



**LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY  
OLD LEE COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
2120 MAIN STREET, FORT MYERS, FL 33901  
BOARD CHAMBERS**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2011  
8:30 AM**

**AGENDA**

1. Call to Order/Review of Affidavit of Publication
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Public Forum
4. Introduction and Welcome of Newest Board Members
5. Approval of Minutes – October 24, 2011
6. New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan Update
  - A. Current Lee Plan Framework
  - B. Proposed Urban-Suburban-Rural Environmental Framework
  - C. Future Mixed-Use Strategies
7. Other Business
8. Adjournment – Next Meeting Date: December 16, 2011

Any person appealing a decision made at this hearing must ensure a record of the proceedings is made. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Reasonable Accommodations will be made upon request. If you are in need of a Reasonable Accommodation or would like additional information, please contact Janet Miller at 239-533-8583.

**New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan Update  
Local Planning Agency Position Paper  
Current Status of Lee County  
November 18, 2011**

The Lee Plan is the current document that describes the county's land use. It is a living document that has been evolving since its original adoption in 1984. The current land use framework of the county – 29 future land use categories – is described through an extensive series of maps and policies in the Plan. One of the key issues that will be addressed in the New Horizon 2035 Plan is providing better distinctions between different community environments in Lee County. To do this, the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (E.A.R.) identified a Land Use Framework that defines the general land use pattern for the county that recognizes existing development characteristics while supporting the new vision for a more energy efficient and compact growth pattern. This Framework will be used to update the Lee Plan by introducing policies that include new principles that guide preferred urban, suburban, and rural development forms.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the current status of Lee County in terms of existing land use categories and actual development and density patterns and to provide a framework for a revised Future Land Use Map. The goal is to create a Future Land Use Map with a clear distinction between urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource areas that correspond with the Land Use Framework established in the E.A.R.

**E.A.R. Land Use Framework: Urban, Suburban, Rural and Environmental Resource**

The E.A.R. provides a Land Use Framework that defines the general land use pattern for Lee County in four land use types – urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource. A summary of the land use type and principles for form, use and transportation in each area is provided below:

Urban: Urban areas have an interconnected development pattern with moderate to high density, a mixture of uses, and links to public spaces. Multi-modal connections are a priority and are provided through an integrated and highly connected transportation network, short block lengths and street widths, and prominent pedestrian connections and accesses.

Suburban: Suburban areas reflect low to moderate density development and separations of uses. Suburb development is fueled by a high desire for residential neighborhoods and privacy. Residential streets and park/green space layouts are designed to reduce cut-through traffic and establish distinct boundaries for residential communities. The automobile is the primary means of transportation in a suburban area. Public spaces are also designed to meet the needs and interests of residential users.

Rural: Rural development relies primarily on a pattern of large expanses of agricultural and conservation lands with occasional clustered residential development. Rural areas may be viewed as agricultural industrial lands as the areas function as working areas. Rural form and

use are comprised of commercial agriculture and farm lands, low density residential development (if any), separation of uses, and utilization of the natural environment for open spaces.

Environmental Resource Areas: These areas include undeveloped lands containing wetlands, natural water bodies and water courses, native uplands, coastal and estuarine ecosystems, wildlife corridors, significant species habitat, high aquifer recharge potential, and conservation. These lands are very sparsely developed and have significant natural and ecological value.

These land use types establish the Land Use Framework for New Horizon 2035. The next section describes the current land use framework of the Lee Plan.

**Lee Plan Framework: Current Future Land Use Categories of Lee County**

Lee County currently has 29 future land use categories. These land use categories are used to classify unincorporated Lee County into “Future Urban Areas” and “Non-Urban Areas.” In addition to the future urban areas and the non-urban areas, the Lee Plan also identifies several “other”, or customized, future land use categories. A table has been created and is attached that depicts the general allowable uses of each future land use category and the standard allowable densities. A summary of the Lee Plan’s current future land use categories is provided below:

Future Urban Areas: The Future Urban Areas of the Lee Plan include the following land use categories: Intensive Development, Central Urban, Urban Community, Suburban, Outlying Suburban, Industrial Development, Public Facilities, University Community, Commercial, and Sub-Outlying Suburban. The maximum density range for the Future Urban Areas, including bonus density is from two units an acre (2 du/acre) in the Sub-Outlying Suburban areas to 22 units an acre (22 du/acre) in the Intensive Development areas. The Commercial, Industrial Development, and Public Facilities future land use categories do not permit residential uses.

Non-Urban Areas: The Lee Plan currently includes the following future land use categories as Non-Urban Areas: Rural, Outer Islands, Rural Community Preserve, Open Lands, Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource (DR/GR), Conservation Lands – Wetlands, Conservation Lands – Uplands, and Coastal Rural. The maximum density range for the Non-Urban Areas is from one unit an acre (1 du/acre) in the Coastal Rural, Outer Islands, Rural, and Rural Community Preserve areas to one unit on ten acres (1 du/10 acres) in the DR/GR areas. The Conservation future land use categories do not permit residential uses.

Other Areas: The following future land use categories do not fit into to current future urban and non-urban framework of the Lee Plan: Destination Resort Mixed Use Water Dependent, Burnt Store Marina Village, Tradeport, Airport Lands, Interstate Highway Interchange Areas, Wetlands, and New Community. The maximum density range for these areas ranges from one unit on twenty acres (1 du/20 acres) in the Wetlands future land use category to 9.36 units an acre (9.36 du/acre) in the Destination Resort Mixed Use Water Dependent future land use category.

## **New Horizon 2035 Framework:**

### **Application of E.A.R. Definitions to Existing Future Land Use Categories**

In an attempt to distinguish between the existing future land use categories of the Lee Plan using the urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource land use type framework, staff has organized the existing future land use categories using the definitions provided by the E.A.R. This categorization was based on the densities, intensities and general description provided for each future land use category in the Future Land Use Element of the Lee Plan. Below, each of the existing future land use categories is identified in one of the four categories of the Land Use Framework provided by the E.A.R. Attached is a table that describes each of the existing future land use categories and a demonstrative map of the existing future land use categories classified as urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource using the definitions provided by the E.A.R.

**Urban Areas:** The following future land use categories are defined as urban areas as provided in the E.A.R.: University Community, Intensive Development, Central Urban, Industrial Development, Interstate Highway Interchange Areas, and Tradeport. These categories comprise 45,578 acres or 11.91% of Lee County and characterize urban areas because of their potential for moderate to high density and intensity development.

**Suburban:** The following future land use categories are defined as suburban areas as provided in the E.A.R.: Urban Community, Suburban, Outlying Suburban, Sub-Outlying Suburban, Outer Islands, and New Community. These categories comprise 106,520 acres or 27.83% of Lee County and characterize suburban areas because of their large contiguous areas of low-density residential uses.

**Rural:** The following future land use categories are defined as rural areas as provided in the E.A.R.: Coastal Rural, Rural, Rural Community Preserve, and Open Lands. These categories comprise 56,438 acres or 14.75% of Lee County and characterize rural areas because of their land areas dedicated to pasture and farms and large-lot residential subdivisions.

**Environmental Resource:** The following future land use categories are defined as Environmental Resource areas as provided in the E.A.R.: Conservation Lands Uplands and Wetlands, Wetlands, and Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource (DR/GR). These categories comprise 162,792 acres or 42.53% of Lee County and characterize environmental resource areas because of their significant natural and ecological value.

**Other Areas:** The following future land use categories are not defined in the context provided in the E.A.R.: Commercial, Public Facilities, Airport, Destination Resort Mixed Use Water Dependent, and Burnt Store Marina. These areas comprise 11,428 acres or 2.99% of Lee County. These areas will require discussion to determine how they should be addressed in the New Horizon 2035 Framework. Discussion points are provided below.



### **Discussion Points for Future Analysis**

Reviewing the existing Lee Plan future land use categories and looking ahead as Lee County explores ways to achieve the vision expressed in the E.A.R. there are several questions that must be addressed. Over the coming months, starting with today's discussion, staff will address these questions.

- How can Lee County achieve a better delineation between urban, suburban, rural, and environmental resource areas in terms of their overall development pattern?
- Should the Public Facilities, Airport, and Commercial future land use categories continue to be identified as separate future land use categories, or should these be treated as uses allowed by zoning in more broadly defined future land use categories? How do these Lee Plan categories fit into the E.A.R. framework of urban, suburban, rural, and environmental resource areas?
- Currently, there are five Interstate Highway Interchange Areas: General Interchange, General Commercial Interchange, Industrial Commercial Interchange, Industrial Interchange, and the University Village Interchange. Can one or more of these be combined?
- Should Lee County continue to create customized future land use categories such as the Destination Resort Mixed Use Water Dependent future land use category and the Burnt Store Marina future land use category? How should the existing customized future land use categories be addressed?
- Can any of the other existing future land use categories be combined to simplify the Future Land Use Map?

FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORY	GENERALISED ALLOWABLE USES	STANDARD MIN.	STANDARD MAX.	BONUS DENSITY	NOTES
<b>Urban Areas</b>					
University Community	Residential, commercial, public and quasi-public, and limited light industrial land uses - mixed use is encouraged.	1	15	0	See Policy 1.1.9. All development within the University Community must be designed to enhance and support the University. 6510 total units.
Intensive Development	Planned mixed-use centers of high-density residential, commercial, limited light industrial (see Policy 7.1.6), and office uses are encouraged.	8	14	8	See Policy 1.1.2.
Central Urban	Residential, commercial, public and quasi-public, and limited light industrial land uses - mixed use is encouraged.	4	10	5	See Policy 1.1.3. Urban core of the county.
Tradeport	Light manufacturing or assembly, warehousing, and distribution facilities; research and development activities; laboratories; ground transportation and airport-related terminals or transfer facilities; hotels/motels, meeting facilities; office uses; and <u>stand alone retail.</u>	0	0	0	See Policy 1.2.2.
University Village Interchange	Industrial Commercial interchange + university community.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.3.5
General Commercial Interchange	Retail, planned commercial districts, shopping, office, financial, and business.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.3.3.
General Interchange	Service stations, hotel, motel, restaurants, and gift shops. But because of their location, market attractions, and desire for flexibility, these interchange uses permit a broad range of land uses that include tourist commercial, general commercial and light industrial/commercial.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.3.2.
Industrial Commercial Interchange	Light industrial and/or commercial uses.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.3.4.
Industrial Interchange	Light industrial, research, office, visitor serving uses such as restaurant and hotel uses.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.3.1.
Industrial Development	Mainly for industrial activities, as well as for selective land use mixtures such as the combined uses of industrial, manufacturing, research, properly buffered recreational uses, office complex (if related to adjoining industrial uses) and limerock mining and fill dirt operations.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.1.7.

### Suburban Areas

Urban Community	Residential, commercial, public and quasi-public, and limited light industry - mixed use is encouraged.	1	6	4	See Policy 1.1.4.
New Community	Full range of uses needed to to develop a complete community.	1	6	0	See Policy 1.6.1.
Suburban	Areas are or will be predominantly residential. Higher densities, commercial development greater than neighborhood centers, and industrial land uses are not permitted.	1	6	0	See Policy 1.1.5.
Outlying Suburban	Lower density residential. Commercial development greater than neighborhood centers, and industrial land uses are not permitted.	1	3	0	See Policy 1.1.6. In general, these areas are rural in nature or contain existing low-density development
Sub-Outlying Suburban	Lower density residential. Commercial development greater than neighborhood centers, and industrial land uses are not permitted.	1	2	0	See Policy 1.1.11.
Outer Islands	Low density residential.	0	1	0	See Policy 1.4.2.

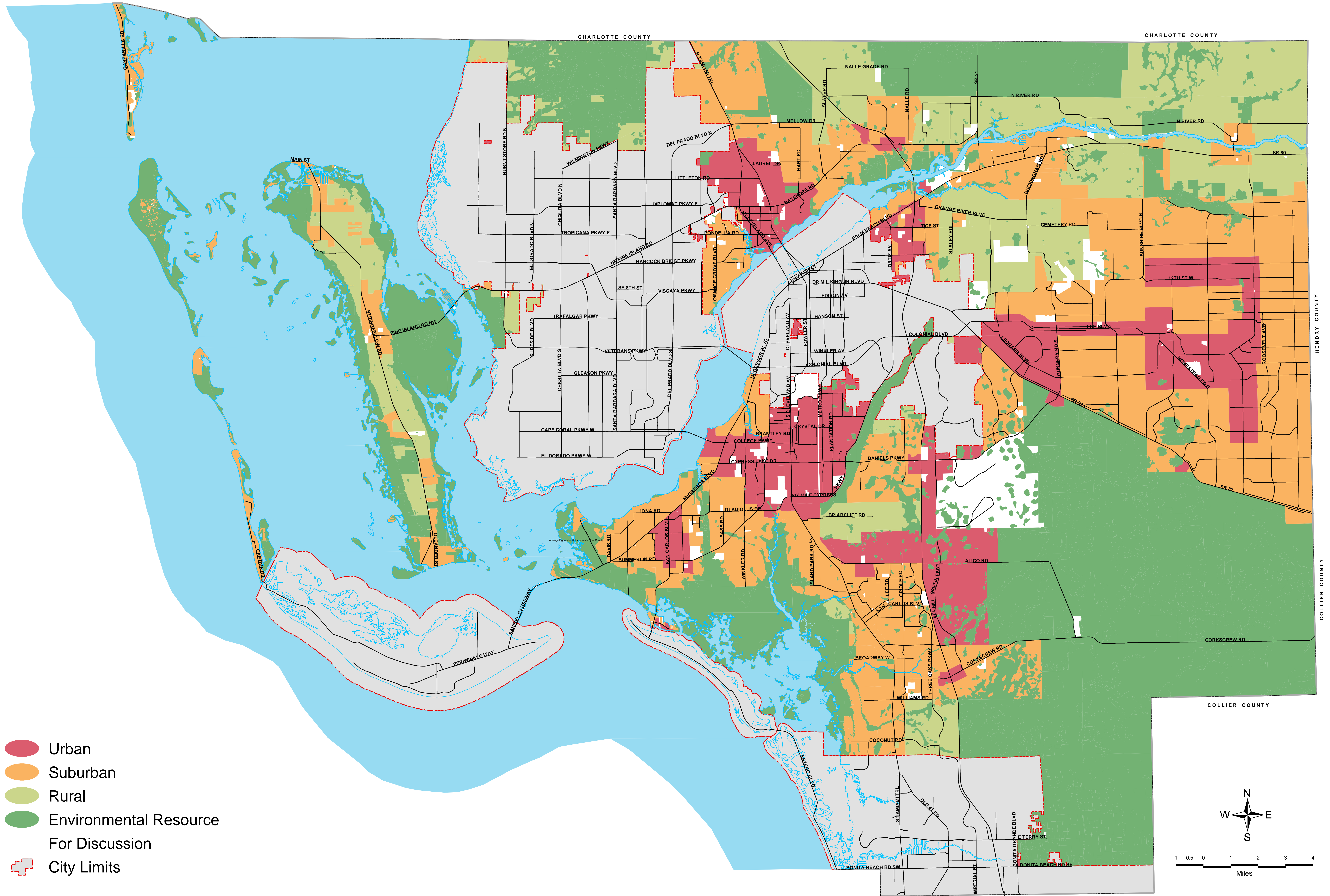
### Rural Areas

Coastal Rural	The Coastal Rural areas will remain rural except for portions of properties where residential lots are permitted in exchange for permanent preservation or restoration of native upland habitats or a commitment to preserve agricultural activity on existing farmland, on the remainder of the property.	0.1	1	0	See Policy 1.4.7.
Rural	The Rural areas are to remain predominantly rural--that is, low density residential, agricultural uses, and minimal non-residential land uses that are needed to serve the rural community. These areas are not to be programmed to receive urban-type capital improvements, and they can anticipate a continued level of public services below that of the urban areas.	0	1	0	See Policy 1.4.1.
Rural Community Preserve	Special design approaches are to be used to maintain the existing rural character, for example: conservation easements, flexible road design standards (including relocation of future arterials not serving the rural community), special fencing and sign standards, and retention of historic rural uses.	0	1	0	See Policy 1.4.3.

