

**DESCRIPTION OF REQUEST:
ENVISION ALACHUA SECTOR PLAN / COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN AMENDMENT**

JUNE 22, 2015

This request is to amend specific text and maps of the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan in order to provide significant conservation lands and agricultural lands in perpetuity, and provide opportunities for additional employment-oriented mixed use in eastern Alachua County on approximately 52,745+ acres owned by Plum Creek.

Description of the Request

The Envision Alachua Sector Plan (EASP) establishes the Objectives and Policies for 52,745+ acres of land located in the eastern portion of Alachua County. During an extensive 4+ year visioning process, community representatives articulated a future vision to leverage the opportunities associated with planning for such a large-scale land area while it remained under a single ownership. The Framework Map for the Planning Area reflects the collaborative work of the citizen-based Envision Alachua planning process and illustrates land use relationships that will support future economic development areas in east Alachua County and:

1. Creates economic opportunities that accommodate significantly more jobs than anticipated in the historic trend-based projections used in the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan. The proposed scale of the Jobs Centers creates an opportunity in Alachua County that doesn't currently exist to attract large employers that can serve as the catalytic tenants to energize a region's economy and to provide expansion opportunities for existing institutional prospects that are currently constrained by parcel size or adjacent uses. These opportunities at this scale will support the UF pre-eminence initiative to be a top 10 Research Institute, will diversify the local economy beyond UF/government, and will address poverty and unemployment issues within east Alachua County.
2. Places new Job Centers in east County where they will directly address poverty and unemployment in east Gainesville and Hawthorne, and will address economic inequity issues that exist between west County and east County.
3. Permanently protects significantly more land from development than would be protected under the current Comprehensive Plan. The amendment requires the development of communities that have a balanced and compatible mix of land uses and employs environmentally sustainable development practices while conserving lands to protect ecosystems and wildlife corridors.

The Envision Alachua Framework Map illustrates this planning strategy through four primary land use components:

1. Preservation Lands
Preservation areas that consist of specifically designated lands, which are intended for use as natural reserves, shall be managed through a Conservation Management Plan to insure the preservation of the natural resources in perpetuity. Preservation lands within the EASP were identified to function as an enhancement of Lochloosa Creek's connected wetland system to promote linkages for wildlife habitat and to build upon East Alachua County's conservation framework. By protecting the creek and key uplands and wetlands that border this important resource, the EASP Preservation lands supplement existing conservation lands in East County and helps to protect the long-term health and integrity of this corridor. The 3,538 acre EASP Preservation lands corridor retains connectivity between protected conservation lands in the eastern portion of Alachua County, as part of the Critical Ecological Corridor.

2. Conservation Lands

Conservation Lands are identified in locations that would protect valuable natural resources, particularly those that support the long-term economic and environmental objectives of Alachua County. The locations of Conservation Lands were based upon the following criteria:

- Contribution to regional landscape and ecological linkages within Northern Florida;
- Protection of large wetland strands and major tributary systems and large, forested wetland strands that provide core habitat that supports numerous native game and non-game species;
- Contiguity with existing conservation lands and Plum Creek conservation easements in Alachua County;
- Opportunity to build upon Alachua County’s “Emerald Necklace”;
- Contribution to the conservation and enhancement of natural resources, local and regional watersheds and natural preserves (Paynes Prairie, Lochloosa Lake, Newnan’s Lake Conservation Area, Orange Lake, Phifer Flatwoods, Balu Forest); and
- Integration of green infrastructure, including its roles in stormwater management to minimize flooding and maintain connections between natural areas to support wildlife movement, as well as its role as a community amenity and regional recreation destination.

3. Urban Lands (Employment Oriented Mixed Uses)

Urban Lands, designated as Employment Oriented Mixed Uses (EA-EOMU) in the EASP, were identified in locations that would focus future growth in a few key developable areas to maximize economic potential while minimizing development pressure on surrounding rural, agricultural, and conservation areas. The location of EOMU Lands was based upon the following criteria:

- Leveraging existing resources – building upon existing infrastructure, nearby population centers, and institutional and commercial anchors;
- Access to significant existing infrastructure, including major roadways, airports, and rail;
- Proximity to existing population centers, including Gainesville, east Gainesville, and Hawthorne;
- Land suitability for concentrated, mixed-use economic development;
- Opportunity to protect/preserve adjacent communities, including Windsor; and
- Proximity to a network of open spaces that support outdoor recreation.

4. Rural / Agricultural Lands

Rural / Agricultural Lands are retained in locations that maintain and enhance the rural development form and landscape that define the edges of the urbanizing areas, and preserves the natural and cultural assets, which embody the area’s heritage and traditions. Rural / Agricultural Lands also maintain functioning, productive agricultural and silvicultural operations and lands, accommodate agricultural support activities and protect valuable farmland for use by existing and future generations.

