

Reason for Request and Description of Request

Envision Alachua Sector Plan

This request is to amend the 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 60,136 acres owned by Plum Creek.

Reason for Request

In 2005, Alachua County government asked Plum Creek for a master plan of all of its holdings in the county. In response to the County's request, 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 visioning process was launched in June 2011 to explore potential opportunities for Plum Creek's holdings in Alachua County.

The process is designed to be:

- A holistic approach to sustainable conservation and economic development;
- An opportunity for a unique partnership and collaboration between the public and private sectors; and
- An open dialogue with community leaders representing economic development, business, local government, education, environmental, conservation and residents 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 facilitated Task Force meetings, two Community Workshops held at local churches, and a series of four Educational Forums on related topics.

The Task Force is composed of 31 members representing business, economic development, local government, education, environmental, conservation and residents of Alachua County. Members were selected by Plum Creek based on discussions with local government officials, organizational representatives and community leaders. In selecting Task Force members, the company worked to ensure that different interests and constituencies with a range of opinions on economic, environmental and community issues in Alachua County were represented. Members of the general public were invited to participate in the Envision Alachua visioning process by attending Task Force meetings, Community Workshops and Educational Forums.

Task Force and community members provided input into the visioning process for Plum Creek lands in Alachua County. Through discussions with the Task Force and community, the company explored potential future economic development and conservation scenarios that could achieve long-range economic, environmental and community goals. The result is a document that describes the community's vision for potential future economic development and conservation on lands Plum Creek owns in Alachua County, entitled: *Envision Alachua Task Force, Vision, Goals and Guiding Principles for Plum Creek Lands in Alachua County*.

Key issues identified by the Task Force, and addressed in the Guiding Principles, 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 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. Technical Advisory Group membership is composed of 19 members including representatives from agencies with regulatory and review authority over large-scale, land-use planning and policy decisions in Alachua County and the state. It also includes individuals with specialized technical expertise in economics, conservation and community planning, as well as liaisons from the Task Force who are keepers of the vision.

The Technical Advisory Group (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. The Task Force, the community and Plum Creek evaluated the TAG’s input, as it relates to the Phase I vision, for use in creating the 60,136 acre sector plan. 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

The Envision Alachua Phase II process consisted of five Task Force meetings, four community workshops, four Technical Advisory Committee meetings and the sponsorship of one economic development forum through the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce. The outcome of the Phase II process was the 50-year, Long-term Master Plan (LTMP) for Plum Creek’s holdings in Alachua County shaped by the community’s vision in Phase I. During Phase II, work on the subsequent Detailed Specific Area Plans (DSAPs) for portions of the LTMP began with the Task Force and community.

During Phase II, Plum Creek determined to use the Sector Plan process for its land-use application as it best represented the outcomes of the community’s vision. The Sector Plan is a comprehensive planning tool that:

- Ensures lands are designated for conservation and economic development;
- Plans lands greater than 15,000 acres; and
- Exceeds the current planning horizon of 20 years.

The sector plan comprehensive planning tool was recently added to Alachua County's options for comprehensive land use planning in anticipation of Plum Creek's requested land-use application.

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 60,000+ acres are still owned by one entity, Plum Creek, with enough property and patience to set aside over 50,000 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)

Recognizing that implementation of the community vision requires much more than approval of a land use change, and in response to the community vision, goals and guiding principles, separate teams addressing priority topics were formed in the three key areas of the vision – economy, conservation/environment, community. Those teams are looking deeper into the issues and solutions for those topic areas.

In the Economy goal area: Plum Creek, partnering with the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, the Council of Economic Outreach, Innovation Gainesville, the University of Florida and Santa Fe College, to create a regional marketing plan for economic development. With the economic progress initiative, Plum Creek is funding the baseline analysis of the greater Alachua County area, a high education asset report of UF and SFC, a regional blue print marketing plan and the necessary tools. Over 150 interviews have comprised the data research including administration, deans and researchers at UF and SFC, businesses, government officials and community members interested in bettering the economy. The community partnership will support this effort as it executes the forthcoming plans.

