

Rural Lands Stewardship Council Meeting

November 20, 2002

Meeting Report

PARTICIPANTS

Eighteen of the 23 council members attended, including DCA Secretary Steven Seibert, and new council members Pamela Mac’Kie, Land Management Director for South Florida Water Management District (and a former Collier County Commissioner); Don Ross, President of Florida Environmental (now EarthBalance), the leading wetland mitigation firm in Florida; Alan Shelby, Governmental Liaison for Florida Forestry Association; and Pete Spyke, who manages citrus operations in 11 counties. **Council members who could not attend were:** Eric Draper, Florida Audubon; Mark Glisson, DEP; Tom Jones, Barron Collier Company; Phil Leary, Florida Farm Bureau Federation; and Sue Mullins, The Nature Conservancy.

Representatives attended from 9 counties -- Alachua, DeSoto, Lake, Hendry, Highlands, Marion, Martin, St. Lucie and Volusia -- as well as council members Jonathan Steverson representing Florida Association of Counties and Chris Doolin representing Small Counties Coalition. Participants also included county commissioners from Hendry and Marion counties.

Representatives of the Governors Office and the Florida House attended.

In addition, representatives from 3 other counties -- Gilchrist (a county commissioner), Seminole and St. Johns had planned to attend but had last minute conflicts. Nevertheless, all expressed "serious interest" in the concept and wanted to receive all the meeting materials and stay on the mailing list.

OUTCOMES

The South Florida Water Management District Representative, Director of Land Management Pamela Mac’Kie, **offered to explore ways in which financial assistance could be extended to Hendry County** so the county can give serious consideration to implementing the Rural Lands Stewardship concept.

The representative from the Governor’s Office (council member Denver Stutler) asked for two of the maps that were used to explain the Collier County success story. He will use the maps to brief the Governor on this concept, and to encourage Gov. Bush to give the concept his attention and support.

An announcement was made in Collier County on the day of the meeting that the first rural village is being established under the county's recently approved Rural Lands Stewardship Area. The village will be a university town, with Ave Marie University at the center.

More information about the Collier County Rural Lands Stewardship Area is provided in a separate description accompanying this report.

BENEFITS OF RLSAs: as suggested by Chuck Littlejohn

This planning tool offers the following SIMULTANEOUS benefits:

- Incentive based
- Control of urban and “rural” sprawl
- Separation of urban and rural land uses
- Maintains asset value of rural lands
- Preservation of open space for agriculture and natural environment
- Accommodates future development in well planned clustered patterns
- Allows all within RLSAs to economically benefit from development
- Relies upon existential growth management laws/rules
- Allows for flexibility in location of future development of RLSAs
- Forces citizens and growth management institutions to address growth management in a more long term proactive way

PRESENTATIONS

The Questions: First, what issues is your county facing that create challenges for maintaining rural areas, preserving environmental resources and helping agricultural operations remain viable? And, secondly, what issues are you facing that planning tools (such as the Rural Lands Stewardship Area concept) must help you address?

St. Lucie County

- Experiencing pressure to convert citrus and cattle land.
- A lot of ag owners do not want to flip to something else, but many have no choice
- Economics are forcing people to convert lands.
- There is increasing pressure for 5-acre ranchettes – these are a major problem since they chop up land and are a very inefficient development pattern
- Our County Board is split on their opinion of what to do but basically act pragmatically.
- The municipalities in our County are not as pragmatic.
- TDRs – Sending zones are fine; receiving zones are the bear!
- No local government can afford to go out and buy easements.

Alachua County

- We are trying to protect both rural lands and environmental preservation areas.
- We are also attempting to deal responsibly with urban sprawl.
- Properties next to municipalities are being quickly annexed.
- Basically, four guidelines now determine what we do:
 1. Retention of an urban “cluster” boundary between the urban and the rural (we estimate there is 20 years of capacity in this urban cluster boundary)
 2. Adopted an urban services line within the boundary.
 3. Expanded the buffer around wetlands -- and can't build in the uplands.
 4. Require cluster subdivisions in rural areas that must have 60-80% common perpetual open space.

- Amendments have been challenged and meditation continues with close votes.
4 main issues of contention--
 - ✓ Requirement for clustering
 - ✓ Restrictions on building near wetlands and in uplands
 - ✓ Urban services line
 - ✓ Did not expand urban boundary
- A visioning process is now being undertaken.
- It is anticipated that we will adopt a program at least similar to the Stewardship program.

LIST OF ISSUES IN OTHER COUNTIES

Hendry County

- We are a rural county with critical areas of state concern, where the center of the county is being bought by the state
- PILT – payments in lieu of taxes, won’t replace the loss we will suffer from property tax revenues on these lands and the agricultural activities that are the base of our economy
- We have very low revenue possibilities from property taxes on our remaining lands and are looking for funds to prepare for a likely population influx (Highway 80 will likely go to 4 lanes before other highways)
- We’re behind the 8 ball on everything
- How do we not rip off the tax base without an economic recovery program?
- Money will have to come from a variety of sources.
- I sometimes wonder if the driving force behind the purchase of private lands in the county is really to protect the panther or if is because water is really what’s at stake.
- Audience comment – We need to try to keep issues on the local screen and not allow them to become federal issues for Congress.

Highlands County

- There is competition between different, major interests: the development of the Lake Wales Ridge area, endangered wildlife and the citrus industry.
- There are a lot of individually owned old platted lots.
- There is very little money for new development.
- The County does not provide much infrastructure.
- Sewer connections are tough to do, and there is an issue with pollution from local package plants.

Lake County

- 60% of the county is in wetlands or flood zones
- We have Orlando on one side, major new growth on another and lakes everywhere.
- We have 14 municipalities, many of which are very protective of their individual “character”.
- We have lots of former orange groves that were the victims of the 3 freezes in the 80s.

