

**RESOLUTION 2008- 127**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF NASSAU COUNTY ADOPTING THE EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL REPORT FOR THE NASSAU COUNTY 2010 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN; STATING THE INTENT OF THE BOARD TO AMEND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN BASED UPON RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THE REPORT; AND APPROVING TRANSMITTAL OF THE REPORT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 163.3191, FLORIDA STATUTES.**

**WHEREAS**, the Florida Legislature intends that local planning be a continuous and ongoing process; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of County Commissioners has adopted the Nassau County 2010 Comprehensive Plan, Ordinance No. 2002-06 on March 11, 2002; and

**WHEREAS**, Section 163.3191, Florida Statutes, directs local governments to periodically assess the success or failure of the adopted plan to adequately address changing conditions and state policies and rules; and

**WHEREAS**, Section 163.3191, Florida Statutes, directs local governments to adopt needed amendments to ensure that the plan provides appropriate policy guidance for growth and development; and

**WHEREAS**, the Planning & Zoning Board, acting as the designated Local Planning Agency, has reviewed the Evaluation and Appraisal Report, held an advertised public hearing, provided for participation by the public in the process, and rendered its recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of County Commissioners has reviewed the Evaluation and Appraisal Report, held an advertised public hearing, and provided for comments and public participation in the process in accordance with the requirements of state law and the procedures adopted for public participation in the planning process;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF NASSAU COUNTY, FLORIDA:**

**SECTION 1**

The Board of County Commissioners does hereby adopt the Evaluation and Appraisal Report for the Nassau County 2010 Comprehensive Plan, attached here as Exhibit A.

**SECTION 2**

The Board of County Commissioners does hereby state its intention to amend the Nassau County 2010 Comprehensive Plan (Ordinance No. 2002-06) in accordance with the recommendations contained in the Evaluation and Appraisal Report.

**SECTION 3**

The Board of County Commissioners does hereby approve transmittal of the Evaluation and Appraisal Report to the Department of Community Affairs for the purpose of a sufficiency review in accordance with Section 163.3191, Florida Statutes.

**SECTION 4**

This Resolution shall become effective immediately upon its passage.

**SECTION 5**

All Resolutions and parts of Resolutions in conflict herewith are repealed to the extent of such conflict.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
NASSAU COUNTY, FLORIDA



MARIANNE MARSHALL  
Its: Chairman

Attest as to Chairman's  
Signature:



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JOHN A. CRAWFORD  
Its: Ex-Officio Clerk

Approved as to form by the  
Nassau County Attorney



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DAVID A. HALLMAN  
County Attorney

# **2010 Comprehensive Plan Evaluation and Appraisal Report**

**Nassau County, Florida**

**Adopted July 14, 2008**



**Prepared by:  
Nassau County Growth Management Department  
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Doug McDowell, Strategic Planner**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Evaluation and Appraisal Report is the first step in the process for updating the comprehensive plan. Chapter 163, Florida Statutes mandates that the County periodically evaluate the level of success of its Comprehensive Plan through the preparation of an Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) once every seven years. This review of the Comprehensive Plan affords an opportunity to identify changes or amendments that are needed to update the plan including reformulated objectives, policies or standards. This report will serve as a guide for the EAR-based amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to be adopted in 2008-2009. The planning horizon will be updated from 2010 to 2030.

A substantial amount of development has occurred in Nassau County since the last EAR was adopted by the County Commission in 2000. Nassau County is part of the Northeast Florida Region which includes Clay, Duval, Nassau, Baker, and St. Johns counties. While Jacksonville (i.e. Duval County) remains the center of population in the region, Nassau and the other surrounding counties are growing relatively faster. Population growth in Clay, St. Johns and Nassau Counties is predicted to outpace the traditional regional center of Jacksonville between 2010 and 2030.

While opportunities for infill development in Fernandina Beach and the unincorporated areas of Amelia Island still exist, the island's land development patterns are now largely settled. The Yulee area has replaced Amelia Island as the focal point of new growth in the County. This area, roughly defined as the eastern portion of the County between the Amelia River and I-95, is where the greatest amount of new development has taken place in the past seven years.

The areas of the County west of I-95 remains mostly rural, but new development planned within the County and in the surrounding jurisdictions of Jacksonville, Baker County and Camden County, Georgia indicate that certain areas in the western part of the county will be increasingly subject to urban development pressures in the near future.

In order to meet the challenges of managing growth in the next 20 years, the County identified ten major local issues to be addressed in the EAR. The issues were identified through a series of meetings with public agencies, interdepartmental staff review, and public hearings conducted with the Local Planning Agency. The issues were further refined at the scoping meeting with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The issues that emerged represent common themes and concerns heard from a variety of stakeholders:

- Issue 1: Update the future land use plan
- Issue 2: Strengthen of long-range transportation planning efforts
- Issue 3: Promote economic development
- Issue 4: Protect and expand land designated for job generating land uses
- Issue 5: Preserve rural lifestyle choices
- Issue 6: Preserve environmental resources
- Issue 7: Promote a greater diversity of housing types and prices
- Issue 8: Enhance intergovernmental coordination
- Issue 9: Create a financially sustainable community
- Issue 10: Create a first-class parks and recreation system

Each of these issues has been analyzed in depth and specific recommendations for adding, deleting or amending the Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the Comprehensive Plan have been made to address each issue in Parts 3 and 4 of the EAR.

In analyzing each of the ten major issues, it was apparent that the issues and their solutions were interconnected on many levels. The analysis of the ten major issues has yielded six broad, yet tangible, goals that the County needs to achieve in order to manage growth effectively in the next 20 years:

### **1. A Future Land Use Map that is a Useful Tool for Managing Growth**

To accommodate future population growth, Nassau County must set aside sufficient vacant land to allow for residential, commercial and industrial development, provide services in the most efficient manner possible, and protect the natural environment. The density and intensities set in the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) are an influential component of the County's growth management strategy. By designating areas for higher or lower densities or intensities of use, growth can be directed and infrastructure planned to serve the expected population.

The County's adopted 2010 Future Land Use Map series no longer reflects an accurate depiction of the amount of land required to accommodate anticipated growth, the character of developed and undeveloped land, and the availability of water supplies, public facilities, and services. The FLUM map series should be updated to reflect the anticipated growth of the County through the planning period of 2010-2030, and land use categories should reflect a transition of densities and intensities that clearly define and separate urban and rural areas.

### **2. A Land Development Code that Creates More Efficient Development Patterns**

Encouraging denser, more compact and more concentrated development with the right mix of uses in certain locations creates better scale economies and reduces delivery costs for public and private goods and services. While the Comprehensive Plan guides growth towards this general goal, the Plan's strategies may not be sufficient to achieve real cost-saving results. Options that may be considered include: identifying areas where FLUM designations might be changed to increase maximum and add minimum densities; using methods to redirect growth to areas that can support the impacts of growth with adequate public facilities; and planning for a more mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development.

Recognizing the relationship between transportation and land use is essential to understanding the problems of traffic congestion. Enhancing land use planning decisions is a key to positively affecting the transportation network. The County needs to encourage master planning and design concepts that encourage internal capture of generated trips, pedestrian-friendly streets with on-street parking, potential transit opportunities. Objectives and policies should reinforce the need for strategies to address long range transportation issues through the creation of long range area-wide master plans that are examples of principled land use decisions which promote an interconnected roadway network serving a variety of complementary uses.

Promoting mixed-use projects and incorporating effective traditional neighborhood development (TND) and "village center" design concepts into its Comprehensive Plan will lead to more sustainable and cost-effective development for the County as a whole. Such development practices can significantly reduce the costs of infrastructure. In the long term, encouraging mixed use and transit-oriented developments preserves valuable open space, expands housing choices improves the County's jobs/housing balance, and extends the timetable for the community's eventually build out.

### **3. A Coordinated Economic Development Program**

Economic development is a high priority issue in Nassau County that is linked with several of the other key issues explored as part of this EAR. While residents of frequently cite "quality of life" as a benefit of living in Nassau County, they also cited shortcomings such as long commute times and traffic congestion, both of which are directly related to a lack of high-paying jobs within the county. The need for specific incentives and policies that support economic development has been repeatedly asserted by community stakeholders throughout the issue identification process.

The key to any effective economic development program will be a formal evaluation of tools that could benefit the county and effective interagency coordination. Barriers to economic development in Nassau County include an inadequate transportation network, a lack of "shovel ready" sites for job-creating uses and lack of a public investment strategy. Interagency coordination and effective participation by community stakeholders are essential to overcoming these barriers. One recommended tool that Nassau County may use is the adoption of an Economic Development Element into the comprehensive plan. Such an element is optional, but has the advantage of providing a central policy statement for economic development in the County.

The County should increase public-private partnership activities with the County's local and regional economic development organizations, business organizations and major landowners. Key partners should include the Nassau County Economic Development

Board, the Jacksonville Cornerstone Development Partnership, the Chambers of Commerce, and Rayonier (The County's largest private landowner). The County's economic development approach, coordination and collaboration activities should be formulated into a set of goals, objectives and policies. This activity can be accomplished, in part, by the creation of the optional Economic Development Element in the Comprehensive Plan.

Economic development efforts are a community responsibility, and communities that succeed are those which develop and adopt a shared vision. Today, there is a lack of shared vision for what economic development means to Nassau County and the community. The County and its economic development partners continue to work cooperatively, but until the community can develop and fund an expanded long-term economic development program, the County will not attain its potential.

#### **4. A Land Acquisition Program for Recreation and Conservation**

Nassau County has an extensive network of waterways, wetlands and unique natural features. Protection of these unique natural features is seen as critical for maintaining the vitality and unique character of the county, and the Northeast Florida region.

As the County grows, additional pressure will be placed upon vacant and undeveloped lands which are in close proximity to natural and environmental resources. The County's vacant and undeveloped lands accommodate a variety of residential lifestyles, commercial, industrial, and recreation needs to accommodate a growing population. Due to the needs of an expanding community, the unincorporated areas of the County are receiving the majority of development. While significant resources have been protected throughout the county, the preservation of natural resources demands its own focus in order for these areas to remain important to the long-term environmental and economic viability of the community.

Just as growing communities need to upgrade and expand their transportation and utilities infrastructure, they also need to upgrade and expand their "green infrastructure" - the network of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas, which sustain clean air, water, and natural resources and enrich their citizens' quality of life.

The County should develop a long-range, financially feasible plan for the identification and acquisition of environmental resources. The plan may include: an inventory of countywide environmental resources; a priority ranking and criteria of areas for permanent preservation; a funding approach to accommodate land acquisition; coordination and partnering efforts; and, an implementation program. Future land acquisitions should also be coordinated with the goals of a Recreation Master Plan.

Partnerships should be maintained with organizations such as Florida Communities Trust, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and other organizations to provide the necessary funds to implement these efforts.

Land Development Regulations should be adopted that require new development to be reviewed for the establishment and acquisition of natural greenways where they may provide links between nature reserves, parks, cultural and historic sites, natural wetlands, beaches and other water bodies.

## **5. A Recreation Master Plan**

Parks and recreation facilities not only enrich the lives of those in the community, but also can improve the aesthetics of neighborhoods, increase property values, generate tourism, and enhance the overall image of the County. Parks and recreation facilities create opportunities for social gathering places, intramural and organized athletics, and social services for the elderly and disabled, and provide a stable environment for the physical and mentally disabled. Parks also provide open space for wildlife habitat and preserve sensitive ecosystems threatened by development.

The County acknowledges the need to phase in parks and recreation facilities in order to keep pace with its population growth. The County should establish a dedicated Parks and Recreation Department and prepare a Recreation Master Plan in cooperation with appropriate agencies to guide the development and maintenance of County parks and recreation facilities.

The Recreation Master Plan should analyze level of service standards and inventory the current conditions of the County's parks system. It should recommend guidelines for the size, timing and phasing of parks in the County by using population trends and projections. The plan should include criteria for, and priority ranking of, lands for acquisition and development. It should consider existing and potential funding sources as well as programs for implementation and capital improvements for future parks and recreation facilities.

As discussed above, the acquisition of land should be an immediate priority in order to provide future parks and recreation facilities. The Recreation Master Plan should be the basis for a long-range financially feasible plan for the identification and acquisition of land for recreational purposes.

## **6. An Active Role in the Region**

In its first annual report, The Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida notes that Florida's population is projected to increase from approximately 18 million to 27.5 million over the next 25 years, and double in 50 years. Unless such growth is planned wisely, suburban sprawl, transportation congestion, coastal densification, habitat fragmentation, and reduced agricultural land will be the inevitable result of this population increase.

As mentioned previously, population growth in Clay, St. Johns and Nassau Counties is predicted to outpace the traditional regional center of Jacksonville in the next 20 years. As population shifts to these areas, greater consensus and cooperation are essential at all levels of government in order to implement regional policies and practices that will support economic vitality and livability of the Northeast Florida region.

Many of the issues facing Nassau County today and in the foreseeable future will require a higher level of intergovernmental coordination. The County's rate of growth and development places a great deal of pressure on the delivery of core public services and infrastructure to residents. Effective intergovernmental coordination plays a crucial role in the County's overall approach to meeting existing and future challenges.

Intergovernmental coordination activities by their nature are ongoing, and formal or informal activities require qualified staff, support systems and processes for successful implementation. The County needs to define itself within the Northeast Florida region and take an active role in regional planning efforts. This will ensure that while the County and the region continue to grow, the quality of life that stimulates this growth will be sustained.

# **PART 1**

## **Introduction**



*Old Florida Welcome Sign, U.S. 1*

## **Summary**

Part 1 is an introduction to the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR). It contains descriptions of the format, processes and requirements of the EAR, including the process for identifying the County's major issues and the public participation process taken to prepare the EAR. It also contains a discussion of the relevant changes to the State Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 163 F.S., the Florida Statutes, the minimum criteria contained in Chapter 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code, and the Strategic Regional Policy Plan since the County's last EAR was adopted in 2000.

## **Background**

The State of Florida's local government comprehensive planning law, Chapter 163, Part 2, Florida Statutes (F.S), requires that all counties and municipalities throughout Florida maintain a long-range comprehensive planning program and that comprehensive planning be a continuous and ongoing process. The Comprehensive Plan is one of the primary growth management planning tools for the County, containing policy guidelines for the control of growth and maintaining quality of life. The Plan is made up of nine specific elements: Future Land Use, Traffic Circulation, Housing, Public Facilities (includes sanitary sewer, stormwater drainage, potable water, natural groundwater recharge), Coastal Management, Conservation, Open Space and Recreation, Intergovernmental Coordination, and Capital Improvements. A Public School Facilities Element will be included by June 2008. Together, they provide a comprehensive look at the issues facing the County, and plan for future growth.

The Legislature mandates that the County periodically evaluate the level of success of its Plan in adequately addressing changing conditions and reflecting changes in State policy on planning and growth management. That mandate is carried out through the required preparation of an Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) of the Comprehensive Plan once every seven years.

The Evaluation and Appraisal Report is the first step in the process for updating the comprehensive plan. This overall review of the Comprehensive Plan affords an opportunity to identify changes or amendments that are needed to update the plan including reformulated objectives, policies or standards. The last EAR was adopted by the County Commission in October 2000.

In 1998, the legislature amended Chapter 163, Part 2 of the Florida Statutes to incorporate new criteria for Evaluation and Appraisal Reports. Prior to 1998, the requirements of the EAR were uniform. Every local government in the State of Florida had similar Evaluation and Appraisal Reports in terms of contents. The effect of the 1998 legislation was to allow each local government to evaluate only those major issues that affect its ability to achieve its goals.

The contents of the EAR document contain the following information as required by Section 163.3191(2), F.S.:

- Population growth and changes in land area, including annexation.

