

EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL REPORT OF THE CITY OF FELLSMERE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

CHAPTER FOUR – CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the findings and conclusions of the EAR in regards to the progress achieved in addressing the major issues. Particular emphasis will be provided on what, if any, changes to the Plan may be warranted based upon these findings including identification of any actions or corrective measures and whether plan amendments are anticipated to address the major issues identified and analyzed in this report.

In addition, this chapter will provide a summary of all other recommended plan changes identified throughout the EAR as a result of changes to the State Comprehensive Plan, Florida Statutes, Florida Administrative Code, and regional plans. Finally, an identification of actions 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 or further studies determined to be needed.

MAJOR ISSUES

Maintain Historic Character of the Historic City. A review of the Plan policies, primarily in the Future Land Use and Transportation Elements, concludes that the goals, objectives and policies of the Plan are sufficient to ensure protection of the historic character of the City, subject, or course, to their successful implementation. A review of the Plan has revealed that a number of the required land development codes to help guide urban design have not yet been implemented. The best means to protect the historic character of the City is to ensure that all development and redevelopment is required to conform to specific urban form and design. To do this, these requirements must be codified.

In addition to the completion of the codification of the urban design requirements of the Plan, the City should investigate the use of graphic form-based codes to reinforce the desired community vision and maintain the historic character. Urban design requirements are cumbersome to accomplish through standard text-based regulations. However, implementing a form-based code is essentially a re-write of substantial portions of code and could as well require substantial amendments to the Plan. The City leaders and general public are likely unfamiliar with this type of regulating regime. An investigation into the use of a graphic form based code should proceed first through education and outreach and only after “buy-in” and acceptance of its benefits over the current regulatory system should it proceed to development and implementation.

Recommendations: Codify remaining policies of the plan related to urban design
 Evaluate the merits of a form-based code for the City of Fellsmere

Complete Streets (Street lighting, Sidewalks, Paved streets). A review of the Plan policies, primarily in the Transportation Element, concludes that the goals, objectives and policies of the Plan are sufficient to ensure development of complete streets. Again, the primary drawback is consistent implementation. Added to this constraint is the ever-present limitation of funding primarily for city-funded paving projects. Together these constraints prove to be a formidable obstacle. Just as with the previous issue, a graphic form-based code may help to solidify the desired street system in the City and make it much easier for developers to understand the required street pattern and thus provide complete streets. This combined with clearly adopted roadway cross-sections for various rights-of-way would allow the City to plan for the total costs of each roadway and reflect these costs in any future funding program. The temptation to bypass complete streets in exchange for more expedient paving projects will still face the City at each funding decision.

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Recommendations: Adopt complete street cross-sections for all road types in the City
Evaluate the merits of form-based code for the City of Fellsmere

Expanded Bus Service. The socioeconomic characteristics of the City clearly indicate that a larger than average proportion of the population do not have access to a vehicle for their daily travel needs. Transit service in the City and between Fellsmere and the urbanized eastern areas of the County open opportunities for the residents. Transit service, however, is a subsidized mode of travel without adequate dedicated funds. In today's tight fiscal environment, not expanding, but maintaining transit service levels is the goal. A review of the Plan policies, primarily in the Transportation Element, concludes that the policies of the Plan do not provide sufficient direction on avenues to maintain and expand transit service. First, the City should consider amending the Plan to identify a long range vision for transit service – a nonbinding guide to direct the City in its intergovernmental coordination efforts with the transit provider. Second the City should identify increments of this desired service and coordinate with the transit provider to prioritize these for consideration as funding allows. Third, the City should develop numerous strategies to consider in developing additional funding sources to maintain and expand transit service.

Recommendations: Identify a long range vision for transit service
Identify incremental transit service enhancements
Identify funding strategies for transit service

Codes to Meet Vision. As the City continues to grow, a strong desire exists to ensure that such growth will not result in the same standard nondescript, commonplace look that can be found anywhere in the Treasure Coast. A review of the visioning exercises conducted during the evaluation period, including the Sustainable Design Assessment; the Your Town: A Citizen Institute on Rural Design; the expansion of the Community Redevelopment Area; and the development of the Villages of Fellsmere, reveals that the results provide a clear vision for the desired future of the City. This vision has not been adopted into the Plan as an optional component as set forth in Chapter 163.3167(11) of the Florida Statutes. Nevertheless, a review of the Plan policies, primarily in the Future Land Use and Transportation Elements, concludes that the goals, objectives and policies of the Plan provide sufficient guidance in developing land development regulations to ensure codes meet vision. As indicated earlier, a review of the Plan has revealed that a number of the required land development codes to help guide urban design have not yet been implemented. In addition, as an interim until a form-based code is evaluated and potentially adopted for the City, a thorough review of the Land Development Code should be undertaken to ensure the existing code has implemented the Plan directives and will indeed meet the vision of the City.

