



An Issue Guide for

Land Use Decision Making in Your Community

FAMU [FLORIDA
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*A Florida Cooperative Extension Program
collaboratively led by faculty from
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical
University and the University of Florida*



As many as
1,000 people
move to Florida
daily.



Photo by Tyler Jones, University of Florida/IFAS

Introduction to Land Use Issues in Florida

Florida's natural resources and economic incentives, such as year-round sunshine and no state income tax, attract new residents daily, sometimes as many as one thousand a day. This influx of new residents is expected to increase the state's population to 33.7 million by 2070. Providing new and existing residents with the services, employment, housing, and paradise they seek creates challenges to maintaining our existing community character and the natural environment.

This population growth will require land, water, and energy—resources that may seem plentiful in some parts of Florida but are limited overall. How will drinking water quality be affected? Where will our food come from if farmland becomes suburbs? Decisions around land use significantly impact most aspects of Florida's residents' lives. Many decisions about how land is used are made at the local level, and Florida's residents have opportunities to influence the land-use priorities that affect their community.

About This Issue Guide

The purpose of this document is to help us talk productively about the look and livability of our community.

Deliberative Dialogue

It's not a debate. It's not even about reaching agreement. It's about looking for a shared direction and seeking common ground for action by carefully listening to one another while sharing our thoughts and what we care about.

The historical distribution of human communities and land use in Florida has been influenced by many factors, including the historical conquest of indigenous peoples, land speculation, racism, agriculture, the turpentine and forest industry, tourism and theme parks, etc. Each aspect of Florida's past left a legacy that influences our communities' character and sense of place. Decisions made today may determine which history is cherished and celebrated. The character of a community might be changed with future land use, anticipated population growth, and ecosystem protection.

Land use in Florida for development, transportation, water supply, or natural resource preservation is shaped and enforced through comprehensive plans, zoning, and land development regulations established by each county and municipality. Creating and revising comprehensive plans and local legislation include opportunities for public input. This is where the public can express their vision and concern for their community, consider where and how development should occur, and what should be protected. Public participation at the appropriate time could make a difference in ensuring the community's priorities remain.

Unfortunately, most citizens do not understand the comprehensive planning and zoning process, which is not transparent. As a result, citizens may become aware of land-use decisions after they are made.

How land is designated and how a community develops are essential topics for community discussion. Each decision has an impact and will likely affect others, limiting some and enhancing others through a complex web of intersecting economic, environmental, and social priorities. We invite you to engage in the process and share your ideas and concerns through this deliberative forum.



How land is designated and how a community develops are essential topics for community discussion.



Photo by Tyler Jones, University of Florida/IFAS

Option 1: Shaping your community's future landscape

In this option, we recognize that some development is necessary and desirable. It is also vital, however, to develop within the limitations of our water, air, and land natural resources. A comprehensive plan should guide land development and protect areas that have natural, agricultural, historical, and cultural values. But these good ideas cost money and may require hiring staff.



Photo by Marisol Amador, University of Florida/IFAS

Examples of what might be done	Some trade-offs and consequences to consider
1. Protect water resources both on surface and below ground.	Stricter regulations may restrict development of economically viable industry and housing.
2. Maintain and protect access to cultural and historical places and their character.	Setting aside these areas may hinder economic growth and reduce tax revenue. Private property rights may be infringed upon.
3. Protect farmland and greenspace in rural and urban areas.	The value of land declines if development is not an option. Greenspace does not generate tax revenue.
4. Promote tourism and visitation that showcases the resources of a community.	Tourism itself may change the character of an area.
5. Policies in our community should protect property values and aesthetics.	This can prevent individuals from using their property how they see fit - e.g., grow gardens, install rain barrels, or dry clothes on a line.
Additional actions?	

Option 2: Shaping community decision making on land use

In this option, we recognize that development can enhance the livability of a region—make traffic flow better, support diverse businesses, and create recreational opportunities. We also need to retain affordable housing and should not price people out of their homes. We desire clean, safe, and resilient communities for all residents, but what are the costs?



Photo by Cat Wofford, University of Florida/IFAS

Examples of what might be done

1. Maintain and protect community gathering places.
2. Invest and incentivize renovating, revitalizing, and rebuilding properties and areas that are in decline to keep our community thriving. Focus development within the urban area to create a compact community.
3. All new development should provide homes in a variety of price ranges and sizes to accommodate everyone.
4. To increase safety, reduce street vegetation and increase lighting.
5. Install more sidewalks for pedestrians and bike paths to enable people to travel without cars to reduce congestion and provide exercise.

Additional actions?

Some trade-offs and consequences to consider

Funding would need to be diverted from other areas to purchase and maintain the space.

Current homeowners could be pushed out of their home.

Development is a competitive business and must be designed for what sells. More regulations limit creativity.

Reducing vegetation creates less appealing communities. More lighting hides the stars.

The space needed for sidewalks will take away from people's yards. New traffic patterns could slow down automobile travel time.

Option 3: Shaping community decisions about land development



People may want their voices to be heard but may not know when and how their input would be welcome. The details of the comprehensive planning process may make the entire enterprise difficult to access, and it may appear that the public has no role. Education and transparency can be key to an effective planning process, recognizing there are also times when public input is too late to be helpful.

Examples of what might be done

1. Improve transparency of the planning process by educating residents.
2. Create opportunities for residents to attend meetings and become engaged in the land-use planning process.
3. Provide resources for staff to complete the tasks of implementing and enforcing good planning at the municipal scale.
4. Form a citizen oversight committee that is responsible for seeing that the process is accessible, fair, and transparent and integrated into the decision-making process.

Additional actions?

Some trade-offs and consequences to consider

Funding, staff, and time requirements to educate residents.

Completing a citizen-engaged process will slow the work being done by decision-makers. Time is money.

This will remove resources and staff from other priorities.

Development is a competitive and lucrative business. Too many regulations may force good developers to leave our region.

What can we expect from a deliberative forum?	What should we not expect?
A civic and respectful atmosphere	Minds to be changed
Listening to understand diverse ideas and differences of opinion	Consensus
Welcoming atmosphere for participation	An action plan
Exploring the nuances and ambiguities of the issue	Quick solution
Deepened understanding	
Realizing areas of agreement and disagreement	
Identifying possible next steps for decision makers and/or citizens	
Future dialogue considerations	

CIVIC is an Extension program of both Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and the University of Florida IFAS Extension that builds capacity in communities to work toward their improved well-being. Through deliberative discussions and town hall meetings, CIVIC activities provide information and engage communities in the hard work of discussing contentious issues that require community-scale solutions. Learn more at: <https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/civic/>



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