- The extent of vacant and developable land.
- The financial feasibility of implementing the comprehensive plan and of providing needed infrastructure to achieve and maintain adopted level-of-service standards and sustain concurrency management systems through the capital improvements element, as well as the ability to address infrastructure backlogs and meet the demands of growth on public services and facilities.
- The location of existing development in relation to the location of development as anticipated in the original plan.
- An identification of the major issues and, where pertinent, the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of these issues.
- Relevant changes to the state comprehensive plan, the requirements of Chapter 163, Florida Statutes, the minimum criteria contained in chapter 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code, and the appropriate strategic regional policy plan.
- An assessment of whether the plan objectives within each element, as they relate to major issues, have been achieved, and whether unforeseen or unanticipated changes in circumstances have resulted in problems or opportunities with respect to major issues identified in each element.
- A brief assessment of successes and shortcomings related to each element of the plan.
- Identification of any actions or corrective measures, including whether plan amendments are anticipated to address the major issues identified and analyzed in the report. Such identification shall include, as appropriate, new population projections, new revised planning timeframes, a revised future conditions map or map series, an updated capital improvements element, and any new and revised goals, objectives, and policies for major issues identified within each element.
- A summary of the public participation program and activities undertaken by the County in preparing the EAR.
- An assessment of the success or failure of coordinating the future land use map and associated planned residential development with public schools and their capacities; and establishing appropriate population projections and planning and siting of new schools jointly with the school board.
- An assessment of the comprehensive plan with respect to the water management district's regional water supply plan, including revisions of the potable water element to include a work plan, covering at least a 10-year period, for building water supply facilities to serve existing and projected development for which the County is responsible. Nassau County is not located in a Priority Water Resource Caution Area.
- An evaluation of whether any past reduction in land use density within the coastal high-hazard area impairs the property rights of current residents when redevelopment occurs.

- An assessment of the extent to which changes are needed to develop a common methodology for measuring impacts on transportation facilities for the purpose of implementing its concurrency management system in coordination with the municipalities and counties, as appropriate pursuant to Sec. 163.3180(10), F.S.

## **Organization of the EAR**

The EAR is divided into six (6) parts:

- Part 1 - Introduction
- Part 2 - Community Assessment
- Part 3 - Local Major Issues
- Part 4 - Assessment of Objectives and Policies
- Part 5 - Special Topics
- Part 6 - Additional Recommendations

Part 1 contains the format of the EAR; and a description of the EAR process and requirements, including the process for identifying the County's major issues and the public participation process taken to prepare the EAR. It also contains a discussion of the relevant changes to the State Comprehensive Plan, Chapter 163 F.S., the Florida Statutes, the minimum criteria contained in Chapter 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code, and the Strategic Regional Policy Plan since the County's last EAR was adopted in 2000.

Part 2 summarizes the changes that have occurred in the County since the adoption of the last EAR.

Part 3 presents an evaluation of the ten (10) major issues identified by the Nassau County and agreed upon by DCA and includes recommendations to address each issue.

Part 4 provides an assessment of key objectives and policies in each of the nine (9) elements of the County's Comprehensive Plan and how they relate to the ten major issues.

Part 5 includes a discussion of special topics the County is required to address in the EAR per the requirements of Sec. 163.3191(2), Florida Statutes.

Part 6 provides additional recommendations for the updating of the Comprehensive Plan, including universal changes in the format and style of the Plan, maps to be added to the Plan, updates to the data and analysis required for the Plan, a summary of recommended additions or revisions to the Land Development Regulations, and a summary of recommended supplemental plans or studies.

## **Public Participation**

The Planning & Zoning Board serves as the Local Planning Agency (LPA) for Nassau County. The LPA was updated on the procedural and substantive issues associated with the EAR at the public meetings held on November 6, 2007 and February 26, 2008. Similar updates were given to the Board of County Commissioners at public hearings conducted on June 20, 2007 and February 20, 2008. A voluntary scoping meeting with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC), representatives of Baker County and the City of Jacksonville, and other agencies was held on September 12, 2007 at the Northeast Florida Regional Council to assist in the creation of the list of major issues. This list of major issues was presented to, and approved by the LPA on August 20, 2007. Preceding the public hearing noticed pursuant to Sec. 125.66(4)(b)(2), the LPA conducted a public involvement meeting on April 1, 2008 to review Parts 1-3 of the EAR, and the procedure, schedule and content of the EAR.

In June 2007, the County engaged the consulting firm of MGT of America to begin a one year-long process to formulate a County-wide vision plan. Vision 2032 will address issues related to the future growth and development of the County as a whole, but will also focus on the specific needs of areas within the County. The visioning process will include at least eight (8) public workshops in locations throughout the county held between February 18 and May 20, 2008. Nassau County sent a brochure by mail to 37,000 known addresses in the County and published a series of full page advertisements to advise residents of the date, time and location of these public involvement meetings.

Vision 2032 will conform to the requirements of a community vision that may be adopted into the County's comprehensive plan pursuant to Sec. 163.3167(11) F.S. It is anticipated that the vision plan will be completed by August 2008. Although the vision will not be completed until nearly nine months after the EAR is due, the County has used as much information as possible that has been gathered in the first part of the visioning process in the creation of the EAR. It is the intent of the County to utilize the complete vision to guide the creation and adoption of the EAR-based amendments which will occur throughout 2009. A complete scope of work for the visioning can be found in Appendix E.

Following the completion of the Vision Plan, an implementation schedule will be developed by County staff and the Local Planning Agency (LPA) that will detail the various actions needed to implement the recommendations of the EAR. This will include a summary of the actions required, the agencies responsible for implementation, a preliminary schedule or timetable for implementation, and potential funding sources if appropriate.

### **Identification of the Major Local Issues**

A key part of the EAR process is identification of key issues facing The County. The issues were identified through a series of meetings with public agencies, interdepartmental staff review, and the public hearing conducted with the Local Planning Agency on August 20, 2007. The following issues emerged and represent common themes and concerns heard from a variety of stakeholders. The issues were further refined at the scoping meeting with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA ) and other agencies held on September 12, 2007 at the Northeast Florida Regional Council. A

Letter of Understanding was sent by the Department of Community Affairs to the Nassau County on November 30, 2007, agreeing with the list of major issues and the scope of work outlined by the County (see Appendix D). The County identified ten major local issues to be addressed in the EAR. These issues are summarized on the following pages.

## **Summary of Major Local Issues**

### **Issue 1- Update the future land use plan**

The County's adopted 2010 Future Land Use Map series no longer reflects an accurate depiction of the amount of land required to accommodate anticipated growth, the character of developed and undeveloped land, and the availability of water supplies, public facilities, and services. The map series should be updated to reflect the anticipated growth of the County through the planning period of 2010-2030, and land use categories should be re-defined to reflect a transition of densities and intensities that clearly define and separate urban and rural areas. The map series should also incorporate the Coastal High Hazard Area, now defined as the Category 1 storm surge zone, and updated hurricane evacuation times should be adopted into the plan. Terms such as density, intensity and net and gross area need to be defined in the plan.

### **Issue 2- Strengthen long-range transportation planning efforts**

Traffic congestion is a major concern in the County. A1A/SR200 remains the primary corridor through the county. A lack of transportation connectivity within the county is a major concern. The need to continue and improve long-range transportation planning efforts is seen as a key issue in the County. Alternative corridors need to be identified. Alternative modes of transportation for both people and goods need to be investigated. Planning should be coordinated among a wide range of participants at both the County and regional levels, including the Local Planning Agency, First Coast MPO, and FDOT.

### **Issue 3- Promote economic development**

Economic development is a high priority issue in the County that is linked with several of the other key issues on this list. High out-of-county commuter rates contribute to traffic congestion, and also reflect a lack of high-paying jobs in the county. The County needs to prepare for transitions in its economic base as development patterns in the County mature. The County should consider the adoption of an Economic Development element to the comprehensive plan.

### **Issue 4- Protect and expand land designated for job generating land uses**

The County has a relatively low proportion of land designated for certain job-generating land uses, especially industrial and business park -type uses. The single industrial FLUM designation creates incompatible uses and contains restrictive development standards that discourage industrial development in the County.

### **Issue 5- Preserve rural lifestyle choices**

While eastern portions of the County are transitioning to more urban uses, much of the county has a distinctive rural character. Balancing new development with the rural lifestyle desired by residents is an important goal for the County's future.

**Issue 6- Preserve environmental resources**

The County is blessed with an extensive network of waterways, wetlands and unique natural areas. Protection of these unique natural features is seen as critical for maintaining the unique character of the county, which is economically essential to the County for tourism and maintaining the quality of life that attracts residents and businesses. Protection of environmental resources is also essential to water quality and the health of Northeast Florida.

**Issue 7- Promote a greater diversity of housing types and prices**

The need for a wider range of housing types and price points is an issue that could prove critical in the future. Given rising home prices, affordable housing options are increasingly harder to find within the county. Incentives tied to construction and duration of affordable and workforce housing, including mixed-use projects, should be investigated. Incentives tied to lower maintenance, energy efficient housing should also be investigated.

**Issue 8- Enhance intergovernmental coordination**

The County should coordinate planning and service delivery more closely with the municipalities within the County (Fernandina Beach, Callahan, and Hilliard), including designating areas for possible future municipal incorporation in the County's future land use plan. The County will coordinate the creation of a school concurrency system with the Nassau County School District, which will include the adoption of a new Schools element into the Comprehensive Plan. Also, the County should coordinate more closely with regional and state agencies, public utilities, and other entities that influence growth, to find regional solutions to planning issues in Northeast Florida.

**Issue 9- Create a financially sustainable community**

The County should establish development standards and reasonable fees that will allow new growth to pay for the impacts it creates. The comprehensive plan needs to articulate strategies and options that foster cooperative approaches between the private sector and other governmental service providers to find financially feasible infrastructure funding.

**Issue 10- Create a first-class parks and recreation system**

As the County continues to grow, the need for more recreation facilities and a greater variety of recreation facilities will grow as well. The County should take the opportunity now to plan a first class system of active and passive recreational facilities throughout the county.

## **Changes in Growth Management Law**

The EAR process requires that the County address relevant changes to the requirements of Chapter 163, Florida Statutes, the minimum criteria contained in Rule 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code, the State Comprehensive Plan (Sec. 187.201, F.S.), and the appropriate Strategic Regional Policy Plan since the adoption of the original plan or the most recent evaluation and appraisal report update amendments. Several important regulatory changes have occurred at the state and regional levels since completion of the last EAR in 2000, and these changes may need to be reflected in the EAR-based amendments. In some important cases, such as the recent requirements for adoption of Schools Elements to the comprehensive plan or the adoption of the new Coastal High Hazard Area as part of the FLUM series, the amendments to the Comprehensive Plan will need to be adopted far in advance of the EAR-based amendments.

### **Statutory and Rule Changes**

Comprehensive plans must address all current statutory and rule requirements. The EAR presents an opportunity to ensure that the plan is up to date with current statutory and rule requirements.

Appendix A presents a summary of changes to Chapter 163, Part II, F.S., and Rule 9J-5, F.A.C. from 1999 through 2007 in a table format. The changes are summarized by year and include the corresponding citations. The tables, which provide a determination of consistency with the County's Comprehensive Plan, indicate which of the new citations have already been addressed in the Comprehensive Plan, which will require future plan amendments and which are not applicable to the Nassau County.

### **State Comprehensive Plan**

The State Comprehensive Plan was amended in 1999 by Chapter 99-378 to include policies related to urban policy in the State Comprehensive Plan (see Appendix B). Goal 17, which was previously titled "Downtown Revitalization", was revised and entitled "Urban and Downtown Revitalization". The goal was revised to more broadly refer to urban areas generally, rather than downtown areas specifically.

The education goals and policies 187.201(1) of the State Comprehensive Plan were repealed by Chapter 2002-387 in 2002.

The County's Comprehensive Plan is currently consistent with State Comprehensive Plan. The EAR based amendments may include refinements to the Goals, Objectives,

and Policies that further its consistency with these added state Comprehensive Plan policies.

**Northeast Florida Strategic Regional Policy Plan**

There have been no significant changes to the Northeast Florida Strategic Policy Plan since completion of the County's last EAR in 2000.

# **PART 2**

## **Community Assessment**



*Yulee High School Graduation, Class of 2007*

## **Summary**

Part 2 is an assessment of population and land use data that summarizes the changes that have occurred in the County since the adoption of the last EAR. Part 2 also addresses internal and external economic factors that have influenced the growth of the County since the last EAR (2000) and that are likely to influence growth in the future.

This assessment was created using the best data available from a variety of sources, including the Nassau County Growth Management Department, Nassau County Property Appraiser, the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC), and the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR).

## **Background**

Nassau County is a thriving coastal county located in the far northeastern corner of Florida that has grown and prospered for more than 150 years. The County has experienced substantial growth in the last half-century; from less than 18, 000 people in 1960 to approximately 69,671 people today. The County is bordered to the north by Camden County, Georgia, the south by Duval County (i.e. the City of Jacksonville); the west by Charlton County, Georgia and Baker County; and to the east by the Atlantic Ocean. There are three incorporated municipalities within the county. Fernandina Beach, the official county seat, is the largest. It is located on the northern end of Amelia Island. Hilliard and Callahan are small municipalities located in the northwest and southwest areas of the county respectively.

*Table 1 Historical Census Count for Nassau County 1830-2006*

<i>1830</i>	<i>1840</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1860</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1880</i>	<i>1890</i>	<i>1900</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1920</i>
1,511	1,892	2,146	3,644	4,247	6,635	8,294	9,654	10,525	11,340
<i>1930</i>	<i>1940</i>	<i>1950</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005*</i>	<i>2006**</i>
9,375	10,826	12,811	17,189	20,626	32,894	43,941	57,663	65,759	68,188

\*Est. 4/01/2005

\*\*Est. 4/01/2006

Source: Bureau of Economic and Business Research (B.E.B.R.), University of Florida

## **Changes in Land Area**

At the time of adoption of the 2000 Evaluation and Appraisal Report, unincorporated Nassau County consisted of approximately 617 square miles, out of a total area of approximately 650 square miles. Since October 2000, the three municipalities annexed approximately 226 acres of land, decreasing the unincorporated area less than one square mile. The current County and municipal boundaries are depicted on Maps 1 and 2. Appendix C provides a list of the annexations in this time period.

## **Population Growth**

The current estimated population of Nassau County is 69,671. As shown in Table 2, this represents an increase in population of 20% since 2000, when the population was estimated at 57,663. The County's population is expected to increase by 7% to 74,900 by the year 2010 and by 33% to 104,800 by the year 2030.

Table 3 shows the percent change between the 2007 population estimate and the 2030 projection for Nassau County and its municipalities. Fernandina Beach remains the most populated municipality and Callahan the least. The majority of the County's population is located in the unincorporated portion of Nassau County.

*Table 2 Population Estimates for Nassau County 2000-2006*

	July 1* 2000	Estimate April 1* 2001	Percent Change	Estimate April 1* 2002	Percent Change	Estimate April 1* 2003	Percent Change	Estimate April 1* 2004	Percent Change	Estimate April 1* 2005	Percent Change	Estimate April 1* 2006	Percent Change	Percent Change from July 1, 2000-April 1, 2006
Nassau County	57,663	59,409	3.03	61,094	2.84	63,062	3.22	65,016	3.10	65,759	1.14	68,188	3.69	18.25
Callahan	962	1,007	4.68	1,018	1.09	1,023	0.49	1,141	11.53	1,274	11.66	1,345	5.57	39.81
Fernandina Beach	10,549	10,686	1.30	10,963	2.59	11,361	3.63	11,541	1.58	11,621	0.69	11,815	1.67	12.00
Hilliard	2,702	2,738	1.33	2,741	0.11	2,748	0.26	2,853	3.82	2,920	2.35	2,964	1.51	9.70
Unincorporated	43,450	44,577	2.59	46,372	4.03	47,930	3.36	49,481	3.24	49,944	0.94	52,064	4.24	19.83

Source: Nassau County Growth Management Department

*Table 3 Population Projections for Nassau County 2007-2030*

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2015	2020	2030
Nassau County	69,671	71,256	73,020	74,900	83,300	92,000	104,800
Callahan	1,412	1,487	1,569	1,658	1,976	2,322	3,135
Fernandina Beach	11,921	12,076	12,209	12,331	12,824	13,337	14,404
Hilliard	3,011	3,060	3,112	3,174	3,498	3,883	4,659
Unincorporated	53,326	54,633	56,130	57,737	65,001	72,457	82,601

Source: Nassau County Growth Management Department

*Table 4 B.E.B.R. Population Projections for Nassau County 2010-2030*

	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Low	67,200	70,800	73,300	74,600	75,100
Medium	74,900	83,300	91,200	98,200	104,800
High	82,200	95,900	110,000	124,400	139,400

Source: Bureau of Economic and Business Research (B.E.B.R.), University of Florida

## **Location of Existing Development**

As shown on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) (Map 3), and the distribution of land uses Table 5 below, the County is primarily rural in nature, with a moderate amount of commercial land. Residential and vacant land is found throughout the County, both east and west of I-95.

