



Resident-Initiated Special Area Plans: Options for Measuring Community Interest

Staff response to Board of County Commissioners request for information

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1. Introduction and Direction from the Board of County Commissioners

At the February 25, 2014 Board of County Commissioners meeting discussion on Rural Clusters, the Board authorized advertisement of public hearings for a Comprehensive Plan amendment to revise the policies on Rural Clusters relating to the process of boundary delineation and requirements for special area plans. The Board also considered, but did not take action on, a request by Melrose residents to initiate a special area plan for the Melrose Rural Cluster. **Based on that discussion, the Board requested that staff bring back recommendations on how to establish a threshold to measure the community interest in a special area plan.**

This report includes the following information in response to the Board's request:

- Background on special area planning in general, and in Alachua County
- Review of other local government's approaches to resident-initiated special area plans
- Discussion of options for measuring community interest in a special area plan

Staff is seeking direction on whether the Board would like to establish a formal process for measuring a community's interest in resident-initiated special area plans. If so, then staff is also seeking direction on which method is preferred and any specific components to include as part of that method.

If the Board provides such direction, then staff will prepare draft amendments to the Unified Land Development Code Chapter 402 Article 16 to establish the process, and will return to the Board of County Commissioners for review and authorization to advertise public hearings.

2. General Description of Special Area Planning

A special area plan (or area plan) is an in-depth study of the existing characteristics, trends, issues and opportunities for a portion of a county or city. Area plans may be initiated by the local governing body or by residents who have an interest in developing a plan for their area. Area plans may cover different geographic scales such as neighborhoods, corridors, or districts. Some of the topic areas commonly addressed in such plans may include future land use, zoning, development standards, housing, economic development, transportation, resource protection, or public facilities and services. The area planning process usually results recommendations for follow-up actions to address unique aspects of the area.

Some area plans are regulatory, and may result in proposed policies for the area that are adopted into the local Comprehensive Plan. In such cases, area plans need to be generally consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. Other area plans may be non-regulatory, and serve as guides for elected officials and staff to use when making other planning decisions.

3. Background on Special Area Studies and Planning in Alachua County

a. Existing Special Area Plans Adopted in the Comprehensive Plan

There are existing special area studies and plans adopted as part of the County's Comprehensive Plan, including Cross Creek Village, Idylwild-Serenola, and Plan East Gainesville. These special area plans were initiated and adopted primarily because stakeholders within the community had a strong interest in participating in the development of plans to address specific issues that were unique to those areas. These plans were developed prior to adoption of formal policies in the Comprehensive Plan which provide for special area studies and plans to be prepared as part of a Community and Neighborhood Planning Program.

Cross Creek Village: In the mid-1980s, a report titled Cross Creek Special Area Study was prepared by a non-profit citizens group known as Friends of Cross Creek. The report contained a detailed inventory and analysis of land use, natural resources, and historic resources within the Cross Creek area. As part of the special area study, a survey of residents was conducted about preferences and options for future growth and development (the survey had a 38% response rate). The study contained recommendations for a proposed amendment to the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan to establish policies for the Cross Creek area focusing on preservation of the unique natural, cultural, and historic resources. The special area plan for Cross Creek Village was ultimately adopted as part of the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan, and is still part of the currently-adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Cross Creek special area plan is provided under Objective 8.2 and subsequent policies of the Future Land Use Element.

Idylwild-Serenola: A special area study and plan for the Idylwild-Serenola area was prepared and adopted into the County's Comprehensive Plan in the late 1980s. This special area plan focused on protection of the unique environmental resources of this area (including groundwater, wildlife habitat, and Paynes Prairie) through special residential density standards and requirements for connection of new development to central water and sewer systems. The special area plan for Idylwild-Serenola is provided under Objective 8.4 and subsequent policies of the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Element.

