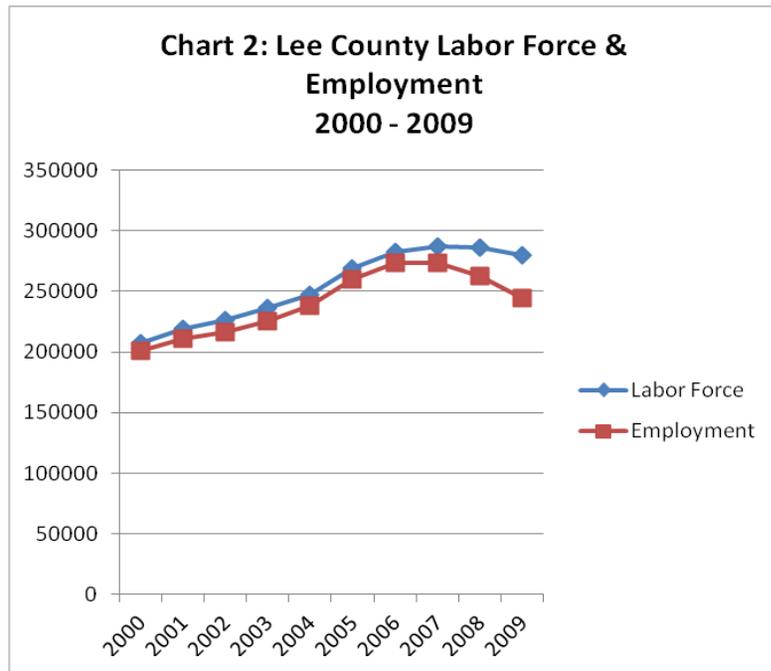
DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

This population growth coupled with the county's Lee Plan policies, LDC regulations, and market forces resulted in the following sprawl development patterns:

- **Low density, single use residential development** — Since 2004, the land area in Lee County occupied by single family residential development has increased by more than 6,500 acres to a total of more than 40,000 acres. Residential uses are the dominant land use type in the county, increasing from 9% of total land area in 2004 to more than 11% in 2010.
- **Single use commercial centers** — Large-scale, single use strip plazas, professional areas, business parks, and retail areas have been developed as the predominant commercial pattern throughout the county in order to meet the service, commercial, industrial, and workforce needs of the increased population.
- **Auto-centric transportation systems** — Since both residential and commercial uses in the county are largely separated and distinct, the county has needed to establish an extensive roadway network to connect the independent uses together.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

After three decades of steady growth, Lee County was heavily impacted by the economic and development downturn that plagued the entire state, nation, and world. Looking at the last decade, it is easy to understand the severity of this impact as the county saw residential building rates rise from a steady average of approximately 6,000 units per year in the early part of the decade to a high of nearly 9,000 units per year in 2006. Following this high development period, residential growth plummeted to a low of 796 in 2009, less than 10 percent of the peak just three years later. At the same time, employment rates and labor force numbers also rose and then declined following the 2007 economic downturn. During the later portion of the decade total employment fell over 10% from 273,589 in 2007 to 244,913 in 2009 (Chart 2).



Source: State of Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation

While this economic downturn has had a severe negative impact on the county and its residents and businesses, it has provided Lee County with a unique opportunity to strategically evaluate its current planning and land development practices to determine how to ensure a more sustainable future. Without development pressures it is easier for the county to assess the outcomes of current Lee Plan policies and LDC regulations and to recognize the challenges presented by past sprawl development patterns including:

- Lack of integration between uses.
- Need to promote viable transportation alternatives.
- Need to promote redevelopment and vitality of urban areas.
- Need to maintain viable rural areas and agricultural uses.

While these challenges are not unique to Lee County, they are much more pronounced because of our recent history as a high growth area. As Lee County looks towards the future, it is important to consider alternatives that provide a more sustainable approach to future development efforts including:

- Promotion of complete street practices.
- Support for mixed-use centers.
- Fostering distinct community features.
- Enhanced protection of vital natural resources.
- Expansion of economic generators to diversify the economy.
- Clearer definition of and delineation between urban, suburban, and rural areas.