*Table 5 Land Use Distribution*

FLUM Category	2000 Acres	sq mi	%	Gain	Loss	2007 Acres	sq mi	%
Agriculture (AG)	176,695	276.1	42.50%	64474.28	3177.58	237,992	371.9	57.24%
Commercial (COM)	2,245	3.5	0.54%	117.00	14.45	2,348	3.7	0.56%
Conservation I & II (CSV)	106,296	166.1	25.56%	0.00	67.80	106,228	166.0	25.55%
Conservation (CSV)	1,928	3.0	0.46%	0.00	0.00	1,928	3.0	0.46%
High Density Residential (HDR)	642	1.0	0.15%	75.25	81.07	636	1.0	0.15%
Industrial (IND)	899	1.4	0.22%	20.23	57.99	861	1.3	0.21%
Low Density Residential (LDR)	19,373	30.3	4.66%	3616.07	140.77	22,848	35.7	5.49%
Medium Density Residential (MDR)	17,628	27.5	4.24%	298.20	183.05	17,743	27.7	4.27%
Public Buildings & Grounds(PBG)(OPB incl.)	977	1.5	0.23%	295.00	0.29	1,272	2.0	0.31%
Recreation (REC)	1,047	1.6	0.25%	57.67	127.10	978	1.5	0.24%
Rural Residential (RR)	67,044	104.8	16.12%	0.00	67044.00	0	0.0	0.00%
Multi-Use (MU)	0	0.0	0.00%	1940.40	0.00	1,940	3.0	0.47%
Incorporated Areas	11,449	17.9	2.75%	226.20	0.00	11,676	18.2	2.81%
Water	9,347	14.6	2.25%	0.00	0.00	9,347	14.6	2.25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>415,797</b>	<b>649.7</b>				<b>415,797</b>	<b>649.7</b>	

Source: Nassau County Growth Management Department

Commercial uses are mainly clustered in commercial “corridors”, located along major roadways, such as A1A/S.R.200. The small amounts of industrial land are located on the north side of A1A/S.R.200 in Yulee, southwest of Callahan in the Crawford industrial park, and at the very north end of Amelia Island at the mouth of Egan’s Creek.

A substantial amount of development has occurred in eastern Nassau County since adoption of the 2000 EAR. While opportunities for infill development in Fernandina Beach and the unincorporated areas of Amelia Island exist, the island’s land development patterns are largely settled. The Yulee area, roughly defined as the eastern portion of the County between the Amelia River and I-95, is where the greatest amount of new development has taken place in the past seven years.

Amendments to the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) are made well in advance of vertical development activity. Because of this, FLUM amendments can serve as an indicator of future development trends in a county. FLUM amendments adopted by Nassau County between October 2000 and October 2007 are listed in Table 6. These amendments reflect the increasing trend of urbanization in Nassau County and conversion of traditionally rural areas to suburban uses.

Table 6 FLUM Amendments 2000-2007

File #	Ord.#	FROM	TO	Acres	Dist.
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	AG	PBG	160	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	AG	OPB	80	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	AG	LDR	43	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	AG	LDR	655.00	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	AG	LDR	365.00	Hilliard
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	AG	LDR	223.00	Hilliard
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	COM	MDR	5	Amelia Is
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	HDR	MDR	50.00	Amelia Is
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	IND	REC	10	Amelia Is
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	LDR	REC	20	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	LDR	REC	27	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	LDR	PBG	25.00	Callahan
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	MDR	IND	14.48	Amelia Is
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	MDR	PBG	30	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	RR	MDR	239	Yulee
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	RR	LDR	1486.00	Hilliard
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	RR	LDR	839.00	Callahan
2000 EAR-Based	2002-06	RR	AG	64466.82	N/A
CPA00-004	2001-06	LDR	COM	4.07	Callahan
CPA01-003	2001-14	RR	COM	10	Yulee
CPA01-004	2001-24	MDR	COM	1.9	Yulee
CPA01-005	2001-30	LDR	HDR	9.5	Yulee
CPA01-006	2001-32	LDR	HDR	9.9	Yulee
CPA02-004	2002-15	REC	MDR	4.20	Amelia Is
CPA02-006	2002-16	IND	HDR	16.00	Yulee
CPA02-007	2002-26	RR	LDR	3.18	Callahan
CPA02-008	2002-27	MDR	COM	1.45	Yulee
CPA02-009	2002-25	MDR	COM	1.98	Amelia Is
CPA02-011	2002-39	MDR	COM	1.20	Amelia Is
CPA02-012	2002-45	MDR	COM	5.43	Yulee
CPA02-013	2002-50	MDR	COM	1.61	Amelia Is
CPA02-014	2002-57	MDR	COM	4.65	Yulee
CPA03-001	2003-09	AG	COM	9.85	Callahan
CPA03-003	2003-16	LDR	HDR	9.48	Yulee
CPA03-004	2003-21	PBG	COM	0.29	Amelia Is
CPA03-005	2003-29	COM	MDR	1.85	Yulee
CPA03-006	2003-30	IND	COM	1.62	Yulee
CPA03-010	2003-38	COM	AG	1.11	Hilliard
CPA03-012	2003-46	MDR	COM	2.88	Yulee
CPA04-002	2004-16	COM	LDR	1.89	Callahan
CPA04-003	2004-20	LDR	COM	9.94	Yulee
CPA04-004	2004-25	LDR	COM	2.79	Yulee
CPA04-005	2004-27	LDR	COM	1.86	Yulee
CPA04-006	2004-34	MDR	COM	2.12	Hilliard
CPA04-010	2004-50	LDR	COM	9.00	Yulee
CPA04-011	2004-51	MDR	COM	3.50	Yulee
CPA04-013	2004-60	MDR	COM	4.50	Hilliard
CPA05-002	2005-75	IND	HDR	30.37	Yulee
CPA05-004	2005-44	AG	COM	7.98	Yulee
CPA05-005	2005-51	LDR	COM	4.98	Yulee
CPA05-008	2005-69	HDR	REC	0.67	Amelia Is
CPA05-011	2005-72	LDR	IND	5.75	Yulee
CPA05-012	2006-01	MDR	COM	0.28	Yulee
CPA05-013	2006-02	MDR	COM	1.16	Yulee
CPA05-014	2006-03	MDR	COM	0.78	Yulee
CPA05-015	2006-04	MDR	COM	0.18	Yulee
CPA05-016	2006-05	MDR	COM	0.16	Yulee
CPA05-017	2006-06	MDR	COM	0.20	Yulee
CPA05-018	2006-07	MDR	COM	0.20	Yulee
CPA05-019	2006-08	MDR	COM	0.23	Yulee
CPA05-020	2006-09	MDR	COM	0.23	Yulee
CPA05-021	2006-10	MDR	COM	0.24	Yulee
CPA05-022	2006-11	MDR	COM	0.35	Yulee
CPA05-023	2006-12	MDR	COM	2.82	Yulee
CPA05-024	2006-13	MDR	COM	0.45	Yulee
CPA05-025	2006-14	MDR	COM	0.62	Yulee
CPA05-026	2006-48	LDR	COM	1.50	Yulee
CPA06-001	2006-34	MDR	COM	7.25	Hilliard
CPA06-002	2006-39	MDR	COM	2.40	Callahan
CPA06-004	2006-81	AG	MU	1629.40	Yulee
CPA06-006	2006-79	HDR	MU	30.40	Amelia Is
CPA06-006	2006-79	MDR	MU	89.80	Amelia Is
CPA06-006	2006-79	REC	MU	122.90	Amelia Is

Source: Nassau County Growth Management Department

## **Vacant and Developable Land**

According to the Nassau County Property Appraiser's Office, approximately 42,564 acres in the unincorporated portion of Nassau County are classified as vacant. Table 7 shows vacant land in unincorporated Nassau County by FLUM category. Classification of vacant land was determined using the Nassau County Property Appraiser property use codes.

Table 7 Vacant Land by Future Land Use Map Category

FLUM Category	Acres	Vacant Acres	Percent Vacant
Agriculture	314,263	21,421	6.6%
Recreation	978	174	17.8%
Low Density Residential	22,848	4,726	20.7%
Medium Density Residential	17,743	5,455	30.7%
High Density Residential	636	94	14.8%
Public Buildings and Grounds	1,272	325	25.6%
Commercial	2,348	1,653	70.4%
Industrial	861	638	20.6%
<b>Total</b>		<b>42,564</b>	

Source: Nassau County Property Appraiser's Office

Within the residential land use categories, there are 10,275 vacant acres. Development potential for vacant land within each FLUM category was calculated by subtracting the percentage of wetlands for each land use category and using the maximum permissible density for that land use category. As shown in Table 8 below, there is capacity to develop up to a maximum of 21,587 dwelling units within the vacant land designated for residential use. As shown in Table 9, The University of Florida's Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing projects that there will be 34,421 households in unincorporated Nassau County by 2030. In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that there were 18,841 housing units in unincorporated Nassau County. This indicates that approximately 15,580 new residential units will need to be constructed in the County to accommodate the projected population growth between 2000 and 2030. Based on this analysis, it is likely that the majority of these new units could be accommodated on vacant land found in existing residential FLUM designations.

FLUM Category	Vacant Acres	Wetland (CSV I-II)	Maximum Density	Net Developable Acres	Potential Units
Low Density Residential(LDR)	4,726	893	2 du/acre	3,833	7,666
Med. Density Residential(MDR)	5,455	1,182-8	3 du/acre	4,271	12,814
High Density Residential(HDR)	94	2	12 du/acre	92	1,107

*Table 8 Development Potential on Vacant Residential Land*

Source: Nassau County Property Appraiser's Office, Northeast Florida Regional Council

*Table 9 Projected Households by Size, Unincorporated Nassau County 2005 - 2030*

Household Size	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
1 to 2 persons	10,991	12,996	14,821	16,647	18,388	20,027
3 to 4 persons	6,495	7,629	8,625	9,603	10,514	11,360
5 or more person	1,712	2,016	2,287	2,550	2,801	3,034
Total	19,198	22,641	25,733	28,800	31,703	34,421

Source: Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse, Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing, University of Florida

In addition to this vacant land, much of the agricultural land in Nassau County is considered developable, although it is not necessarily classified by the Property Appraiser as vacant. The number of potential units in the agriculture designation is shown in Table 10. Potential units were calculated by subtracting the acres of wetlands from the number of acres designated as Agriculture and apply the two density ranges that currently apply within Agriculture. When combined with the estimated development potential in the residential FLUM categories, this represents a surplus development potential of 60,365 dwelling units based on the Shimberg Center's estimates for housing needs in 2030.

*Table 10 Residential Development Capacity in Agricultural Land*

FLUM Category	Total Acres	Wetland (CSV I-II)	Maximum Density	Net Developable Acres	Potential Units
Agriculture (AG)>320 ac	249,813	73,320	1du /20 acres	176,493	8,824
Agriculture (AG)<320 ac	64,450	18,916	1du/acre	45,534	45,534
Total	314,263	92,236		222,027	54,358

Source: Northeast Florida Regional Council

## **Internal and External Economic Forces**

Nassau County is located 25 minutes from Jacksonville International Airport, is served by two major railways and is home to a deep natural port. Nassau County's economy is diverse, ranging from agricultural activity in the west and central areas (mostly silviculture), to a variety of urban activities closer to, and on, Amelia Island. The Port of Fernandina, operated by the Nassau County Ocean Highway and Port Authority, will play a crucial role in future economic development. The significance of this role is recognized by its inclusion in the Florida Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) Plan of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The Fernandina Beach Airport, located on 602 acres and operated by the City of Fernandina Beach, has general aviation and transport facilities. Sufficient land is owned by the airport to provide for future growth and expansion needs for both airport operations and commercial businesses.

In 2006, 18,210 people were employed in Nassau County. According to Florida Legislative Research, the top six employment sectors in Nassau County are the leisure and hospitality industry (21.4 percent); trade, transportation and utilities (21.3 percent); government (20.9 percent); construction (6.9 percent); professional and business services (6.7 percent); and the manufacturing sector (6.4 percent.). Collectively, tourism is the largest employer in Nassau County - providing approximately 21 percent of all jobs. The Nassau County economy is twice as dependent on tourism as the average Florida County. Major attractions include AIP, Ritz-Carlton, White Oak Plantation, historic Fernandina Beach and American Beach.

The Nassau County Economic Development Board (NCEDB) has identified eight target industry clusters that are the focus of economic development efforts. The targeted industries are: Aviation-Aerospace, Corporate Headquarters, Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology, Electronics and Semiconductors, Medical Equipment and Technologies, Customer Service and Technical Support Centers, Internet Technology, and Motor Vehicle Parts and Accessories.

Several important external factors may also affect economic and land development within Nassau County.

The Jacksonville Port Authority, known as JAXPORT, is an international trade seaport. JAXPORT expansion plans include improvements to its three marine terminals (Tallyrand, Blount Island, and Dames Point) and also improvements to the Jacksonville harbor. At the Dames Point terminal, JAXPORT, is building a 158-acre container-handling facility. This facility will be used by a Tokyo-based shipping line, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines (MOL), and its terminal operating partner, TraPac, to load and unload container ships sailing to and from ports in Asia. Terminal construction started in 2007, with completion projected for December 2008. Ship and terminal operations are expected to begin in late 2008 or early 2009.

MOL's operations will create more than 1,600 new private sector port jobs in Jacksonville, while supporting operations in trucking, distribution and related services could generate a total of 6,000 direct and indirect local jobs throughout the northeast Florida region. The new port facilities will enable northeast Florida businesses to export directly to nations throughout Asia - opening a huge new consumer market for them, giving them an opportunity to boost sales. This, along with planned expansions of the Panama Canal to be completed by 2014, will make northeast Florida more attractive for a host of businesses to grow operations in this region by enabling local companies to export directly to Asian markets, or easily receive goods directly from Asia.

These advantages will create new opportunities in manufacturing, distribution and warehousing, all linked to trade with these new markets. For example, home improvement and department stores may now look to open distribution centers anywhere in northeast Florida because this facility will provide them with a direct local link to their Asian suppliers. Similarly, manufacturing plants which rely on parts or materials from Asia may consider northeast Florida more closely for their operations because they now have a direct link to their Asian suppliers.

Jacksonville-based CSX railroad plans to spend \$40 million to upgrade tracks and build a link through Nassau County to connect the rails along U.S. 17 to the main line running north toward Waycross, Ga. JAXPORT projections call for a tripling of cargo in coming years largely because of the MOL terminal under construction at Dames Point and a pending agreement with Korean shipping company Hanjin.

The purpose is to divert cargo containers from the road while also avoiding rail congestion in downtown Jacksonville. The Nassau County Economic Development Board has stated that rail transportation is critical to the county's industrial development and that this rail infrastructure improvement will make Nassau County more attractive to warehouse and distribution facilities that can take advantage of the new rail to points north.

The Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base is located in Camden County, Georgia, near the Florida-Georgia border adjacent to Nassau County. With the 2005 BRAC recommendation for closure of the New London Naval Submarine Base in Connecticut, This 16,000 acre facility will become the Navy's primary submarine base on the East Coast. The base currently employs approximately 9,000 military and civilian personnel. An additional 2,000-3,000 personnel may be transferred to Kings Bay following the closure of the New London base.

The Villages of Kingsland is a planned development on 15,000 acres recently annexed into the City of Kingsland in Camden County, Georgia, west of U.S. 17 and north of SR 40. On the 15,000 acres, of which approximately one-third is wetlands, the developer has plans to build approximately 40,000 residential units, 13.5 million square feet of industrial development, and 9.5 million square feet for commercial use.

The Timucuan DRI (Development of Regional Impact) is a 6,095-acre mixed-use development of regional impact in northern Duval County, west of Interstate 95 and east of U.S. 1. It was proposed in 2006 and will be developed with an estimated 10,297 residential units, 803,000 square feet of commercial space, and 200,000 square feet of office space.

In adjacent Baker County, proposed DRIs will significantly change the rural character. Currently under review are the 3,200-acre Cedar Creek project with 7,000 homes and 425,000 square feet of commercial use; and Navona Creek, a 3,654-acre development with 8,300 homes, a 1.5-million square feet business park, and a 330,000 square feet village center. These new developments could triple the population of Baker County.

# **PART 3**

## **Major Local Issues**



*Signpost, U.S. 1, near Boulogne*

## **Summary**

Part 3 presents the evaluation of the ten (10) major issues identified by Nassau County through a series of meetings with public agencies, interdepartmental staff review, and the public hearing conducted with the Local Planning Agency, and agreed upon by DCA. Each issue is addressed separately and includes analysis and recommendations to address each issue.