- Now, we have a new Beltway passing through part of the County.
- Our issues are very similar to other comparable counties.

Volusia County

- We also deal with agriculture, with conservation areas and concerns with various rural issues
- We are preparing a study identified as the "South Central Volusia Study Area" to preserve agricultural, conservation, and related areas from urban encroachment for an area of approximately 100,000 acres along the SR 415/Tomoka Farms Road corridor.
- We have an active land acquisition program which has targeted the South Central Area for purchase of development rights as well as fee simple purchase.
- We plan to address the annexation pressure for urban growth in the south central study area through Interlocal Agreements with adjacent municipalities.
- Comment from Rick Drummond – One size fits all in the statute rarely fits any particular County. We need flexibility and appropriate models to help all the various communities.

Martin County

- Seventy five percent of the land has an Agricultural type of land use and 75% of the population is contained within the Primary Urban Service District along the east coast.
- While the (one unit per 20 acre) Agricultural Land Use and the Urban Service District were sufficient 20 years ago to protect (Martin County) against sprawl we are now finding that there is a market for subdivisions of 20 acre lots.
- Many of the proposed 20 acre lot subdivisions are for equestrian communities, such as Trailside, a 900 acre ranch/grove divided up into minimum 20 acre AG lots. Trailside like many residential subdivisions is complete with preserve areas, deed restrictions and a paved road.
- New residents that come to Martin County are from both states to the north and Counties to the south.
- Martin County is currently reviewing a land use amendment request to change 3900 acres, much of it productive pasture, from Agricultural (one unit per 20 acres) to Agricultural Ranchette (one unit per five acres).
- We are looking at the Rural Lands Stewardship program as one option to present to the Martin County Board of County Commissioners for the protection of Agricultural lands.

Marion County

- We have little genuine rural land left; it has been developed as horse land. Our tag is "Horse Capital of the World".
- We need to develop and market incentives so owners want to be part of a genuine program.

AGRICULTURE PRESENTATION

- There are positive roles for intensive agriculture as part of any truly sustainable community

- “Urban Agriculture” recognizes agriculture’s role in the long-term urban landscape.
- There is great pressure on agriculture because free trade, and urban development, will cause the industries to move out of the country; oranges to Brazil and tomatoes to Mexico
- To the extent that agriculture can offer improvements to the urban system, residents must assume a stake in the long-term outcome of agriculture, including profitability.

FOLLOWUP POSSIBILITIES

1. Create sample guidelines for counties.
2. Set up interlocal agreements.
3. Develop possible pilot program – in cooperation with DEP, DOACS, DCA and the water management districts – to use existing sources of funding to pay for the services necessary to implement this concept in small rural counties.
4. There is a good argument in favor of using existing funding sources for this purpose since the funds spent in Collier County to establish the RLSA (which will permanently protect 90,000 acres of environmentally sensitive lands and result in the retention of another 85,000 acres of open space uses) would have been sufficient to only purchase only 500 acres of environmentally sensitive land.
5. The PowerPoint presentation on the Web is good but we need help in explaining the details on what is happening in Collier County. Collier got private ag landowners involved from the beginning and moved to a value-added approach rather than just a regulatory approach.
6. Several county representatives agreed with Assistant County Manager Gregg Welstead from Lake County and Planning Director Dennis Murphy from St. Lucie County that "This is by far the best concept we've ever seen to address rural growth issues." However, they also agreed with planners Mariah Hutchinson from Highlands County and Clyde Dulin from Martin County who both said, "I can see this is an innovative, imaginative and exciting concept. But I do not have any idea how I can even begin to explain this to my commissioners."
7. It is clear that a succinct presentation is needed to describe this concept to county commissioners and planners in a very simple, understandable way.
8. A PowerPoint presentation would be a better choice for this purpose than a video.
9. Personal presentations by one or more council members, in concert with Walker Banning from DCA, who are able to meet with county planners and take part in county commission workshops, will be important in cultivating interest in the concept, and explaining how individual counties can adapt the Rural Lands Stewardship concept to address local needs and issues.
10. We need help in explaining the details of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and how to deal with it; how do we help urbanites understand what is really at stake?
11. Urban agriculture will only become possible if “urbanites” become genuine stakeholders.
12. We need a “walking around” list of consequences if agriculture is displaced in Florida.
13. We need to articulate the positive roles that agriculture can play in the long-term urban landscape, thereby showing the non-agricultural public that they have a stake in the outcome.
14. Collier is a good start and we need to add other pieces to it.
15. We need to move toward a model that has statewide implications.

16. We need to develop leadership at the state level with help from this group and then tie in all stakeholders.
17. We should not restrict ourselves to only working with state agencies; there are other possibilities -- e.g. Florida Chamber, Farm Bureau, etc.
18. Maybe take RLSA to communities and maximize tie-ins for people who actually live in these communities.
19. We need to sell it to the landholders first, then apply the principles to the government.

NEXT STEPS

1. Send out an E-mail asking for comments on what to we should do and why.
2. How do we institutionalize a mechanism that will ensure continuation of resources and services rather than just focusing on assets that become extinguished? We need to find something that we can support....right now. In 10 years, it will be all over for a lot of areas.
3. Market our approach. We need to determine – and explain -- how everyone wins. We need to explain to all interests that urban dwellers win, the developers win, the counties, state, and municipalities win, the environment win, and agriculture wins. Agriculture is simply a facilitator, and partner. Any other way, and it will be “Big Sugar”, “Big Citrus”, and “Big Cattle” against the poor homeowner – a battle that ag operators cannot win with 1.9% of the vote.
4. Schedule a meeting with leading agricultural organizations to introduce the concepts and start a dialogue. The sooner the better.