In the Community goal area: The East County Educators Committee was formed with the goal of taking a strategic approach to addressing preparation and awareness issues so that youth are ready for these new opportunities. The Committee specifically discussed these issues within the African American community, where it is seeking to ensure this community is prepared for the future. This committee's purpose is to discuss issues, challenges and recommendations which will be shared with other community groups addressing this education preparation and job training effort as a whole inclusive of Innovation Gainesville, Florida Works and Alachua County Public Schools.

In the Conservation Lands/Environment goal area: Plum Creek has convened a water team to produce a comprehensive integrated water system strategy to support the LTMP for the company's lands in Alachua County and as this relates to the North Florida Region. The water team is comprised of experts in water, wastewater, stormwater, wetlands, wildlife, environment,

land-use planning and engineering from the business sector and public sector. The strategy seeks to make the community's goals for water a reality with a focus of aggressive conservation methods and viewing water use with a new ethic that guide participation within the LTMP. A Water Advisory Review Panel of independent experts will be convened in 2014 in order to review the work of the water team and provide input to the strategy.

Over the past two-and-a-half years of the Envision Alachua 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 for Plum Creek's 60,136 acres in Alachua County – reflects the community's vision, desire and goals for how it wants to mature over the next 50 years.

Description of the Request

The Envision Alachua Sector Plan (EASP) establishes the Objectives and Policies for 60,136+ acres of lands located in the eastern portion of Alachua County. During an extensive 2-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 a future economic development area in East Alachua County and:

- Creates economic progress opportunities that support and enhance the innovation economy, provide job opportunities and services at all economic levels and ensure a robust and sustainable economy;
- Supports the development of communities that have a balanced and compatible mix of land uses and employ environmentally sustainable development practices while conserving lands to protect ecosystems, wildlife corridors and working landscapes; and
- Promotes and encourages long-term planning for conservation, development, and agriculture on a landscape scale as identified within Chapter 163. 3245, F. S.

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

1. Conservation Lands

The vision for the EASP Conservation Lands considers the broader regional landscape setting within which the lands are located; the identification of key environmental linkages in the regional landscape; the identification of sufficient lands to accommodate future needs of Alachua County for jobs creation centers and expanding population; the identification of lands targeted for agricultural and silvicultural uses; and the identification of significant environmental resources within lands targeted for urban uses for resource protection and management. Conservation Lands were 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 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, community watersheds and natural preserves (Paynes Prarie, Lochloosa Lake, Newnan's Lake Conservation Area, Orange Lake, Phifer Flatwoods, Balu Forest);
- Enhancement of Lochloosa Creek's connected wetland system to promote linkages for habitat and to build upon East Alachua County's conservation framework; and
- Integration of green infrastructure, including its roles in stormwater management to minimize flooding and in maintaining connections between natural areas to support wildlife movement, as well as its role as a community amenity and regional recreation destination.

2. Urban Lands (Employment Oriented Mixed Uses)

Urban Lands, designated as Employment Oriented Mixed Uses (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 the open space framework/network to support outdoor recreation economy.

3. Rural Lands

Rural Lands were identified in locations that were designed to maintain and enhance the rural development form and landscape that define the edges of the urbanizing areas, and to preserve the natural and cultural assets, particularly of Windsor, which embody the area's heritage and traditions. The location of Rural Lands was based upon the following criteria:

- Proximity to and opportunity to protect and enhance the existing rural community of Windsor;
- Potential to contain and define the edge of the proposed EOMU Land Use areas; and
- Opportunity to maintain the character and form of the existing development pattern as a natural extension of Windsor.

4. Agricultural Lands

Agriculture Lands were identified to maintain functioning, productive agricultural and silvicultural operations and lands, accommodate agricultural support activities, and protect valuable farmland for use by existing and future generations. The location of Agriculture Lands was based upon the following criteria:

- Proximity to potential commercial and/or institutional uses within EOMU Lands;
- Suitability as a transition zone to conservation areas;
- Opportunity to maintain and enhance existing agricultural adjacencies, heritage, and character of the area;
- Serving as a "greenbelt" to limit sprawl and promote compact development; and
- Land suitability for agriculture and silviculture uses.