In many cases, the recommendations are broad in scope. These issues are complex. While the EAR attempts to define and analyze the problems to the highest degree possible, the creation of specific actions and policies will require the time and energy of many diverse interests during the EAR-based amendment process which will follow the adoption and transmittal of this report.

In some cases, specific recommendations have been made for actions, such as revising or adopting land development regulations, because there is already an existing policy in the comprehensive plan that requires such an action to address that particular issue, but it has not yet been achieved.

## **Issue 1- Update the future land use plan**

*The County's adopted 2010 Future Land Use Map series no longer reflects an accurate depiction of the amount of land required to accommodate anticipated growth, the character of developed and undeveloped land, and the availability of water supplies, public facilities, and services. The map series should be updated to reflect the anticipated growth of the County through the planning period of 2010-2030, and land use categories should be re-defined to reflect a transition of densities and intensities that clearly define and separate urban and rural areas. The map series should also incorporate the Coastal High Hazard Area, now defined as the Category 1 storm surge zone, and updated hurricane evacuation times should be adopted into the plan. Terms such as density, intensity and net and gross area need to be defined in the plan.*

### **Background**

Nassau County is part of the Northeast Florida Region which includes Clay, Duval, Nassau, Baker and St. Johns counties. While Jacksonville/Duval County remains the center of population in the region, Nassau and the other surrounding counties are growing relatively faster. Jacksonville's percentage of the regional population has declined over the past several decades. This trend will continue and accelerate. In 1990, Jacksonville comprised 86% of the population of the region. By 2000, Jacksonville's share of the population had decreased to 71% and is projected to be only 63% of the region in 2030.

The shift in regional population is further documented by reviewing figures on regional commuting. As the counties surrounding Jacksonville begin to grow at a faster rate, one issue that will need to be considered is the impact this growth will have on the regional transportation network. According to Jacksonville's 2005 Mayor's Growth Management Task Force, examination of 2005 and 2010 commuting patterns indicates that the majority of commuting will continue to be from outlying counties to work destinations in Jacksonville.

To accommodate our future population growth, Nassau County must set aside sufficient vacant land to allow for residential, commercial and industrial development, provide services in the most efficient manner possible, and protect the natural environment. How a local government plans for its physical development greatly affects the well-being of the whole jurisdiction in every sense. Planning for the next twenty-five years and beyond is more critical now than at any other time in the history of the County.

### **Issue Analysis**

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan, a document originally adopted 17 years ago that was intended to guide development of the community, is today seen by a wide range of stakeholders as failing to provide that guidance.

While the Comprehensive Plan has been updated over the years with changes that reflected changes in development patterns and community issues, it is essentially in the same format that was adopted in 1991. That document was developed to ensure ease of review by State agencies utilizing a check-off system for compliance, but this approach did little to provide real assistance to policy makers faced with decisions. While it addressed all the numerous individual requirements, it did not provide a clear, distinct view for what the community should look like nor did it give the citizens and decision makers a set of guidelines that was easy to understand and useful in evaluating future growth options.

### **Vision 2032**

Growth Management is perceived by the public as one of the major issues facing the County over the next twenty years. The County continues to experience rapid urbanization with increased population growth. How, where, and when growth and development occurs will impact the look and function of the County as well as the cost of services to the public. The community needs to be actively engaged in order to form a consensus on what the physical, social and economic future of the County will look like.

The County is presently engaged in a process to formulate a County-wide vision plan. This plan will address issues related to the future growth and development of the County as a whole, but will also focus on the specific needs of areas within the County. This plan will conform to the requirements of a community vision that may be adopted into the County's comprehensive plan pursuant to Sec. 163.3167(11) F.S. It is anticipated that the vision plan will be completed by August 2008. It is the intent of the County to utilize the complete vision to guide the creation and adoption of the EAR-based amendments. An implementation schedule will also be developed by staff and the LPA that will detail the various actions needed to implement the recommendations of the EAR, including a summary of the actions required, the agencies responsible for implementation, a preliminary schedule or timetable for implementation, and potential funding sources if appropriate.

### **The Future Land Use Map**

The density and intensities set in each Future Land Use category are an influential component of the County's growth management strategy. By designating areas for higher and lower densities, growth can be directed and infrastructure planned to serve the expected population.

With respect to achieving the expected densities outlined on the Future Land Use Map, the Plan has been somewhat successful. However, by favoring very low density suburban development (i.e. between 1 and 2 dwelling units per gross acre), true urbanization can not and will not occur. Conversely, it promotes a level of development that is, by standard definitions, too dense to be considered truly "rural". Continuation of this trend across the County will create an inefficient development pattern for the provision of services, leading to increased costs to the County and a greater burden on taxpaying residents. It may also jeopardize the land supply need to serve the projected population, leading to increased development in surrounding jurisdictions which will not add to the County's tax base but may still impact services such as roads and water supply. Land use categories should reflect a transition of densities and intensities that

clearly define and separate urban, suburban and rural areas (Please refer to recommendations for Future Land Use Policy 1.02.05 in Part 4 for more details).

In addition, the plan needs to have clearly articulated density and intensity standards. Density is generally measured as gross density, inclusive of interior roads, parks and certain open spaces excluding waters of the state and designated wildlife corridors. A clear set of definitions is completely lacking from the current plan. The use of parcel size on a certain date as the basis of agricultural density is unrelated to sound planning principles and practices.

Non-residential density is currently measured by "land coverage". This is a little-used measurement including building, land and wet retention ponds. Consequently, it is impossible to evaluate the maximum development potential of vacant properties. More effective and commonly used intensity standards include building-to-lot coverage ratio or floor area ratio (FAR).

#### **Mixed vs. Multi Use Development**

Regarding the form of new growth and its ability to provide self-sustaining communities, the Plan has been less than successful. While there have been "multi-use" projects approved and/or developed during the review period, there have been few truly "mixed-use" communities built. In order to achieve sustainability, communities should offer the mixture of uses, but in a form that makes those uses accessible to the population in a true multimodal environment. The Multi-Use Plan category, while allowing mixed uses, does not require such a mix.

#### **State and Regional Visioning**

As mentioned previously, population growth in Clay, St. Johns and Nassau Counties is predicted to outpace the traditional regional center of Jacksonville/Duval County between 2010 and 2030. As population shifts to these areas, greater consensus and cooperation are essential at all levels of government in order to implement regional policies and practices that will support economic vitality and livability of the Northeast Florida region.

In 2005, the Legislature enacted Section 163.3247, Florida Statutes, creating the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida. The Commission was created as a standing body to help the citizens of this state envision and plan their collective future, with an eye towards both 25 and 50 year horizons. Sustainability has been described as leaving Florida for our children no worse, or better, than we inherited it for ourselves.

The Commission's First Annual Report notes that Florida's population is projected to increase from approximately 18 million to 27.5 million over the next 25 years, and double in 50 years. Unless such growth is planned wisely, suburban sprawl, transportation congestion, coastal densification, habitat fragmentation, and reduced agricultural land will be the inevitable result of this population increase. Land that should be protected will be lost forever unless it is identified soon and protected.

The Committee notes that growth issues are made more complex by the consequences of climate change, with some predicting sea level rise by as much as 12 inches by 2075. This "confluence of crises" makes the identification of statewide growth management priorities both critical and urgent and explains the need for the long-term visioning for which the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida is charged.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Engage the Community**

- Create a Vision Plan for the County based on an extensive citizen involvement program that enlists the support of all major stakeholders. The Vision should be prepared in a highly illustrative manner using memorable images to convey the key components and building blocks of the Vision.
- Remove Future Land Use Policy 1.06.05, requiring a Special Area Study (also referred to as locally defined sector plan) for the Yulee Planning District. This policy became obsolete when the proposed area-wide DRI was abandoned. The County may consider a redevelopment plan for historic Yulee pursuant to Sec. 163.360, F.S.
- Implement an educational campaign geared to help citizens better understand the County's planning process. Educational methods might include pamphlets, project-specific community workshops and internet-based activities.

### **2. Encourage Efficient Development Patterns**

- Accommodate new development in a more compact growth pattern with more land use diversity, where there is improved interrelationship of living, working, shopping, education and recreational activities, where there are expanded travel choices, and where the vitality and revitalization of older neighborhoods and commercial areas can be sustained.

#### ***Future Land Use Map***

- Review existing FLUM land use categories to and amend them as necessary to ensure that they promote efficient development patterns.
- Provide effective and measurable density and intensity standards.
- Establish specific criteria for changes in land use.
- Create a new industrial/office business park land use category (refer to recommendations for for Future Land Use Policy 1.02.05) and include policies limiting amendments on lands with industrial designations on the FLUM (see Future Land Use Policy 1.02.01).
- Include water-dependent commercial/industrial land use category on FLUM (refer to recommendations for Policy 1.02.05) to protect existing water dependent uses from intrusion by incompatible land uses and to maximize the beneficial use of coastal natural resources (see Coastal Management Policy 5.08.02)
- Remove wetlands (Conservation I & II) as a separate land use category on the FLUM. A separate map generally identifying wetlands as a limited

development overlay should be included in the Plan, utilizing the most recent data from SJRWMD. Lands determined by the Board of County Commissioners with the advice of the St. Johns River Water Management District that not to be jurisdictional wetlands should be allowed to be developed at the underlying densities and intensities shown on the FLUM.

- Review and refine incompatible use buffers in the Land Development Regulations to set standards for buffering and separation between land uses of different densities or intensity of use so as to minimize interference between uses as required by Future Land Use Policy 1.03.01.

### ***Encourage Master-Planned and Cluster Development***

- Define and adopt bonuses and other incentives into the Land Development Regulations provide incentives such as density bonuses and extension of time limits for certificates of concurrency to promote construction of master planned and mixed use development as required by Future Land Use Policy 1.08.07.
- Define and adopt bonuses and other incentives into the Land Development Regulations to provide density bonus incentives to direct commercial and multi-family into "cluster" development patterns, thereby, eliminating or reducing strip or ribbon development, which follows major County or state roads as required by Future Land Use Policy 1.03.03.

### **3. Protect Areas of Special Concern**

- Adopt Plan Objectives and Policies and/or Land Development Regulations that protect areas with special economic, environmental, recreational or cultural value from intrusion of incompatible commercial, industrial or residential land uses.

#### ***Agriculture***

- Define the role of the County in protecting the integrity of agricultural land (refer to recommendations for Policy 1.02.05 regarding agricultural and rural land use categories), and define what actions, if any, will be taken to protect agriculture. (see Future Land Use Policy 1.04A.01)

#### ***Coastal Areas***

- Revise Coastal Management Policy 5.04A.01 to re-define the "Coastal High-Hazard Area" (CHHA) as the Category 1 surge zone as amended by HB 1759 in 2006. This must be accomplished by May 2008 per Chapter 163, F.S. Revise this definition in the Land Development Regulations and other documents as appropriate.
- Coordinate with DEP, Corps of Engineers and other relevant agencies to adopt Land Development Regulations that specify performance standards for shoreline land uses as required by Coastal Management Policy 5.08.04.

#### ***Wildlife Corridors***

- Consider identifying wildlife corridors as part of the FLUM series. Wildlife corridors create habitat linkages between existing preserves and environmentally sensitive areas. Preservation techniques within mapped corridors include full fee and less than fee acquisition, clustering of permitted development, density transfers and wildlife crossings at roadways.

#### ***Port/Aviation Facilities***

- Adopt Land Development Regulations which set standards for maximum height limits, minimum setback distances, buffers and other methods to protect ports, airports and related facilities from encroachment of incompatible land uses as required by Traffic Circulation Objective 2.08.

#### **4. Create Urban Service Boundaries**

- Coordinate with utilities providers to utilize the planned extension of water and wastewater service to delineate urban service boundaries and as an incentive to encourage compact, mixed-use development with those boundaries.
- Promote compact growth within urban service boundaries by encouraging the use of facility extension policies, whereby the cost of providing public facilities and services that benefit new development is borne by those individuals that receive direct benefit as required by Future Land Use Policy 1.06.03.

#### **5. Support a Regional Vision**

- Support greater regional collaboration and participate in efforts undertaken by the Northeast Florida Regional Council to develop a regional vision in the northeast Florida region.

## **Issue 2- Strengthen long-range transportation planning efforts**

*Traffic congestion is a major concern in the County. A1A/SR200 remains the primary corridor through the county. A lack of transportation connectivity within the county is a major concern. The need to continue and improve long-range transportation planning efforts is seen as a key issue in the County. Alternative corridors need to be identified. Alternative modes of transportation for both people and goods need to be investigated. Planning should be coordinated among a wide range of participants at both the County and regional levels, including the Local Planning Agency, First Coast MPO, and FDOT.*

### **Background**

Based on the County's high rate of residential growth and existing development patterns, traffic congestion continues to present an ever-growing problem for Nassau County. The U.S. Census indicates that approximately 46% of the Nassau County's employed residents commute outside of the county for work. Most of these commuters are dependent upon A1A/S.R. 200, I-95 and U.S. 17 for access to employment centers in Jacksonville and other areas. Many sections of these roadways are operating at near or over capacity. Traffic congestion and commuting times have risen steadily since 2000 and are only expected to become worse.

The existing Traffic Circulation Element was prepared at a time when urbanization of the Yulee area was just beginning. The consultant did not identify prospective deficiencies, instead calling for additional studies and monitoring to provide guidance for managing development. A significant portion of these studies were to be undertaken as part of the Yulee Planning Area (area-wide DRI) and were not completed. In addition to its failure to quantitatively project 2008 traffic conditions, the existing element does not contain a Future Transportation Map (required by Sec. 9J-5.019(5) F.A.C.), identifying the components of a transportation system.

Combined with the lack of viable alternative transportation modes and a major gap in funding, a comprehensive solution for traffic congestion and increasing mobility must be explored beyond adding traffic lanes. Specific strategies that should be investigated to address these issues include opportunities to expand travel mode choice, the identification and funding for new east-west corridors, the proposed outer beltway, and perhaps most significantly, efficient land use planning promoting more compact, mixed-use development.

## **Issue Analysis**

According to Rule 9J-5.019, "A local government which has all or part of its jurisdiction within the urban area of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) pursuant to Section 339.175, F.S., shall prepare and adopt a transportation element consistent with the provisions of this Rule and Chapter 163, Part II, F.S." In addition, "the transportation elements of the local plans shall be coordinated with the long range transportation plan of the MPO. The purpose of the transportation element shall be to plan for a multimodal transportation system that places emphasis on public transportation systems." State regulations such as 9J-5, are intended to require government to help direct the numerous (and occasionally competing) infrastructure systems under the general umbrella of "transportation". Nassau County became a voting member of the First Coast MPO in 2004, a development that will impact the content and format of this element.

### **Improve and establish new transportation corridors**

The dependency upon A1A/S.R. 200 for access to Jacksonville and surrounding areas has resulted in constrained and backlogged facilities, corresponding levels of service reduction, increased commute times, and a perception of no relief in sight. A1A/S.R. 200 is also the primary hurricane evacuation route for Amelia Island and the eastern portions of the mainland. There is a major need for additional roadway facilities which are intended to alleviate existing network deficiencies, improve east-west connectivity, maintain acceptable hurricane evacuation times, and encourage local economic development to reduce the need to commute outside the County for work.

The First Coast MPO 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan includes a number of much needed roadway and transit improvements for the entire MPO area, which includes part of Nassau County. The MPO will receive federal and state funds; however competition between MPO's and other state agencies for a limited amount of funding is very stiff. There are over 100 projects classified as "unfunded needs", which means that these needs cannot be met with projected funding from all sources through the year 2030. The listed roadway improvements, however, should be viewed as part of a larger framework of long-range transportation planning solutions that include additional tools beyond capacity improvements.

### **Creating developments which shorten or eliminate vehicle trips**

Recognizing the relationship between transportation and land use is essential to understanding the problems of traffic congestion. Enhancing land use planning decisions is a key to positively affecting the transportation network. The existing low-density, automobile oriented land use patterns that have characterized the majority of Nassau County are not optimal. Such patterns need to be modified to include higher density mixed-use development that will shorten existing automobile trips, shift trips to other modes, and/or eliminate vehicular trips altogether.

