



# **ALACHUA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: 2011-2030 EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL ISSUE SUMMARY**

3/15/2018

---

## **STATEMENT OF ISSUE**

### **Issue Area 1: Land Use and Development Standards**

This issue paper will cover the following topic:

Assess existing open space, landscaping and utility requirements relative to existing Comprehensive Plan objectives for walkable, mixed use urban development within the Urban Cluster.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last 20 years the County has increasingly looked to more urban forms of development within the Urban Cluster. One prominent feature of urban development is its support for all modes of transportation, including bicycles and pedestrians. Infrastructure, such as roadways and utilities, play a vital role in defining urban places, and proper design and location of these facilities is required to support pedestrians. Landscaping within the public realm, as well as the appropriate location of active and passive open spaces, encourages walkability.

## **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN POLICIES RELATING TO ISSUE**

### **Future Land Use Element**

### **GENERAL STRATEGY 3**

Promote the spatial organization of neighborhoods, districts, and corridors through urban design codes, incorporating graphics that serve as predictable guides for community development. Implementation shall be through a combination of standard requirements and incentives, creating a planning framework that includes provisions to:

- Create neighborhoods that are compact, connected to adjacent development, have limited mixed uses at centers, and have interconnected, mixed modal streets with pedestrian, bicycle, and transit friendly areas.
- Integrate civic, institutional, and commercial activity in neighborhoods and districts, not isolated in remote, single-use complexes.

- Avoid large areas of single-use, similar densities, and similar types of units. A diverse mix of land uses, housing types and costs and densities shall be promoted. Identify locations or districts where special or single use activities shall be allowed or restricted (e.g., large scale retail or industrial areas).
- Link corridors that are regional connectors of neighborhoods and districts, ranging from parkways and transit lines to watersheds and greenways.
- Provide for infill where appropriate.

**Policy 1.4.1.4** Urban development shall incorporate design techniques to promote integration with adjacent neighborhoods and enhance the quality of the living environment. Such design techniques shall include:

(a) Pervious open space shall be designed as a usable part of the development as required by Conservation and Open Space Policy 5.2.2 and Stormwater Management Element Policy 5.1.11. Pervious open space requirements fulfilled through the use of conservation resource areas per Conservation and Open Space Element Policy 5.2.3 shall incorporate usable open space, to the extent consistent with the character and protection of the resource.

**Policy 2.1.8** Stormwater management facilities shall be sufficient to serve the functional purpose, and shall be designed as a public amenity that provides usable open space or an aesthetic feature that resembles natural areas. The use of shared stormwater facilities shall be evaluated as part of the development plan process, and utilized to the extent feasible. Low Impact Development (LID) techniques for stormwater management shall be encouraged.

**Policy 7.1.8** Buffers shall be required between two adjacent uses as generally described in the Buffer Group Matrix table.

As part of the update of the land development regulations to implement the Comprehensive Plan, buffer requirements shall be further specified, including buffer height and width, amount and type of plant material, and use of walls, fences, and berms. Use of effective transitional design practices shall be recognized in the land development regulations as an alternative to or in combination with buffers, to integrate development along the edges of different land use categories and within mixed use developments.

## **Stormwater Management Element**

**Policy 5.1.10** Alachua County shall require stormwater management facilities be designed in accordance with the Stormwater Management and Landscaping Policies of the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPo) as outlined in the MTPo Policies Manual as an integral part of the development, as a physical or visual amenity

that provides usable open space or that resembles native habitat communities by planting native vegetation in and around the facility to the maximum extent feasible.

## **Conservation and Open Space Element**

**OBJECTIVE 5.2 - OPEN SPACE** Preserve open space within developments to ensure public health, safety, and welfare; protect and enhance natural resources; provide public gathering spaces; promote pedestrian and bicycle connectivity; and enhance recreational opportunities.

**Policy 5.2.1** Natural features such as steep slopes, ridges, sinkhole areas, floodplains, and other unsuitable areas for urban development shall be retained as open space areas. If appropriate, these areas shall be developed for use as trails, and where possible, used to connect other recreation and open space areas and other developments.