The recommendations of this report focus on how to address these challenges in a comprehensive manner by evaluating what has worked and what has not, and by recommending adjustments to the county's planning policies and regulations needed to implement

appropriate solutions while continuing to build upon the successful planning and land use management traditions established over the last twenty-five years.

Setting a Future Planning Direction

The Lee Plan is the county’s planning policy document. It serves as a road map for how the county will address a variety of issues including land use, transportation, housing, natural and cultural resource protection, education and workforce opportunities, the economy, and other county planning and development needs and state requirements.

Since it was first adopted, the plan has been amended on a regular basis to address the county’s ever changing needs. Despite these numerous amendments, many of the new challenges the county is facing and new opportunities the community envisions for the future are not explicitly addressed or supported by the current Lee Plan.

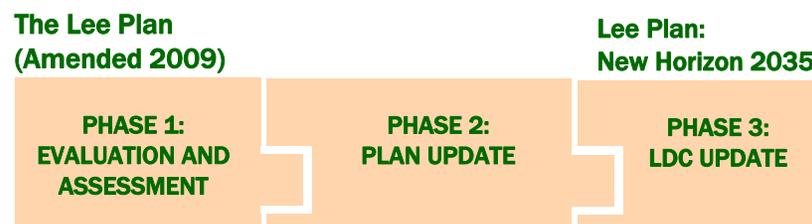
Through the Lee Plan update process ((known as New Horizon 2035 and further described in the next section), a new vision and policy directions have emerged to help guide future updates to the Lee Plan. This EAR outlines this new vision and the changes in policy direction that need to be considered in order to implement this vision in the future. Although change will not occur over night, the New Horizon 2035 process will help set the stage for a more sustainable future for Lee County.

New Horizon 2035 Process

Beginning in the spring of 2010, Lee County kicked off the New Horizon 2035 process with the objective of amending its comprehensive plan to better address the community’s vision for the 21st century. The goal was to take a critical and strategic look at the successes and challenges of the county’s current planning and land

development practices in order to better identify how to address the county’s needs in the future. As part of this effort, the county determined that it would actively engage its communities in a discussion about what the county’s vision ought to be and how it ought to achieve this vision.

Phases for Revising the Lee Plan



PROCESS OVERVIEW

The New Horizon 2035 process was centered on a county visioning effort. Through New Horizon 2035 process, the county sought to engage an active group of stakeholders—citizens, business people, public officials, and professional staff—in a discussion focused on identifying and addressing issues and opportunities that face Lee County and developing a vision for Lee County’s future.

Components of the New Horizon 2035 process are outlined below along with details of the county’s extensive community outreach efforts. The Lee County New Horizon 2035 process includes three phases as follows:

- **Phase 1: Evaluation and Assessment**—the first and current phase, which includes establishment of a community vision and then evaluation and assessment of the Lee Plan through this EAR, in order to determine how to amend the plan to better achieve the county’s new vision.

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- **Phase 2: Comprehensive Plan Update**—this second phase will update the Lee Plan planning directives and long term objectives needed to address the EAR findings and achieve the county’s vision. The comprehensive plan update phase will commence once the State of Florida finds the EAR sufficient and will take 18 – 24 months to complete.

As expressed throughout the New Horizon 2035 EAR, the county will have to address a variety of challenges in order for the county’s vision to be fully realized. These challenges included: density minimums; future land use definitions; changes to the future land use map; neighborhood concerns related to infill development; mixed-use and higher density/intensity projects; future level of service standards for public services and infrastructure systems; concurrency management; economics of green energy implementation; development incentives; community desires—county vision conflicts; mining interests; rural residential areas; urban growth areas/urban growth boundaries; connectivity between suburban neighborhoods; gated communities; implementation of infill scenarios; economic development diversification; prioritizing infill/redevelopment locations; changes to the county’s demographics; and, county land development practices. The challenges will be addressed through the development of future goals, objectives, and policies in the updated Lee Plan.

- **Phase 3: Land Development Code Update** – the final phase will update the county’s development practices and revise the county’s land development procedures in order to implement the updated Lee Plan goals, objectives, and policies and county vision. The LDC update will commence once the Lee Plan has been adopted and will take another 12 – 18 months to complete.

EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL REPORT

The first phase of the process is this Evaluation and Appraisal Report. This is one of the most critical components of the process as it establishes a planning framework and guideline for how the plan and regulations will be updated in phases 2 and 3. As such, the county spent a considerable amount of time working with its many stakeholders—citizens, business people, public officials, and professional staff—to develop a future vision, identify planning challenges and opportunities, and establish a work plan for implementing the vision.

As part of this process, county staff facilitated over 45 meetings and workshops to discuss how the county should develop and change in the future. Meeting locations were geographically distributed throughout the county with the intent of reaching out to the county’s diverse stakeholder base. The meetings and workshops included:

INTER-AGENCY SCOPING MEETINGS

- Three meetings
- March 2010

COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOPS

- Ten workshops
- April – May 2010

COUNTY INTER-DEPARTMENTAL VISION WORKSHOP

- One 3-day workshop
- June 2010

COUNTY INTER-DEPARTMENTAL POLICY WORKSHOPS

- Thirteen staff workshops
- August 2010

COMMUNITY VISION FRAMEWORK WORKSHOPS

- Twenty workshops
- October – December 2010

LPA WORKSHOP AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

- 2 hearings
- January – February 2011

BOCC EAR ADOPTION WORKSHOP AND HEARING

- 2 workshops and hearings
- January – February 2011

In addition to these meetings and workshops, county staff gave periodic project update presentations to the Local Planning Agency (LPA) and Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to enable policy officials and opportunity to provide guidance and direction on the process and its outcomes. A summary of the major community meetings and workshops follows.

INTER-AGENCY SCOPING MEETINGS

In March 2010—early in the New Horizon 2035 process—the Lee County Planning Division hosted three scoping meetings with local, regional, and state government agencies, including Lee County departments. The focus of the scoping meetings was to identify critical issues that these public representatives deemed important to address through the update to the plan. These inter-agency scoping meetings included:

- Public Safety Agencies
- Intergovernmental Agencies
- Lee County Agencies

As part of this process, the county developed a Letter of Understanding between the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the county to acknowledge the critical community issues that would serve as the basis for this EAR. Confirmation of DCA's agreement with the issues identified by the county was received through a letter dated July 22, 2010.

COMMUNITY VISIONING WORKSHOPS

In April and May 2010, the Lee County Planning Division hosted a series of nine visioning workshops aimed at informing community members about the comprehensive plan update and engaging them in a dialogue about what issues, challenges, and opportunities will affect Lee County's future. These workshops were held in the following locations:

- Lee County Community Development/Public Works Building, April 15
- Fort Myers Shores, April 20
- Pine Island, April 21
- North Fort Myers, April 27
- Estero, April 28
- South Fort Myers, May 4
- Lehigh Acres, May 5
- Boca Grande, May 11
- Captiva, May 13
- Public Policy Leaders from LPA and CSAC, May 19

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Visioning workshops were throughout the county to capture a diversity of ideas and opinions about Lee County's future.

At each of these meetings participants formed small groups and engaged in a facilitated discussion to identify their future visions for Lee County. Each group identified issues they believed the county needs to address in order for the county to achieve its future vision. The discussion focused on the following topics:

- **Community Vision** - quality of life, community character, community features, lifestyle
- **Land Use/Development** - prominent features, design characteristics, urban form, agricultural preservation, rural land
- **Parks / Conservation** - parks and public spaces, conservation areas, built and natural environment, access and location
- **Transportation** - sidewalks/trails, bikeways, greenways, blueways, waterways, transit, roadways

- **Public Services** - utilities, infrastructure, public amenities, energy, schools, cultural resources

STAFF AND INTER-DEPARTMENTAL VISION WORKSHOP



Lee County staff and other agency representatives discuss the Vision Framework during a June 2010 workshop.

On June 28 and 29, 2010 the Lee County Planning Division held a workshop for about 20 Lee County staff from all departments in county government. Participants helped refine the county's future issues and opportunities and lay the groundwork for the county's vision and planning direction that was presented. The result of this workshop led a policy discussion which staff later used to evaluate the county's current policies and practices.