The County needs to encourage master planning and incorporate effective traditional neighborhood development (TND) and "village center" design concepts into its Comprehensive Plan and land use decisions. Objectives and Policies should reinforce the need for strategies to address long range transportation issues through the creation of long range area-wide master plans that are examples of principled land use decisions which promote the following:

- Employment and services within a designated boundary to ensure internal capture of generated trips;
- An interconnected roadway network serving a variety of complementary uses;
- Pedestrian-friendly local and collector streets with on-street parking;
- Potential transit opportunities

While some of the rationale for master planning is in response to long range deficiencies along A1A/S.R. 200, promoting mixed-use projects will lead to more sustainable and cost-effective development for the County as a whole. Such development practices can divert local trips from major off-site roadways and even reduce the need to expand existing rights-of-way. In the long term, encouraging mixed use and transit-oriented developments preserves valuable open space, improves the County's jobs/housing imbalance, and extends the timetable for the community's eventually build out.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Identify Alternative Transportation Corridors**

- Create a Future Transportation Map. Designate a regional system of arterial and collector roadways, identifying existing segments and proposed expansions, linkages, multi-modal systems and other alternative transportation options. The Future Transportation Map will provide a means to coordinate land use decision making; protect necessary rights-of-way from premature or incompatible development; and achieving a safe and efficient mobility system that presents viable options to the single-passenger automobile.
- Continue coordination with FCMPO, FDOT and other local agencies to identify potential alternative transportation corridors.
- Coordinate with FDOT, FCMPO, and other agencies to institute a plan for protection and acquisition of rights-of-way to ensure continuity of the roadway network and to protect the existing and future roadway network from development and other encroachments as required by Traffic Circulation Objective 2.03. Identify potential corridors for acquisition. Provide map of potential corridors in Plan
- Coordinate roadway improvements with adjacent counties and the expansion of ports, airports and rail lines.

### **2. Support Transit and Transportation Alternatives**

- Continue support and involvement in FCMPO long-range planning activities and support policies that will specifically direct revenues to fund transit and other alternative transportation improvements.
- Investigate options for assisting private, public, or non/profit organizations implement transportation operations that will serve as alternatives to the Florida Intrastate Highway System as required by Traffic Circulation Policy 2.06.08

- Develop a long-range Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan for Amelia Island.
- Encourage a county-wide bicycle route network required by as part of a Recreation Master Plan (see recommendations for Objective 7.01) Traffic Circulation Policy 2.04.01

### **3. Encourage Efficient Development Patterns**

- Create incentives to encourage mixed-use developments that promote internal capture of generated trips, an interconnected roadway network, a pedestrian-friendly environment, and potential transit opportunities.
- Consider greenways to link existing and proposed nature reserves, parks, cultural and historic sites with each other. Refer to recommendations for Recreation Master Plan (Objective 7.01). (see Recreation & Open Space Policy 7.02.07)
- Review SR 200/A1A Access Management Overlay requirements for effectiveness, include FDOT comments in this analysis. Remove overlay or revise requirements as appropriate. (see Future Land Use Policy 1.02.05H and Traffic Circulation Policy 2.05.07).

### **Issue 3- Promote economic development**

*Economic development is a high priority issue in the County that is linked with several of the other key issues on this list. High out-of-county commuter rates in contribute to traffic congestion, and also reflect a lack of high-paying jobs in the county. The County needs to prepare for transitions in its economic base as development patterns in the County mature. The County should consider the adoption of an Economic Development element to the comprehensive plan.*

#### **Background**

Economic development is a high priority issue in Nassau County that is linked with several of the other key issues explored as part of this EAR. The need for specific incentives and policies that support economic development was repeatedly asserted by community stakeholders throughout the issue identification process. The goal of economic development is to improve the economic well-being of a community through job creation, job retention, tax base enhancements and quality of life. While residents of frequently cite “quality of life” as a benefit of living in Nassau County, they also cited shortcomings such as long commute times and traffic congestion, both of which are directly related to a lack of high-paying jobs within the county. Out-of-county commuter rates in Nassau County approach 46%. Such high rates contribute to traffic congestion, but are also a result of a lack of high paying job sectors within the county. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006), wages earned within Nassau County are 3.4% lower than the average wage earned in the state of Florida, and a full 5% lower than the average wage calculated for the Jacksonville MSA.

Currently, economic development activities in Nassau County are spearheaded by the Nassau County Economic Development Board (NCEDB), a non-profit organization formed in 1995 as a public-private partnership. The staff of the NCEDB provides site selection, permitting/ zoning and other assistance to new and expanding businesses. They encourage the development of the infrastructure and financial assistance needed to recruit and nurture high-technology, innovation industries. The Amelia Island-Fernandina Beach- Yulee Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Nassau Chamber of Commerce also contribute to the economic development activities within the County.

## **Issue Analysis**

This issue relates to the ability of Nassau County to attract primary industries which bring new and higher-wage jobs to the County. Primary industries are those which sell their goods or services outside the geographic boundaries of the local economy, therefore bringing dollars into the local economy. The tourism and construction sectors that dominate the Nassau County economy are not primary industries; wages from these sectors rarely exceed the wages paid in the primary industry sector.

By 2009, the new MOL/TraPac container port facilities at Dames Point in Jacksonville (see Part 2) will enable businesses in Nassau County and elsewhere in the northeast Florida region to export directly to nations throughout Asia and create new opportunities in manufacturing, distribution and warehousing linked to trade with these new markets.

In order to better serve these new port facilities, CSX railroad plans to spend \$40 million to upgrade tracks and build a link through Nassau County to connect the rails along U.S. 17 to the main line running north toward Waycross, Georgia (see Part 2). The NCEDB has stated that rail transportation is critical to the county's industrial development and that this rail infrastructure improvement will make Nassau County more attractive to warehouse and distribution facilities that can take advantage of the new rail links to points north.

It is important that Nassau County position itself to take full advantage of these and other changes to compete both within the region and as part of the national and global marketplace.

### **Commonly Used Economic Development Incentives & Strategies**

Economic incentives are tools used to influence business decisions regarding location of new investment such as expansion of an existing business or location of a new facility. Such incentives can either be direct financial incentives such as tax exemptions and land assembly, or non-financial "in-kind", incentives such as infrastructure improvements. Nassau County is currently classified as a rural county by the State of Florida creating additional incentives under certain State economic development program. As the population continues to grow, Nassau County cannot rely on that rural status into the future.

Direct financial incentives can take many forms. The most commonly used incentives of this type in Florida are land assembly and donation, tax abatement and fee waivers. With land assembly and donation, a local government or designated economic development agency assembles land and either donates outright or sells at a discount to an entity that will then use the property for a job creating use. The advantage of this incentive to the job-generator is a streamlining of the purchase process that results from a single conveyor of land, as well as cost savings on both the purchase price and transaction costs. The advantage of this incentive to the economic development agency is the ability to target specific locations for economic development.

Tax abatement can take many forms; the most common locally administered forms are a reduction of ad valorem taxes for a set period of time or refund of a portion of ad valorem taxes paid. Other tax credits, such as sales tax and corporate income tax credits may

also be offered as an economic incentive, especially if the local government has a state or federally designated enterprise zone or empowerment zone.

Local governments may also use fee credits as an economic incentive. Fees that could be credited include utility connection charges, development review fees, impact fees, and fair share assessments. In the case of Nassau County, the county could investigate alternative methods for determining fair share assessments for primary job creating industries. Because such a high proportion of county residents commute to other counties for work, attracting job creating industries would actually have a positive impact on traffic congestion on county roads, thus justifying reduced assessments.

In-kind incentives are another method for attractive primary industries. Common in-kind incentives include technical assistance, streamlined review processes, density and intensity bonuses, and provision of infrastructure such as utilities and roads. In-kind incentives are frequently offered in conjunction with a targeted location and targeted industry approach to economic development.

Technical assistance is a very broad category of incentives that includes activities ranging from development review assistance to workforce development. With development review assistance, an economic development agency may “walk through” the development review process with an employer, or act on behalf of an employer so that the review process runs smoothly. The economic development agency essentially acts as an advocate for the employer. Workforce development is an increasingly popular tool that communities are using to attract businesses. Such efforts may include industry specific job training, literacy programs, job placement and employee assistance programs geared toward employee retention. Workforce development programs benefit employers by providing a ready supply of employees and benefit communities by assisting with development of skills needed for higher wage jobs.

Another in-kind incentive is an expedited review process for targeted industries and/or targeted areas. Under this scenario, a streamlined process would be established for review of zoning and land development activities. This could take the form of concurrent reviews of building permit and zoning requests. Intensity bonuses may be used as a way to allow for more intense development appropriate sites where certain job creation goals are met. For example, where an identified target industry is seeking to locate on an appropriate site, the maximum allowable floor area ratio may be increased by a given percentage if certain performance standards are met.

It is essential to employ safeguards when using publicly-funded incentives to attract businesses. Such safeguarding mechanisms include performance-based incentives that tie financial incentives to job and payroll promises and regular audits to ensure that obligations of the business receiving incentives are met.

### **Developing Policies and Implementing Incentives**

One method that Nassau County may use is the adoption of an Economic Development Element into the comprehensive plan. Such an element is optional, but has the advantage of providing a central policy statement for economic development in the County. Key to implementation of any economic development policy in Nassau County will be a formal evaluation of tools that could benefit the county and interagency coordination. Barriers to economic development in Nassau County include an inadequate transportation network, a lack of “shovel ready” sites for job-creating uses and lack of a public investment strategy. Interagency coordination and effective participation by the NCEDB are keys to overcoming these barriers.

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan lacks specific goals, policies and objectives which address incentives for economic development. The comprehensive plan's Intergovernmental Coordination Element (ICE) provides objectives and policies that are generally supportive of broad economic development activities; however, specific activities are not identified that relate to this topic.

### **Public and Private Partnership**

The County should increase public-private partnership activities with the County's local and regional economic development organizations, business organizations and major landowners. Key partners should include the Nassau County Economic Development Board, the Jacksonville Cornerstone Development Partnership, and the Chambers of Commerce, and Rayonier (The County's largest private landowner). The County's economic development approach, coordination and collaboration activities should be formulated into a set of goals, objectives and policies.

This activity should be accomplished, in part by the creation of the optional Economic Development Element in the Comprehensive Plan.

The identification of this issue in this EAR highlights a significant change in focus for the County. Economic development efforts are a community responsibility, and communities that succeed are those which develop and adopt a shared vision. Today, there is a lack of shared vision for what economic development means to Nassau County and the community. The County and its economic development partners continue to work cooperatively, but until the community can develop and fund an expanded long-term economic development program, the County will not attain its potential.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Create an Economic Development Element**

- Coordinate with municipal and countywide economic development organizations to create an optional economic development element consistent with the provisions of Chapter 163, F.S. and 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code, with goals, objectives and policies to guide countywide economic development efforts to improve the size and quality of the local economy. This optional element involves data analysis and coordination. It may therefore need to be adopted at a later date than the EAR-based amendments.
- Develop formal economic incentive policies and programs based on the goals, objectives and policies of the economic development element.

### **2. Enhance Public-Private Partnerships**

- Develop a greater level of coordination and collaboration for countywide economic development efforts by establishing partnerships between public, non-profit and private entities.
- Investigate options for assisting private, public, or non/profit organizations implement transportation operations that will serve as alternatives to the Florida Intrastate Highway System as required by Traffic Circulation Policy 2.06.08

## **Issue 4- Protect and expand land designated for job-generating land uses**

*The County has a relatively low proportion of land designated for certain job-generating land uses, especially industrial and business park -type uses. The single industrial FLUM designation creates incompatible uses and contains restrictive development standards that discourage industrial development in the County.*

### **Background**

Nassau County has a relatively low proportion of land designated for job generating land uses. This includes such Future Land Use categories as Industrial and more intense Commercial uses, such as business parks. An additional difficulty is that the Industrial FLUM category contains unnecessarily restrictive intensity standards. This significantly limits the marketability of these areas for their designated use. A number of structural weaknesses within the local economy of Nassau County have emerged since the completion of the last EAR. This is supported by a range of indicators which show Nassau County has a growing imbalance of residents to primary industry jobs.

Conventional wisdom holds that Nassau County serves as a “bedroom community”, providing skilled workers for industries in neighboring counties. The County’s economy is largely dependent upon industries in the Jacksonville/Duval County area and, to a lesser degree, the King’s Bay-St. Marys area for its economic growth and development.

Nassau County is home to a limited number of primary industries from which internal economic growth can be captured, to meet the needs of residents who want to work within the county. As noted previously, the average wage of jobs in Nassau County was lower the state average wage and the average wage in the Jacksonville MSA. It is estimated that 46% of Nassau County resident workforce commutes to work in neighboring counties.

This issue centers on the ability of Nassau County to accommodate industries which bring new and higher-wage primary jobs to the county. Primary jobs are generated from primary industries. Primary industries are those which sell their goods or services outside the geographic boundaries of the local economy. Retail and service sectors are not providers of primary jobs and rarely exceed the wages paid in the primary industry sector. This jobs-housing imbalance has appeared over the last twenty years, and now the county suffers from a lack of job-generating land needed to accommodate the worker population projected to live in the county during the planning period of the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Issue Analysis**

As the County grows, providing good jobs for future residents is of significant importance. The 2007 population estimate for Nassau County was 69,569 persons. By 2030, the County is projected to reach a population of 104,800 persons, an increase of 50% in twenty years. In 2007, the number of workers aged 16 and over and residing in Nassau County was estimated at 34,693 persons. Approximately 46% of Nassau County workers commuted to surrounding counties for employment.

The existing trend of workers commuting to neighboring counties is unsustainable, and if continued at present rates will negatively impact the quality of life for Nassau County residents. The County is at a point where it must choose between allowing continued unbalanced residential and commercial growth or guide development in a more balanced manner, by encouraging additional areas to accommodate higher wage primary industries and business park users.

By 2009, the new MOL/TraPac container port facilities at Dames Point in Jacksonville (see Part 2) will enable businesses in Nassau County and elsewhere in the northeast Florida region to export directly to nations throughout Asia and create new opportunities in manufacturing, distribution and warehousing linked to trade with these new markets.

In order to better serve these new port facilities, CSX railroad plans to spend \$40 million to upgrade tracks and build a link through Nassau County to connect the rails along U.S. 17 to the main line running north toward Waycross, Georgia (see Part 2). The NCEDB has stated that rail transportation is critical to the county's industrial development and that this rail infrastructure improvement will make Nassau County more attractive to warehouse and distribution facilities that can take advantage of the new rail links to points north.

In order to take full advantage of these changes, The County must be able to attract and retain new industries related to these new markets. Adequate lands designated for industrial use, located and sized appropriately for target industries will be essential to the County's ability to compete both within the region and as part of the national and global marketplace.

While this issue is complex and requires broad community involvement, it remains fundamentally rooted in land use policy. As the performance of the Comprehensive Plan is reviewed with regard to goals, objectives and policies (GOPs) there are some successes which can be cited. What stands out, however, is a lack of cohesion for countywide economic development planning and partnering efforts.

### **Adequate Industrial Land**

Nassau County currently has approximately 874 acres of Industrial (I) land designated on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. This accounts for less than 0.3% of the total unincorporated area of the County. The Nassau County Comprehensive Plan contains few objectives and policies to guide the siting of industrial and business parks or the conversion of prime industrial land to non-industrial use; therefore, no blueprint exists to identify appropriate sites for the future. In Florida, the process to amend the FLUM and designate new industrial land may take 12 months or longer to accomplish. This time frame is simply too long for some industrial users to wait for land to become available. Nassau County needs to identify an additional industrial land that is highly accessible and has infrastructure in-place over the planning period of the Comprehensive Plan to accommodate meaningful economic development efforts.

The Industrial land use category shown on the FLUM provides for the full range of industrial activities. The specific range and intensity for uses appropriate in a particular industrial area varies by location as a function of the availability of public services and access, and compatibility with surrounding uses. In Nassau County, many Industrial-designated sites have limited potential for expansion due to infrastructure limitations, size and arrangement. In some cases, the encroachment of non-industrial uses surrounding these areas has made further expansion of industrial users a potential land use conflict.

Nassau County should develop an industrial land designation strategy which is designed to provide reasonable flexibility for the marketplace in the siting of future industrial uses, while also offering neighborhoods, businesses, and infrastructure providers a level of predictability as to where future employment concentrations might be located. Balancing these objectives in a meaningful way will require diligence, mutual understanding and an ongoing planning dialogue.