Open Lands	Open Lands are upland areas that are located north of Rural and/or sparsely developed areas in Township 43 South. These areas are extremely remote from public services and are characterized by agricultural and low-density residential uses.	0	0.2	0	See Policy 1.4.4.
<b>Environmental Resources Areas</b>					
Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource	Agriculture, natural resource extraction and related facilities, conservation uses, publicly-owned gun range facilities, private recreation facilities, and residential .	0	0.1	0	See Policy 1.4.5.
Wetlands	Very low density residential uses, and recreational uses that will not affect the ecological functions of wetlands.	0	0.05	0	See Policy 1.5.1.
Conservation Lands - Upland	Wildlife preserves; mitigation areas and banks; natural resource based parks; ancillary uses for environmental research and education, historic and cultural preservation, and natural resource based parks; and water conservation lands such as aquifer recharge areas, flowways, flood prone areas, and well fields.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.4.6.
Conservation Lands - Wetlands	Wildlife preserves; mitigation areas and banks; natural resource based parks; ancillary uses for environmental research and education, historic and cultural preservation, and natural resource based parks; and water conservation lands such as aquifer recharge areas, flowways, flood prone areas, and well fields.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.4.6.
<b>Other Areas</b>					
Denstination Resort Mixed Use Water Dependent	Residential, resort, commercial and industrial type activities that benefit from access to the water front.	6	9.36	0	See Goal 31.
Burnt Store Marina Village	Retail (55,000 square feet), wet and dry slips (1,325 slips), office (15,000 square feet), hotel (145 hotel units), and residential (160 dwelling units).	*	*	*	See Policy 1.7.12.
Commercial	Commercial	0	0	0	See Policy 1.1.10.
Airport	Hotels/motels, light industrial, service stations, ancillary retail/shopping, and office development	0	0	0	See Policy 1.2.1.
Public Facilities	Public schools, parks, airports, public transportation, and other governmental facilities.	0	0	0	See Policy 1.1.8.



# LEE COUNTY URBAN - SUBURBAN - RURAL - ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE AREAS



Map Generated November 2011  
Prepared By DCD/Planning Division



Future Urban Areas include Lands Designated: Intensive Development, Central Urban, Urban Community, Interchange Areas, Destination Resort Mixed Use Water Dependent, Industrial Development, and Tradeport  
 Suburban Areas include Lands Designated: University Community, Suburban, Outlying Suburban, Sub-Outlying Suburban, New Community, Burnt Store Marina Village, and Outer Islands  
 Rural Areas include Lands Designated: Rural, Rural Community Preserve, Coastal Rural, and Open Lands  
 Conservation/Wetlands includes Lands Designated: Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource, Wetlands, Conservation Uplands, and Conservation Wetlands

For Discussion:  
Airport, Commercial, and Public Facilities



**New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan Update**  
**Local Planning Agency Position Paper**  
**Urban-Suburban-Rural-Environmental Framework**

**November 9, 2011**

**Background**

On March 1, 2011 the Lee County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) adopted the New Horizon 2035: Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR). Chapter 2, “A Vision Framework: A Sustainable Planning Approach” addresses the county’s four critical community issues – livability, strong connections, community character, and sustainability. A sustainable planning approach is characterized by: a clear distinction between urban, suburban and rural areas; a more compact and efficient pattern of development; a range of mixed use development to serve the community; and increased opportunities for walking, biking, and transit ridership.

Implementation of the New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan will include policies and principles to guide preferred development forms within their specific context. In short, everything has its place – urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource areas. One size does not fit all. This paper takes a closer look at case studies and identifies what makes a great urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource area. It also puts forward strategies to promote all four types of places in Lee County. Solutions are suggested to answer the challenge to implement the community’s vision for making all four places happen.

**Urban Areas**

Urban areas include an integrated mix of housing types and other uses in a compact, pedestrian and transit-friendly pattern. They are often focused around a defined center such as a park, civic space or neighborhood center. The EAR identified three such places in Lee County: the City of Fort Myers and surrounding neighborhoods, north of the Caloosahatchee River around North Fort Myers and Cape Coral, and northeast of Fort Myers between the city boundary and Interstate 75. Other such places with urban characteristics in unincorporated Lee County include portions of south Fort Myers along U.S. 41 near the Villas and at College Parkway.

Urban areas are high in density and intensity, have a mix of uses, and are linked to a public space – such as a “Central Park”, for example, Central Park in New York City. They are connected, typically with short blocks and narrow streets. For pedestrians or users of mass transit, urban areas are the easiest places to live, work and play . Urban areas have higher infrastructure requirements but a lower cost per capita to provide infrastructure. The ability to minimize land consumption, travel distances, achieve connectivity and provide focused services makes urban development more sustainable.

However, some of the urban areas that are currently designated as Intensive and most of Central Urban in the Lee Plan have actually been developed with lesser intensities. The densities, for example in most of Lehigh Acres, Daniels-Gateway, parts of North Fort Myers and Iona, more closely match the suburban

development pattern described below with existing densities at less than 1,500 dwelling units per square mile (equivalent to 2.5 dwelling units per acre (Transit Development Plan Map 3-6) and low connectivity. Most of the areas designated as Urban Community have not developed in a true urban form, as described above. The available vacant lands in the Intensive, Central Urban or Urban Community categories are minimal and scattered. A major exception is the number of vacant lots and parcels in Lehigh Acres.

The category with residential densities thresholds identified in the Current Status of Lee County position paper are below those needed to support Bus Rapid Transit. As an example, residential densities to support Bus Rapid Transit would need to be between 15 and 23 dwelling units per acre, greater than 8 units per acre may support premium services and greater than 5 units per acre may support increased frequencies or express bus (Lee Tran Transit Development Plan Table 6-1).

### **Suburban Areas**

Suburban areas are typically characterized by their lower intensity development patterns and a clear separation between uses. However, a more diverse and integrated mix of uses is desired in suburban areas in the future. The EAR identified several such places in Lee County.

Suburban areas of the county include areas of lower density and lesser intensity than the urban centers. Lehigh Acres is the largest suburban development in unincorporated Lee County. The next largest is along the US 41 and Interstate 75 corridors south of Fort Myers to the boundary of the City of Bonita Springs (San Carlos Park, Miromar, Estero and areas around Florida Gulf Coast University). Another suburban area includes neighborhoods along the Caloosahatchee River (McGregor, Cypress Lake, Harlem Heights, Fort Myers Shores, the Verandah and Iona. Another example is North Fort Myers along Bayshore Road from east of Business 41 extending to Interstate 75.

Suburban areas are low-to-moderate-density. Uses are more separated and less integrated than in urban areas. The public spaces are often amenities for specific developments, such as clubhouses and golf courses. There is typically an extensive street network, but less connectivity than in an urban area. The blocks and street widths are wider than urban areas. There is less in terms of pedestrian access and/or public transit, than in urban areas.

Most existing development is scattered and near the lower end of the allowable density range. Typically, connectivity was not required and as a result there is very little. Scattered development with little connectivity makes provision of transportation infrastructure dependent on travel by the automobile. It requires the provision of utilities provision over a greater distance and emergency services cover a larger area, resulting in the need for more stations/vehicles to achieve response times.

### **Rural Areas**

Rural areas are comprised primarily of large expanses of agricultural and conservation lands. In some areas, occasional clustered residential development or rural centers may also be present.

Examples of areas in Lee County with rural attributes are Alva, Bayshore, North Olga, Buckingham, Corkscrew Road Community, and most of Pine Island. Rural uses are low in density and intensity. Uses are separated by greater distances than in suburban areas. The natural environment is often the major feature in or around rural areas. There is often a predominance of agricultural uses and farm lands. Rural areas have a sparse street pattern, and limited connectivity - and often no access to public transit. Streets are rural by design with minimal pedestrian connection and access. Lee County has an equestrian heritage and occasionally there are horse trails for transportation and recreational purposes in rural areas.

### **Environmental Resource Areas**

Environmental Resource Areas include undeveloped wetlands, natural bodies of water, native uplands, coastal areas, wildlife corridors, and other conservation areas. Environmental Resource Areas are sparsely developed if at all. Access and road networks are typically limited. Often these areas are under public ownership. Lee County is fortunate to be rich in areas with environmental resources such as the coastal Estero Bay State Park, Cayo Costa State Park, Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge, and Charlotte Harbor and Estero Bay buffers. Wetland Environmental Resource Areas include Six Mile Cypress Slough, Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed, Imperial Marsh, Caloosahatchee Creek, and others. Upland environmental resource areas include Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods, Bob Janes Preserve, and Prairie Pines.

### **What Makes A Great Place?**

The American Planning Association (APA) has seven useful attributes of great neighborhoods, applicable to urban and suburban places, but not all of which are applicable to rural and environmental resource areas. A great place:

1. Has a variety of functional attributes that contribute to a resident's day-to-day living (i.e. residential, commercial, or mixed-uses).
2. Accommodates multi-modal transportation (i.e. pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, drivers).
3. Has design and architectural features that are visually interesting.
4. Encourages human contact and social activities.
5. Promotes community involvement and maintains a secure environment.
6. Promotes sustainability and responds to climatic demands.
7. Has a memorable character.



## Case Studies in Florida

Nearby there are some examples of great urban communities in Florida, with some or all of the characteristics above.

**Coconut Grove** is for many where Florida started. The first settled community in Miami-Dade, it began with Tequesta Indians, then Bahamians, and later northerners seeking warmer weather. This Miami-area neighborhood is home to the oldest home in Dade County, the home of Ralph Munroe – one of South Florida’s original pioneers. Coconut Grove is famous for its tree canopy, mix of land uses, access to Biscayne Bay, and a committed citizenry that is protective of its unique South Florida character. Coconut Grove is served by Metrobus throughout the area, and by the Miami Metrorail.

**Hyde Park** in Tampa is home to a revitalized open-air shopping district near the University of Tampa and Downtown. The neighborhood dates back to the 1880's. The first house in the neighborhood was built by James Watrous in 1882. Rapid growth occurred and a street car line was installed on Swann Avenue and Rome Avenue. These are wide streets, while most streets in the neighborhood are much narrower. Recently, small companies began using neighborhood electric vehicles to carry pedestrians from this area to other urban neighborhoods such as Downtown and Ybor City.

**Ybor City** is a historic neighborhood in Tampa, northeast of Downtown. It was also founded in the 1880s and has a history of cigar manufacturing and immigrant waves from Spain, Cuba and Italy. After decades of decline, a portion of the neighborhood was redeveloped with nightclubs and entertainment venues. Ybor has been designated as a National Historic Landmark District, and many buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The main commercial thoroughfare – 7th Avenue - was awarded as one of the “10 Great Streets in America” by the American Planning Association. The Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HARTline) operates streetcars as well as buses in this part of Tampa in addition to fixed-route transit service.

**Las Olas Boulevard** is a thoroughfare in Fort Lauderdale running from a central business district to the Atlantic Ocean. It is a commercial area mixed in with canals and waterfront homes. There are tropical courtyards with bars, art galleries, restaurants and hotels. Las Olas Boulevard is served by fixed-route transit and can also be accessed by water taxi. Located near the beach and international airport, it has become a dining and shopping destination.

**Punta Gorda** is the county seat of Charlotte County and the only incorporated municipality in the county. Punta Gorda contains ten places on the National Register of Historic Places. Punta Gorda was badly damaged by Hurricane Charley August 13, 2004. TEAM Punta Gorda was created in 2004 in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Charley to revitalize greater Punta Gorda, create the Citizens' Master Plan 2005, and guide future development. The planning process has led to revitalization of commercial buildings, the rebuilding of an event center venue, beautification projects, and a new bicycle loan program.

**Thornton Park** is one of several historic districts in Orlando. The neighborhood is full of historic homes and brick paved streets. It is also home to high-end restaurants, boutiques, and Star Tower, an upper

end condominium development. Over time Thornton Park has become one of the most desirable places to live , attracting young professionals and urban dwellers to an active lifestyle and diverse community. It is served by Lymmo, Orlando’s Bus Rapid Transit System.

Examples of great suburban communities are also nearby with some or all of the characteristics above:

**Baldwin Park** is an award-winning new neighborhood (National Association of Home Builders, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Congress for the New Urbanism) about three miles from downtown Orlando. It was designed as a livable, walkable community built on the site of a former Naval Training Center. The neighborhood features a range of housing types, new schools, parks, lakes, shops and restaurants. It has fixed-route transit service.

**Celebration** is also in the Orlando area about 30 minutes from downtown with a broad mix of residential single-family houses, condominiums, and a traditional village square. Many homes have front porches and rear access to the garage by means of a service alley. Community and architectural guidelines make for a unique looking community which has won numerous planning awards including “Best New Community” from the Urban Land Institute. One fixed-route line connects Celebration to the Greater Orlando area.