**Policy 5.2.2** Pervious open space shall be provided on at least 20% of the development site through a variety of features such as:

- (a) Open spaces dedicated primarily to public, recreation, or pedestrian use, such as community gardens, community fields, greens, plazas, and squares.
- (b) Natural areas of non-invasive trees and plants.
- (c) Landscaped areas, including street trees, utilizing a variety and balanced mix of canopy and understory trees, shrubs, and groundcovers, consistent with xeriscape principles and emphasizing native species.
- (d) Linkages to larger open space corridors.
- (e) Portions of stormwater management areas that meet conservation, recreation, or open space design criteria as specified in the Land Development Code.
- (f) Portions of green roofs that meet open space design criteria to be specified in the Land Development Code.

**Policy 5.2.6** Nonresidential and mixed use developments, including TOD or TND, may reduce the amount of open space maintained onsite by participating in the County's Transfer of Development Rights Program and purchasing development rights in accordance with Section 9.0 of the Future Land Use Element. The purchase of development rights shall be recorded on the Final Development Plan in the manner provided in the Land Development Regulations.

**Policy 5.2.7** Within Transit Oriented Developments, Traditional Neighborhood Developments, and mixed use development within Activity Centers, a portion of public plazas or squares which combine natural areas with permeable paved surfaces may be

counted toward the required amount of open space to be maintained onsite, provided that the open space requirements of this section are fulfilled first with conservation areas in accordance with Policy 5.2.3. Design standards for plazas and squares which may qualify as open space shall be provided in the Land Development Code, and shall include:

- (1) minimum and maximum size thresholds and dimensions;
- (2) maximum area which may be applied toward the open space requirement based on development size;
- (3) allowance for the use of permeable paved surfaces; and
- (4) standards for general public accessibility and functional integration with surrounding development.

**Policy 5.3.6** The County shall enhance the value and beauty of bicycle and pedestrian routes by locating them to take advantage of scenic resources while maintaining the ecological integrity of other conservation and preservation areas.

### **Economic Element**

**Policy 1.6.1** The County shall encourage expanded and new businesses to locate in well-designed, compact mixed-use communities as encouraged in the Future Land Use Element.

## **ANALYSIS RELATING TO ISSUE**

The Comprehensive Plan does not include detailed policies or requirements about location or design of utility infrastructure. However, there is substantial discussion about Open Space.

One main topic that could be better implemented in the Comprehensive Plan is the idea of the Public Realm. At its core, the Public Realm would include all of those areas that are available for the public at large to use. This might include roads, sidewalks, plazas, parks and, in Alachua County, Open Space. The Public Realm may include things like seating, utilities and other infrastructure. The way that different parts of the Public Realm relate to each other and to private development is important to define. While the County's Comprehensive Plan discusses the need to accommodate all users within new development, it may be necessary to provide more cohesive guidance about the design of the Public Realm.

When compared with historic development, there are more utilities now that need to be accommodated in new development. As an example, stormwater management

conveyance infrastructure and reclaimed water were not required or available when most of downtown Gainesville was first constructed. Other new types of utilities include fiber optic cable, natural gas, and cable. Each of these new utilities requires additional space somewhere in new development. While in older development they may be accommodated vertically on poles, they are typically spaced horizontally when underground. Thus, when these utilities are placed within the Public Realm, there can be unintended consequences to how that area is designed and functions.

## **POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING ISSUE**

Review and revise policies relating to promotion of urban form in the Urban Cluster to establish policy framework for reconciling potential conflicts in site planning between needs relating to utilities, open space, and landscaping in the land development regulations.

## **REFERENCE MATERIALS**

*Alachua County Public Works Construction and Inspection Standards*

<http://www.alachuacounty.us/Depts/PW/Documents/policies/ECI/Construction%20and%20Inspection%20Standards%20Rev.1.05.07Final.pdf>

*Gainesville Regional Utilities Design Standards and Construction Detail*

<https://www.gru.com/TabID/3904/>