Plan East Gainesville: Plan East Gainesville is a special area plan developed in the early 2000s to promote economic development and revitalization in the eastern urban areas of Gainesville and Alachua County. The Plan was a joint effort by the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO), Alachua County, and the City of Gainesville that involved widespread public participation and input. Plan East Gainesville provides a balance between land development, environmental protection, and improved transportation mobility. Policies to incorporate the Plan East Gainesville guiding vision were adopted as part of the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan in 2007, and are provided under Objective 8.5 of the Future Land Use Element.

b. Special Area Studies Conducted but not Adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan

Rutledge Neighborhood: A planning process was initiated in 2006 under the Community and Neighborhood Planning Program for the Rutledge area (the area generally located west of NW 43rd Street and east of I-75, between NW 39th Avenue and NW 23rd Blvd.). Staff conducted a detailed study of existing conditions and held several community meetings with high turnout, which resulted in an identification of issues of concern and possible recommendations and strategies to address those issues. The primary issue of concern for this area related to the improvement of unpaved roads, and the County's special assessment district process was identified as an available tool to address that issue. The special area study did not result in the adoption of any specific policies for Rutledge as part of the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Paynes Prairie West Strategic Ecosystem: The Board of County Commissioners approved a Scope of Work in 2006 for a special area study for the Paynes Prairie West Strategic Ecosystem and some adjacent parcels under common ownership. The primary issue for this area was maintaining functional connectivity with the surrounding ecosystems; there was also potential issues relating to interaction of the ecosystem with the adjacent Urban Cluster. The County employed an environmental consultant to ground-truth the natural resources within the area. A special area study of the strategic ecosystem was prepared by County staff with assistance from the consultant. The property owners and staff collaborated to identify possible strategies for future protection of the strategic ecosystem. The special area study did not result in the adoption of special area plan policies, primarily due to a lack of consensus by all property owners.

c. Alachua County Comprehensive Plan Policies on Special Area Planning

The Alachua County Comprehensive Plan provides for the possibility of special area studies and plans for a variety of areas within Alachua County, and for a variety of purposes. Special area plans may be developed to protect unique environmental, historic, or cultural resources within Strategic Ecosystems, significant habitat areas, listed species habitat areas, or to address specific needs and circumstances in other areas designated by the Board of County Commissioners (such as Rural Clusters or Urban Activity Centers). A special area study/plan may function to protect the character of a neighborhood, identify and plan for public services and infrastructure, promote redevelopment, or facilitate joint planning among multiple jurisdictions. The special area planning process involves significant public input and encourages collaborative planning.

As part of the 2002 update of the Comprehensive Plan (which went into effect in 2005), there was an increased emphasis placed on establishing a formal process for studying and planning for the unique needs and circumstances of geographically focused areas. Policies were adopted into the Comprehensive Plan which identify the possibility of developing special area plans for specific areas such as Rural Clusters, Strategic Ecosystems, Urban Activity Centers and neighborhoods. At the time these policies were adopted in the early 2000s, the County was experiencing strong growth in population and development activity, and also had more resources available to engage in geographically focused planning activities. By the late 2000's, the County was experiencing fiscal constraints relating to the overall economic downturn which resulted in decreases in the County resources available to conduct

such planning activities. The following section summarizes the adopted Comprehensive Plan policies on special area planning.

Community and Neighborhood Planning: Policy 7.1.28 of the Future Land Use Element (see Appendix) provides for a Community and Neighborhood Planning Program which empowers communities and neighborhoods to address specific needs and circumstances of their areas by incorporating their vision and goals into geographically focused special area plans. The policy provides that special area plans may be developed for urban or rural areas, and would utilize neighborhoods, districts, and corridors as the basic planning areas.

Rural Clusters: The Comprehensive Plan identifies Rural Clusters as areas for special area planning. Policies 6.4.2 and 6.4.5 of the Future Land Use Element (see Appendix) require the County to delineate precise boundaries for Rural Clusters, and propose for this to be done in connection with special area plans. The Board of County Commissioners authorized advertisement of a Comprehensive Plan amendment to revise these policies to provide for delineation of precise Rural Cluster boundaries, with an option to develop special area plans to address broader community issues. The policies provide that special area plans for Rural Clusters should incorporate the community's vision or goals and include provisions to ensure consistency of the Rural Cluster with the policies for the surrounding Rural/Agriculture areas.

