



MEETING MINUTES
JOINT MEETING WITH LAKE COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS
OUR COMMUNITY – OUR FUTURE
Session 5
Monday, September 29, 2008
Magnolia Room, Lake-Sumter Community College
Leesburg, Florida

Present:

- Commissioner Jennifer Hill
Commissioner Linda Stewart
Council Member Judy Tice
Council Member Jack Hogan
Commissioner James Rotella
Mayor Chris Bell
Commissioner John Gunter
Commissioner Sanna Henderson
Mayor Pro-Tem Mary Marquard
Mayor Melissa DeMarco
Mayor Nancy Clutts
Councilmember Norb Thomas
Board Member Cindy Barrow
Nadine Foley
Lou Fabrizio
Rob Kelly
Jerry Miller
Ray Gilley
Susan Boyajan

Representing:

- Lake County BCC
Lake County BCC
Town of Astatula
City of Clermont
City of Eustis
City of Fruitland Park
City of Fruitland Park
City of Leesburg
City of Mascotte
City of Mount Dora
City of Tavares
City of Tavares
Lake County Schools
Lake Soil & Water Cons. Dist.
Chamber Alliance of Lake County
Citizen's Coalition of Lake County
Progress Energy
Metro Orlando Econ. Dev. Council
Recording Secretary

Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner James Rotella, City of Eustis, welcomed all the participants and thanked them for being there. He related that this session was about sprawl and recapped that at the last meeting they were talking about the "big four", which were water, schools, transportation, and economic development. He explained that this was a publicly-advertised meeting, but there would not be any formal decisions being made that evening. He stated that they would have a lively discussion as facilitated by Orange County Commissioner Teresa Jacobs, who was Chairwoman of the Central Florida Smart Alliance and past Chairwoman of the Florida Association of Counties, and there would be some audio-visuals. He had the participants introduce themselves by stating their names and who they represented. He then explained that the discussion would be interactive and that they would be able to register their votes on the issues.

Mr. T. J. Fish, Executive Director of the LSMPO, stated that they had gone through these sessions since May of 2007 trying to develop a community vision, and the statement that has been made at every one of the previous four sessions was that all the efforts going on in Lake County should be tied together into one cohesive plan or vision for the community. He pointed out that the reality was that there was not just one plan or vision, but various entities that were pursuing separate issues, such as the quality and supply of water, schools, transportation, various economic development, public safety, and housing issues. He commented that they started realizing that they could not do their job at the MPO regarding transportation unless they tied it into land use, and he pointed out the importance of the design of the communities so that they were walkable, had transit access, and did not require long distance driving to reach critical opportunities. He reported that all through 2009 the MPO would be working to finalize the 2035 Transportation Plan, which would reflect what the needs are and try to project out what would happen over the next 10 or 20 years. He noted that they then would apply the rules of cost feasibility, which would place a limit on the realization of projects. He introduced Commissioner Teresa Jacobs, who represented the West Orange District.

Presentation by Commissioner Jacobs and Survey

Commissioner Jacobs stated that she was honored that Mr. Fish asked her to come and talk to this group, because she was very impressed with what Lake County was already doing and that Lake County was the first county in the State of Florida that was actually working together to deal with transportation concurrency. She explained how the polling devices worked. She commented that even in these economic tough times and slower growth, the decisions that they make about growth were important, and they needed to look at the financial impacts of growth, because any growth was not necessarily better than no growth. She suggested that they spend some time on the economic equation of growing their cities and county. She also suggested the idea of coming together and understanding their differences and areas of agreement; coming up with a game plan for how they would negotiate those disagreements and how they might proceed forward to address not only their 2035 long-range transportation plan, but their own models for their individual cities; and whether there was an opportunity for all of them to come up with a vision for the whole county. She noted that each city could do something different, but they could still have a unified plan that works together.

The first two questions of the poll showed that eight City Council Members, two County Commissioners, and five community stakeholders attended the meeting and that the majority decided to attend the meeting because they were concerned about the way their jurisdiction and other jurisdictions around them were dealing with growth.