STAFF AND INTER-DEPARTMENTAL POLICY WORKSHOP

Throughout the month of August 2010, culminating on August 30, 31, and September 1, the Lee County Planning Division held a series of workshops for Lee County staff. Participants included a diverse group of county departments including county administration, budgeting, natural resources, transportation, parks and recreation, LeeTran, community development, economic development, human services, attorney's office, and sustainability office. The workshops were aimed at closely evaluating the existing Lee Plan goals, objectives, and policies in order to determine how the plan should change in the future. Through this evaluation, staff developed a future vision for the county and identified what opportunities and challenges the county would face implementing that vision. The result of this series of workshops was a proposed vision framework which county staff presented to the community in the fall.

COMMUNITY VISION FRAMEWORK WORKSHOPS

Before the EAR could be developed, staff presented the proposed Vision Framework to citizens, business owners, and policy officials to ensure that the process so far has captured the ideas discussed in the visioning workshops. Several of these meetings were sponsored by neighborhood groups or other organizations during their regular meetings.

As with the first series of workshops, meeting locations were geographically distributed throughout the county with the intent of reaching out to all areas of the county. Meetings held during the fall of 2010 included:

- Bayshore Community Planning Panel, North Fort Myers, October 5



A second series of workshops was held to present the proposed Vision Framework to the community for their input.

- Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, Fort Myers, October 6
- Alva Community Association, Alva, October 11
- Real Estate Investment Society, Fort Myers, October 12
- Lehigh Acres Community Planning Panel, Lehigh Acres, October 13
- North Olga Community Planning Panel, North Fort Myers, October 14
- Estero Council of Community Leaders, Estero, October 15
- Estero Community Planning Panel, Estero, October 18
- Page Park Community Association, Fort Myers, October 18

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- Captiva Planning Panel, Captiva, October 19
- Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association, Boca Grande, October 20
- Community Sustainability Advisory Committee, Fort Myers, October 20
- Florida Planning & Zoning Association, Fort Myers, October 22
- Reconnecting Lee, Fort Myers, October 28
- North Fort Myers Community Planning Panel, November 2
- Greater Pine Island Civic Association, Bokeelia, November 2
- East Lee County Council, Fort Myers, November 16
- City of Bonita Spring LPA, Bonita Springs, November 18
- Lee County LPA, Fort Myers, November 29
- City of Fort Myers LPA, Fort Myers, December 3

LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY AND BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS APPROVAL

Community review of the draft EAR Vision Framework was conducted during November and December 2010. The Local Planning Agency conducted a public hearing and workshop about the draft EAR on January 31 and February 14, 2011 and forwarded its recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners for approval of the EAR. The Board of County Commissioners conducted a two-day adoption workshop and public hearing on February 28 and March 1, 2011. Following the review and approval of the EAR by the Florida Department of Community Affairs, the county will begin a comprehensive plan amendment process designed to create the goals, policies, and other tools needed to address the critical community issues and other specific recommendations outlined in this EAR.

Critical Community Issues

During the visioning workshops, participants were asked to identify critical community issues that need to be addressed through county planning policies. Through these discussions, participants revealed a desire for more special places within Lee County—uniquely identifiable places with a complementary mix of uses that promote livability, walkability, and a variety of residential housing opportunities. They envision these places focused within compact centers of activity linked by a multi-modal transportation system that provides a more varied set of travel choices than are available today. They believe these places should promote more ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable development patterns without necessitating exclusive use of the automobile. Additionally, they believe these centers should include a variety of public spaces that act as community gathering places and link the areas with the neighborhoods that surround them.

In order to achieve the types of places envisioned for Lee County in the future, four key issues must be addressed in the New Horizon 2035 Plan:

- Livability
- Strong Connections
- Community Character
- Sustainability

These four issues served as a foundation for the development of the new vision and policy directions outlined in this EAR as well as the basis for the review and assessment of the Lee Plan goals and policies.

A brief explanation of each issue and its primary components is provided below. Chapter 3 of this EAR provides a more detailed

explanation of each issue along with an assessment and analysis of how the existing comprehensive plan relates to the issue.

ISSUE #1: LIVABILITY

Livability refers to the physical qualities that promote Lee County's character, identity, and lifestyles. The livability issue concerns three primary components:

- Differentiated Development Forms and Land Use Patterns
- Parks, Public Spaces, Open Spaces, Recreation, and Cultural Facilities
- Public Services

This EAR evaluates how well current goals, objectives, and policies support the county's livability and proposes new policy directions to help establish a development framework that will support the county's sense of place and quality of life in the future.