Specific policies should be developed to guide the location of industrial uses and business parks in the Comprehensive Plan. Without specific policies, industrial and business uses will continue to compete against other uses for locations throughout Nassau County, and it will be difficult to ensure appropriate areas are reserved. A short description of each element is provided below. This siting outline only provides a starting point and should be further evaluated for what works best in Nassau County. These policies can guide the decision making process for siting industrial and business park areas within Nassau County:

**Size:** Moderate to Heavy industrial uses should be over 40 acres in size, with planned industrial centers of over 200 acres. Light Industrial areas should be a minimum of 15 acres in size.

**Description:** Moderate to Heavy Industrial areas are primarily for manufacturing, processing and assembly uses. In the past, large industrial users were often located in isolation from each other; preferably industries should locate together in planned centers. Many industrial centers also include some warehouse, storage and contractor yards with a minor amount of supporting commercial use - but they should be and usually are over 75% industrial use. Light Industrial centers are primarily for lighter manufacturing use with some supporting office and retail uses located within the center.

**Spacing:** Moderate to Heavy Industrial uses are encouraged to locate near each other in planned industrial centers. They are located with access to interstate highways, rail and port facilities and suitable separation from residential uses. Planned industrial centers

should generally be distributed throughout the community. Light Industrial areas should be generally distributed throughout the community with direct access to the regional transportation network.

Criteria: Centers should be sited in advance on the FLUM in order to ensure public safety, predictability and adequate infrastructure. New Heavy and Moderate Industrial centers should be distant from existing or planned residential areas. Due to lesser potential impacts, Light Industrial centers can be located closer to residential, though residential uses should be buffered through; landscaping, large setbacks and transitional uses, such as office or open space.

### **Maintaining Industrial Inventory**

Another topic receiving discussion during the EAR was the County's lack of success to maintain existing inventories of industrial, business park and employment generating land uses. Within some markets, industrial land uses have a slower absorption rate than residential or commercial.

Industrial areas that are developable in the near-term become attractive sites for other uses, and the lack of interest to develop the land for industrial purposes makes it attractive for conversion to other land uses. This is the scenario that has characterized Nassau County over the last decade. This issue may be further exacerbated when the County allows approved industrial and business park areas to be converted. A land use conflict may be created as the non-industrial use may be incompatible with the remaining industrial land use. This encroachment lowers the vacant industrial areas suitability for development and may increase the land costs beyond the site selection criteria of targeted industries, as the surrounding land is consumed for non-industrial purposes and the potential for conflict between these land uses is increased.

### **Implement Strategic Activities**

Economic development prospects and associated activities move quickly, and to secure new industries and business opportunities requires significant efforts from all organizations involved. Communities that are successful in expanding and securing new industries typically have at their disposal a comprehensive set of resources to recruit new industries and businesses.

A common checklist item for industries and businesses undertaking a site evaluation is whether sites are "shovel-ready"; meaning land use, zoning, and infrastructure are in-place for construction of a new facility. The County can play a role in providing appropriate areas for industrial uses, particularly designated with the proper land use and zoning districts, as well as participation in joint infrastructure planning and coordination efforts with utility providers.

In order to compete regionally for industrial growth and economic development, the County must develop objectives and policies that support targeted community economic development activities; and plan for industrial developments that will allow for a master-planned, high quality development that has a long-term investment schedule.

### **Public and Private Partnership**

As mentioned previously in the analysis of Issue 3, The County should increase public-private partnership activities with local and regional economic development organizations, business organizations and major landowners. Key partners should include the Nassau County Economic Development Board, the Jacksonville Cornerstone

Development Partnership, the Chambers of Commerce, and Rayonier (The County's largest private landowner). The County's economic development approach, coordination and collaboration activities should be formulated into a set of goals, objectives and policies. This activity should be accomplished in part by the creation of the optional Economic Development Element in the Comprehensive Plan.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Provide Land for Industry and Employment**

- Provide adequate land designated for industrial, business/office park and employment centers. To address this issue, a number of elements must be addressed to guide policy such as location, size, type, distribution and compatibility requirements of existing and new employment centers.
- Create a new industrial/office business park land use category (refer to recommendations for Future Land Use Policy 1.02.05) and include policies limiting amendments on lands with industrial designations on the FLUM (see Future Land Use Policy 1.02.01)

### **2. Protect and Maintain the Industrial Inventory**

- Maintain the inventory of existing and planned industrial and business park areas. Develop performance criteria for the conversion of the County's inventory of industrial land to other land use categories.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations which set standards for minimum setback distances, buffers and other methods to protect ports, airports and related facilities from encroachment of incompatible land uses as required by Traffic Circulation Objective 2.08.
- Include water-dependent commercial/industrial land use category on FLUM (refer to recommendations for Policy 1.02.05) to protect existing water dependent uses from intrusion by incompatible land uses and to maximize the beneficial use of coastal natural resources (see Coastal Management Policy 5.08.02)

### **3. Develop Strategies for Industrial Development**

- Develop strategies to remove and/or address the existing obstacles in developing "shovel-ready" industrial sites to support economic development efforts. Economic development activities move quickly, and this requires the County and its partners to be in a position to meet these challenges in a timely manner.

### **4. Enhance Public-Private Coordination**

- Develop a greater level of coordination and collaboration for countywide economic development efforts between public and private entities (Refer to recommendations for Issue 3).

## **Issue 5- Preserve rural lifestyle choices**

*While eastern portions of the County are transitioning to more urban uses, much of the county has a distinctive rural character. Balancing new development with the rural lifestyle desired by residents is an important goal for the County's future.*

### **Background**

Despite the rapid urbanization of certain areas, the vast majority of Nassau County remains quite rural and has a distinctively small-town character. Balancing this historically rural character with new development is an important goal for the future. Based upon input gathered, "rural character" conveys a range of images by county residents, ranging agriculture and farming operations to very low density "country living". As the region grows, additional pressures have been placed on the agricultural and rural lands located in the central and western parts of the county. These agricultural and rural lands are accommodating a growing variety of residential lifestyles, ranging from bona-fide farms to housing at suburban-level densities. Within the unincorporated areas of the county, low density rural living is accommodated in portions of the Agriculture (AG) areas) totaling 67,044 acres. The majority of Agricultural property has a density of 1 unit per 20 acres, a density generally too low to support residential development. While the population of rural areas is increasing, the amount of land available to support agricultural industries is decreasing. The County will face a challenge in balancing the needs of urban growth, rural living and maintaining the agricultural component of the local economy.

The permanent loss of the county's traditionally agricultural areas greatly impacts the quality of life for people living in rural areas and their ability to make a living from the land.

### **Issue Analysis**

The existing trend of rural land fragmentation, urban growth, and development along corridors present major challenges in preserving agricultural and rural land character throughout the county. If continued at present rates, these trends will forever alter the quality of life for Nassau County residents. For the purpose of the EAR and specifically this issue, the point to highlight is that the County is actively addressing this issue. The intent of this issue analysis is to identify causes, relationships and additional concepts for Nassau County to review during EAR based amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to strengthen policies and increase positive outcomes during the planning period.

This issue can be addressed with additional objectives and policies incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan and companion requirements within the Land Development Regulations.

### **"Rural Living"**

The goal of the County is to retain rural lands, preserve and maintain rural character, and provide lifestyle choice to all residents. Rural areas are being adversely impacted by new development that is out-of-character with the existing rural landscape. Many rural areas long thought to be protected from urban encroachment are no longer sheltered from the County's continued growth. In particular, areas closer to urban areas have experienced the greatest amount of development, which has contributed to the loss of rural character for the area.

Rural areas that are distant from urban centers, as well as those in close proximity to urban centers comprise the inventory and choice for residents. People who seek a rural lifestyle represent a diverse demographic, and one that has been growing for more than a decade.

The County's Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations contain policies and standards to maintain the character of rural areas and communities. However, it is evident these policies are not meeting the intent of the Plan or the expectations of the community, and the policies and requirements for maintaining rural character should be improved.

Strengthening the County's existing policies would increase protection of the rural lands. Changes to existing policies may include developing a system which measures the appropriateness of the conversion of Agriculture to other land uses, expanding clustering and open space provisions, increasing minimum buffer requirements between incompatible uses in rural areas, and implementing "development edge" and scenic buffers along roadway corridors and adjacent developments.

### **Agricultural Lands**

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the continuing contribution of the agricultural industry to the county's economy. According to the U.S. Dept of Agriculture 2002 Census of Agriculture, farms in Nassau County were responsible for the sale of over \$27 million in agricultural products in 2002. Tens of thousands of acres of the County's land area was in agricultural production, either as cropland, pasture land, or in silviculture for timber and pulp production.

The agricultural industry is experiencing changes in many of its basic production and market forces. Economic shifts in the agricultural industry continue to influence Nassau County's economy, and the combined effects of inflated real estate prices and costs of production have contributed to the conversion of agricultural land to more intensive uses.

The Agriculture land use category generally reflects the most productive agricultural lands in the County and allows a full range of agricultural uses, including intense uses such as confined feeding operations (CFOs) to open pasture and timber and pulp wood production. While large CFOs can be allowed with the Agriculture category, this type of agriculture production is not a major part of the county rural landscape.

The continued fragmentation of large rural land tracts into smaller parcels, growth of the urbanized area, and the aesthetics of new development along major transportation corridors presents a challenge to the preservation of agricultural and rural land character throughout the county. The County has been at this crossroads for some time, and policies which reflect the community's vision will be critical to balance the competing demands of development and rural lifestyle option.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Define Urban, Suburban and Rural Areas**

- Refer to recommendations for Issue 1 regarding review of FLUM categories and encouraging efficient development patterns.
- Coordinate with utilities providers to utilize the extension of water and wastewater service to delineate urban service boundaries and as an incentive to encourage compact, mixed-use development with those boundaries.
- Higher density areas should be defined in proximity to existing towns and rural villages, based on the suitability of the land for development and the availability of essential public services and support services.

### **2. Preserve Open Space**

- Require residential development in rural areas to meet mandatory clustering and open space provisions for subdivisions in the Agriculture land use categories. Bonus provisions should encourage additional permanent open space and density allowances.
- Set priorities for open space preservation required for planned developments based on size, character, use, etc. (see Conservation Policy 6.02.03M)
- Adopt Land Development Regulations as required by Conservation Policy 6.05.09 to specify that developments proposed adjacent to "Outstanding Florida Waters", wildlife sanctuaries, wildlife refuges, state preserves, sanctuaries, forest, and publicly owned parks, gardens, and wildlife management areas in the County shall be environmentally compatible in order to conserve wildlife populations and habitat through the use of buffers, lower densities and intensities of use, adjacent to boundaries, etc.

- Create “development edge” and scenic buffer standards along roadway corridors and between adjacent developments to maintain corridor views, rural character, and roadway aesthetics by ensuring development is set back from the right-of-way where an area for natural or landscaped vegetation can be maintained or preserved.

### **3. Protect Agriculture**

- Define the role of the County in protecting the integrity of agricultural land (refer to recommendations for Policy 1.02.05 regarding agricultural and rural land use categories), and define what actions, if any, will be taken to protect agriculture (see Future Land Use Policy 1.04A.01).
- Develop a system which measures the appropriateness of the conversion of Agriculture designated areas to other land uses. The County should evaluate the benefits of developing a performance standard point system that would assist decision makers assess conversion of Agriculture areas into other land uses. Such a system would allow equal treatment across the county, be transparent and predictable, while allowing land use conversions in those areas where sufficient points can be accumulated to justify the land use change.
- Provide incentives to acquire management agreements for flatwoods and forests of the St. Mary’s River Basin that would favor the continued management of the timber resources on a sustainable, long term basis applying Best Management Practices as described in the Florida Division of Forestry Silviculture Best Management Practices Handbook and Conservation Policies 6.02.06A and 6.05.02A

## **Issue 6- Preserve environmental resources**

*The County is blessed with an extensive network of waterways, wetlands and unique natural areas. Protection of these unique natural features is seen as critical for maintaining the unique character of the county, which is economically essential to the County for tourism and maintaining the quality of life that attracts residents and businesses. Protection of environmental resources is also key to water quality and the health of Northeast Florida.*

### **Background**

Nassau County has an extensive network of waterways, wetlands and unique natural features. Protection of these unique natural features is seen as critical for maintaining the unique character of the county, and also to the health of Northeast Florida.

As the County grows, additional pressure will be placed upon vacant and undeveloped lands which are in close proximity to natural and environmental resources. The County's vacant and undeveloped lands accommodate a variety of residential lifestyles, commercial, industrial, and recreation needs to accommodate a growing population. Due to the needs of an expanding community, the unincorporated areas of the County are

receiving the majority of development. While significant resources have been protected throughout the county, the preservation of natural resources demands its own focus in order for these areas to remain important to the long-term environmental and economic viability of the community.

This issue deals with the ability of the programs, initiatives, and Comprehensive Plan objectives and policies to preserve, protect and maintain the inventory of environmental resources, wildlife and wildlife habitats throughout the county, to assure the long term health and integrity of the ecosystems found in Nassau County, and to capture the community-wide quality of life and economic benefits that are dependent on the area's natural features.

Currently, the County's role is primarily limited to land use policy and implementing development standards, and less towards more public activities such as the purchase, ownership and management of environmental resources. The rapid growth and consumption of land within the County has increased the public's awareness of the need to protect environmental resources.

### **Issue Analysis**

The existing trend of natural resource and habitat fragmentation, urban growth patterns, invasion of exotic plant and animal species, and point and non-point pollution sources presents major challenges in protecting Environmental resources throughout the county. If continued at present rates, these trends will negatively impact the quality of natural resources for Nassau County residents. This issue requires implementation of a comprehensive approach beginning with the Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Regulations and other County standards and practices. State and Federal programs and regulations are also critical to the attainment of long-term natural resource preservation, but are not the focus of this review.

### **"Green Infrastructure"**

Just as growing communities need to upgrade and expand their transportation and utilities infrastructure, they also need to upgrade and expand their "green infrastructure" - the network of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas, which sustain clean air, water, and natural resources and enrich their citizens' quality of life.

The County's most important natural lands comprise its "green infrastructure," and provide the bulk of its natural support system. Ecosystem services, such as cleaning the air, filtering and cooling water, storing and cycling nutrients, conserving and generating soils, pollinating crops and other plants, regulating climate, sequestering carbon, protecting areas against storm and flood damage, and maintaining aquifers and streams, are all provided by the existing expanses of forests, wetlands, and other natural lands. These ecologically valuable lands also provide marketable goods and services, like forest products, fish and wildlife, and recreation. They serve as vital habitat for native species, provide scenery, and contribute in many ways to the health and quality of life for residents.

Green infrastructure benefits all citizens. For farmers, fishermen, foresters, and those who cater to outdoor recreation, it provides their livelihood. For urban & suburban dwellers, it provides clean drinking water. For those living or farming near shorelines, streams, or steep hillsides, it protects their land from erosion. The green infrastructure provides places for hobbies, recreational activities, and educational opportunities.

Studies have shown that if the values of ecological services are considered, natural lands show a net gain in cost-benefit analyses. While residential areas require public services, natural areas need little, other than protection. Further, they make public construction of many engineered facilities unnecessary.

In addition to their ecological and economic contributions, these lands provide a sense of place and a unique identity. Natural landscapes make communities more comfortable and appealing; they link current generations to their heritage and cultural past. For everyone who lives in or visits Nassau County, protecting green infrastructure helps to preserve our quality of life and safeguard it for future generations.

### **"Green Development"**

In order for new development to be environmentally sustainable, developers and planners are increasingly looking to implement "green development" standards which address environmental and resource conservation concerns in innovative ways. There are many benefits of building green including lower operating costs for residents, increased comfort, higher perceived value, reduced sprawl, and protection of the natural environment.

The elements of green development fall into three basic categories: environmental responsiveness, resource efficiency, and community and cultural sensitivity. Green development projects consider siting and land-use issues; conserve energy, water, and other precious resources; provide a healthy and comfortable indoor space through the use of reused and recycled products, as well as energy- and resource-efficient products; blend in with the natural environment and protect open space; increase a sense of community; and address cultural issues.

In the past developers have often equated green development with reduced profits and delayed schedules. The reality, however, is that well-executed green development projects often perform extremely well financially and often command a premium price in the marketplace. Some of the general benefits of green development are reduced capital costs, reduced operating costs, health and productivity benefits, higher perceived value and quality.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System is a third party certification program and the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED gives building owners and operators the tools they need to have an immediate and measurable impact on their buildings' performance. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.