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ENVISION ALACHUA TASK FORCE MEMBERS

PHASE 1

Updated December 2012

Roster of Task Force Members

Jane Adams

Vice President, University Relations
The University of Florida

Dr. Dale Brill

President
Florida Chamber Foundation

Rob Brinkman

Vice Chair of Citizens Advisory Committee to
MTPO, Member of Rural Concerns Advisory
Committee, Former Chair of Suwannee St.
Johns Sierra Club

Robert Castellucci

Vice President, Marketing
RoomSync

Brent Christensen

CEO
Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce &
Council for Economic Outreach

Dr. Karen Cole-Smith

Executive Director
East Gainesville Initiative & Community
Outreach
Santa Fe College

Tom Coward

Retired Alachua County Commissioner &
Retired Lincoln High School Teacher

Ed Dix

Realtor, Developer
Edix Investments, Inc.

Mike Dykes

Officer, Cracker Boys Hunt Club
Senior Project Manager, CH2MHILL

Vivian Filer

Chair
Cotton Club Museum & Cultural Center

Eric Godet

President & CEO
Godet Industries

Dr. Richard Hilsenbeck

Director of Conservation Projects
Florida Chapter Office
The Nature Conservancy

Robert Hutchinson

Executive Director
Alachua Conservation Trust

Pete Johnson

Former Board Member
Gainesville Regional Airport Authority

Dug Jones

Assistant Vice President of Economic
Development
Santa Fe College
Center for Innovation & Economic Development

Nona Jones

Community Relations Director
GRU

Lindsay Krieg

Community Director
March of Dimes

Charles Lee

Director of Advocacy
Audubon Florida

Eddie Lee Martin

Former Vice Chair, NCFL Regional Planning
Council
Former Commissioner, City of Hawthorne

Jack Payne

Senior Vice President
Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences (IFAS)
University of Florida

Brad Pollitt
Vice President of Facilities
Shands Healthcare

Ed Regan
Assistant General Manager, Strategic Planning
GRU

Steven Seibert, J.D.
The Seibert Law Firm

Bill Strassberger
District Engineer
Clay Electric

Adrian Taylor
Pastor
Springhill Missionary Baptist Church

Kevin Thorpe
Senior Pastor
Faith Missionary Baptist

Terry Tougaw
Director, Community Planning
Alachua County Public Schools

Bobbi Walton
President Community Service for Windsor,
Former Librarian for CH2MHILL and Former
Research Librarian for Environmental Science &
Engineering

Justin Williams
Officer, Public Relations
Cracker Boys Hunt Club

Ex Officio Members

Rick Drummond
Assistant County Manager
Alachua County

Scott Koons
Executive Director
NCF Regional Planning Council

Participating Task Force Members Representing Plum Creek

Todd Powell
Director, Real Estate
Plum Creek

Rose Fagler
Manager Community Relations
Plum Creek

Plum Creek Resource Liaison to the Task Force

Jon Rashleigh
Senior Resources Manager
Plum Creek

MIG, Inc.

Daniel Iacofano
Principal & Lead Facilitator
MIG, Inc.

Joan Chaplick
Principal
MIG, Inc.



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ENVISION ALACHUA TASK FORCE MEMBERS

PHASE 2

Roster of Task Force Members – Phase II

Jane Adams

Vice President, University Relations
The University of Florida

Dr. Dale Brill

Founder and Obsessive Thinker
Thinkspot Inc.

Rob Brinkman

Vice Chair of Citizens Advisory Committee to
MTPO, Former Chair of Suwannee St. Johns
Sierra Club

Dorothy M. Brown (alternate for Bobbi Walton)
Windsor Resident

Robert Castellucci

President, CEO
RoomSync

Dr. Karen Cole-Smith

Executive Director
Community Outreach and East Gainesville
Instruction
Santa Fe College

Ken Cornell

Realtor, Cornell & Associates

Tom Coward

Retired Alachua County Commissioner &
Retired Lincoln High School Teacher

Ed Dix

Realtor, Developer
Edix Investments, Inc.