**In the Florida panhandle, Seaside** is a master-planned community. The vision of Seaside was an old-fashioned beach town. The founder Robert S. Davis developed it with architect Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company. The houses are colorful with a variety of styles. The community is a textbook neo-traditional design with residential, office, retail and community services in close proximity to one another, a pedestrian-friendly street grid, and an emphasis on vernacular architecture. Seaside does not have transit service.

Examples of great rural communities in Florida include:

**Everglades City** is a Collier County town without malls, traffic lights, high-rises, or beaches. It was a trading outpost and fishing community which gained some notoriety during the construction of Alligator Alley in the 1920s. There is still a neo-classic city hall, bank, and other structures that harken back to the past. There are mansions on Riverside Drive close to where stone crabs are still harvested.

**Apalachicola** is a port town in the panhandle defined by it’s fishing industry. Established in 1831 it was once the third largest port on the Gulf of Mexico. Like many rural towns in Florida it has wide, tree-lined streets with picturesque homes from the nineteenth and twentieth century. Apalachicola has over 900 historic homes and buildings listed in its extensive National Register District and it was selected as one of the nation’s Dozen Distinctive Destinations in 2008 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Examples of great environmental resource areas in Florida include:

**Everglades National Park** is a national park that protects the southern Everglades. It is the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States, and is visited on average by one million people each year.

**The Florida Keys** are the most extensive living coral reef in the United States and is adjacent to the 126 mile island chain at the southern tip of the Florida Peninsula. The Florida Keys National Marine

Sanctuary and Protection Act designated the waters surrounding the Florida Keys as a National Marine Sanctuary.

**The Ocala National Forest** is the second largest National Forest in the U.S. It covers about 607 square miles of Central Florida. The Ocala National Forest, established in 1908, is the oldest national forest east of the Mississippi River and the southernmost national forest in the continental states.

**Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park** is a linear swamp forest, approximately twenty miles long by five miles wide and oriented from north to south. It has been sculpted by the movement of water for thousands of years and clean fresh water is the key to its existence. It is known as the “Amazon of North America”.

**Paynes Prairie State Preserve** is among the most significant natural and historical areas in Florida. The 20,000-acre preserve was a center for man's activities for many centuries--Indian occupation of the area dates back to 10,000 B.C. Ranger-led walks and backpacking trips offer exceptional opportunities for viewing the Preserve's diverse wildlife from an observation tower near the visitor center. Horseback riding for visitors with their own horses, bicycle trails, hiking trails and camping are available.

### **Barriers or Challenges**

Lee County is at a disadvantage when it comes to urban-style, compact, pedestrian and transit-friendly development, as found in the examples above. The Gulf of Mexico, Caloosahatchee River and large conservation and environmentally sensitive lands act as natural barriers to urbanization, however, conservation and environmentally sensitive areas are identified in the EAR as part of what makes Lee County special. Natural features are also included in the example communities listed above. Development may feature conservation and environmentally sensitive areas while preserving those areas. There also is the opportunity to cluster development around conservation and environmentally sensitive areas.

Conservation areas such as Estero Bay State Park, Lover's Key and San Carlos Bay, Charlotte Harbor Buffer, Little Pine Island, and J.W. Ding Darling, etc. act as barriers with minimal connectivity. These surround most of the barrier islands (Cayo Costa, North Captiva, Captiva, Sanibel, Fort Myers Beach, Pine Island, etc.). The Caloosahatchee River and inland conservation areas such as Six Mile Cypress Slough, CREW/Imperial Marsh, Telegraph Creek/Bob Janes Preserve, Charlotte Harbor Flatwoods, Prairie Pines, Caloosahatchee Creek, etc. are sources of water supply/wellfields. All support man and wildlife and are critical to the ecosystems and sustainability of Lee County.

Significant portions of the built environment may limit developing future urban areas and redeveloping existing urban areas described in the EAR. Lee County has developed with a suburban sprawl pattern and the infrastructure pattern is based on separated uses. The historic growth pattern originated in small population centers in the city of Fort Myers and villages with linear development typically along state highways. Dependency on the automobile, Euclidean zoning and the pre-platting of many communities (such as Lehigh Acres) has brought us to where we are today.

The primary development method for the last 50 years has been residential projects focused on automobile travel (on major roads) with little or no provision of daily needs or connectivity to adjacent developments. The typical plat has dead-end local streets with few connections to the street network. Gates and walls are common. Similarly commercial development is in a narrow strip along major roadways and is not typically connected to adjacent properties. Utilities infrastructure is primarily built along roadways. Parks and schools are regional and are not developed to serve specific neighborhoods. The water management system is dependent on man-made canals emptying into natural systems.

Current future land use policies and existing Euclidean zoning have spread suburban and lower density urban development over more of Lee County than may be ultimately sustainable. A large part of the county has developed with one-story low density (Cape Coral, Lehigh Acres, San Carlos Park, the Villas, Fort Myers Shores, etc.)

Several types of areas with prospects for redevelopment were identified in the EAR. They include existing shopping centers (at major intersections), strip roadway corridors, and smaller new activity centers. Additional areas of opportunity include existing greyfield (re)development and remaining large undeveloped parcels in areas designated as urban on the future land use map.

Challenges facing Lee County 1) are the dearth of urban development opportunities due to established suburban development patterns and policies in planned urban areas, 2) Economic, regulatory and logistical barriers to the redevelopment of existing suburban development and 3) Protection of rural and environmental resource areas from sprawl development further into non-urban areas and 4) Transforming regulations and creating redevelopment opportunities for projects that are desirable, sustainable, and marketable in keeping with the county's adopted vision.

### **Strategies**

Strategies for more clearly establishing urban, suburban, rural, and environmental resource areas could include 1) identify future land use categories as either urban, suburban, rural, environmental resource areas; 2) establishment of a transition from urban to suburban to rural with a variation in land use designations; 3) develop an urban growth boundary combined with incentives to focus and promote intensification in planned urban areas; and 4) determine the appropriate urban/suburban growth boundary to prohibit, restrict, limit or discourage further sprawl into rural and environmental resource areas. A second set of strategies to develop activity centers will be further developed in the Mixed-Use Center, Interchanges, and Urban Mixed-Use Centers position papers. All strategies will require evaluation and possible modification of the existing land use map designations.

### **Urban Solutions**

The Current Status of Lee County position paper describes urban characteristics. Lee County lacks the density, planning and regulatory tools to make this happen at a large scale. However, selected geographic areas have already been identified in specific planning communities where mixed use, transit-friendly, pedestrian-friendly urban development can occur.

Four tools are appropriate for existing and future urban areas, similar to what is already outlined in the Compact Communities regulations.

- Increase densities and intensities in urban areas, core, node or activity centers, and at multi-modal connections by specific location or a floating, flexible overlay of a larger area with consideration of height and incentives to direct new development and promote urban infill;
- Minimum densities and intensities to maintain integrity of urban categories and where services are dependent on density;
- Traditional development forms, walkability and connectivity. Creation of small block size designed to the human scale to, promote traditional neighborhood development with provision of goods and services used on a daily basis within a walkable distance,;
- Integrate land use with transportation. Provide urban infrastructure and services. Require or allow building facades near the public right-of-way line. Transit, bicycle and pedestrian based levels of service. Provide municipal parking lots and streets with on-street or municipal parking.

### **Suburban Solutions**

With limited urban land to work with (and the desire to maintain intact rural and environmental preserves) – addressing the suburban form as it is in Lee County is a challenge as is the case in much of Florida and the nation as a whole.

New Orleans Architect Aron Chang reflected on suburban development in “*Beyond Foreclosure: The Future of Suburban Housing*” posted September 14, 2011 in the *Design Observer Group* website.

<http://places.designobserver.com/feature/beyond-foreclosure-the-future-of-suburban-housing/29438/#comments>

He said, “Rethinking suburban design is an enormous challenge because many suburban neighborhoods have been designed, developed and managed precisely to avoid change and limit uncertainty.”

“Innovations in zoning policies, construction techniques, property assessment and taxation, parking distribution, maintenance and expansion of utilities, provision of social services, processes for formalizing existing informal housing — all these strategies will be required for us to truly rework the suburbs, one home and one neighborhood at a time.”

Five strategies are appropriate for existing and future suburban areas:

- Establish connectivity between neighborhoods, services, and resources and to urban areas by providing through and multiple access points;
- Designate neighborhood centers and nodes and focus public investment;
- Incentivize the common location of services to reduce trips;
- Prioritize walkability and bikeability, especially in linkage of greenways and roadway facilities to parks, neighborhoods and mixed use areas;
- Locate transit hubs at activity centers with parking facilities to facilitate express bus service.

## **Rural Solutions**

Key to taking care of Lee County is taking care of its rural land, some of which currently looks like suburban development currently. Protecting rural development (or land) means promoting real agricultural (and commercial uses related to agriculture) and discouraging the conversion of farms to less appropriate uses such as golf course communities, strip malls, and single-acre residential subdivisions.

Four tools are appropriate for existing and future rural areas:

- Decrease densities in identified rural areas with larger lot requirements, open space and preserve requirements, clustering density, and strategies for use of well and septic in rural areas;
- Minimize services in rural areas (i.e. no transit, two-lane roads, less frequent sidewalks, paved shoulders on higher speed or volume roads, well/septic tanks).
- Farmland trusts and other strategies to boost agricultural uses on rural lands; and
- Encouragement of commercial agricultural activities on rural lands in zoning, regulation and administrative policies.

## **Environmental Resource Area Solutions**

Lee County is fortunate to have many areas of significant environmental resources in most every community, including coastal areas, wetlands, and uplands in public and private ownership.

Three tools are appropriate for existing and future environmental resource areas:

- Continue to protect vital resources using existing regulatory and additional regulatory tools;
- Continue efforts to promote conservation purchases to put additional acreage into public ownership, while continuing to maintain existing conservation lands under public ownership;
- Explore ideas such as conservation trusts to protect lands where public ownership is not possible or where there are barriers to public ownership.

## **Recommendations**

*Adopt a Future Land Use Map that clearly distinguishes between urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource areas.* The existing future land use map was discussed in issue paper number one. Currently there are multiple urban, suburban and rural categories. As noted above there is a blurred distinction between urban, suburban, and rural areas.

*Maintain existing area categories while revising urban, suburban, and rural categories.*

*Direct increases in densities and intensities to designated urban areas:* Increase viability of investment in mixed-use centers and core development areas, decrease infrastructure costs-per-capita while increasing tax base, increase viability of transit, protect water supplies, and more accurately reflect specific community desires.

## Discussion

The issue of what is or should be urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource areas needs to be considered throughout the Lee Plan. Following this, how can the Lee Plan be modified to better define, defend, and distinguish these four forms?

Possible answers to these questions will be the focus of the Local Planning Agency (LPA) and Community Sustainability Advisory Committee (CSAC) meetings. Planning staff will lead a discussion with the LPA about concerns relating to how to promote the County's adopted vision and relate it to specific communities, neighborhoods and geographic areas focusing on these four forms:

- Where should urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource areas be located? For economic development? For sustainability?
- What future land use categories should be kept? Which should be eliminated, or folded into other categories?
- How should urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource areas be defined? Transitioned?
- What density and height are appropriate for urban, suburban, rural and environmental resource areas?
- Are specific policies related to these four forms needed for specific Planning Communities?
- Should urban areas in communities such as Alva, Pine Island/Matlacha or Boca Grande be addressed differently?
- Should suburban areas in Captiva, Bayshore, Buckingham, and Olga be addressed differently?
- Are there more priority urban areas that need identification?
- How can suburban and rural uses be contained so they do not become sprawl? Incentives? Disincentives? Growth boundary at urban line? Suburban line? Environmental Resource Area?
- What is the best way to transition between urban, suburban and rural places (and environmental resource areas)?
- What is the best way to transition between residential and non-residential uses?
- What policies are needed to address barriers to great communities?
- Are there specific policies or regulations pertaining to signs, landscaping, parking, utilities, interconnections, level of service, tree canopy, affordable housing, architectural standards, and road design which are acting as barriers to great communities?



THE DESIGN OBSERVER GROUP

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Aron Chang

## Beyond Foreclosure: The Future of Suburban Housing



Suburban development, South San Jose, CA, 2006. [Photo by Sean O'Flaherty via [Wikimedia Commons](#)]

These are places we Americans know well: suburban and exurban neighborhoods, where gently curving streets are lined with single-family houses with driveways, multi-car garages, front lawns. We have been constructing these houses for decades, from coast to coast; and for decades the extensive car-dependent neighborhoods and cities they have produced have been roundly critiqued for their negative impact on natural landscapes and ecological systems, on cultural life and social relations, on energy use and personal health. For at least a generation urban design practitioners and theorists have focused on the redevelopment of suburbia; one of the most prominent recent studies is Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson's *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs*, which features case studies for up-zoning corridors, converting strip malls, reusing big box stores, etc. [1] The big-picture ideas and national movements are by now well known — [transit-oriented development](#), [New Urbanism](#), [Smart Growth](#), and so on. And yet the suburban reformers, focusing almost always on the scale of systems, have rarely paid sustained attention to suburbia's essential component, its irreducible unit — the freestanding single-family house.

From the modest Cape Cods of Levittown to the center-hall colonials of New England, from the bungalows of the South and Midwest to the Spanish-inflected ranches of California, [these houses at once embody and perpetuate longstanding national ideas and assumptions](#) about home ownership, land use, family life and the relationship of the individual house to its neighbors and to the community as a whole. Viewed collectively, suburban housing constitutes the most ubiquitous construction type in the United States in the last half century. At the peak of the housing boom that ended in 2006, single-family houses made up more than three-quarters of housing construction permits and housing starts; and by then the average size had ballooned to more than 2,200 square feet, and the average price topped \$250,000. [2] The sustained growth in sales of ever-larger suburban homes is truly remarkable, especially given changing family structures and population demographics and the marked mobility of American life. In fact, since the postwar years, average household size has notably decreased (from 3.8 people in 1940 to 2.59 in 2000), and the population remains strikingly peripatetic (in 2009 and 2010, 12.5 percent of Americans relocated). [3] The disconnection between the rising diversity of housing needs and the monotony of housing production speaks to the tenacity of the postwar American dream



— the enduring allure of the detached house with front lawn and backyard patio — as well as to the profitability of catering to these aspirations.