Strategic Ecosystems: Strategic Ecosystems are identified in the Comprehensive Plan as significant natural areas that serve important ecological functions, with related policies to protect their ecological functions. Strategic Ecosystems are identified as potential areas for special area planning. Policies in the Conservation and Open Space Element provide that the County shall create special area plans for Strategic Ecosystems as one way to ensure that each ecosystem is evaluated and protected based on the integrity of the ecological unit. Policies 4.10.2 and 4.10.3 of the Conservation and Open Space Element address special area planning for Strategic Ecosystems (see Appendix).

Urban Activity Centers: Urban Activity Centers are nodes of concentrated higher density and intensity development which are designated on the Future Land Use Map within the Urban Cluster. The designated Activity Centers in Alachua County are mostly developed with a mix of commercial, residential, or industrial land uses. Policy 2.1.10 of the Future Land Use Element (see Appendix) provides that the County may initiate "master plans" for Activity Centers in the specific context of promoting redevelopment that is consistent with the general Activity Center policies which promote compact mixed use development.

d. Special Area Planning Process in the Unified Land Development Code

The Alachua County Unified Land Development Code (ULDC) Chapter 402 Article 16 (adopted in 2006) outlines a four-step process for special area plans, such as those for Rural Clusters. This process includes the preparation and approval of a Scope of Work, a formal Study of the area, and preparation of a Special Area Plan.

Step 1: Pre-Application (for non-County-initiated plans). Prior to the initiation of a special area planning process, a property owner or resident shall request and participate in a pre-application conference with the Growth Management Department staff. At this conference, staff reviews the special area planning process with the residents or property owners, and assists with the identification of topic areas to be considered as part of the planning process.

Step 2: Scope of Work. The Scope of Work generally identifies the study area boundary, the public participation process, and the issues to be considered as part of the planning process. The ULDC identifies the Scope of Work as a collaborative effort between the County, property owners, and the public. In accordance with ULDC Section 402.100(a), all property owners within the area for which a Special Area Plan is being developed, “shall be notified in writing of the intent to develop a plan for the area at least 30 days prior to the public hearing [on the Scope of Work] and shall be encouraged to participate in the planning process”. Once the draft Scope has been developed, it is considered at a public hearing of the Board of County Commissioners. If the Scope of Work is approved by resolution, then the Special Area Study identified in Step 3 would begin.

Step 3: Special Area Study. The Special Area Study generally involves information gathering and analysis which forms the basis for the Special Area Plan. The Study includes at least one Stakeholder Workshop; an analysis of existing conditions relating to land use, natural resources, and infrastructure; an evaluation of any community issues identified as part of the approved Scope of Work; and identification of options or recommendations to address those issues.

Step 4: Special Area Plan. The special area plan involves implementation of the recommendations identified in the special area study. Such implementation may include regulatory or non-regulatory actions. The special area plan could include policies, regulations, and/or maps that are proposed for adoption as part of the Comprehensive Plan or Land Development Code. The special area plan could also include non-regulatory actions such as identification of capital facility needs or intergovernmental coordination on specific issues.

4. Research on Other Communities Approaches to Resident-Initiated Special Area Plans

Staff researched other local government’s approaches to resident-initiated special area plans, or similar types of processes. Staff focused particularly on methods for measuring interest in neighborhood-based planning initiatives, including any numerical thresholds and the criteria for selection of the areas. Staff also reviewed Alachua County’s special assessment district process, as suggested by the Board of County Commissioners in the discussion of this issue at their February 25, 2014 meeting.

The concept of geographically focused neighborhood-based planning is common around the country. There are a variety of approaches used to measure community interest and to select the areas for special area planning. These approaches include surveys of areas, neighborhood petitions, periodic application cycles, and establishing criteria for areas to be selected for special area planning. The following section summarizes some of the common approaches used by local governments to measure community interest in

neighborhood-based planning initiatives. Additional detail and web links to additional information on these examples are included in Appendix A of this Report.