In response to the next question, most participants thought that the quality of life in their city or county has both improved and declined in some ways because of changes it has undergone in the last ten years, and a list of those responses was created. The things that were noted that have improved were the amount of cultural activities, more job opportunities, appreciation of natural treasures, preservation of natural lands, better libraries, better fire and emergency services, better intergovernmental coordination,

improved health care, diverse age groups, and expansion of the community college. The things that were noted to have decreased in quality of life were traffic, quality of water in lakes, overcrowded schools, aesthetics of area, loss of rural areas, increased crime, and threatened environmentally sensitive areas.

Most participants polled also thought that the quality of life in their city or county would be better, rather than worse, ten years from now, in part due to things such as improved alternate transit, appreciation and protection for the environment, green building, and improved education. Participants were concerned about sprawl, lack of money, and lack of commercial development and high-wage jobs. An overwhelming majority of 93 percent of participants polled felt that they did not have the resources, especially revenue and water, to make their city or county a better place to live, and many believed that a lot of their regulatory authority was usurped by the State legislature.

In response to the next question polled, most participants (73 percent) felt that they had adequate control over new development to address growth concerns, and most people had mixed feelings regarding whether they had adequate control to protect their jurisdiction from outside forces and growth that may impact them. Commissioner Jacobs commented that it was better not to lose control over trips being put on the roads by other jurisdictions, and had them think about how they could work together to create an environment where there was mutual respect and enough, but not too much, control.

Sprawl vs. Smart Growth

Commissioner Jacobs described sprawl as the progressive loss of open space as an urban area grows and spreads into the surrounding countryside and as a development pattern with no boundaries that had an unlimited expansion of low-density, sporadic residential and commercial development and fragmented responsibility for land-use and zoning decisions. Most participants felt that Lake County has experienced sprawl. Commissioner Jacobs stated that smart growth was the antidote for sprawl, and most participants agreed with at least some of the principles of smart growth. She went on to specify that smart growth was well-planned development that protects open space and farmland, revitalizes communities, keeps housing affordable, and provides more transportation choices. She also stated that smart growth was environmentally-sensitive land development with the goals of minimizing dependence on the automobile, reducing air pollution, and making infrastructure investments more efficient. She went over some principles of smart growth, including creating a range of housing opportunities; making development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective; fostering distinctive, attractive communities; directing development towards existing communities; preserving open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas; and encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration. Most participants agreed with all six of those principles.

Commissioner Jacobs went over four smart growth principles that were not always embraced by everyone and were sometimes hard to actually put in place, which were

mixed land uses, compact building design, walkable communities, and variety of transportation choices. She pointed out that the common goal regarding smart growth was to preserve open space, and she gave an analogy regarding families dividing property on an island which pointed out that more density can, but does not automatically, preserve open space, agricultural land, and environmentally sensitive land and that this would only be true if there was a way to guarantee that only a limited amount of people were going to move to the community. She polled the participants on whether they felt that they had adequate protections in place to permanently preserve enough open space, with about two-thirds voting that they did not have enough of those protections. She recommended that they have more dialogue about the tools that were currently available to them, and she felt that the cities and county could work together on this.

Commissioner Jacobs related that smart growth also reduced reliance on automobiles, which would improve quality of life, reduce global warming, help with the energy crisis and rising gas prices, and reduce air pollution, as well as helping to stay within the 1970 Clean Air Act regulations, which were currently at 75 parts per million. She also mentioned new State regulations that dealt with urban sprawl, including a requirement that future land use elements would have to include greenhouse gas reduction strategies that discourage urban sprawl using energy-efficient land use patterns and a traffic circulation element that must address reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector. She also noted that MPO's must consider strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions through integration of land use and transportation planning programs within their Long Range Transportation Plans. She commented that mixed use at the city and community level could reduce commute times, gas consumption, and air pollution and increase the quality of life and the tax base; and asked if mixed use would also make sense at a neighborhood level, which would result in less trips and not just shorter trips. She polled everyone on whether they had the right mix of uses, and the majority felt that their constituents would benefit from more employment, retail, entertainment, and other opportunities within their city or county, and all the participants felt that their tax base would benefit from more employment centers and retail/commercial development.