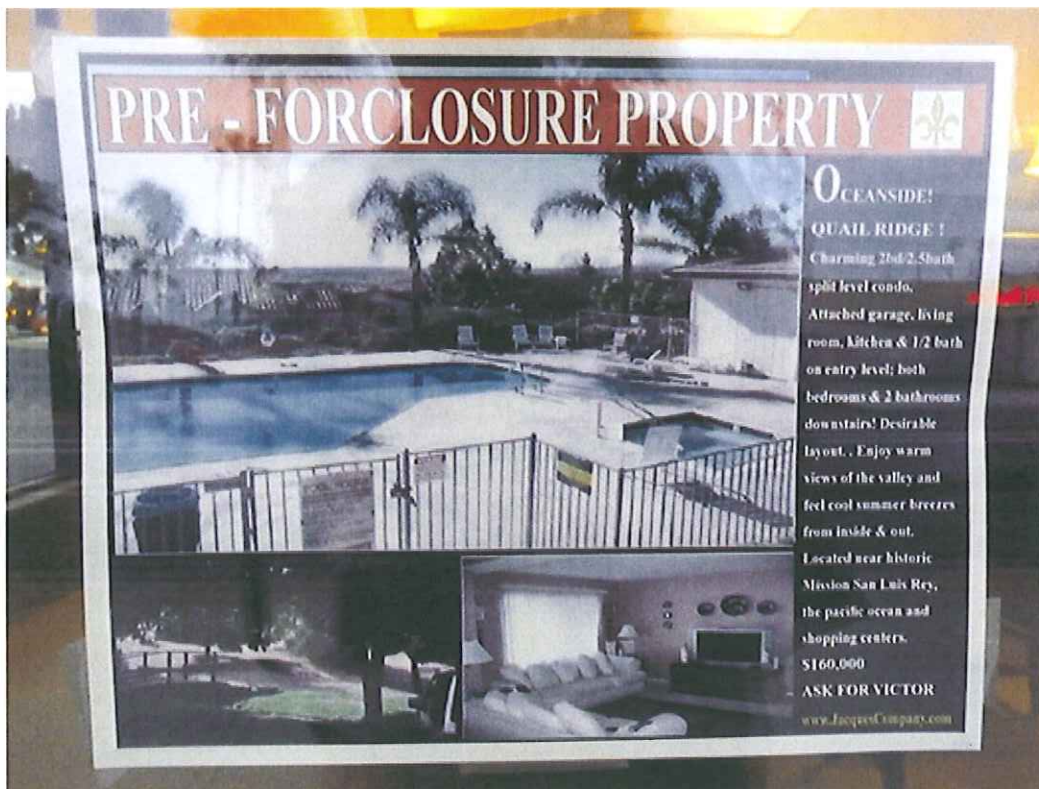
Suburban development, Colorado Spring, CO, 2008. [Photo by David Shankbone via [Wikimedia Commons](#)]

### Outdated Dreams

That is, until recently. The [accelerating decline of suburban neighborhoods from Florida to California](#) suggests that the contradictions of the system are finally catching up with it. The Great Recession is challenging not only the economics of homebuilding but also the essence of the suburban dream. Residential construction has slowed dramatically, and yet there remains a massive oversupply of single-family houses, especially on large lots. [4] This raises a difficult question: What to do with that oversupply, with the millions of houses now in foreclosure, many deteriorating or abandoned? [5] It is possible — and no doubt to many real estate developers desirable — that once the economy revives we will simply return to home-building-as-usual. But right now we have an opportunity to rethink suburban housing: to make it responsive not to dated demographics and wishful economics but rather to the actual needs of a diversifying and dynamic population — not only to the so-called traditional households but also to the growing ranks of those who prefer to rent rather than buy, who either can't afford or don't want a 2,000-square-foot-plus detached house, who are retired and living on fixed incomes and maybe driving less, who want granny or nanny flats, who want to pay less for utilities and reduce their carbon footprint, and so on.

Rethinking suburban design is an enormous challenge because many suburban neighborhoods have been designed, developed and managed precisely to avoid change and limit uncertainty. Indeed, many subdivisions exude a palpable sense of stasis, even immutability, which owes not to residential construction technologies, which are relatively adaptable, but rather to the economic expectations and regulatory structures that inform their inhabitation. [6] By now these are familiar: we know that many houses function not simply as family residences but also as investment vehicles; they're not just homes but commodities. Lightweight wood-frame designs are replicated across the country, regardless of location and climate, because they are cheap and efficient to build; often the houses are purchased to be quickly flipped, not dwelt in comfortably or solidly for years. It was indiscriminate production of this housing type that inflated the bubble and drove the economy to near collapse; yet the very policies that enabled the proliferation of these neighborhoods now render them unproductively inflexible. Large-scale social, cultural and economic changes — in family structure, household income and mobility, gas prices, home heating and cooling costs — have registered hardly at all in the built environment of suburbia.





Top: Salton City, CA, 2008. [Photo by [Jeroen Elfferich](#)] Real Estate Office, Oceanside, CA, 2010. [Photo by [Joe Wolf](#)]

All of which is to say that entire neighborhoods are frozen in a state of functional deficiency by restrictive municipal zoning and especially by what are known in real estate law as the "covenants, conditions, and restrictions" that govern new residential developments. Builder-developers establish CC&Rs to reassure prospective homebuyers that their investments will be safe. Once the neighborhood is occupied, the developer establishes a homeowner association, which then administers and enforces the CC&Rs; as millions of Americans know well, it's not uncommon for HOAs to restrict the choice of exterior paint colors, prohibit boats or RVs from parking in driveways, ban outdoor clotheslines, limit structural modifications, forbid modes of occupation (like rentals or granny flats), etc. In recent decades the number of common-interest developments governed by HOAs has increased exponentially, from fewer than 500 in 1964 to more than 300,000 today, encompassing an estimated 24.8 million housing units and 62 million residents (20 percent of the population). CC&Rs provide the legal basis by which homeowner associations can levy fines and place liens on homes in violation. Thus property



owners are guaranteed that the neighbors won't, for example, double the size of their house or rent out spare bedrooms or build an outhouse on the front lawn. It's a classic compact: you submit to restrictions on your own rights in exchange for stability and to protect your investment. [7]

But the foreclosure crisis has made it painfully clear that such culturally accepted and legally sanctioned resistance to change might be as much a liability as a benefit. We're at a pivotal moment, when thousands of neighborhoods will need to adapt in order to accommodate current realities and correct deficiencies in the housing market. Successful environments are in fact *always* adapting. Can we imagine a city in which a parking lot could never be used for anything but parking, or where individual properties could not be bundled for redevelopment? [Agility of use and occupation](#) are essential to ongoing vitality. Yet somehow we've come to expect our suburbs to remain frozen in time — dream time — and as a result we've consigned them to premature obsolescence. One of the sad and critical ironies of today's housing market is that more and more Americans are threatened with homelessness even as the housing market struggles with excess inventory, in large part because regulations prevent the kind of modifications that would better meet contemporary needs.

Across the country ailing subdivisions are being abandoned and left to ruin. These are not atmospheric or appealing ruins — the heavy-timbered warehouses or spacious former factories that lend themselves to loft-style living or entrepreneurial start-ups — but instead cheaply built shells of wood-frame construction, quick to decay and often remote from urban centers or amenities. In a widely discussed article in the March 2008 issue of *The Atlantic*, provocatively titled "[The Next Slum](#)," real estate analyst and Brookings Institution fellow Christopher Leinberger summarizes the conditions that make change so difficult:

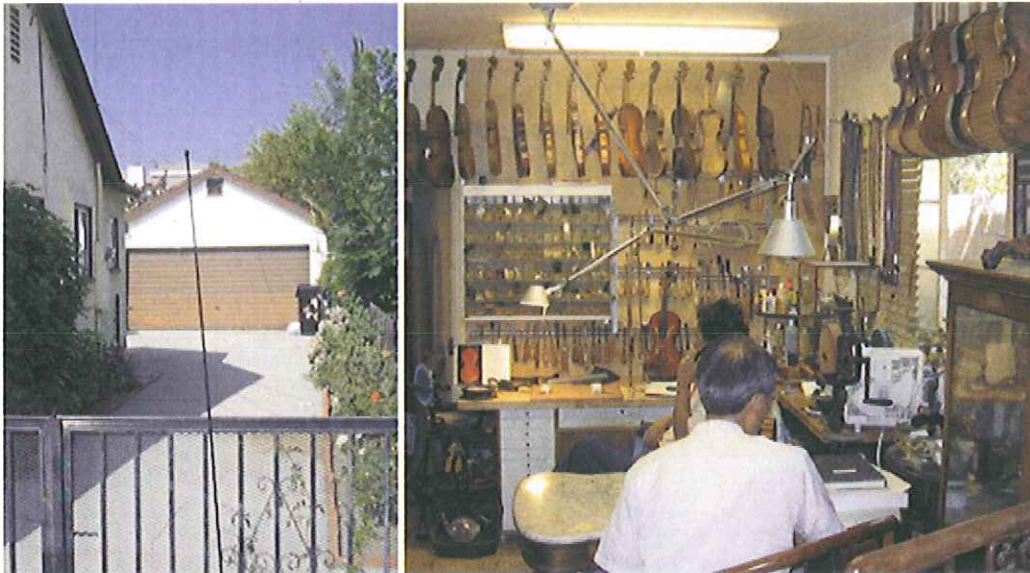
Suburbia's many small parcels of land, held by different owners with different motivations, make the purchase of whole neighborhoods almost unheard-of. Condemnation of single-family housing for "higher and better use" is politically difficult, and in most states it has become almost legally impossible in recent years. In any case, the infrastructure supporting large-lot suburban residential areas — roads, sewer and water lines — cannot support the dense development that urbanization would require, and is not easy to upgrade. Once large-lot, suburban residential landscapes are built, they are hard to unbuild.

Leinberger concludes that the current trend of middle and upper classes repopulating city centers, and the developer-driven focus on creating suburban "lifestyle centers" and mixed-use neighborhoods will produce "more of a balance between walkable and drivable communities"; but he acknowledges that this resurgent urbanism will inevitably "leave some places diminished."

### **New Opportunities**

I believe that as designers we cannot accept as inevitable the decline of suburban neighborhoods, even if these neighborhoods exist, as Leinberger puts it, "on the fringes, in towns far away from the central city, not served by rail transit, and lacking any real core." To do so will be to overlook important opportunities, and maybe also obligations. These neighborhoods embody major investments of energy and material resources; the housing surplus constitutes a vast store of underused — or "underperforming," as developers would say — shelter, of habitable spaces already served by basic infrastructure. For the design professions these converging conditions pose an exciting challenge. Can architects, landscape architects and urban designers collaborate with developers, builders, economists, engineers, ecologists, homeowners and homebuyers, all focusing on the collective goal of reimagining the suburban single-family residence and reversing the decline of so many suburbs? And in the process can we effectively address the deeper issues of housing affordability and suburban sprawl?





Suburban housing with instrument workshop in back. [Photos by Aron Chang]

We might start by studying longstanding patterns and practices of housing adaptation in Southern California — a part of the country with no shortage of upscale real estate but with a dearth of affordable options. [8] In Los Angeles it's not unusual to find recent immigrants, young people, the elderly, poor families and sometimes even professional-class single people doubling up with relatives, or occupying illegal units such as converted garages, or sometimes even living in suburban houses converted into single-room-occupancy dwellings. City officials have estimated that in the late 1990s there were 50,000 to 100,000 people housed in illegally converted garages throughout Los Angeles County, with even more in other forms of substandard housing. [9] Informal units also serve as businesses, e.g., chiropractors' offices, seamstresses' workshops, musicians' instrument shops and schools, etc.

In other words, informal or illegal housing is hardly a new phenomenon; in fact, for many years, it has compensated for crucial gaps in the formal housing economy. [10] In Los Angeles and other cities, illegal units are too numerous for authorities to crack down on effectively; and their elimination would displace thousands of families. [11] But they are also too numerous to ignore; no city can plan effectively without a realistic population census. In fact, informal housing is problematic for various reasons. Tenants pay no property taxes or utility fees and have no legal recourse in disputes with landlords; lack of a formal address complicates job and driver license applications; units not built to code may lack good ventilation and safe emergency egress; overcrowding can diminish shared amenities such as street parking; illegal tapping of sewerage and electricity can strain infrastructure; and so on.