Alachua County's process for resident-initiated special assessment districts includes a combination of neighborhood petition and survey to measure the community's interest and support. Property owners must petition the Board for creation of a special assessment district by submitting a petition signed by owners of at least 50% of the property to be specially benefitted by a proposed improvement (60% for unpaved road improvements). The petitions with an estimated cost of the proposed improvements are brought to the Board for a vote on whether or not to conduct an interest poll of affected property owners (the Board may direct staff to perform the interest poll in the absence of a resident-initiated petition). At this stage, the Board also defines the area to be included within the special assessment district upon recommendation from the County Manager.

Property owners who respond to the interest poll indicate whether or not they are interested in the creation of a special assessment district and the imposition of an assessment to fund the proposed improvements. The poll includes the estimated cost of improvements, and the allocation of that cost to each property owner. If the poll results show that at least 50% plus one of the affected property owners responding are in favor of the creation of the district (or, for unpaved roads, a minimum 60% response rate is required with at least 75% of the affected property owners responding in favor), then the results of the interest poll are brought to the Board for a determination of whether to advertise a public hearing. At that public hearing, the Board considers whether or not to create the special assessment district and impose a non-ad valorem assessment on properties within the district to fund the proposed improvements.

Some communities require a neighborhood petition for resident-initiated neighborhood plans. In the **Town of Chapel Hill, NC** for example, there is a **two-phased petition process** to initiate the process for establishment of a Neighborhood Conservation District. In order for the Town to hold an initial public information meeting for general discussion of the planning process, the neighborhood must submit a Phase 1 petition with the signatures of property owners representing at least 51% of the land area within the proposed district, or 51% of the total number of property owners in a proposed district. After the public information meeting has been completed, the neighborhood must then submit a Phase 2 petition in order to proceed with a feasibility review of the proposal by the local Planning Board. The Phase 2 petition must be signed by the same numbers of property owners indicated for Phase 1. After the submittal of the Phase 2 petition and the Feasibility Review by the Planning Board, the Town Council then decides whether or not to move forward with the development of the Neighborhood Conservation District proposal. The Town Council may initiate either phase of this process without the need for a neighborhood petition.

Flathead County, Montana uses a similar **petition process for resident-initiated neighborhood plans**. A minimum of 3 property owners must formally request that the County hold an advertised public meeting to discuss the neighborhood planning process. After this initial public informational meeting, the neighborhood must circulate a petition for signatures indicating that they are interested in developing a neighborhood plan and are requesting technical assistance from the County. If the petition is signed by the owners of at least 10% of the parcels within the planning area, then the process of preparing the neighborhood plan proceeds in accordance with the County's Growth policy. Once a proposed

neighborhood plan has been developed, it must be supported by at least 50% of all landowners in the planning area by signing a petition of support, or by a survey with 60% of responding landowners indicating support in order to be submitted to the County Planning Board for acceptance/adoption.

Some communities, such as **Gainesville, Florida and Bloomington, Indiana**, have neighborhood planning programs that **provide for an open application cycle** where neighborhoods may apply to be part of the neighborhood planning program. These programs are generally tied to funding that is allocated by the cities for neighborhood capital projects. The application process is a way to gauge the neighborhood's level of interest in developing a neighborhood plan as well as its sustained commitment to implementing the plan. The local governing Board selects the neighborhood(s) based on an evaluation of factors and recommendation from staff.

Some communities, such as **Denver, Colorado and Austin, Texas** evaluate proposals to initiate **neighborhood plans based on criteria relating to the purpose or need for the neighborhood plan**. Such criteria may include: significant change is occurring or anticipated, public facility improvements need to be addressed, opportunities exist for infill or redevelopment, evidence of disinvestment or deteriorating housing, number of zoning requests submitted, presence of significant transportation corridors, and the amount of undeveloped land in the area.

Minneapolis, Minnesota has a longstanding and funded neighborhood revitalization program, which **requires "broad based community support" for any proposed neighborhood plan**. This may consist of one or more of the following: an advertised community meeting is held where a recorded vote is taken; at least three focus groups have met that represent the neighborhood; a survey is conducted with a 20% response rate; and/or an interview or survey is conducted of at least 350 randomly selected households with a least a 70% response rate.