ISSUE #2: STRONG CONNECTIONS

Strong connections, as established by the county's land use patterns, transportation resources, and public facilities, integrate the county into a single unified place. The strong connections issue concerns three primary components:

- Connected development patterns
- Mobility and transportation
- Interconnectivity of parks, public spaces, and public resources

This EAR evaluates how well current goals, objectives, and policies promote and provide for strong connections through the integration of land uses, an interconnected transportation system, and accessibility of parks, public spaces, and public resources.

It also identifies new policy directions to help promote strong connections as a fundamental component of future growth in Lee County.

ISSUE #3: COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Lee County is comprised of diverse local communities, each with their own distinct character and identity. The character and identity of each community are defined by their unique attributes including the following four features:

- Location (coastal, river, or inland)
- Development features (urban, suburban, or rural)
- Community design/master planning attributes (streetscape, architectural, and transportation systems)
- History and local culture

This EAR evaluates how well current goals, objectives, and policies preserve and enhance the attributes of their local communities while achieving county-wide planning principles. New policy directions are also proposed to ensure that desired attributes of the county's communities are maintained in the future.

ISSUE #4: SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is a balanced approach to development that considers community, environmental, and economic conditions. The sustainability issue concerns four primary components:

- Economic resiliency
- Energy conservation, environmental stewardship, and green design
- Sustainable growth and infrastructure provision
- Strong social context

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This EAR evaluates how well current goals, objectives, and policies foster cultural diversity, expand the employment base, support clean industries and a diversified economic base, improve environmental stewardship, address climate change and coastal resiliency, promote redevelopment and green building design, provide new opportunities for cleaner alternative energy sources, and foster the unique qualities that comprise Lee County's character and sense of place. New policy directions that build on the county's current sustainability policies and initiatives are also recommended to help ensure a more sustainable future.

Vision Framework: Creating a Foundation for the Lee Plan

A proposed Vision Framework for Lee County was developed through discussions with the community and other stakeholders about the four critical community issues outlined above. The new policy directions captured in the vision build on ideas and issues identified by the community during the visioning workshops and subsequent staff workshops and help illustrate key aspects of the vision expressed by the community. They were used to help facilitate discussions about potential changes to The Lee Plan as part of the New Horizon 2035 process and to confirm with the community that their ideas and issues were reflected in the resulting Vision Framework. The Vision Framework consists of three key components:

1. Land Use Framework

Building upon the community vision for a more efficient and compact development form that improves the livability for Lee County citizens, the Land Use Framework provides the foundation for an evaluation and update of the county's future land use element and land use plan. The county's new vision for land use is described by the livability, strong connections, community

character, and sustainability issues. These issues have been translated into a Land Use Framework consisting of urban, suburban, rural, and environmental resources elements. The Land Use Framework includes a description of each element along with principles for development in each of these contexts.

2. Mixed-Use

During the visioning process, participants revealed a desire for more special places within Lee County. General Mixed-Use Form Principles were developed to guide the transformation of existing development patterns over time to better achieve the community's vision. In addition, definitions for different types and scales of mixed-use development that address the livability, community character, and strong connections issues were also developed. Types of mixed-use places envisioned in Lee County in the future include: regional, community, neighborhood, or rural centers and redevelopment/infill corridors. Concepts for each type of mixed-use complement the Land Use Framework by providing site-specific models for development and corresponding principles for design.

3. Sustainability Policies

Like many communities in Florida and across the country, Lee County is embracing sustainability as a framework for improving and creating more efficient government operations and transforming the county's approach to land use and transportation planning. In the context of New Horizon 2035, the term sustainability means a balanced approach to development that considers community well-being and equity, environmental and resource conservation, and economic resilience and vitality. It is characterized by strategies to promote living within the county's inherent limits, and understanding the interconnections among economy, society, and environmental conditions. The Vision Framework provides an overview of current sustainability policies and identifies new ways that Lee County can become more

sustainable through new initiatives. These new directions emerged from input received from members of the community, intergovernmental partners, county staff, and others during the visioning phase.

