

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR), as required by state law, is to evaluate how well the county's comprehensive plan is performing. The EAR process provides the opportunity for the county to work with community stakeholders to identify Lee County's needs for and concerns about the future, establish a new county vision, and identify planning strategies to achieve that vision in the future. During development of the EAR, the county initiated an extensive community-based effort. This effort focused on allowing stakeholders to provide guidance on two key topics: 1) the issues and opportunities they see facing the county and 2) the future they would like to see for Lee County. In addition to this broad-based community effort, the planning staff conducted several interdepartmental workshops to allow the operational departments within the county to participate in helping to shape a strategic planning response to the county's issues and opportunities.

EAR FOCUS -THE BIG IDEAS

The recommendations in this EAR document are specifically directed toward what Lee County wants to become—a vibrant, livable, sustainable Lee County. In order to achieve this vision, the EAR recommends amendments to the Lee Plan that are intended to create proactive policies that focus on a countywide integrated land use and transportation vision and to reduce the reactive policies that focus primarily on managing and reacting to development.

In summary, the recommendations of the EAR include amending the policies of the Plan to accomplish the following:

1. TAKE CARE OF LEE COUNTY

The comprehensive plan should place a priority on taking care of those things that makes Lee County special and unique. This means prioritizing capital improvement decisions to ensure that Lee County will always be a great place to live, conduct business, and visit.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Reevaluate the priorities of the Capital Improvements Element and capital project expenditures to align with our vision.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Introduce a specific policy that requires capital improvement expenditures to be prioritized as follows:

Take care of what makes Lee County unique and special—natural resource protection; coastal areas and beaches; other priorities.

1. Focus on preserving and enhancing the quality of life in Lee County.
2. Support economic development.
3. Redevelop mixed use places (focus on a catalyst location to showcase the future.
4. New development/growth areas.

2. PROVIDE A CLEAR AND INFORMED DIRECTION FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The Lee Plan should be a clear and accessible document for everyone. This means introducing the right policies targeted to meet the unique needs of a specific local community (one size may not fit all) and introducing explanatory maps and graphics that help to explain key policy direction that is designed to support the community vision.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Introduce planning policies that recognize and reinforce the distinction between urban, suburban, and rural areas and require that these areas be mapped or otherwise identified.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Adopt tools to manage the location of growth such as an urban growth boundary or urban service area.
- Establish standards to limit expansion of new development outside of designated urban areas.
- Introduce the idea of planning transects as a tool to recognize the differences between urban, suburban and rural areas.
- Re-evaluate the density ranges within the urban land use areas.
- Identify tools and incentives that will support this new vision and preferred development patterns including funding, regulatory reform, enhanced TDR program, etc.
- Develop/redevelop mixed use places which provide a unique center for the county's different communities and neighborhoods. Start by focusing on a catalyst location to showcase the county's future vision.

3. MAKE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT A PRIORITY

Jobs, jobs, jobs. The comprehensive plan can help the county both create and implement its economic strategy through specific land use and capital programming actions that include proactive support for targeted job growth.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Develop a strategic update to the county's economic strategic plan and development strategy.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Identify economic development priority locations as part of the land use plan (e.g., Research Diamond) and recognize and reinforce the importance of providing the necessary support for these areas through land use and capital planning policies.
- Expand a proactive strategic initiative for economic development.
- Review and/or update incentives for targeted economic industries and areas.
- Establish clear policies that prioritize commercial agriculture activities as an economic development objective, including the re-evaluation of regulations that limit these activities.

4. CONNECT PEOPLE TO PEOPLE TO PLACES

There are many more options for connecting people today than ever before. The Lee Plan should evolve to focus future transportation activities and park and recreation resources on desired outcomes as well as desired projects by thinking outside the box about how people want to connect to each other and to the businesses, recreation areas, and other places they want or need to visit.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Introduce a tiered street network structure (streets for vehicles, streets for people) based on urban, suburban, and rural characteristics that recognizes the tenets of complete streets as guiding principles.
- Introduce a tiered park network structure (neighborhood parks, public spaces, community facilities, and regional areas) based on urban, suburban, and rural characteristics that recognizes the varied needs for park and recreational resources.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Recognize the tenets of complete streets as guiding principles for all transportation and land use decisions as well as capital expenditures and decisions.
- Prepare a mobility plan to integrate all aspects of transportation form and function.
- Consider the varied needs of park resources when developing communities in order to ensure parks provide for an array of resources and opportunities.
- Recognize the opportunities to utilize parks as a way to connect neighborhoods, commercial areas, and mixed-use centers.
- Recognize, protect, and provide wildlife corridor connections to link together conservation areas.

5. PRESERVE THE UNIQUE IDENTITY OF OUR COMMUNITIES

Neighborhoods and communities are the heart and the energy that help to make Lee County special. The Comprehensive Plan is an important place to formalize the process that the County will continue to use to help these communities help themselves.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Formalize the current community planning programs and the outcomes of these initiatives.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

Use Neighborhood Improvement Districts, MSTU's, MSBUs or other relevant financing tools to support the initiatives and recommendations of the community plans.