Other communities, such a **Palm Beach County**, have **non-regulatory neighborhood plans**. These non-regulatory plans serve as guidance to the County Commission and staff when making future decisions relating to a particular neighborhood. Neighborhood plans are generally prepared by representatives from the neighborhood with some technical assistance from staff. Once a plan is completed, the County Commission takes action to receive the report and file it. It is not adopted by the County Commission.

5. Options for Measuring a Community's Level of Interest in a Special Area Plan

The Board has directed staff to provide recommendations on a process for measuring a community's interest in developing a special area plan. Based on review of other local government's approaches to measuring interest in resident-initiated area plans or similar processes, staff has identified a few potential options that could work for Alachua County in the context of special area plans. Each of these methods has multiple variables that need to be considered. These options and some of the variables to be considered are summarized below.

a. Neighborhood Petition

One way of measuring a community's level of interest in special area planning would be to establish a process where residents or property owners submit a petition to indicate their interest in developing a special area plan. If a petition is signed by a certain number of people who are representative of the planning area, then the petition could be brought to the Board of County Commissioners, along with an analysis by staff of the feasibility and cost of developing a special area study and plan. The Board would then vote on whether or not to move forward with the special area planning process by authorizing the preparation and advertisement of a public hearing on a Scope of Work. The primary advantage of a neighborhood petition is that it is resident-driven which generally results in greater involvement and ownership of the process by the residents. A neighborhood petition would also involve little to no cost to the County. One negative aspect is that a petition would only account for those residents or property owners who are in favor of initiating a special area plan; it would not account for those who are opposed. There are several variables that would need to be considered as part of a neighborhood petition process:

- **Defining the Boundaries of the Planning Area** – Prior to circulating a neighborhood petition, the boundaries of the planning area would need to be defined in general terms. One way to do this would for the residents to define the area with technical assistance from staff, as part of the pre-application process.
- **Who is Eligible to Sign the Petition?** – A petition would need to be signed by people who are representative of the area and potentially affected by the special area plan. The petition could require signature by property owners, registered voters, residents, or some other representative group. Names and mailing addresses for tax parcel owners are readily accessible from the County Property Appraiser. There are certain Rural Clusters which extend across multiple jurisdictions (Melrose and Evinston), so consideration would need to be given to the question of whether residency in Alachua County is a requirement to sign such a petition.
- **How many signatures would be required on the petition?** – This could be defined as a flat number, or as a percentage of a representative group such as the property owners within the planning area. There is no commonly accepted percentage of property that would be considered sufficient for this purpose.
- **Content of the Petition** – The petition should make it clear what the people signing it are supporting. For special area plans, a petition would indicate that the signatories support and wish to participate in the process of developing a special area plan to address certain issues or topics. The County could develop a model petition form and general information to assist residents who are interested in developing a petition to initiate a special area plan.

b. Survey of Property Owners

Another way of measuring a community's level of interest in special area planning would be for the County to conduct a geographically-focused survey of residents to determine whether or not they would be interested in participating in a special area planning process. A survey could be conducted by mail, online, phone, or some combination of these. A survey has the potential to produce more useful data than a petition if there is an adequate response rate. There is an opportunity with a survey to ask more detailed questions to determine the respondents' degree of interest in special area planning. Unlike a petition, a survey could provide information about the number of respondents who are opposed to participating in the development of a special area plan. It can be difficult, however, to get residents to respond to a survey, which could lead to an insufficient response rate. A survey would also involve greater cost to the County in terms of staff time, mailing supplies and postage. Some considerations in conducting a survey include:

- **Defining the geographic area to be surveyed** – The boundaries of the survey area would need to be defined by the residents of the area with assistance from staff, as part of the pre-application process.
- **Defining the survey population** - The survey population could consist of property owners, registered voters, or some other available database of population. The population to be surveyed should be representative of the people who would be potentially affected by a special area plan (e.g., people who own property in the area or live in the area). The people being surveyed should be connected with a physical property address located within the planning area.
- **Survey Content** - The survey would need to include descriptive information about special area planning and its purposes, and would also need to ask appropriate questions to determine whether the respondent is interested in participating in the process for development of a special area study and plan. The information provided and the formulation of the questions are critical to obtaining the desired information.
- **Acceptable Response Rate** – A minimum acceptable response rate for the survey would need to be established in order to ensure that the survey results are representative of the target population. Response rate is typically described as a percentage of the total survey population. There is wide variation on what is considered an acceptable response rate for a survey, depending on the research purpose, the type of analysis being conducted, and how the survey is administered. For purposes of determining a community's interest in special area planning, a high response rate would be desirable because the special area plan would potentially require a significant investment of time and resources by residents and by the County.
- **Number of Positive Responses Required:** The survey process would need to identify an acceptable percentage of responses from people indicating they are interested in participating in the process of developing a special area study and plan. On the other hand, the survey should

also take into account the number of respondents who are not interested in participating in such a process.

- **Areas Located within Multiple Jurisdictions** – There are two designated Rural Clusters where the community is located within multiple jurisdictions in addition to unincorporated Alachua County (Melrose and Evinston). Consideration needs to be given to the issue of whether to include residents or property owners from other jurisdictions in a survey for purposes of measuring the community’s interest in special area planning.

The following table compares some of the pros and cons of a neighborhood petition and a survey:

Neighborhood Petition		Survey by County	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident-initiated = more likely to have community support • Little or no direct cost to County for staff time, mailing, or supplies. • More open process than survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burden on residents to get signatures • Difficult to frame the question(s) (e.g., do you want to participate in a special area planning process?) • Does not account for those opposed • Difficult to target a geographic area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to ask more refined questions to determine degree of interest • Can provide more information to County in terms of those in favor or opposed, if response rate is adequate • Easier to target a geographic area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty getting people to respond; response rate may be inadequate • County cost for staff time, mailing, and supplies • County-initiated survey may cause concern among residents

6. Other Methods of Selecting Areas for Special Area Planning

a. Periodic Application Cycle

One method the County could use to select areas for special area planning would be to establish a periodic application cycle, where interested neighborhoods could apply to be considered for the special area plan process. There is usually a small amount of funding provided to neighborhoods that apply for participation in this type of process. The County Commission could publicize an application cycle for special area plans every year or two, and then select the areas from those applications that are

submitted. As part of the application, the neighborhood would provide general information about the proposed planning area and the issues or topics that they would like to address as part of the planning process. The application could also require some form of neighborhood petition with a minimum number of signatures in order to be considered. If this method is used, there should be criteria established for the Board of County Commissioners to use in the selection of the areas for special area planning.

b. Criteria for Selection of Areas

The County could establish criteria for use in the selection of areas for special area planning. If residents of an area express interest in developing a special area plan to address certain issues, then their request could be evaluated pursuant to some adopted criteria. This would provide staff with the opportunity to evaluate the need for and feasibility of the special area plan, and how it may tie in with other policies in the Comprehensive Plan. Some examples of selection criteria may include:

- Significant changes are occurring or anticipated in the area
- Public infrastructure improvements need to be addressed
- Opportunities exist to promote infill or redevelopment
- Evidence of disinvestment or deteriorating housing,
- Opportunity exists to influence site selection, development or expansion of an activity generator
- Need for additional protection of historic or natural resources beyond that which is provided under general policy

One of the criteria could also be that there is broad-based support for developing a special area plan to address certain issues. A neighborhood petition could be built into a selection process as a way to measure the amount of community support.

7. Staff Recommendation

Staff is seeking direction on whether the Board would like to establish a formal process for measuring community interest as part of any resident-initiated special area plan. If so, staff is also seeking direction on which method is preferred and any specific components to be included as part of draft amendments to the Unified Land Development Code.

If the Board provides such direction, then staff will prepare draft amendments to the Unified Land Development Code Chapter 402 Article 16 to establish the process, and will return to the Board of County Commissioners for review and authorization to advertise public hearings.