Recommendations: Codify remaining policies of the plan related to urban design
Evaluate the merits of a form-based code for the City of Fellsmere
Perform comprehensive review of Land Development Code to ensure codes will result in desire vision of the City.
Consider adoption of visioning exercises into Plan

Implement Central Sewer System. The Plan policies, primarily in the Public Facilities Element, provide the guidance to the City to investigate and consider the provision of central sewer system throughout the City. The County has planned and accommodated adequate capacity to serve the City's sanitary sewer treatment needs; the City has yet to embark on providing the required services lines and requiring connection. Since a majority of the local streets are still

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unpaved, now is the time to consider a central system. The primary deterrent is funding and the consideration of the added costs that would be imposed on the residents of the City, many of which are working poor with little excess discretionary income. The City should also consider alternative measures such as heightened regulation of septic systems to ensure their proper functioning. After the City determines the level of commitment to any desired system, appropriate plans and programs can be adopted.

Recommendations: Develop a full cost accounting of a proposed sewer system or septic system regulatory regime
Identify funding sources that may be used to implement sewer system

Capitalize on our Conservation Opportunities. Policies that would allow the City to capitalize on their conservation opportunities would be most appropriate in the Future Land Use and Conservation Elements. However, since the proximity of the City to the adjoining conservation areas only recently occurred as part of the annexations, the Plan does not contain much direction that would guide the City in this direction. Creating meaningful direction though to capitalize in the conservation opportunities should involve a wider stakeholder group including Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Council, Business Development Board, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, SJRWMD, and major land owners. The efforts created should also reinforce a comprehensive economic development program for the City and the region in general. As such, the City of Fellsmere should continue the development of an Economic Element addressing the markets that would best fit within the environment offered by the surrounding conservation areas and the permitted activities available in these conservation areas. Only through such an effort should future goals, objectives, and policies be developed to capitalize on the conservation areas.

Recommendations: Develop conceptual plans and programs to capitalize on the adjoining conservation areas
Develop concrete actions that will lead toward implementation of the plans and programs

Economic Development. The City has taken strong, bold actions to position itself for economic success. Having recently annexed over 20,000 acres of vacant land and embarked on a number of economic development initiatives, the City is pro-actively seeking economic development. In November 2009, the City developed an Economic Development Plan in partnership with the Sebastian Area Chamber of Commerce. The City also provides targeted economic development assistance through its Community Redevelopment Agency. Along with these initiatives, the City also wishes to take advantage of the many conservation areas in the immediate area as discussed earlier. In such a challenging environment, attaining lasting economic development is difficult. A continuous multi-pronged effort is required. To this end, the City should continue along its current path implementing the recommendation of the Economic Development Plan including the creation of an Economic Development Element.

Recommendations: Implement recommendations of the Economic Development Plan

1. The City of Fellsmere should place the Tax Abatement Referendum on the City's 2010 ballot for voter consideration;
2. Utilizing this report, the City of Fellsmere should draft & implement an Economic Development Element for the City's Comprehensive Plan;
3. The City of Fellsmere should consider the creation of a dedication staff position for planning and economic development;

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4. The City of Fellsmere should develop and engage in a marketing campaign to target domestic and foreign investment;
5. The City should proactively pursue substantive programs that foster economic development (e.g., Brownfield designation, TEA designation, etc.);
6. Review and update the CRA Master Plan, incorporating the additional 860 acres recently added, should be considered in the near future.

CHANGES DUE TO REVIEW OF PLAN OBJECTIVES

Recommendations emanating from the detailed review of the plan objectives in relation to the major issues from Chapter 3 of this EAR are summarized on pages 4-5 through 4-8.

CHANGES DUE TO STATUTORY AND RULE REVISIONS

The tables on pages 4-9 through 4-16 provide a summary of the changes required to maintain consistency with changes in state statutory and rule revisions. This section of the report simply lists these recommendations grouped according to the source of the required change, i.e., changes due to amendments to the State Plan, Florida Administrative Code, and State Statutes.

CHANGES BASED ON GENERAL REVIEW OF PLAN

In addition to analyzing the Plan in relation to the major issues and statutory and rule changes, a general review of Plan was also conducted for each element to determine the status of the achievement of each policy. The tables on pages 4-17 through 4-40 are an excerpt of the complete tables provided in the Appendix D providing the complete analysis of the status of each policy in the Plan. The following tables reflect only those policies that require amendments to the Plan.

CHANGES DUE TO STATUTORY AND RULE REVISIONS

The tables beginning on page 4-41 provide a summary of the changes required from the SJRWMD in response to their request for analysis of EAR issues during the initial scope development.