Suburban housing with informal apartment. [Photos by Aron Chang]

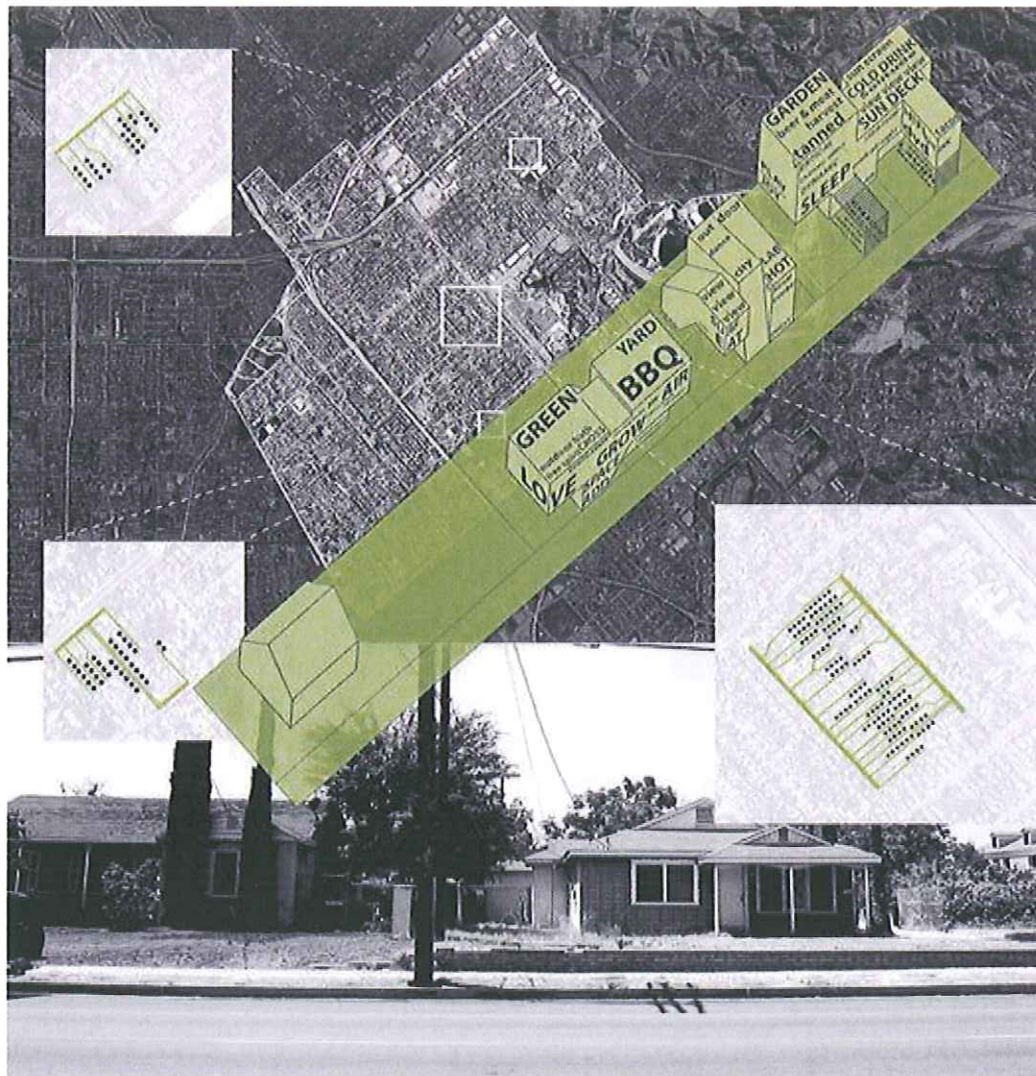
To reduce or eliminate extralegal housing will require that we repeal federal subsidies that incentivize

current patterns of suburban development, as well as overhaul the zoning and regulatory structures that dictate minimum lot sizes, density, setbacks and modes of occupancy. But surely the need to do so is compelling, for extralegal units do more than underscore the actual and unmet needs of the housing market and the limitations of current policy; they function as vital examples of how higher densities, alternate modes of tenancy and ownership, and a responsive and diverse mix of uses not only can help individual residents but also reinvigorate whole neighborhoods. Indeed, they offer promising new models to innovative developers.

Informal housing suggests new and expanded roles for building and urban designers in enabling the transformation of single-use residential monocultures into lively, dynamic, mixed-use and mixed-income districts. The challenge for designers will be to redirect their traditional practices to participate in the kind of small-scale and incremental change that usually occurs without the resources of municipalities or redevelopment agencies or third-party developers. For years now homeowners have been making decisions to convert garages or set up second units; the cumulative effects of these individual decisions and investments — installing a window in the side wall of a garage or adding a bathroom or stove in an underused space, thus enabling a recent graduate to live in the city or an entrepreneur to seed a business — have helped to transform many older urban neighborhoods in Southern California. And they suggest possibilities that seem more hopeful than Leinberger's forecast of suburb-slums for the poor and lifestyle centers for the wealthy. [12]

What designers and planners can do, then, is to reinforce these positive trends and create viable visions of neighborhoods that are equipped to adapt, to change and grow in density and use without diminishing quality of life, while bringing new income, amenities and services. We have to collaborate with policymakers, zoning boards, neighborhood associations, builders, engineers and lawyers; we have to study neighborhoods that have already been densified and diversified by informal housing and start-up businesses; and we have to use our understanding of spatial relationships and land use to modify negative perceptions of infill and mixed use. In doing so, architects might finally succeed in claiming a professional place at the forefront of suburban redevelopment, rather than merely critiquing and bemoaning the waste of so much ill-conceived growth.





Backyard Homes, Pacoima 10k Project, cityLAB, UCLA. [Photo via cityLAB]

### Design Research

Some promising initiatives are already underway. At the School of Architecture and Urban Design at UCLA, the design center cityLAB is working on the [Backyard Homes project](#). Under the direction of cityLAB directors Dana Cuff and Roger Sherman, an interdisciplinary team — university designers, community organizations, Los Angeles planning officials, city council staff and the Community Redevelopment Agency, and for-profit and non-profit developers — is examining the potential for [infilling workforce housing](#) in the backyards of large residential sites in the Pacoima district of the San Fernando Valley; ultimately the center hopes to encourage experimentation throughout Southern California. Other center activities include researching the history of single-family housing and suburban infill; working with non-profit developers such as Habitat for Humanity to build two units instead of one unit on suburban lots; persuading private homeowners to erect prototype backyard homes; and, scheduled for 2013, constructing a prototype infill unit in the Hammer Museum courtyard.

Some municipalities are already focusing on the potential of infill. In 2003 the city of Santa Cruz, California, recognized there was a scarcity of affordable housing within its municipal boundaries, due largely to the limited availability of developable land and an increasing population. In response to state legislation requiring cities to permit accessory dwelling units as a matter of right, the city created an [Accessory Dwelling Unit Program](#), enacting an ordinance regulating the development of mother-in-law or granny flats on single-family lots. The ADU Program seeks to "promote infill development to help preserve the surrounding natural greenbelt," to "help minimize the impact of population growth on the community by providing more rental housing," and to "foster the use of public transportation." Funded by the California Pollution Control Financing Authority, the program is being implemented in a number of ways, including publication of an *ADU Plan Sets Book* featuring [prototypes designed by local and regional architects](#); distribution of an *ADU Manual* and a *Garage Conversion Manual* with guidelines for obtaining permits; public workshops; wage subsidies for licensed contractors who employ apprentice workers to build ADUs; and loans to homeowners of up to \$100,000 through a local bank. In the three years prior to the implementation of the program, Santa Cruz issued an average of six construction



permits for ADUs each year. In the eight years since, the city has issued an average of 23 permits each year. Those numbers rose steadily before the recession, reaching a peak of 36 permits in 2007 before declining in the last three years due to wider economic distress. [13]



Prototype accessory dwelling unit, SixEight Design, created for the Santa Cruz Accessory Dwelling Unit Program.

What is remarkable about the Santa Cruz ADU program is the degree of cooperation that its implementation required — cooperation between city planners and city council, between the community at large and city officials, and between individual stakeholders and the community. In speaking with key individuals, I learned that the program required a shared understanding of the issues of housing affordability and housing choice, and the acknowledgement that thousands of illegal garage conversions throughout Santa Cruz were the direct result of failed policies. [14] For example, a local architect and city council member, Mark Primack — who as a zoning board member in the 1980s and '90s worked with frustrated homeowners who struggled to comply with restrictive codes — became a strong champion of the ADU Program. With his professional knowledge of building practices, Mark worked with the fire marshal to develop new requirements for sprinklers and firewall separations; with the water department to adjust the requirements for new attachments to utilities for ADUs; and with the planning department to rewrite the parking requirements — all to ensure that the new ADU policies would not be prohibitively costly. In a related effort, a local garden designer, Lynn Robinson, ran successfully for the city council as a "concerned community member" in order to represent neighborhood interests, especially regarding the potential effects of ADUs on privacy, daylight and parking congestion. It is important to note that both Primack and Robinson combined their professional experience — the understanding of building, space and design — with a sustained engagement in political and social processes in order to make the new ADU program a meaningful contribution to the urban future of Santa Cruz.

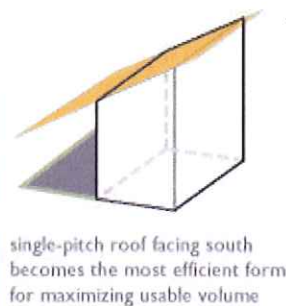
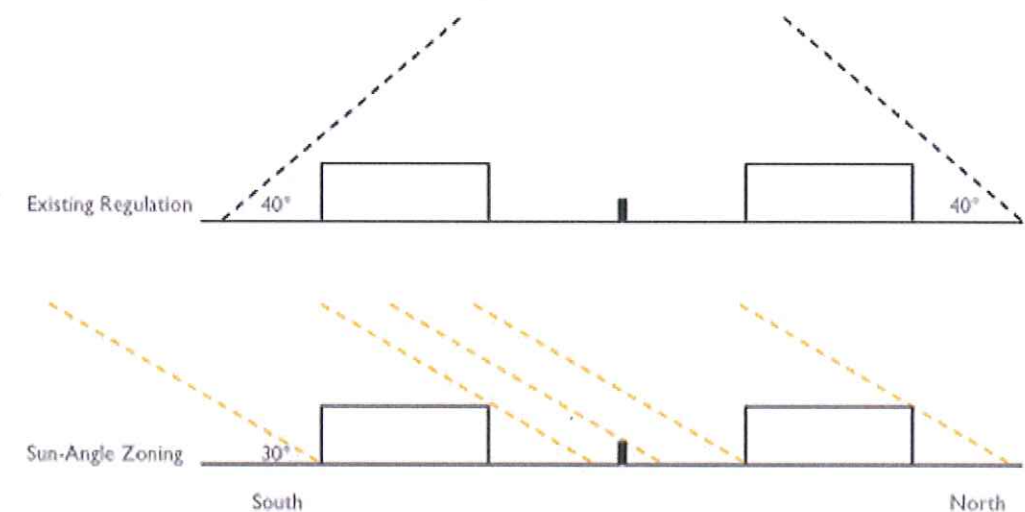
Both the cityLAB project and Santa Cruz program demonstrate the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and political advocacy. I'd like to further emphasize this with examples from my own research. In 2009 I studied the capacity of single-family residential lots in Temple City, southwest of Los Angeles in the San Gabriel Valley, to accommodate infill rental units that would alleviate the pressures of the regional housing market. Temple City (population 35,558, according to the 2010 U.S. Census) has a large immigrant and non-white population; it's a place where many garages have already been converted to extralegal units. In thinking about how new units could be inserted into built-out suburban lots, I looked carefully at the city's zoning code and at the prototypical single-family lot.

According to one zoning regulation, a 40-degree plane drawn from the front property line cannot be intersected by any part of the structure in the front 30 feet of the lot. [15] City planners most likely intended this as another means, along with setbacks and height restrictions, of controlling the buildable envelope of single-family homes, bringing order and coherence to the street by dictating a consistent relationship between the house, front yard and street. Rather than challenging the necessity of such a



rule, I propose that the 40-degree rule be the model for a new kind of regulation that would allow infill units to be constructed with minimal impact. For example, the city could develop sun-angle zoning, a performance-driven regulation that would require infill units to be designed so that a plane drawn from a given sun angle across the relevant top edge of the infill unit could not block more than 20 percent of a neighboring facade or yard. This regulation would address neighbors' fears about new structures diminishing their quality of life, while providing a new buildable envelope within which architects could work. The resulting forms would be specific to the climate and existing geometry of the lots.

My study also proposes flag-lot parking zones that could alleviate homeowner concerns about parking shortages that might result from new infill or commercial development. The city could purchase rear portions of lots in residential areas and provide street access via long driveways (in plan the long driveway resembles a flag pole; hence the term "flag lot"); these lots would accommodate cars internally within the block, so that the overall appearance of the street would change little as the block capacity expanded. The parking lots could be regulated so that development rights of individual homeowners would be linked to parking spots they own or rent, potentially a means of deriving additional city revenues. Finally, I propose that architects work with engineers and manufacturers to identify building systems and materials especially suitable for infill housing. For example, an exterior envelope of [structural insulated panels](#) could be built more quickly than an envelope of standard two-by-four construction, minimizing the disruption to daily life for residents.



Proposed ADUs and sun-angle zoning, Temple City, CA, research by Aron Chang. [Images courtesy of Aron Chang]

While none of these strategies alone would ensure an efficient or friction-free transition from lower density single-family neighborhoods into more complex, higher-density and multi-use neighborhoods — and none would be easy to achieve politically — they begin to suggest how architects could use their knowledge of housing typologies and spatial relationships, and their ability to envision possible futures, to work with multiple public-and private-sector collaborators to plan and implement viable approaches to suburban redevelopment. Innovations in zoning policies, construction techniques, property assessment and taxation, parking distribution, maintenance and expansion of utilities, provision of social services, processes for formalizing existing informal housing — all these strategies will be required for us to truly rework the suburbs, one home and one neighborhood at a time.



Work such as this is hardly outside the realm of what architects are already doing (again, as we see with cityLAB and Santa Cruz). But to achieve large-scale results, we need to move beyond the ideas competition, the student thesis, the part-time and often pro bono work of architects and institutions. We need to develop broader interest and initiative among an entire generation of practitioners to take on the complexities of innovative suburban redevelopment. Just as urban redevelopment has been at the forefront of academic discourse and planning and design practice for the last several decades, suburban redevelopment must take on similar importance. It's an urgent issue with arguably greater relevance for the future of the American landscape, both physical and social, and how that landscape is inhabited and traversed. The result might be a new kind of American suburb that grows over time and responds to the needs of a dynamic population as well as to the contingencies of time, place and economics.

In an article in *The New York Times*, architecture educator and critic Witold Rybczynski lamented the monotony of single-family subdivisions across the country. He noted the disproportionate media and public attention to the "glass-roofed museums, the granite-faced office towers, the glamorous hotels," and pointed out that Americans spend more on the construction of single-family houses than on any other building type. Yet most homebuyers are asked to choose among houses and neighborhoods essentially identical in structure and function, differing only in stylistic flourishes or material finishes. Rybczynski was especially disappointed by the "scant evidence that the [building] industry [is] responding seriously to the chief concern of many young Americans: housing affordability. Instead of pioneering innovations in construction, design and planning that would reduce selling prices and enlarge the size of the first-time-buyer's market, most builders prefer to cater to the prosperous second- and third-time buyer. The button that is labeled 'Small and Cheap' remains unpushed. Too bad." He then concluded: "It might be time to reconsider the single-family house; either we content ourselves with smaller houses, or we will be obliged to look at alternatives like patio and row houses, and to resurrect such housing types as the California bungalow court and the Georgian housing terrace." *It might be time*, wrote Rybczynski. It's especially notable, then, that [the article I've just quoted](#) was published in 1991.

Two decades on, the issues remain just as relevant, except the houses have gotten bigger and more wasteful and the environmental imperatives more urgent. Writing for the same newspaper in 2009, design writer Allison Arieff focused upon the same theme of "[suburban and exurban master-planned communities and how to make them better](#)." She cited big box reuse and the High Line in New York City as examples of the ingenuity designers and developers could apply toward transforming subdivisions into "self-sufficient mixed-use neighborhood[s]," imagining "three-car-garaged McMansions ... subdivided into rental units with street-front cafés, shops and other local businesses." It's a spirited call to action, whether or not one agrees with the particular post-suburban spin. The problems of affordable housing, sustainable development and the fate of suburban single-family neighborhoods are more pressing than ever. Design alone will never bring about the changes that are necessary and desirable. Rather it is at the intersection of public policy and design, zoning innovation and design, construction innovation and design, neighborhood activism and design, and cultural perception and design, that possibilities for change exist.