Appendix A: Examples of Other Communities Approaches to Resident-Initiated Special Area Plans

a. Alachua County: Special Assessment District Petition Process

(Alachua County Code of Ordinances, Part II, Title 3, Chapter 37: Special Assessment Districts, Sec. 37.06, Resident-Initiated Petition)

Property owners desiring the establishment of a special assessment district shall petition the Board on forms provided by the County. The petition states that those persons who are signing the petition are interested in the creation of a special assessment district and the imposition of an assessment to fund a proposed improvement. The petition generally describes the proposed improvement and the area to be specially benefitted thereby. **The petition must be signed by the owners of at least 50 percent of the property to be specially benefitted by the proposed improvement. For petitions for unpaved road improvements, the petition shall be signed by the owners of at least 60 percent of the property to be specifically benefitted by the proposed improvement.**

The signed petition is delivered to the County, and then staff creates an estimate of the cost of improvements, and places the estimate and the petition on a Board meeting agenda. At the scheduled meeting, **the Board considers the estimate of cost and the petition, and votes whether or not to conduct a public interest poll of the affected property owners.** If the Board chooses to conduct a property owner interest poll, the Board, upon recommendation of the County Manager, must define the area to be included within the special assessment district.

Upon the direction of the Board, staff shall perform a property owner interest poll of affected property owners. The Board may also direct staff to perform a property owner interest poll in the absence of a resident-initiated petition. The interest poll shall state that those residents who are signing the poll are interested in the creation of a special assessment district and the imposition of an assessment to fund a proposed improvement. The interest poll describes the proposed improvement, the area to be specially benefitted thereby, the estimated improvement cost, and the allocation of the cost to each property owner. The interest poll is mailed to each property owner and states a date by which the poll must be returned to the County.

For the property owner interest poll to be brought to the Board for a determination of whether to publish a notice of intent to conduct a public hearing for consideration of whether to impose a non-ad valorem assessment, the interest poll results shall show that: **of those responding to the poll, 50 percent plus one of properties are in favor of the creation of the special assessment district. For proposed improvements to unpaved roads, the owners of at least 60 percent of property must respond and the owners of at least 75 percent of properties responding to the poll must indicate that they are in favor of the creation of the special assessment district.**

b. Chapel Hill, NC: Neighborhood Conservation District Petition Process

A neighborhood may propose to establish a “Neighborhood Conservation District”, which is a special designation used to protect distinctive neighborhood characteristics. The Neighborhood Conservation District is established through a two-phased neighborhood petition process (see below). Each phase

requires signature by property owners representing at least 51% of the land area within the proposed district, or 51% of the property owners in a proposed district, upon submittal and acceptance of a petition by the Town Council. The Town Council will take action on a request to establish a District upon receipt of the petition signed by property owners. Separate property owner petitions are required for each phase, and the forms are provided by the Town. The Town Council may also initiate the process to establish a Neighborhood Conservation District without a neighborhood petition.

Phase 1 (informational): The Town Council receives a Phase 1 petition from neighborhood residents to initiate a planning process to establish a Neighborhood Conservation District. The petition is referred to the Planning Board which oversees a Public Information Meeting facilitated by Town staff to provide general information about the planning process. After the Public Information Meeting, Phase 1 is complete until action is taken by either the Town Council or the neighborhood to initiate Phase 2.

Phase 2 (initiation, plan development, and enactment): The Town Council receives a Phase 2 petition from neighborhood residents and refers it to the Planning Board. The Planning Board conducts a “Feasibility Review” of the proposal to establish a Neighborhood Conservation District. The Feasibility Review is forwarded to the Town Council, which makes a decision on whether to move forward with the development of a Neighborhood Conservation District Plan proposal. Once the Plan for the Neighborhood Conservation District has been developed through a public process, the proposed Plan is brought before the Town Council for adoption/enactment.

<http://www.townofchapelhill.org/index.aspx?page=570>

<http://www.townofchapelhill.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=7264>

c. Flathead County, MT: Resident Initiation Process for Neighborhood Plans

A minimum of three property owners from a neighborhood must formally request that the Planning and Zoning Department hold an advertised public meeting to inform property owners about neighborhood plans and the process used to create them. The neighborhood contacts and County staff coordinate to prepare a tentative boundary for the neighborhood planning area. The County then mails notices to all landowners whose property might be included in the tentative planning area, informing them of the initial informational meeting.