Commissioner Jacobs talked about walkable communities, stating that there had to be a safe, comfortable, appealing, and convenient place to walk for it to work. She pointed out that the possibility of walkable communities and most of the transportation options of bicycle, bus, trolley, and train required more density than we were accustomed to living in or approving. She showed some slides illustrating some mixed use developments and compact designs in other areas of the state and country. The last polling question asked how confident the participants were that their city or county was heading in the right direction regarding planning for, accommodating, or controlling growth. The majority of those polled (56 percent) had concerns about the direction they were moving and would like to move towards implementing smart growth solutions, and a little over a third of those polled responded that they felt like they were going in the right direction because they were implementing smart growth principles.

Open Discussion and Next Steps

Commissioner Stewart commented that she felt that this meeting was very valuable, because everyone needed to be aware of how damaging sprawl was to them, including in the areas of education, economic development, and providing services to their citizens. She felt that there needed to be more cooperation between the cities and the county and that dialogues such as this would help lead them in getting on the same page so that they had the same vision for the future for Lake County.

Commissioner Jacobs recognized that there was a lot of common agreement about what the concerns and threats were and what the future should look like, and she thought that they could talk about how to negotiate any differences.

Commissioner Rotella stated that this was the perfect forum to address the issue of sprawl and other issues such as economic development and that it should be continued. He felt that the demographics would bring more people to Florida, but that revamping their Land Development Regulations and Comp Plan to plan for smart growth was a painful, long arduous process that did not come easily. Also, beyond that they still had to coordinate their interlocal agreements with the surrounding cities and the county.

Mayor Clutts suggested that at the next meeting they come to the table communicating their respective community's vision for the future so that a common thread could be extrapolated of what collectively they were communicating to help with an overall vision for Lake County. She also expressed a concern about all the cities looking the same and having no identity.

Commissioner Jacobs pointed out that they did not all have to have the same vision, but there was a way to integrate different visions so that they could peacefully co-exist.

Ms. Nadine Foley, a member of the LPA (Local Planning Agency), related that it was likely by the next Our Community - Our Future meeting, that the LPA would have sent the rest of the Comp Plan and the Future Land Use Element and map forward to the County Commissioners. She stated that they have ardently tried to incorporate some of the best parts of smart growth in the new Comp Plan. She commented that they have had wonderful input from the cities on their behalf and that the County has indicated that they will endeavor to rely on joint planning areas or interlocal service agreement areas.

School Board Member Cindy Barrow stated that the struggles that they faced regarding funding was such that they could not operate smaller schools with any efficiency, and their children would not have exposure to a variety of different courses if they were to do smaller schools. She also mentioned that because of impact fees, they saw new schools being built in new development areas, but the funding was not there for older schools that needed renovation and a lot of help. She pointed out, however, that Lake County was an A school district, and the School Board needed to be the economic engine.

Commissioner Jacobs noted that to get schools within walking distance, they would need much greater density. Regarding speaking with constituents, she suggested that they did not talk to them with the developer whose project was on the line, but to communicate with residents when there was no specific pending project to discuss.

Mr. John Drury, City Manager of Tavares, stated that they just held their first summit meeting between the Golden Triangle District Cities of Mount Dora, Eustis, and Tavares, and he thanked those cities for all getting together and to discuss where they were headed. He believed that communication was happening in Lake County. He mentioned that the designs for the expansion of the schools and the County buildings were going up instead of sprawling out. He opined that a lot of the smart growth principles were happening and it was an exciting time to be here.

Mr. Clark Morris from the East Lake Citizens' Council, asked several questions for the officials to think about, including how the officials would diversity the economy, how children could use their education locally, and what economy/business would be suitable for the County's ecological needs. He commented that they needed to find developers who will embrace smart growth instead of sprawl.

Mr. Fish stated that he was planning on having the next Our Community - Our Future meeting in January, and he wanted to fit in an update from each city and stakeholder of the highpoints of what they wanted everyone to know about their city or district. He mentioned that next time he wanted to discuss the Interlocal Service Delivery Boundary Area and bring back the map from the first meeting that showed the urban growth boundaries that had been suggested to them by the various municipalities and to look at which cities were starting to show promise of densities that could actually work in the right places for transit. He also related that they were going to closely look at which projects the cities deemed were critical to their community.

Commissioner Stewart related that the County was making an aggressive effort towards targeting industries such as Agritech, Green Tech, Health Services, Recreation, and Leisure; was taking some very positive steps; and knew the direction they were going.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to be brought to the attention of the Joint Meeting of the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization and Lake County Officials, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Welton Cadwell, Chairman