**New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan Update**  
**Local Planning Agency Position Paper**  
**Lee County Mixed-Use**  
**November 18, 2011**

## **Background**

Central to the vision adopted through the 2011 Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) is the development of mixed-use centers. According to the report, mixed-use centers are:

*“Places that feature a complementary mix of uses, promote livability and walkability, and include a variety of residential housing opportunities. ... These places (are) focused within compact centers of activity linked by a multi-modal transportation system that provides a more varied set of travel choices.”*

As places that bring people, neighborhoods, commercial centers, public facilities, parks, and multi-modal transportation systems together, mixed-use centers are essential to Lee County’s future.

While the EAR highlighted mixed-use centers as a central component of the county’s future vision, enabling and promoting development of mixed-use centers has been a focus of Lee County’s planning and development effort for nearly three decades. Here is a summary of the county’s thirty-year effort to foster mixed-use developments:

- 1984 – The Lee Plan adopts Future Land Use Categories that allow for a mixture of residential uses along with commercial, office, and (in some categories) light industrial.
- 1991 – Lee Plan policies were adopted to promote mixed-use developments through clustering uses, reducing vehicular trips, and minimizing sprawl. The policies called for the development of mixed-use zoning classifications such as planned villages.
- 1994 –The Mixed-Use Planned Development Zoning Classification (MPD) is adopted into the Lee County Land Development Code to help, *“capture within the development a substantial percentage of the vehicular trips that are projected to be generated.”* Amendments to the MPD have been adopted to further encourage mixed-use zoning.
- 2004 – The 2004 EAR identified the need to better promote the development of mixed-use centers including the establishment of mixed-use future land use overlay areas, form-based code standards, and development incentives and disincentives.
- 2007 – Lee Plan Goal 4: Sustainable Development Design is adopted to incorporate the concepts and principles of New Urbanism, Traditional Neighborhood Design, and Transit Oriented Development. Additional amendments to the Future Land Use Map Series are adopted to include an overlay depicting targeted mixed-use development areas.
- 2010 – The Compact Communities Code is adopted into the Lee County Land Development Code to provide form-based regulations intended to create compact, walkable neighborhoods and mixed-use areas.

- 2011 – The New Horizon 2035: 2011 EAR identifies mixed-use centers as one of the primary components of the county’s updated land use framework and highlights how the Lee Plan can be amended to better foster mixed-use through the county’s future development efforts—particularly those in redeveloping commercial centers and corridors.
- 2010-2011 – Community Planning Program initiates the planning of up to six mixed-use centers within three local community planning areas (North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres, and Palm Beach Boulevard) utilizing the Compact Communities Code.

### **Challenges to Achieving Mixed-Use**

Despite the county’s efforts to support the development of mixed-use areas, the predominant development pattern in Lee County is comprised of single-use, separated residential, commercial, professional, industrial, and public space and parks areas that are each best accessed by personal vehicles. In order to determine why the county’s efforts to foster mixed-use have not achieved the intended goals, Lee County has been engaged in a series of staff charrettes, Local Planning Agency (LPA) policy workshops, and Community Sustainability Advisory Committee (Sustainability Committee) policy meetings. The goal of these discussions is to better understand why the county’s past efforts have not achieved the desired development practices and identify specific policies and practices that will enable the county to achieve its goal of developing mixed-use centers.

#### Suburban-based Lee Plan Policies

Through these different discussions, a common theme has come forward—the county has gotten where we are because of its land use policies and zoning standards. The LPA summed up the problem when they explained that, “we are trying to get to urban with suburban land uses and zoning.” Specifically, the county’s compatibility, density standards, buffering, open space requirements, separation of use restrictions, transportation and infrastructure level of service (LOS) standards, site location standards, and other comprehensive plan policies and LDC development requirements have been discussed as reasons the county has a predominantly suburban land use pattern. The regulations were designed to implement a more suburban form of development, where a development has a mixture of uses located adjacent to other uses but rarely has a true integrated and interconnected mix of uses.

In an effort to ensure compatibility between uses and adjacent neighborhoods, commercial centers, and public resources the county has adopted regulations that focus on density, intensity, height, building envelope, and use restrictions through the establishment of setbacks, sideyard buffers, height limits, minimum lot sizes, and lot coverage limits.

Conventional policies and standards are designed to provide for orderly growth, preventing overcrowding of land and people, alleviating congestion, and separating incompatible uses, and buffering adjacent uses. Over the last couple of decades, planners have become increasingly aware that conventional policies and standards are designed to develop suburbia and as a result have a strong influence on how we live our lives. In a study about what is the most appropriate land use tool for development of mixed-use neighborhoods John Barry explained:

*The conventional zoning practices that became widely accepted in the later part of the twentieth century have drastically changed the way American cities and towns have been physically planned and developed. Conventional zoning has encouraged suburban sprawl through its promotion of low density and single use development. The consequences of this type of zoning are not limited to the physical design of the neighborhoods in which we live and work. Sprawl has also changed the way in which Americans conduct their daily lives as we increasingly rely on the automobile to commute to school and work or run errands. (Connecticut Law Journal, Form Based Codes: Measured Success Through Both Mandatory and Optional Implementation)*

### *Lee Plan*

Examples of the county's conventional land use policies and development standards included within the Lee Plan are as follows:

- Buffering/Open Space Requirements:
  - Goal—77
  - Objectives—1.3, 31.4, 77.1, 77.2, 77.3,
  - Policies—1.1.7, 1.4.7, 5.1.5, 5.1.6, 6.1.6, 7.1.8, 16.3.5, 41.1.4, 77.1.1, 77.2.1, 77.3.1, 77.3.4, 107.11.4
  
- Compatibility:
  - Objectives—16.3, 47.2, 66.3
  - Policies—2.2.1, 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 7.1.1, 7.1.2, 7.1.3, 9.2.1, 16.3.3, 17.4.1, 18.1.7, 33.3.2, 46.2.2, 46.4.2, 47.5.4, 85.1.1, 105.1.2
  
- Site location:
  - Goals—6, 39
  - Objectives- 37.1, 37.3
  - Policies—1.4.5, 6.1.2, 18.1.7

In addition to these policies, the county's existing urban and mixed-use land use designations as established in the Future Land Use Element, Future Land Use Map, and Table 1(a) Summary of Residential Densities support densities that are too low to adequately foster mixed-use developments.

### *Land Development Regulations*

Lee County's experience with conventional land use policies and development regulations is not surprising; as a study of conventional land use practices by the American Planning Association (APA) found that such practices may hinder the building of traditional, mixed-use neighborhoods and community centers,

*An evaluation of development trends and the zoning requirements of many communities identified serious problems associated with .... suburban communities. In many instances, conventional zoning regulations are the major contributors towards many communities ... While*

*there is interest in traditional urban communities, existing zoning regulations make redevelopment of urban communities more difficult by applying suburban zoning standards. Larger setbacks and excessive parking requirements make many cherished urban buildings and spaces nonconforming. (American Planning Association)*

Additional planning research has shown that many communities have experienced challenges similar to those Lee County has faced when they tried to implement mixed-use goals through conventional based land use designations and zoning standards. While many local governments sought to use conventional based development policies and practices such as clustering land uses, planned development zoning classifications, and design standards tools to promote mixed-use development, such tools were designed to separate uses and guard against incompatibility. As explained in an article by the Michigan Association of Planning (now known as Michigan APA),

*Planned unit developments (PUD) have been used for many years as an effective means of developing coordinated larger sites. ... However, in many instances, what is intended to be a "mixed-use" development actually ends up being "multiple-use," where there are separate and distinct areas of land uses that are not truly integrated into a mixed-use development. The other limitation of a PUD is that it is designed primarily for the development of larger sites, and with few exceptions, is not well suited for use on individual lots in an urban environment.*

*Clustered open space developments have had success in preserving open space and natural features. ... While open space developments are a significant improvement from (other types of) conventional zoning, the developments still tend to be separated, single-use tracts of land.*

*Many communities have adopted design standards ... While these design standards have been effective in improving the appearance of buildings and landscaping, the standards fail to create meaningful change in the urban form - the end result is usually aesthetically-pleasing sprawl. (Michigan APA)*

Thus, despite the fact that the county desired mixed-use developments and had policies and regulations that allowed for such developments, the conventional land use and zoning practices predominantly found within Chapter 10: Development Standards and Chapter 34: Zoning of the Lee County Land Development Code have resulted in the county's suburban development pattern.

The lesson to be learned from the experiences of Lee County, planning research, and many other jurisdictions indicates that attempts to establish mixed-use centers through conventional zoning practices may not be successful because such practices are intended to develop suburban communities, not mixed-use areas.

#### *Market Forces and Development Process*

The market (aka development community, financial system, property seller, prospective property owner, and community member) is another reason for Lee County's suburban development pattern. The market contributed to suburbia by developing communities which were said to meet the overriding desire for single

family homes located in residential neighborhoods buffered from incompatible uses by landscaping, roadways, and gates. The so called, “*American Dream Home*” was fueled by the development of roadways and cheap fuel. The average American house size has more than doubled since the 1950s and now stands at 2,349 square feet while approximately seventy-five percent of Americans live in suburban communities. As the market has sought to meet the demand for single-family suburban homes and neighborhoods, there has been little to no perceived demand or need to construct more integrated mixed-use developments and centers.

Lee County’s development form has been shaped by four other significant market forces: 1) the timing of the Lee County’s growth, 2) large amounts of undeveloped suburban land uses, 3) developer specialization and 4) development financing. First, Lee County was largely developed after the suburban housing market became the dominant form of development in the mid-twentieth century. Unlike communities in the North and Southeast which originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the county did not have many traditionally established downtown centers, connected neighborhoods, and integrated communities around which suburban neighborhoods developed. Second, when Lee County’s development boom began in the later part of the twentieth century, the county had vast amounts of undeveloped lands designated for low-density land uses. The market took advantage of these large land areas and produced vast areas of suburban developments. Third, as time progressed and the suburban movement grew, developers began to specialize in only one type of development. As a result, developers chose to specialize in one type of use (residential or commercial) and grew uncomfortable attempting mixed-use developments. Fourth, federal financing criteria made development project funding much more available for suburban communities than mixed-use developments. Thus, even developers who may have been interested in developing a mixed-use project were more likely to build a suburban development. Finally, as communities attempted to make mixed-use development easier to construct through techniques such as reduced or shared parking, the financial community grew uneasy about the viability of mixed-use centers without enough parking to satisfy the now ingrained suburban lifestyle.

### **Future Lee County Mixed-Use Practices**

Recognizing that the county needed policies and practices that would better promote and support the development of mixed-use projects, the New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan Update is being reviewed in order to determine how the county’s land use policies and practices can provide:

- Greater direction about how mixed-use centers ought to be developed;
- Minimize policy and regulatory constraints to mixed-use developments;
- Higher level of certainty about the approval process; and
- Better predictability about project outcomes.

Through these updates, the county intends to develop mixed-use policies and standards that focus on the development’s form, design, and intent. The goal is to ensure that county’s future mixed-use efforts produce mixed-use development not projects with adjacent mixture of uses.

In order to achieve this goal, the EAR recommended that the county refine its mixed-use approach to better account for the specific location, size, context, and design conditions of the county’s different urban, suburban,

and rural places. The report established a basic mixed-use framework which described the form, function, and components of mixed-use development. The LPA workshop (see attached discussion summary) in October 2011 built off this discussion as it sought to provide further mixed-use policy direction.

Staff is using this information to help develop a mixed-use policy and development strategy, which will be presented to the LPA and Sustainability Committee starting in December 2011. However, while staff continues to work through the development of this strategy, it is appropriate to confirm what the county is looking to accomplish through its future mixed-use practices by examining where mixed-use center should be located, what the form and character of mixed-use centers ought to be, and how to promote mixed-use through appropriate land use categories and standards.

### Mixed-use Locations Discussion

Recognizing that location is critical to the success of the county's future mixed-use strategy, a good deal of thought has gone into this first aspect of the county's mixed-use strategy. This topic involves whether the Future Land Use Map Mixed-Use Overlay should be amended to better delineate where mixed-use locations are and better direct how to blend such areas with the surrounding existing neighborhoods, service areas, and employment centers. The issue will be address through a discussion of the following concerns:

- Targeted locations that are specifically defined with specific land use categories and delineated on the Future Land Use Map.
- Flexible locations that are generally defined by an overlay on the Future Land Use Map.
- Redevelopment and infill locations that explain how to incorporate mixed-use areas within an existing development area.
- Greenfield and rural locations that explain how mixed-use areas can be used to help protect the character of rural communities.
- Mixed-use location criteria that help establish where mixed-use developments should be placed in proximity to residential, commercial, and industrial uses; transportation resources; and parks and public space areas.

### *Targeted Mixed-Use Locations*

The argument for better defined locations is that the current overlay map is too broad and does not articulate the county's mixed-use priorities. By better delineating mixed-use areas, the map could be better able to focus its mixed-use efforts into targeted areas. According to the EAR, the county should identify specific types of mixed-use areas (regional, community, neighborhood, or rural) and develop land use policies and standards for each of these areas. During their October 2011 mixed-use discussion, the LPA further identified a number of specific locations where the county should target future mixed-use activities (i.e.: Treeline Avenue from Corkscrew Road to Colonial Boulevard; airport area, Six Mile Cypress Parkway to Metro Parkway; Palm Beach Boulevard corridor west of I-75; Winkler Road and College Parkway; and Alva Center). The LPA also stated the county should be committed to mixed-use in targeted locations by not bending to community misperceptions about mixed-use, collaborating with community groups to help address their needs and concerns through the planning process, and working with property owners to recognize the financial advantages of developing a mixed-use project.