Mike Dykes

Officer, Cracker Boys Hunt Club
Senior Project Manager, CH2MHILL

Vivian Filer

Chair, Cotton Club Museum & Cultural Center
Retired, Santa Fe College & Shands Healthcare

Tim Giuliani

CEO
Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce &
Council for Economic Outreach

Eric Godet

President & CEO
Godet Industries

Dr. Richard Hilsenbeck

Director Conservation Projects
The Nature Conservancy

Pete Johnson

Former Board Member
Gainesville Regional Airport Authority

Dug Jones

Associate Vice President of Economic
Development
Santa Fe College

Nona Jones

Public Affairs Director
GRU

Lindsay Krieg

Bariatrics Educator
Center for Obesity Surgery & Treatment

Charles Lee

Director of Advocacy
Audubon Florida

Vicki McGrath

Alachua County Public Schools
Director, Community Planning

Dr. Jack Payne

Senior Vice President
Agriculture and Natural Resources
University of Florida

Brad Pollitt

Vice President of Facilities
Shands Healthcare

Ed Regan

Energy and Utilities Consultant
Retired, Assistant General Manager, Strategic
Planning, GRU

Steven Seibert, J.D.

The Seibert Law Firm

Bill Strassberger

District Engineer
Clay Electric

Adrian Taylor

Pastor
Springhill Missionary Baptist Church

Kevin Thorpe

Senior Pastor
Faith Missionary Baptist

Bobbi Walton

President Community Service for Windsor,
Retired, CH2MHILL and Environmental Science
& Engineering

Helen Warren

Agent, Prudential Trend Realty
Audubon Florida, Alachua County Chapter

Justin Williams

Officer, Public Relations, Cracker Boys Hunt
Club
Information Technologies, Clay Electric

Dr. Gladys Wright

Retired Principal
Alachua County School Board

Ex Officio Members

Betty Baker

County Manager
Alachua County

Edgar Campa-Palafox (alternate for Betty
Baker)

Economic Development Coordinator
Alachua County

Scott Koons

Executive Director
NCF Regional Planning Council

Steve Lachnicht (alternate for Betty Baker)

Director
Alachua County Growth Management

**Participating Task Force Members
Representing Plum Creek**

Todd Powell

Senior Director Real Estate
Plum Creek

Rose Fagler

Manager Community Relations
Plum Creek

**Plum Creek Resource Liaisons to the Task
Force**

Kelly Robinson

Senior Resource Manager

John Sabine

Resource Supervisor

MIG, Inc.

Daniel Iacofano

Principal & Lead Facilitator
MIG, Inc.

Joan Chaplick

Principal
MIG, Inc.



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TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

Roster of Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Members

Jane Adams

Vice President, University Relations
The University of Florida

Chris Bird

Director
Alachua County Department of Environmental
Protection

Alternate for Chris Bird:

Stephen Hofstetter

Senior Planner
Alachua County Department of Environmental
Protection

Rich Budell

Director, Office of Agriculture Water Policy
Department of Agriculture and Consumer
Services
State of Florida

Alternate for Rich Budell:

Darrell Smith

Assistant Director, Office of Agricultural Water
Policy
Department of Agriculture and Consumer
Services
State of Florida

Robert Christianson

Director, Operations and Land Resources
St. Johns River Water Management District

Ann Collett

Vice President
Gainesville Council for Economic Outreach &
Innovation Gainesville

Missy Daniels

Senior Planner
Alachua County Growth Management
Department

Laura DiGruttolo

Fish & Wildlife Biologist
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission

Alternate for Laura DiGruttolo:

Kris Cathey

Regional Coordinator, North Central
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission

Ed Dix

Realtor, Developer
Edix Investments, Inc.

Vivian Filer

Chair, Cotton Club Museum & Cultural Center
Retired, Santa Fe College & Shands Healthcare

Scott Koons

Executive Director
NCF Regional Planning Council

Charles Lee

Director of Advocacy
Audubon Florida

Mike McDaniel

Chief, Office of Comprehensive Planning
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

Alternate for Mike McDaniel:

Ana Richmond

Community Program Manager
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

Brad Pollitt

Vice President of Facilities
Shands Healthcare

Bob Romig

State Transportation Development
Administrator
Department of Transportation
State of Florida

Alternate for Bob Romig:

Jim Wood

Director
Office of Policy Planning
State of Florida

Steven Seibert, J.D.

The Seibert Law Firm

Greg Strong
Northeast Florida District Director
Department of Environmental Protection
State of Florida

Alternate for Greg Strong:
James R. Maher
Assistant Director, Northeast District
Department of Environmental Protection
State of Florida

Alternate for Greg Strong:
Russell Simpson
Ombudsman
Department of Environmental Protection
State of Florida

Justin Williams
Officer, Public Relations, Cracker Boys Hunt
Club
Information Technologies, Clay Electric

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