Summary of Revisions to the EASP Application

Plum Creek Land Company submitted a plan amendment application to Alachua County on June 23, 2014 to create the Envision Alachua Sector Plan. The County subsequently scheduled and conducted a series of workshops in September 2014 to hear County staff presentations regarding the EASP Plan Amendment Application (CPA-01-14) and to receive public comment. In preparation for those workshops, County staff prepared an analysis of the request, which detailed issues, concerns, and omissions that staff identified during their review of the Application. The Application has been substantively revised to address each of the issues that were identified as a part of this preliminary staff review process. Key revisions are highlighted below:

1. The area proposed for development has been significantly reduced.
 - Area B has been removed from the EASP. ‘Area B’ has been renamed ‘EA-Hawthorne’ and is now included in both Annexation and Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) applications that have been submitted to the City of Hawthorne. The proposed development activity within the City CPA application is consistent with the EASP in their entirety.
 - Areas D and E have been removed from the EASP.
 - The proposed policies prohibit development in Area C (renamed US 301 Job Center) prior to 2030.
2. Proposed conservation areas and protection policies have been enhanced.
 - The Lochloosa Creek Conservation Corridor has been expanded and has now been designated as EA-Preservation and will be managed solely for natural resource value with no forestry permitted.
 - Additional data collection and analysis has been prepared to confirm the soil conditions and wetland boundaries in the SR 20 Job Center (previously known as Area A).
 - The proposed policies establish a maximum wetland impact of 400 acres for the entire 52,745 acres within the EASP. (This is less than one (1) percent of the total land area)
3. Infrastructure Needs and Funding have been clarified.
 - Additional data and analysis has been prepared to identify the projected infrastructure needs associated with the plan amendment.
 - Capital improvements required to maintain the adopted Level of Service standards for all applicable services and facilities have been identified for 5-year and 30-year increments in the proposed policies and at build out within the data and analysis documents.
 - The proposed policies clarify the proposed methods for financing required infrastructure and reinforce that the project will bear the financial responsibility for infrastructure improvements and not existing taxpayers.

Reason for Request

In 2005, Alachua County government asked Plum Creek if it had a master plan of all of its holdings in the County. In response to the County’s question, and as part of Plum Creek’s ongoing process for evaluating its lands, the company paused its normal business practice of regularly buying and selling land in the County in order to consider suitable community uses, together with timber, that could be aligned with community needs. Through discussions with numerous community leaders, the company learned about land use opportunities that merited further community discussion. As a result, the Envision Alachua community visioning process was launched in June 2011 to explore potential opportunities for Plum Creek’s holdings in Alachua County.

The initial phase of the Envision Alachua community visioning process began in June 2011 and was completed in February 2012. It included a series of six (6) facilitated Task Force meetings, two (2) Community Workshops held at local churches, and a series of four (4) Educational Forums on related topics.

Through discussions with the Task Force and community, Plum Creek explored potential future economic development and conservation scenarios that could achieve long-range economic, environmental, and community goals.

Key issues identified by the Task Force and addressed in the document Envision Alachua Task Force - Vision, Goals, and Guiding Principles for Plum Creek lands in Alachua County, include:

- Disparity between west Gainesville and east Gainesville with respect to income, jobs, access to quality education, and access to goods and services;

- Growing competition from other regions of Florida, and other areas of the US and the world; and
- Lack of funding for completion of the "Emerald Necklace" conservation vision.

In 2012, Plum Creek continued the Envision Alachua process with Phase II convening a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) along with the Task Force and community members to determine how to achieve the community's Phase I vision and goals on Plum Creek's lands. The TAG provided input into Phase II of Envision Alachua by helping Plum Creek advance the community's land use and conservation strategies for Plum Creek's lands in Alachua County. TAG members were asked to help:

- Identify relevant policies, opportunities, and guidelines associated with Plum Creek lands in Alachua County; and
- Identify issues and opportunities to be addressed in the Plum Creek Lands Sector Plan

Based on the community's vision, the three major reasons for this request to amend the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan to include the Envision Alachua Sector Plan (EASP) can be summarized as follows:

1. The EASP includes the only land holding in single ownership in Alachua County large enough to accommodate a major jobs center, with several significant employers and campuses within a connected livable community, which will enable Gainesville, the University of Florida, and the region to compete in the State, national and global economies. (ECONOMY)
2. The EASP 52,700+ acres are still owned by one entity, Plum Creek, with enough property and patience to set aside over 47,000 acres to be permanently protected in conservation or agriculture, in fair trade for entitlements. (ENVIRONMENT)
3. The EASP, with an approved major jobs center, is a prerequisite to attracting employers that will bring economic opportunities to east Gainesville and Hawthorne, and address historic economic disparity. (COMMUNITY).

Over the past four years of the Envision Alachua community visioning process, over 1,500 community members have been involved. An additional 225 presentations and key leader meetings have supported the effort. This comprehensive community inclusive approach has been unprecedented within the State of Florida to the degree of including the community in the planning process and allowing them to shape our plan. The Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) honored Envision Alachua with its 2013 Award of Excellence in the Best Practices category. The Best Practices Award is intended to honor a specific planning tool, practice, program, project, or process that is a significant advancement to specific elements of planning.

"The awards committee selected the Envision Alachua project for its very public and transparent visioning process," wrote APA Florida President Brian Teeple, AICP, in a letter nominating the process for an APA National Award. "The committee specifically noted the commitment that Plum Creek has made to the all-inclusive nature of the process, engaging residents from all over Alachua County, including those whose voices are typically not heard in the planning process," he added. The Florida APA recommended other landowners look to Envision Alachua as an example of how to include the community in master planning.

As a result, the sector plan application with the submittal of its first part-the 50-year, Long-Term Master Plan (LTMP) for Plum Creek's 52,745 acres in Alachua County reflects the community's vision, desire, and goals for how it wants to mature and grow over the next 50 years.