The county has targeted a number of mixed-use center areas as part of the community planning efforts in North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres, Alva, Caloosahatchee Shores, and Palm Beach Boulevard. Additionally, the Estero community is working to identify potential locations as part of a current effort to update their community plan. Moreover, in four specific locations—North Fort Myers Town Center, Lehigh Acres Downtown, Lehigh Acres Community Center on Homestead Road, Lehigh Acres Neighborhood Center on Joel Boulevard, and the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor west of I-75—the county has initiated the master planning of the community centers through implementation of the Compact Communities Code, planning of transportation improvements, and review of infrastructure needs. By targeting mixed-use locations, the county is able to focus its planning efforts, coordinate infrastructure concerns, and facilitate community planning efforts. Such publically sponsored planning efforts help attract private investments by ensuring that there is community support for the proposed effort, which makes the development review process more predictable.

#### *Flexible Overlay Mixed-use Locations*

While there is value in better targeting mixed-use locations, one of the strengths of the broad overlay map is that it is flexible and open. This flexibility allows privately initiated mixed-use efforts to come forward in locations not previously identified. Privately initiated efforts are often more likely to move beyond the planning stage because there is a known project developer and needed financial backing. This influence can be seen in the county's current planning efforts as only one of the two mixed-use projects currently under development review—Downtown Estero—is located within the mixed-use overlay.

#### *Redevelopment/Infill Mixed-Use Locations*

Redevelopment and infill mixed-use development areas are usually characterized by a high degree of existing build-out, which makes it difficult to assemble raw land on which to build. However, some districts within the county where there are many failed shopping plazas, professional buildings, and undeveloped infill sites present great opportunities in which to introduce a mixed-use development. While auto-oriented strip malls, large-lot developments, and vacant infill sites are fundamentally incompatible with mixed-use, these types of locations represent prime opportunities for conversion to mixed-use over the long term. This is because existing, underutilized suburban commercial centers and neighborhoods have large amounts of open land (parking lots, large open spaces, and stormwater areas) that may be better used as part of an overall mixed-use design. Additionally, they often are located along major roadways and can be easily linked to transit, surrounding neighborhoods, and nearby commercial areas. The key for the county will be to identify mixed-use locations that can easily transition to existing residential neighborhoods and developments so as to provide for the needs of the existing neighborhoods and businesses while protecting the existing character and viability of the community.

#### *Greenfield/Rural Mixed-Use Locations*

Development on greenfield sites in rural areas can be guided by mixed-use principles in order to minimize environmental impacts associated with new development. They may be used in Lee County's rural areas to help transfer existing rural densities into areas most suitable for development. While the county needs to be cautious when identifying greenfield locations so as to not further impact the remaining rural areas, small rural mixed-use centers (through the use of transfer of development rights), may help protect the county's



diminishing rural lands. Greenfield and rural locations that are appropriate for mixed-use include community centers where schools, post offices, parks, churches, convenience shops, personal services, and rural neighborhoods are located. The key is to develop and locate rural mixed-use areas in areas where they are most able to provide for the local needs of the community without allowing new development to encroach upon the rural agricultural areas and farming operations.

#### *Mixed-Use Location Criteria*

Regardless of whether the county targets specific mixed-use locations or promotes a variety of broadly defined areas, mixed-use developments need to be placed in appropriate locations. The county's many underutilized suburban strip centers and infill properties clearly offer the most promising locations, however carefully selected greenfield sites may help protect the county's vital rural lands. The following list expresses some of the criteria which have been identified by the EAR, LPA, and staff as to where mixed-use developments ought to be located:

- Adjacent to, centered within, or surrounded by active development areas, with a variety of diverse residential neighborhoods, employment centers, and public resources (i.e.: parks, government buildings, churches, greenways, and educational and sport facilities) nearby.
- In an area with a high level of connectivity to surrounding areas with strong accessibility via multiple transportation options:
  - Opportunities for pedestrian and bikeway access to residential, workplace, and park areas;
  - High level of accessibility to transit corridors and major roadways;
  - Be situated by intersections near major roadways;
  - Consider proximate to ports, airports, and major roadways; and
  - Promote housing near bus routes.
- Near a major transportation corridor with ample opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian access.
- Near economic development areas so that the mixed-use development can benefit from at least one strong economic anchor that provides jobs for residents, patrons for smaller shops and services, and destination for day users.
  - An economic anchor may include a large entity such as government office, health facility, college, transportation hub, or large employer or a group of organized smaller businesses such as medical offices, professional centers, or commercial retail center.
- Create synergies with surrounding residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, employment areas, government centers, transportation resources, public spaces and parks, greenways and blueways, and other community assets.

#### Location Recommendation

Recognizing the need to both clearly identify specific locations and allow for other development areas to be identified over time in appropriate locations, staff recommends that the current mixed-use overlay be maintained, with adjustments to help target pre-identified locations where public investment should be used to help foster the development of a mixed-use area. In order for the mixed-use overlay to achieve better success, breaking down the barriers described in this and other issue papers (i.e.: urban/suburban/rural/environmental resource area, mixed use land development standards, interchanges, transportation, and public infrastructure)

must also occur. This would include a revision to the conventional land use policies and regulations that restrict uses and promote separation where mixed-use center development meets the location criteria. These revisions would focus on the mixed use areas but must also specify which are applicable in areas outside of the overlay. Additionally, the Lee Plan should establish criteria to help identify where mixed-use centers ought to be located.

### Form and Character Discussion

Mixed-use developments are designed to be vibrant, diverse neighborhoods with higher densities and a range of complementary uses such as commercial shops, restaurants, services, employment centers, governmental services and resources, and public gathering spaces and park areas. They are characterized by their integrated, accessible, and context-oriented form that provides a variety of uses, diverse housing types, employment opportunities, multiple transportation resources, and are anchored by a central public space and civic activity.

The American Institute of Architects asserts that the following form and character features are essential components of mixed-use communities:

- Parks, schools, civic buildings, and commercial establishments located within walking distance of homes;
- Residences with narrow front setbacks, front porches, and detached rear garages or alley-loaded parking;
- Network of interconnected streets and paths suitable for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles;
- Narrower streets with crosswalks, streetscaping, and other traffic-calming measures;
- In-scale development that fits the local context; and
- Buildings oriented to the street with parking behind.

At their October workshop, the LPA as well as the Sustainability Committee and Lee County staff echoed these ideas as they identified what mixed-use design practices should be addressed through the county's form and character policies. These ideas are the basis for the following list of form and character features:

- Human-scale active streetscapes should be established to promote walking, biking, public gatherings, and outside eating.
  - Issues regarding personal comfort should be addressed by providing ample shade, sitting and rest areas, accessible walking spaces, designated bicycle pathways, accessible public spaces, and welcoming green space areas.
- Step-down uses with the densest, most intense, and tallest buildings at the core of the development and less dense residential and public space uses at the fringe where they transition—not buffer—residential areas from surrounding commercial, professional, and other uses.
  - Height should be context-sensitive with smaller mixed-use developments at a more minimal height and community or regional centers a higher height consistent with the density and intensity of the area. Excessively tall buildings, like those along the river in downtown Ft Myers, should be avoided.
- Easily accessible commercial areas which attracts visitors as well as people who work and live in the area.
- Residential densities in the community need to be high enough to provide internal capture for retail and restaurant businesses after commuters have left.

- The highest density residential areas should be located within the commercial areas as well as immediately adjacent to the core areas.
- Moderate density residential single family lots (cottage homes, duplexes, granny flats, etc..) should be located adjacent to higher density residential.
- Lower density estate homes should be located adjacent to moderate density residential areas.
- Parks, civic, and other uses should be spread throughout the development to provide linkages from one area to another and help promote an active streetscape and community environment.
- Minimum density/intensity standards for transit-oriented mixed-use development should be 20-25 dwelling units per acre (du/a) with an additional 50,000 square feet of office and professional use. Residential density could be slightly lower (15 to 20 du/a) if additional office and professional space were incorporated at intensive densities (additional 25,000-35,000 sq. ft) to offset the loss of dwelling units.
- Connectivity within and between the development and other areas in the county should be at a high level to encourage internal capture, promote multi-modal transportation, and allow for short daily trips.
- Highly integrated transportation system designed to the human scale that features convenient transit service; short walkable blocks; grid system roadways; roundabouts; sidewalks, pedestrian pathways, and bikeways and crosswalks; traffic calming measures (narrow lanes, on-street parking, streetscaping, and speed humps); shared parking (structures, interior lot, and on-street parking); and transit hubs.
- Design needs to provide safe, walkable and bikeable conditions that protect the walker or bike rider from cars through streetscapes that include tree lined streets, on street parking, raised curbs, greenscape between sidewalks and the road, and designated bike lanes.
- The variety of types of housing units typical of TND gives people and households at all stages of life housing alternatives suited to their needs, thus providing stability to a community. The proper density of housing (typically very high) will also support the commercial and civic functions at the TND.
- An emphasis on transit in urban and mixed use areas to shift away from automobile scale of development. Revised Level of Service standards (including LOS for other modes) and traffic analysis requirements.
- Creation of a place as a destination rather than a place to drive past or through.
- Removal of barriers and/or provision of incentives.
- Mixed-use development requires local connectivity and access to all areas. Along with bicycling, walking, and vehicle access, mixed-use areas should provide additional access with choices including public transit. Buses provide transit options, but must be considered along with regional highway access.

The challenge for the county moving forward will be how to utilize such features in the development of future development projects in order to ensure that they achieve the desired mixed-use form and character. Questions regarding how to apply and where to use such features must be thought through in order that the county may determine how to establish policies related to mixed-use.

### Form and Character Recommendations

*These form and character principles express the mixed-use form of development which the county has been trying to establish for three decades. Throughout the New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan Update process, the county has led a discussion about how to ensure these principles get implemented through the development of true mixed-use places. Based on these discussions, staff has determined that the above form and character features ought to be utilized as the basis for design principles which should be applied to future mixed-use development projects.*

*Form and character design principles would expand upon the current Lee Plan Goal 4: Sustainable Development Design and the development standards established in the Lee County Land Development Regulations: Chapter 32 Compact Communities Code to create policies focused on the development of mixed-use places. Additionally, they would support additional new or updated mixed-use policies found throughout the Lee Plan, particularly the Visioning, Future Land Use, Transportation, and Community Facilities Elements.*

*Staff recommends that these mixed-use form and character design principles be developed according to the specific context of the mixed-use development—whether urban, suburban, or rural. Mixed-use development will follow these principles whether they are located in an area that has been targeted for mixed-use or whether the property chooses mixed-use. Staff also recommends that properties that follow such principles be provide mixed-use incentives such as bonus densities and/or intensities, transfer of development rights, and streamlined administrative review processes.*

*Particularly, staff recommends that the policies address the following considerations:*

- Higher densities and intensities within the mixed-use areas so as to support the development’s viability and ensure functional transit opportunities.*
- Open and accessible connectivity with surrounding development and neighborhoods must be provided through roadway, greenway, sidewalk, and park connections.*
- Neighborhoods that surround mixed-use ought to have minimum densities so as to provide a transition from the mixed-use development to surrounding residential areas.*
- Enhanced transit facilities (accessible and safe bus stops, shelters and stations, sidewalks, bike trails, etc...) will be provided to allow the center to be connected through a county-wide multi-modal transportation system.*
- Incentives for development which promote the implementation of mixed-use principles. Such incentives may include density bonuses, less intensive administrative processes, and other considerations as identified through the LPA discussions.*

### Mixed-Use Character Types Discussion

*Throughout the discussion about how to ensure future county land use policies and practices result in the types of mixed-use development that the county envisions for its future, one common concern was identified: how to ensure that the county’s land use standards promote such developments. While all of the county’s current land use categories allow for mixed-use, the standards have not resulted in the development of mixed-use projects. In*

*fact, as discussed in Urban-Suburban-Rural-Environmental Framework Issue Paper, the developments that resulted from current land uses rarely achieved the allowable density and intensity levels.*

*Addressing this concern has been identified as a critical component of achieving the county's vision for mixed-use and distinct urban-suburban-rural places. One way to accomplish this is to better define how the county expects mixed-use areas to be designed and also better express the purpose and intent of developments in these areas.*

*The following is a summary of three mixed-use character types that accomplish this goal in urban, suburban, and rural contexts:*

- High density and intensity mixed-use developments: designed to be located in urban communities and function like a downtown area with a high level of connectivity both internally and regionally, variety of housing types, many diverse economic and governmental operations, and varied public spaces. These are the regional hubs, which unite the entire region, providing for their center for commerce, government, and culture. These types of mixed-use developments are located in close proximity to an interchange of predominant roadways with high levels of transit service. With a proportion of civic to economic to residential space at approximately 15:60:35. This type of center would be expected to feature buildings with greatest height, mass, and scale as height ranges would range under 12 stories depending on the area.*
- Moderate density and intensity mixed-use developments: designed to be located in urban or suburban communities and function like a community center with strong levels of connectivity within the community and moderate amounts to other parts of the region, variety of housing types, highly visible and viable economic anchor, and varied public spaces. These are community centers, which meet the needs of the local area and community, providing for a central community hub for jobs, commercial needs, and public resources. They are typically located at the intersections of arterials and collector roadways where they may be served by existing and planned future transit. With a proportion of civic to economic to residential space at approximately 20:50:30. This type of center would be expected to feature buildings with a moderate height, mass, and scale as height ranges would range under 7 stories depending on the area.*
- Low density and intensity mixed-use developments: designed to be located in rural or suburban communities and function like a neighborhood center with block level grid connectivity and good external connections, limited housing options, few economic resources, and central gathering places. These are the neighborhood main streets which meet the commercial and social needs of the local neighborhood. They are typically between 3 and 5 acres in size and located along the main corridor or near the center of the neighborhood. With a proportion of civic to economic to residential space at approximately 15:35:50. This type of center would be expected to feature buildings with a low height, mass, and scale so as to easily blend with the surrounding areas as height ranges would range under 4 stories depending on the area.*

### Mixed-Use Character Types Recommendation

As the county seeks to better promote the development of mixed-use developments, these character types staff recommends become the basis for the establishment of three mixed-use land use categories. Staff has identified the value of utilizing these three different mixed-use character types to help define how the county expects mixed-use areas to be designed and express the purpose and intent of developments in these areas. Specifically, the establishment of mixed-use land use characters would address a number of challenges the county has had in achieving its mixed-use development goals including:

- Identification of specific locations where mixed-use is required as part of the development project.
- Determination of what development policies and standards are to be applied to proposed mixed-use development projects. Mixed-use development policies and standards should address density and intensity provisions, development incentives, location criteria, civic to economic to residential space ratios, appropriate heights, infrastructure provision, and multi-modal transportation resources.
- Identification of how land uses are to be integrated within the development projects in order to ensure that such development result in a true mixed-use community not a multiple use development area.
- Establishment of an interconnected multi-modal transportation system that provides for the safety of all users and accessibility of all modes.
- Articulation of form and character principles that are to be applied in designated mixed-use areas. The principles should recognize the need to consider the relationships between the building and the street, the building and the block, the block and the surrounding area, and the overall development with the greater community and region.