### **Protecting Environmental Resources**

Environmental resources may be found within any land use category throughout Nassau County. A number of Federal, State and County regulations protect Environmental resources, such as wetlands, floodplains, protected vegetation (trees), wildlife and habitat, and uplands upon their identification within lands submitted for development.

The policy of the County is to preserve and protect environmental resources to ensure their existence for future residents. Approximately 108,224 acres are designated within Conservation land use categories or overlay districts which are the responsibility of Nassau County to protect as stated in the Comprehensive Plan. The fact that such a large portion of Nassau County's environmental resources are protected is a positive outcome for the County, especially at a time when rapid growth and development was occurring throughout the County.

The Conservation I, II land use categories and Conservation III overlay district includes most wetlands, creek, stream or river banks, major drainage ways, FEMA defined floodways and some shorelines. The Conservation land use category boundaries illustrated on the FLUM are general delineations and require further documentation on a site specific basis. Residential development rights within Conservation areas are granted at a density of one (1) unit per 5 acres or less.

Although it is the recommendation of this report to remove wetlands (i.e. Conservation I & II) as a separate land use category on the FLUM, it is also its recommendation that a separate map generally identifying wetlands as a limited development overlay district should be included in the plan, utilizing the most recent data from SJRWMD. Development should continue to be limited in wetlands to the density/intensity presently allowed or less. Lands determined by the Board of County Commissioners with the advice of the St. Johns River Water Management District that not to be jurisdictional wetlands should be allowed to be developed at the underlying densities and intensities shown on the FLUM (see recommendations for Issue 1).

All lands within the Conservation IV category are owned by public or quasi-public entities. The lands are held for use as non-profit public recreation and open space amenities. There are significant public land holdings under conservation throughout Nassau County. The lands are owned by various state, regional and local entities with large areas open to the public.

Agricultural areas can also enhance natural systems by the use of fire to manage timber and native forage lands. In addition, cattle grazing in an unimproved, native pasture landscape can result in greater diversity of plants in natural areas. Therefore, low intensity agricultural areas, as a land use can help foster protection of natural resources. However, while the Agriculture land use category maintains a minimum level of open space requirements for land upon which it is designated, it should not be viewed as providing a high degree of permanent protection. Any land designated Agriculture may be changed, so for this reason the conservation benefits of these lands cannot be assumed to exist in perpetuity.

The County currently protects environmental resources utilizing two techniques: directing growth and development away from environmental resources by assigning appropriate land use categories and zoning classifications; and implementing various county, state, and federal regulations that protect identified resources from development impacts. These techniques are implemented by all levels of government and for the most part have been successful in meeting their intent. The County currently contains significant

areas of protected environmental resources. However, the County has traditionally followed a limited role through implementation of its land use policy and regulations, and has not until been actively involved in the purchase or acquisition of environmental resources.

Activities where the County can improve upon its efforts include adopting Land Development Regulations that promote greater protection of resources; developing a long-range financially feasible plan for the identification and acquisition of environmental resources; assembling and maintaining an accurate inventory of public and private conservation lands; and utilizing the best available information regarding the type and location of environmental resources to aid in the review of development submittals.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Identify the "Green Infrastructure"**

- Assemble and maintain an accurate inventory of public and private conservation lands. The inventory should include conservation easements, transfers of development rights, and permanently protected lands within Developments of Regional Impacts (DRIs).
- Utilize the best available information to aid in the review of development submittals and public planning studies. Maintain a Geographic Information System (GIS) inventory of environmental resources. Develop a composite map of environmental resources that reflect the County's objectives and policies.
- Include a map of recorded archaeological sites in the County listed in the Florida Dept. of State Master Site File. (see Future Land Use Policy 1.04A.07C and Conservation Policy 6.09.05.)

### **2. Minimize Impacts of Development**

- Adopt Land Development Regulations that define criteria of and incentivize the use of "green development" standards, including the LEED Green Building Rating System.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations that allow cluster developments in order to preserve wetlands, important native vegetative communities, and other environmentally sensitive communities, by reducing or prohibiting development in the sensitive areas of the property as required by Conservation Policy 6.02.02.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations as required by Conservation Policy 6.05.09 to specify that developments proposed adjacent to "Outstanding Florida Waters", wildlife sanctuaries, wildlife refuges, state preserves, sanctuaries, forest, and publicly owned parks, gardens, and wildlife management areas shall be environmentally compatible in order to conserve wildlife populations and habitat through the use of buffers, lower densities and intensities of use, adjacent to boundaries, etc.

- Set priorities for open space preservation required for planned developments based on size, character, use, etc. (see Conservation Policy 6.02.03M)
- Adopt Land Development Regulations as required by Recreation & Open Space Policy 7.03.01 that include specific open space definitions and standards for the provision and protection of open space. Conservation areas that are under public ownership shall be designated as open space, with development permitted only to enhance the recreational capacity of the area. Conversion of open space to other "active" recreational uses shall be subject to DEP and other responsible agencies' approvals.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations to create incentives to encourage the dedication of recreational land beyond that required under concurrency management through PUD zoning and subdivision regulations as required by Recreation & Open Space Policy 7.03.03.
- Adopt a new zoning district for mining areas which provide adequate buffers to protect surrounding land uses, environmental resources, and archaeological sites as determined by the state.

### **3. Protect Native Plants & Trees**

- Adopt Land Development Regulations that include requirements to preserve/replace the natural/native vegetation along perennial streams and waterways as defined in best management practices for silviculture to maintain the natural beauty of the area, to control erosion, and to retard runoff as required by Future Land Use Policy 1.01.02.
- Provide incentives to acquire management agreements for flatwoods and forests of the St. Mary's River Basin that would favor the continued management of the timber resources on a sustainable, long term basis applying Best Management Practices as described in the Florida Division of Forestry Silviculture Best Management Practices Handbook and Conservation Policies 6.02.06A and 6.05.02A

### **4. Protect Wildlife Habitat**

- Initiate the inventory and mapping, of listed species habitat and implement land development regulations for the protection of endangered and threatened species of plants and wildlife and the habitat in which they exist to ensure their continued survival (see Conservation Policy 6.05.06).
- Cooperate with municipalities, adjacent jurisdictions and private landowners to retain the significant habitats for native wildlife and vegetation as required by Conservation Policy 6.05.10. If on-site habitat of threatened or endangered species should be disturbed by new development, similar habitat should be protected with an emphasis on viability by virtue of its size, configuration, and connecting habitat.

### **5. Protect Water Resources**

- Coordinate with utility providers to explore and establish a plan to extend public sewer lines, where feasible, to control the number of septic tanks sited in environmentally sensitive areas as required by Future Land Use Policy 1.04A.06.
- Investigate alternatives for financing programs to phase out septic tanks and/or package treatment plants in areas of existing urban- or suburban- level development; and provide connections to a regional wastewater system on a voluntary basis.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations which require that wastewater be reused where practical as required by Public Facilities Policy 4.04.05. New wastewater treatment plants should be required to provide for the reuse and/or disposal of wastewater by best available technology, including for agriculture or landscaping irrigation, percolation, or other permitted measures.
- Coordinate with the St. Johns River Water Management District to define the location of significant groundwater recharge areas in the County as required by Public Facilities Policy 4.05A.0.1. These recharge areas will be noted on a map series within the Comprehensive Plan so that requests for rezoning or land use changes in these areas can be evaluated both in terms of need and potential impact to the aquifer.
- Coordinate with the St. Johns River Water Management District and the Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) to identify all known point and non-point sources of pollution within the County as required by Public Facilities Policy 4.05A.02. All permitted discharge sources shall be required to meet state Water Quality Standards, all discharges under state law not requiring a permit will be required to meet all applicable Best Management Practices.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations that include criteria, such as reduced densities and reduced impervious surfaces, to protect the functions of natural drainage systems and natural groundwater aquifer recharge as required by Conservation Policy 6.01.04.
- Establish wellhead protection zones, consistent with Chapter 62-521.400, F.A.C., to prevent aquifer contamination within the wellhead cone of influence as required by Public Facilities Policy 4.05A.03. Include map of wellhead protection zones in Plan.
- Maintain a comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) - based inventory of all stormwater management facilities in all of the drainage sub-basins under the county's jurisdiction as required by Public Facilities Policy 4.05B.06E-F.
- Coordinate with the SJRWMD and the municipalities to determine the need for alternative water supplies to help meet future demands as required by Conservation Policy 6.01.02 . Study the feasibility of using various water supply alternatives such as desalinization, transfer of water, and wastewater reuse as potential alternative water supply sources.

## **6. Protect Coastal Areas**

- Adopt Land Development Regulations to help protect the primary and secondary dune system and mitigate the effects of a storm surge as required by Coastal Management Policy 5.02A.04
- Adopt Land Development Regulations that specify performance standards for shoreline land uses as required by Coastal Management Policy 5.08.04
- Adopt Land Development Regulations which define "coastal resources" and limit specific and cumulative impacts of development or redevelopment on coastal resources as required by Coastal Management Policy 5.11.01
- Request that DEP, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and other stakeholders review the Coastal Management Element and provide recommendations for improving County protection of Aquatic Preserve resources.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations as required by Coastal Management Policy 5.13.09 to limit the amount of stormwater discharge into the waters of the Coastal Zone by requiring all new development in the Coastal Zone to utilize on-site retention or detention methods prior to discharge utilize natural drainage features, to the maximum extent possible for stormwater management, and retain, at minimum, the first one (1) inch of stormwater runoff.

## **7. Promote Soil Conservation**

- Conserve and manage unique agricultural or silvicultural soils as required by Conservation Objective 6.08. Identify and list soils in Plan. Provide a map of these soils in Plan.
- Coordinate with the Florida Dept. of Agriculture and County Extension Agent to explore experimental agricultural programs to strengthen the County's agricultural base.

## **8. Develop a Land Acquisition Program**

- Develop a long-range, financially feasible plan for the identification and acquisition of environmental resources. The plan may include: an inventory of countywide Environmental resources; a priority ranking and criteria of areas for permanent preservation; a funding approach to accommodate land acquisition; coordination and partnering efforts; and, an implementation program. Future land acquisitions should be coordinated with the goals of the County's Recreation Master Plan (See Issue 10 recommendations for Recreation Master Plan).
- Maintain partnerships with organizations such as Florida Communities Trust, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and other organizations to provide the necessary funds to implement these efforts.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations that require new development to be reviewed for the establishment and acquisition of natural greenways where they may provide links between nature reserves, parks, cultural and historic sites,

natural wetlands, beaches and other water bodies as required by Conservation Policy 6.02.09. (see Issue 10 recommendations).

## **Issue 7- Promote a greater diversity of housing types and prices**

*The need for a wider range of housing types and price points is an issue that could prove critical in the future. Given rising home prices, affordable housing options are increasingly harder to find within the county. Incentives tied to construction and duration of affordable and workforce housing, including mixed-use projects, should be investigated. Incentives tied to lower maintenance, energy efficient housing should also be investigated.*

### **Background**

Single family homes are the dominant housing type in Nassau County. The need for a wider range of housing types and price points was cited as an issue that could prove critical in the future. The economic base of Nassau County is largely service-sector driven, which typically pays relatively low wages. Given rising home prices, affordable housing options are increasingly harder to find within the county.

The purpose of the Housing Element is to quantify housing needs and develop policies

	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Total households	25,866	30,231	34,127	38,036	41,709	45,149

to ensure that a varied supply of housing types exists in Nassau County to meet the needs of residents. Such a variety of housing opportunities is critical to maintaining a heterogeneous population capable of supporting a well-functioning community. Because Nassau County has historically functioned as a bedroom community of Jacksonville, single-family homes have been the dominant housing type. As housing costs have risen, the single-family home has increasingly become out of reach of a larger proportion of the population.

### **Issue Analysis**

The majority of Nassau County's housing stock is single-family dwellings. Nearly 55% of Nassau County's housing units are traditional single-family homes, and another 33.4% are manufactured homes (aka mobile homes). The homeownership rate in unincorporated Nassau County is significantly higher than the state of Florida as a whole, with approximately 87% of housing units owner-occupied compared to the State average of 70.3%. Typically, a high rate of home ownership is a positive economic indicator. However, as mentioned earlier, the average annual wage earned in Nassau County is approximately 3.4% lower than the statewide average. This contradictory evidence presents a more complicated, and less positive, picture of economic conditions and housing affordability in Nassau County.

The average home price in Nassau County increased by over 50% from 2000 to 2007, Household incomes did not kept pace with escalating housing costs during this same period, increasing only 10% over the same period before adjusting for inflation.

According to the University of Florida's Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing, households are considered to be "cost-burdened" when more than 30% of household income is paid in rent or mortgage costs. Households are considered "severely cost-burdened" when more than 50% of household income goes to housing costs. According to the Shimberg Center, by 2010, approximately 7,261 Nassau County households will be either cost-burdened or severely cost-burdened in terms of housing costs (see Table 11 below). This will represent approximately 24% of the total projected households in the county in 2010.

*Table 11 Projected Cost-Burdened Households 2005-2030*

*Source: Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse, Shimberg Center for Affordable Housing, University of Florida*

Cost-burdened households	3,861	4,537	5,172	5,815	6,428	7,006
Severely cost-burdened households	2,334	2,724	3,066	3,400	3,714	4,012
Total cost-burdened households	6,195	7,261	8,238	9,215	10,142	11,018

**Existing Housing Programs in Nassau County**

Housing programs in Nassau County are administered through the State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) program. The SHIP program offers three main types of assistance for low- and moderate-income households in Nassau County: down payment assistance for first time homebuyers, home repair assistance, and partnerships with non-profit housing providers for elderly and special needs housing. Homes purchased with SHIP assistance cannot exceed \$180,000 in purchase price. The Nassau County SHIP program is further constrained by funding levels; the program is funded at the state level and funding levels have been cut, with more cuts projected in the future. Also, the County completed the rehabilitation of 20 homes in 2007 under a program financed by a Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) begun in 2005.

**Non-Profit Housing Providers**

Non-profit housing providers can be a valuable way of providing affordable housing. Currently, Nassau Habitat for Humanity (HFH) is the most active non-profit housing provider in Nassau County. HFH relies on volunteer labor and donation of materials for the construction of homes. Homes are sold to qualified very-low and low-income homebuyers with no-interest financing. Since 1994, HFH has built 20 homes in Nassau County.

**Affordable Housing Trust Fund**

One tool that has been successful that Nassau County may wish to use more in the future is the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. At the state level, the SHIP program is an example of one such fund. At the local level, such funds can be used to fund a wide variety of programs ranging from funding non-profit housing providers, homebuyer education and down payment assistance, rehabilitation assistance and construction of affordable units. Such funds are financed through a variety of means, such as permit fees, taxes, interest earned and program fees. Such funds may also be funded through "linkage fees" which are fees levied on new market rate housing units. Administration of such funds occurs at the local government level, and a board of trustees may be established to oversee activities. The County has had an established Local Affordable Housing Trust Fund since 1994. SHIP funds received from the State, derived from documentary stamp taxes collected by counties then remitted to State, are accounted for here with a variety of programs supporting affordable housing.

Nassau County's housing stock reflects market conditions that generally result in single family products producing higher profit yields for developers. The county has a number of policies in place that encourage more diversity of housing types, but there are few programs or incentives that result in and increased variety of housing types and prices.

**Recommendations**

**1. Encourage Efficient Development Patterns**

- Adopt Land Development Regulations which provide a process including incentives which encourage the use of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and mixed use developments to offer a variety of housing types including an affordable housing density bonus provision for such projects as required by Housing Policy 3.01.01.
- Review the allowable densities in residential FLUM categories and consider establishing categories with a greater variety of allowable residential densities as a way of encouraging a more diverse housing stock (see Issue 1 recommendations).
- Define "infill development" and adopt criteria into The Land Development Regulations to encourage infill development by facilitating infrastructure to infill areas, removing blighting influences, stabilizing neighborhoods, and providing private developers with information regarding available funding as required by Housing Policies 3.03.05 and 3.08.02.

## **2. Establish Incentives for Affordable Housing**

- Define and adopt bonuses and other incentives into the Land Development Regulations to offer a variety of housing types including innovative land development techniques such as zero-lot-line development, density bonuses, transfers of development rights, land cost write downs, tax increment financing and public/private partnership ventures as required by Housing Policy 3.03.04.
- Establish performance criteria for type, cost and tenure of affordable housing bonuses.
- Explore inclusionary measures such as requiring a specified proportion of affordable units in new residential developments, or establishing a fee in lieu of actual units that would go into a fund dedicated to affordable housing programs.