These three Vision Framework components were used to guide the evaluation of the Lee Plan in this EAR and will be used to help guide the implementation of the new vision for Lee County through the New Horizon 2035 process.

The Vision Framework is described in more detail in chapter 2. Then, Chapters 3 and 4 identify how to update the Lee Plan policies to better foster and support the difference between urban, suburban, and rural land use contexts. Examples of such policies that are described throughout the report include: an urban growth or service boundary as part of the Future Land Use Element; community specific character policies as part of the Communities Element; context sensitive complete street policies as part of the Transportation Element; area specific level of standards as part of the Community Facilities and Services Element; and, area specific park and open space standards as part of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element. These tools and others will be evaluated throughout the comprehensive plan update process.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Chapter 4 of this EAR includes specific recommendations for amendments to the Lee Plan that will define how the county will address the four critical community issues—livability, strong connections, community character, and sustainability—in order to reinforce the following key aspects of the Vision Framework:

- **Encourage Complete Streets and Context-Sensitive Roadway Design** – establish specific form and transportation

standards, including new standards for complete streets and context-sensitive roadway design that reflects the variations in the character of development in urban, suburban, and rural areas and appropriate multi-modal travel patterns in each area.

- **Delineate and Define Urban/Suburban/Rural Areas** – establish a new Form and Character Element that addresses desired distinctions between urban, suburban, and rural areas at a county-wide scale in terms of their overall development pattern, mix of uses, mix of housing types, types of parks and public spaces, transportation network, and infrastructure needs. Consider developing new land use tools to better delineate between urban, suburban, and rural areas, such as an Urban Growth Boundary and/or Urban Service Area that identifies areas that are appropriate for urban and suburban uses, and establish standards to limit expansion of development outside of these designated areas.
- **Encourage Compact Development Patterns** – promote a more compact pattern of development that supports efficient and cost-effective infrastructure and service delivery. Reevaluate densities within the urban and suburban land use categories to ensure that they are supportive of desired compact patterns.
- **Promote Mixed-Use Centers** – support the development of special places within Lee County; places that are uniquely identifiable with a complementary mix of uses that promote livability, walkability, and a variety of housing choices. Consider increasing densities and including provisions for minimum densities in areas designated as mixed-use and transit-supportive development in designated activity centers.
- **Protect Character of Existing Neighborhoods** – strengthen policies related to infill and redevelopment to ensure the character of established neighborhoods in the county is preserved.

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- **Land Use Transportation Coordination** – strengthen and improve coordination between land development and transportation planning, in the development review process as well as in capital funding decisions.
- **Strengthen the Protection of Vital Environmental Resources** – strengthen the policies and tools used to protect the county’s natural resources.
- **Support Agricultural Uses** – strengthen policies that support and promote agricultural uses and recognize the role that commercial agriculture plays in the county’s economy.

Organization of EAR Contents

In addition to this introductory chapter, this EAR is comprised of the following:

- **Chapter 2: Vision Framework**—outlines a new vision and policy directions for Lee County that reflect input received from members of the community, intergovernmental partners, county staff, and others during the visioning phase.
- **Chapter 3: Critical Community Issues**—examines each of the four critical community issues identified through the EAR process. An analysis of each issue is provided, along with an assessment of how the existing comprehensive plan relates to the issue; a summary of unanticipated changes in the county related to the issues; and a discussion of challenges and opportunities that have resulted from the unanticipated changes.
- **Chapter 4: Recommendations for Existing Lee Plan Elements Amendments**—provides a summary of the recommended amendments to the Lee Plan identified in the analysis of the critical community issues, the element and objectives review, and the review of changes to state law. A full analysis of the latter is provided in the appendix.

- **Appendix A: Data and Trends**—provides an overview of data, trends, and analysis that served as a foundation for the EAR process, including: population, land and development patterns, property rights in coastal high-hazard areas, concurrency management, intergovernmental coordination, new planning efforts/current county programs, and objective and statute assessments.
- **Appendix B: Recommendations for EAR-Based Amendments**—provides a summary of the recommended amendments to the Lee Plan identified through the staff policy workshops.
- **Appendix C: Recommendations based on Changes to State Law**—highlights changes required to address changes in state law since 2004.