Staff recommends that the LPA and Sustainability Committee review the three mixed-use character types and provide direction about how the descriptions could be implemented through future policies and land development standards. Specifically, staff recommends that the committee discuss appropriate densities and intensities, land use standards, and design considerations. Such discussions will be the basis of the land use designations to be presented as part of the December 2011 Mixed-Use Land Use Designations Issue Paper.

Questions that should be considered as part this discussion, which will occur at LPA and Sustainability Committee meetings in November and December include:

- Specify locations the are appropriate for:
  - High density and intensity mixed-use developments?
  - Moderate density and intensity mixed-use developments?
  - Low density and intensity mixed-use developments?
- Development standards that address density and intensity provisions, location criteria, civic to economic to residential space ratios, and appropriate heights:
  - High density and intensity mixed-use developments.

- *Moderate density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
  - *Low density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
- *Context-based connectivity standards for:*
  - *High density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
  - *Moderate density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
  - *Low density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
- *Infrastructure provision standards for:*
  - *High density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
  - *Moderate density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
  - *Low density and intensity mixed-use developments.*
- *Types of mixed-use incentives that would effectively promote to development of mixed-use areas.*



**New Horizon 2035: Lee Plan Update  
Local Planning Agency Meeting  
October 24, 2011  
Mixed-Use Discussion Comments**

**Current Practices**

- We got where we are because of land use and zoning
- We are trying to get urban with suburban land uses and zoning
  - Need to remove policies and procedures that require buffering
  - Need to lessen requirements for open space
  - Base open space requirements on overall community area, not site by site
  - Types of uses should be greater in mixed-use areas
  - Site location standards need to be adjusted in mixed-use areas
  - Transportation concurrency prevents mixed-use
  - Infrastructure LOS standards are designed for suburbia
- Site location standards discourage mixed-use
- Level of Service Standards encourage sprawl
  - Comprehensive plan amendments opposed because of inability to meet service standards
- Disconnection between how we use land in areas where there are airports and major roadways
- Existing platted lots and divided ownership pattern is an obstacle
  - Need to make it easier to assemble land
  - Need to use CRAs to help address common community needs
- Current densities are not high enough for mixed-use
  - Maximums and ranges too low
  - Need to establish minimums
- TDR practices not effective for mixed-use as they add an additional cost to project

**Mixed-use Policy Considerations**

- Determine the appropriate design and locations
  - Not everywhere – select locations
  - Ideal locations are situated close to major roadways and very accessible to such roadways
    - Though not necessarily centered along them
- Mixed-use areas should take advantage of vacant strip plaza locations
- Policies and regulations should be flexible and not overly standardized
  - Project will become cost prohibitive
  - People will not want to build
- Utilities manual does not allow mixed-use
- Mixed-use should be an option, but will not attract everyone
  - Protect existing neighborhoods
- Do not establish LOS standards which discourage mixed-use

- Policies should require mixed-use housing near transit
- Mixed-use center policies need to recognize there are different populations who will use the areas
  - Those who live, work, and play in the area
  - Those who live in the area, but work somewhere else
  - Those who work in the area, but live somewhere else
  - Those who will visit the area
    - All populations are needed to support the commercial uses and residential neighborhoods
    - Building and facilities should allow for multiple uses
    - Parking needs should account for how the different populations will use the resources
- Impact fees become prohibitive
- Allow for small projects rather than focusing on big projects
  - Financing big projects up front make project vulnerable to debt

#### Mixed-use Centers Design Considerations

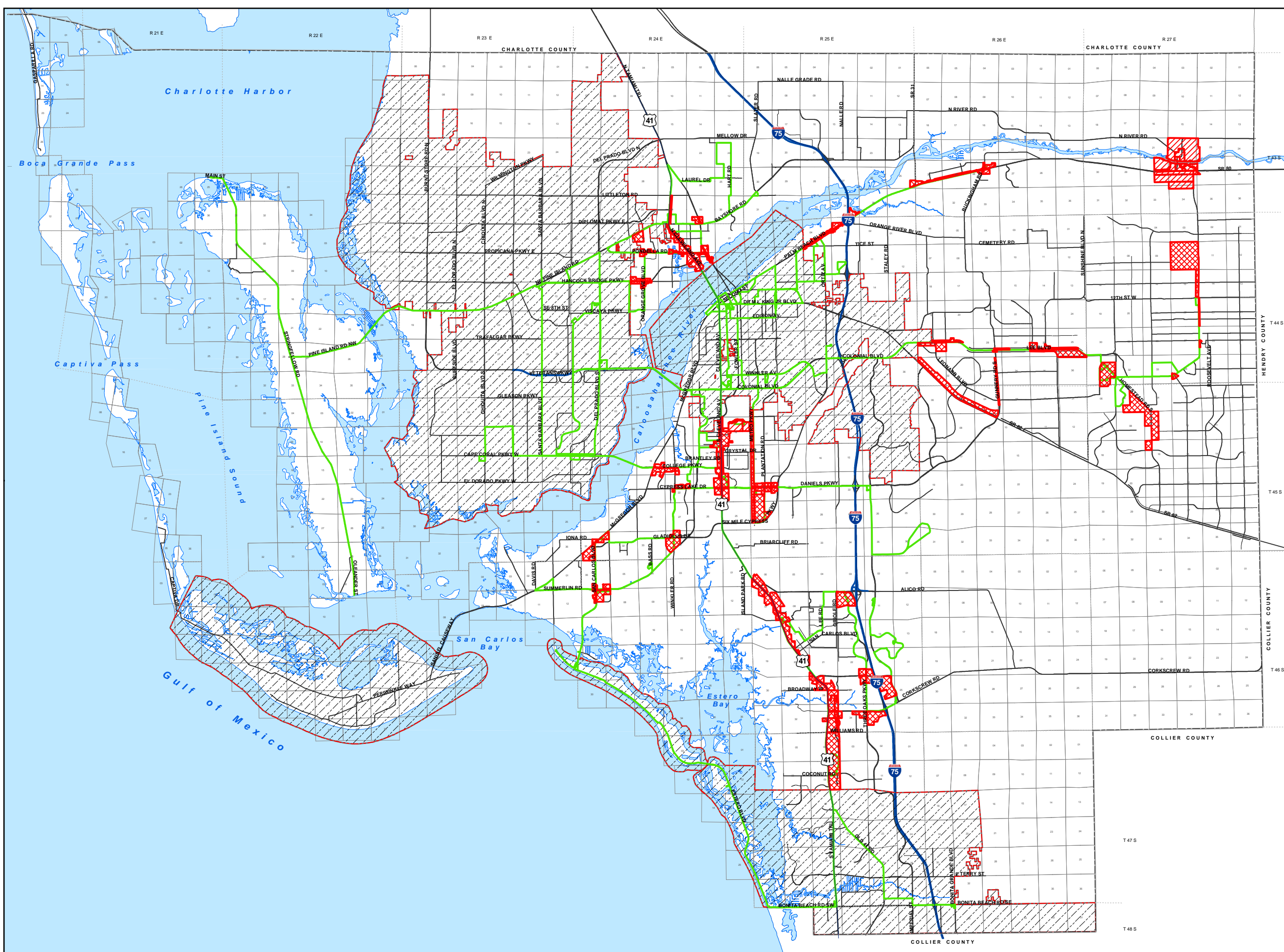
- Locations should:
  - High level of accessibility to major roadways
  - Be situated by intersections near major roadways
  - Consider connectivity to surrounding areas
  - Consider proximate to ports, airports, and major roadways
  - Promote housing near bus routes
- Master plan for mixed-use areas should:
  - Project should rely on step-down uses to transition—not buffer residential areas from surrounding commercial, professional, and other uses
    - Commercial areas should be easily accessible to people coming to the center (visitors) as well as people who work (day-time user) and live (24 hour resident) in the area.
      - If commercial areas are located surrounded only by residential, the commercial will fail from lack of exposure to visitor markets
      - Residential densities in the community need to be high enough to provide internal capture
    - Higher density residential areas should be located within the commercial areas as well as immediately adjacent to the area
    - Moderate density residential single family lots (cottage homes, duplexes, granny flats, etc..) should be located adjacent to higher density residential
    - Lower density estate homes should be located adjacent to moderate density residential areas
    - Parks, civic, and other uses throughout as appropriate
  - Mixed-use centers must encourage greater densities
    - Commercial area viability

- Retail needs high turnover, lots of traffic, and people
    - Transit
      - Minimum: 20-25 du/a + 50,000 sq ft office/professional
  - Allow for a high level of connectivity by:
    - Using roundabouts
    - Including many sidewalks, pedestrian pathways, and bikeways and crosswalks
    - Traffic calming to minimize speed (speed humps, on-street parking, etc...)
    - Transit hubs
      - Partner with suburban centers and churches to use parking areas as park and ride locations
      - Transit nodes provide a captured audience for some retailers
    - High levels of connectivity lead to shorter trips
      - Results in safer, more walkable and bikeable distances
  - Height and densities of buildings should transition from one section to another – step up.
    - Avoid excessively high buildings like downtown Ft Myers
    - Height is a balancing issue
  - Look to integrate big boxed into overall mixed-use design
    - Review places that have done it successfully (City Place, DC, Sarasota, Baldwin Park)
    - Liner buildings
    - Building over parking
    - Parking behind building on alley
    - Fake facades
  - Scale of mixed-use centers and their buildings should be done on a human scale
    - Walkable
    - Promote interaction
    - Comfortable
    - Safe
  - Design needs to address issues of weather
    - Shade
    - Places to sit
  - Design needs to provide safe, walkable and bikeable conditions
    - Protect walker from car
      - Trees that line street
      - On street parking
      - Raised curbs
      - Greenscape between sidewalks and road
    - Bike lanes
- Mixed-use Infrastructure and Public Service Needs/Considerations

- Foster public-private partnerships to provide infrastructure and public services in mixed-use centers
    - County – infrastructure systems and parking
    - Private—alternate impact fees/service contribution system
  - Infrastructure should be planned community-wide, not site by site
  - Stormwater needs more options; ponds not always the best answer
    - Underground
    - Common – make into a community feature
  - LOS issues need to be address
    - A is a deterrent to mixed-use
    - Choices with roadway LOS make conflicts with bike and pedestrian needs
    - Changes to state growth management laws make concurrency dead
    - Roads are only busy 2x a day, ½ the year
      - Rest of time roads are easy to drive on
  - Density/intensity should be tied to infrastructure
    - More efficient and cost effective
  - Height is good for infrastructure costs
- Types of Mixed-use (regional, commercial, neighborhood/rural, and linear)
    - Encourage many neighborhood mixed-use areas
      - More walkable for immediate areas
      - Meet immediate needs of surrounding neighborhoods
      - Not tall – 3-5 stories
      - Can evolve over time to accommodate more people and uses (higher densities and intensities)
    - Community centers
      - Meet needs of colleges, many neighborhoods, multiple uses
      - Take advantage of multi-modal connections
    - Regional centers
      - Employment areas
        - Should be most flexible in uses—light industrial OK
        - Should consider needs of connections to ports
      - Account for major roadways
- Mixed-use Implementation
    - Provide the plan and then look to implement over time
      - Be committed to plan
      - Do not bend to NIMBYism
      - Work with property owners to recognize financial advantages
    - Establish mixed-use FLUM categories
      - Appropriate to type of center

- Some Mixed-use Overlay areas should be required
  - Help address need issue of NIMBYism
  - Education in planning process
- Urban FLUM categories should foster higher densities
  - Minimums, not always maximum
  - Density by meeting certain development standards or criteria or by-right, not TDR
  - Review urban FLUM to identify appropriate increases
- Performance zoning
- Support the plan
  - Once areas identified, process needs to protect against NIMBYism
  - Once mixed-use centers are targeted, process needs to support the plan
- Incentives
  - Incentives can be more administrative than financial
  - Increased building allowances:
    - Density
    - Intensity
    - Type of uses
    - Connectivity
    - Accessibility
  - Decreased building allowance:
    - Buffering
    - Set backs
    - Separation of uses
    - LOS
  - Monetary incentive for different types of developments
    - Different impact fees
    - Mobility fees
  - Target incentives to specific locations
- Use CRAs
  - Parking
  - Water/sewer
  - Parks
  - Other common infrastructure and services
- Use new Compact Communities code
  - Model communities
    - Local communities take ownership of plan
    - Help with infrastructure and transit needs
  - Implement through administrative process
  - Use incentives, not requirements to implement
- Need different type of transit system

- TOD
    - Hub and spoke
    - Local connectors
    - Transit needs pedestrians
  - Infrastructure planning needs to change
- Identified Mixed-use Locations
  - NFM Town Center
    - Residential density needs to be increased
  - Lehigh Acres
    - Most intersections
    - Downtown
    - As identified in plan
  - Daniels Parkway
  - Treeline from Corkscrew to Colonial
    - Many different ones at neighborhood and community scale
    - Especially in airport area
  - Airport area
    - Growth from airport needs to be planned and considered for mixed-use
  - Six Mile – Metro
  - Redevelop existing strip plazas throughout the county
  - Metro/Briarcliff (rural)
  - 78/31 (rural)
  - Alva center (rural)
  - Pondella/41 (regional)
  - Pine Island/41 (regional)
  - Palm Beach I-75 to Cypress (corridor)
  - Diplomat/41
  - College/Winkler (Regional or Community)
    - Connect to Edison College
  - McGregor/College
  - East of I-75 between 82 and Colonial
  - Gateway (82)/Palm Beach Blvd
  - TOD along RxR
  - Metro/Daniels (regional or community TOD)
  - Areas around sport venues



# SPECIAL TREATMENT AREAS

## Mixed Use Overlay

### Legend

- Mixed Use Overlay**
- Mixed Use Overlay
- See Also Specific Community Plan Policies
- Transit Route
- City Limits



Map Generated: April 2011  
 City Limits and Transit Routes  
 current to date of map generation

Adoption Date: May 26, 2007  
 Effective Date: August 13, 2007  
 Latest Effective Date: January 11, 2011  
 Adopted by Ordinance No. 07-15  
 Amended by Ordinance Nos. 09-07,  
 09-08, 10-33