## **3. Maintain Existing Housing Stock**

- Replace Housing Objective 3.02 and set a new objective and policies using updated data to identify and work towards the elimination of substandard housing.
- Identify state, federal and private funding and technical assistance programs to preserve historically significant housing (see Housing Objective 3.06).

## **Issue 8- Enhance intergovernmental coordination**

*The County should coordinate planning and service delivery more closely with the municipalities within the County (Fernandina Beach, Callahan, and Hilliard), including designating areas for possible future municipal incorporation in the County's future land use plan. The County will coordinate the creation of a school concurrency system with the Nassau County School District, which will include the adoption of a new Schools element into the Comprehensive Plan. Also, the County should coordinate more closely*

*with regional and state agencies, public utilities, and other entities that influence growth, to find regional solutions to planning issues in Northeast Florida.*

## **Background**

Many of the issues facing Nassau County today and in the foreseeable future will require a higher level of intergovernmental coordination. The County's rate of growth and development places a great deal of pressure on the delivery of core public services and infrastructure to residents. Effective intergovernmental coordination plays a crucial role in the County's overall approach to meeting existing and future challenges. However, intergovernmental coordination activities by their nature are ongoing, and formal or informal activities require qualified staff, support systems and processes for successful implementation. This will ensure that while Nassau County continues to grow, the quality of life that stimulates this growth will be sustained.

## **Issue Analysis**

### **Coordination with Local Governments**

Intergovernmental coordination between the County, its municipalities and the School District helps to ensure compatible goals, objectives, policies in comprehensive plans; compatible land uses and development activities; efficient use of urban facilities and services; and facilitates sharing of facilities such as solid waste disposal and recreational areas. Intergovernmental coordination is also important in the development of joint planning and other forms of inter-local agreements, level of service standards and provides for a dispute resolution process.

It is anticipated that close, active intergovernmental coordination efforts between the County, its municipalities and the School District will continue, and perhaps accelerate. The County should continue to coordinate with the municipalities to revise or adopt new joint planning agreements, such as the Amelia Island Joint Local Planning Agency (with the City of Fernandina Beach), and/or inter-local agreements regarding redevelopment of vacant/infill properties adjacent to the municipalities, defining transition areas adjacent to municipalities, compatibility of uses and enclaves (islands of unincorporated lands surrounded by city lands). Compatibility of uses for lands being annexed by cities where a land use proposed is different than the adopted County land use is of special interest.

The County will continue to work with the municipalities and the School District to implement the provisions of revised Inter-local Agreement for Public School Facility Planning, which includes the creation of school concurrency as required by Section 163.3180, Florida Statutes (this issue is discussed in detail in Part 5).

### **Coordination with State & Regional Agencies**

Consistency with the regional and state planning efforts is coordinated through formal agreements between the County and the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and also the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC).

Nassau County is also a member of the First Coast Metropolitan Planning Organization (FCMPO) which focuses on regional transportation planning and implementation activities.

The County coordinates water supply issues with the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the cities in Nassau County and other entities, adjacent counties/cities, and private providers.

Between 2010 and 2030, population growth in Clay, St. Johns and Nassau Counties is predicted to outpace the traditional regional center of Jacksonville/Duval County. As population shifts to these areas, greater consensus and cooperation will be essential at all levels of government to implement regional policies and practices that will support economic vitality and livability of the Northeast Florida region.

Towards that end, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and its four Florida district councils have led a multi-year effort to identify new opportunities for the state of Florida to support and encourage regional cooperation. This effort has been documented in the report from the ULI Florida Committee for Regional Cooperation: "Building Florida's Future, State Strategies for Regional Cooperation." The executive summary of this report is included in Appendix I. Efforts to develop better regional cooperation in the northeast Florida region should carefully consider the ULI recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Expand Coordination Activities**

- Implement a formal process for intergovernmental coordination with the with the municipalities of Hilliard and Callahan via a memorandum or letter of agreement, which establishes specific coordination activities to occur between the County and each municipality on a regular basis. (see Intergovernmental Coordination Policy 8.01.03)
- Increase formal coordination with adjacent local governments in Florida (i.e. Jacksonville/Duval Co., Baker Co.) and coordinate approaches to common land use and transportation planning issues.
- Engage in regular, informal meetings to coordinate and exchange information with adjacent local governments in Georgia (i.e. Camden County, Charlton County, City of Kingsland, and City of St. Marys) regarding common land use and transportation planning issues.

### **2. Improve the Annexation Process**

- Improve coordination and record-keeping of each municipality's annexation activities in accordance with the requirements of Ch. 171 F.S (see Intergovernmental Coordination Policy 8.04.03)
- Explore the establishment of joint planning areas to address issues for future annexation areas between the County and its municipalities.

### **3. Create a County-wide Forum**

- Explore the establishment of a county-wide intergovernmental forum comprised of management staff from participating agencies, that would accomplish the following:
  - Identify of multi-jurisdictional issues;
  - Facilitate the resolution of multi-jurisdictional issues by providing a vehicle for consensus building, research, and discussion;
  - Facilitate the formation countywide positions regarding multi-jurisdictional and growth management issues at the County, Regional, and State level;
  - Providing a forum for discussion of legislative proposals having countywide significance.

#### **4. Support a Regional Vision**

- Support and participate in regional collaboration and visioning efforts to develop better regional cooperation in the northeast Florida region
- Support the recommendations by the Florida Committee for Regional Cooperation in the report, "State Strategies for Regional Cooperation"; to establish a state program to support regional visioning that includes state funding of regional visioning activities.

## **Issue 9- Create a financially sustainable community**

*The County should establish development standards and reasonable fees that will allow new growth to pay for the impacts it creates. The comprehensive plan needs to articulate strategies and options that foster cooperative approaches between the private sector and other governmental service providers to find financially feasible infrastructure funding.*

## **Background**

The cost of the infrastructure to serve our growing population and how to pay for it is a pressing concern. Chapter 163, Florida Statutes and Rule 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code require comprehensive plans to have an orderly and balanced approach to development, paying particular attention to economic, social, physical, environmental and financial feasibility; financial feasibility being that committed funding sources are available to finance capital improvements to ensure that level of service standards are achieved and maintained within a five-year planning period. The provisions adopted by Senate Bill 360 now also require a financially feasible work plan for public school facilities to be adopted into the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan addresses this issue through the concurrency requirements to have adequate infrastructure and services to support growth in place prior to development. This is done primarily within the newly amended Capital Improvements Element, the Public Facilities Element, and certain policies within the Future Land Use Element. The Comprehensive Plan establishes policy to meet the demands of new growth by delivering public infrastructure that meets adopted levels of service in a financially responsible way through application of the concurrency management system.

## **Issue Analysis**

There are three basic methods of eliminating infrastructure deficiencies over time:

- Adjusting Level of Service standards (as legally permitted) for the six public services subject to concurrency requirements mandated by State law.
- Raising taxes, fees or other revenue options.
- Increasing the efficiency of delivering public services and public infrastructure, such as with growth management techniques that encourage a better pattern, location and mix of land uses.

### **Level of Service**

Concurrency management is addressed in the Comprehensive Plan, but the Level of Service (LOS) standards and the assessment methods may need revision. A factor that clearly contributes to ongoing deficiencies in adopted levels of service is an underestimation of the public costs of new development. The Comprehensive Plan defines an appropriate process for identifying existing and future capital facilities needs, identifying funding sources and ensuring consistency. However, this could be updated to cover the full costs of new development.

The County may also consider the creation of a long-range capital improvements plan covering a timeframe of 10 to 15 years. While such a schedule is not required by state law, it can form the basis of an optional long-term concurrency management system for transportation and/or public school facilities pursuant to Sec. 163.3180(9) (a), Florida Statutes. Such a system can only be used in specially designated districts or areas

where significant backlogs exist. State law may allow the plan to include interim level-of-service standards on certain facilities and shall rely on the local government's schedule of capital improvements for up to 10 years as a basis for issuing development orders that authorize commencement of construction in these designated districts or areas. Under certain specific conditions, the state may extend reliance on the schedule to 15 years.

Even if such a system is not adopted by the County, A long-range capital improvements plan could serve as a valuable tool for projecting future infrastructure needs, estimating future costs and revenue, guiding future growth to appropriate areas, and serving as a criterion for review of FLUM amendments.

### **Revenue Sources**

The Plan does not address the development of revenue sources in depth. The Comprehensive Plan directs the County to identify needs, to consider certain revenue sources and to maintain financially sound growth, but it does not require analysis that would identify best potential revenue sources or cost reduction options, nor does it establish taxes, fees, or cost reduction strategies.

### **Efficient Development Patterns**

Denser, more compact and more concentrated development with the right mix of uses in certain locations creates better scale economies and reduces delivery costs for public and private goods and services. While the Comprehensive Plan guides growth towards this general goal, the Plan's strategies may not be sufficient to achieve real cost-saving results. Options that may be considered include: identifying areas where FLUM designations might be changed to increase maximum and add minimum densities; using methods to redirect growth to areas that can support the impacts of growth with adequate public facilities; and planning for a more mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development.

The Comprehensive Plan should also address the County's need to seek more accurate data, more thorough analysis, and better communication methods to better inform the public and decision-makers as they deliberate the various policy options for infrastructure funding.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Review & Monitor Levels of Service**

- Review Level of Service standards and assessment methods to ensure standards are relevant, analysis is accurate and that using aggregate measures are not masking deficiencies in parts of the County
- Regularly assess the efficiency with which public infrastructure facilities are delivered by the County relative to other Counties or private providers
- Assess financial feasibility of the Plan using fiscal impact analysis
- Evaluate the benefits of an expanded 10 to 15 year capital improvements plan for use in long-term concurrency management, projecting future infrastructure needs, estimating future costs and revenue, guiding future growth to appropriate areas , and use as a criterion for review of FLUM amendments

## **2. Identify New Revenue Sources & Cost Saving Strategies**

- Annually identify by size, and communicate to the public, the most significant local revenue sources untapped or underutilized by the County, including sources shielded by tax loopholes, and significant cost reduction options.

## **3. Encourage Efficient Development Patterns**

- Adopt Land Development Regulations that encourage a better pattern of density, compactness, location and mix of land uses that will facilitate more cost-effective delivery of public infrastructure as required by Public Facilities Objective 4.03. Options to consider are: identifying areas where FLUM designations might be changed to increase maximum and add minimum densities; using methods to redirect growth to areas that can support the impacts of growth with adequate public facilities; and planning for a more mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development.
- Establish minimum percentages of “mixed-uses” for projects within Multi-Use land use categories and/or above certain thresholds that also support the development of self-sustaining communities.

## **Issue 10- Create a first-class parks and recreation system**

*As the County continues to grow, the need for more recreation facilities and a greater variety of recreation facilities will grow as well. The County should take the opportunity now to plan a first class system of active and passive recreational facilities throughout the county.*

### **Background**

The County and its citizens have long recognized that the overall quality of life improves dramatically as recreational opportunities, both indoor and outdoor, increase. The County's aesthetic beauty is enhanced by public improvements that allow residents to enjoy vistas and scenic parks throughout the County. Parks and recreation facilities not only enrich the lives of those in the community, but also can improve the aesthetics of neighborhoods, increase property values, generate tourism, and enhance the overall image of the County. Parks and recreation facilities create opportunities for social gathering places, intramural and organized athletics, and social services for the elderly and disabled, and provide a stable environment for the physical and mentally disabled. Parks also provide open space for wildlife habitat and preserve sensitive ecosystems threatened by development.

The recreation facilities in Nassau County include state, county and municipal facilities. In the past, the county has often aided in the construction and maintenance of municipal facilities in order to lower costs and avoid duplication of facilities. The county has traditionally concentrated on providing boat ramp facilities, beach access and similar community facilities.

Since 2000, the County has increased its inventory to include new regional and community facilities such as the North End Boat Ramp and Nature Center on Amelia Island and the John Muir Ecological Park in Yulee. The County has also acquired several properties for future recreational facilities at various locations around the County. The County has presently acquired and maintains approximately 303 acres for existing and future parks and recreation facilities.

### **Issue Analysis**

#### **Recreation Master Plan**

The County acknowledges the need to phase in parks and recreation facilities in order to keep pace with its population growth. The County should establish a dedicated Parks and Recreation Department and prepare a Recreation Master Plan in cooperation with appropriate agencies to guide the development and maintenance of County parks and recreation facilities.

The Recreation Master Plan should analyze level of service standards and inventory the current conditions of the County's parks system. It should recommend guidelines for the size, timing and phasing of parks in the County by using population trends and projections. The plan should include criteria for, and priority ranking of, lands for acquisition and development. It should consider existing and potential funding sources

as well as programs for implementation and capital improvements for future parks and recreation facilities.

The County should select and assemble an advisory committee representing both the public and private sector to guide the development of the Master Plan. Extensive public involvement including surveys, public workshops, and extensive discussions with community organizations should be required in order to develop a plan that reflects the needs and values of the County.

### **Land Acquisition**

The acquisition of land should be an immediate priority in order to provide future parks and recreation facilities. The Recreation Master Plan should be the basis for a long-range financially feasible plan for the identification and acquisition of land for recreational purposes. Future land acquisitions efforts will require partnerships with organizations such as Florida Communities Trust, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and other similar organizations to provide the necessary funds to implement these efforts. The County should also continue to pursue grants for funding of public improvements to make all facilities accessible to the public.

New public parks and recreational facilities may also be attainable through private applicant participation in incentive programs. In exchange for additional density and intensity above baseline levels in the proposed developments, private applicants may provide new public parks, recreational facilities or additional areas of open space on and/or offsite.

### **"Green Infrastructure"**

As discussed previously, growing communities need to upgrade and expand their "green infrastructure" -- the network of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas, which sustain clean air, water, and natural resources and enrich their citizens' quality of life (see the analysis of Issue 6 for more information about "green infrastructure").

Dedications of open space and recreational areas in new development should be reviewed in the context of the Recreation Master Plan for the establishment and acquisition of natural greenways where they may provide links between nature preserves, parks, cultural and historic sites, natural wetlands, beaches and other public spaces. Greenway corridors may be used for resource conservation considered to help preserve natural floodplains, wetlands and native habitat or wildlife movement route; or they may be for recreational uses such as pedestrian and bike trails. All methods of acquisition should be explored and considered purchase, granting of easements, transfers of development rights, and public/private partnerships.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Create a Recreation Master Plan**

- Create, maintain, and support a Parks and Recreation Department for County-wide park and recreation planning and management as required by Recreation & Open Space Policy 7.01.09

- Develop a County-wide Recreation Master Plan to identify locations where the County should acquire land or access for public parks, boat ramps, and buffer zones throughout the County to accommodate the recreational needs of its growing population.
- Complete a study analyzing existing public beach access and demand to establish future beach access requirements based upon projected populations. incorporate the findings into the Recreation Master Plan, and Recreation and Open Space and Coastal Management Elements as required by Coastal Management Policy 5.01.01
- Incorporate a beach access and parking plan into the proposed Recreation Master Plan that will assure maximum accessibility to public beaches while providing sufficient protection to maintain the current quality of the beach and dune system (see Coastal Management Policy 5.01.07).
- Create an inventory of existing boat facilities, i.e. marinas and boat ramps, and evaluate the need for additional facilities at least once every five years as required by Coastal Management Policy 5.08.05. Incorporate the findings into the Recreation Master Plan

## **2. Develop a Land Acquisition Program**

- Develop a long-range, financially feasible plan for the identification and acquisition of open space for conservation and recreational uses. Future land acquisitions should be coordinated with the goals of the County's Recreation Master Plan (see Issue 6 recommendations for a land acquisition program).
- Adopt Land Development Regulations that create incentives for the dedication of recreational land beyond that required under concurrency management through PUD zoning and subdivision regulations as required by Recreation & Open Space Policy 7.01.06.

## **3. Maintain the "Green Infrastructure"**

- Adopt Land Development Regulations as required by Recreation & Open Space Policy 7.03.01 that include specific open space definitions and standards for the provision and protection of open space. Conservation areas that are under public ownership shall be designated as open space, with development permitted only to enhance the recreational capacity of the area. Conversion of open space to other "active" recreational uses shall be subject to DEP and other responsible agencies' approvals for dredge and fill.
- Adopt Land Development Regulations that require new development to be reviewed for the establishment and acquisition of natural greenways where they may provide links between nature reserves, parks, cultural and historic sites, natural wetlands, beaches and other water bodies as required by Conservation Policy 6.02.09.