After the initial informational meeting is held, the neighborhood contacts are required to circulate a petition within the planning area indicating that the person signing the petition owns land within the planning area and would like the County to assist the neighborhood in the process of neighborhood planning by holding public organizational meetings and then developing a neighborhood plan. The neighborhood contacts are required to collect signatures representing ownership of at least 10% of the parcels within the tentative boundaries of the planning area, and submit the petition to the Planning and Zoning Department. At this point, the initiation of the neighborhood planning process is complete and the neighborhood plan is then developed in accordance with the County’s Growth Policy (Plan).

It should be noted that once the planning process is completed and a proposed neighborhood plan has been developed, it must be supported by at least 50% of all landowners signing a petition of support, or by a survey with 60% of responding landowners indicating support before the proposed plan may be submitted to the County Planning Board for consideration.

<http://www.flatheadcitizens.org/HowToStartaNeighborhoodPlan.pdf>

d. Bloomington, IN: Neighborhood Planning Initiative (currently inactive)

The Neighborhood Planning Initiative was tied to funding allocated for neighborhood capital projects. The planning department would open an application cycle for all neighborhoods in the city to gauge level of commitment from the neighborhood and determine whether there would be a sustained commitment to implementation of the plan following its adoption. The application was also to determine what expected outcomes of a particular plan were to ensure that a neighborhood plan was the best fit to address an area's interests or concerns. The Board would select a single neighborhood and the department would then initiate the planning process. Once a plan was completed, the department would open the cycle again and select the next neighborhood. The program was discontinued when the funding for capital projects was lost.

e. Austin, TX: Neighborhood Planning Areas

In the early 2000s the Austin City Council divided the urban core of the city into approximately 50 neighborhood planning areas. Decisions for which neighborhoods to plan for first were based on factors such as number of zoning requests submitted, whether a significant corridor passes through the area, amount of vacant land in the area, etc. Neighborhood interest was not a primary factor, but staff did report that some neighborhoods requested to opt-out of the process and staff supported that recommendation to the City Council. Each neighborhood has a 'Neighborhood Contact Team' that implements their neighborhood plan. The structure and governance of these teams is outlined in the City's land development code. Individual property owners can request amendments to the plan for their property, but only the Neighborhood Contact Teams, staff, or City Council may propose amendments affecting more than one property owner. Any amendments proposed by the Neighborhood Contact Teams must be recommended for approval by staff in order to be heard by the City Council.

<https://austintexas.gov/department/neighborhood-planning>
[Austin Land Development Code – Neighborhood Planning](#)
[Neighborhood Plan Amendment Application Packet](#)

f. San Diego, CA: Community Plans

San Diego has a long history of community-level planning. The city has had Council-recognized 'Community Planning Groups' representing specific geographic areas since the 1960s. These groups work with city staff and the community to develop Community Plans that are adopted into the community's general plan. Typical community plan elements include land use, transportation, urban design, public facilities and services, natural and cultural resources, and economic development. There are over 40 community plans that together form the Land Use Element of the City's General Plan. These plans must not contradict any element of the General Plan or any other community plans. To help ensure that various community plans are consistent with the city's general plan and with each other's plans, a representative from each of the Community Planning Groups serves on a city-wide Community Planners Committee that meets with planning staff to share ideas with one another, hear presentations from staff, and make recommendations to the City Council.

<http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/community/index.shtml>

g. Denver, CO: Small Area Plans

In Denver, small area plans can cover anywhere from 10 acres to 4,500 acres. Some are very small and deal with individual neighborhoods, while others address specific corridors or districts within the city. There is a formal application process for initiation of a small area plan that requires a letter of intent to be provided to the City Council. Small area plans are not regulatory but are used to guide the development of city regulations. **Denver has specific criteria for selecting areas for small area planning, including:**

- Evidence of disinvestment and deteriorating housing: high vacancy, unemployment and poverty rates;
- Significant change is occurring or anticipated;
- Public facilities and/or physical improvements need to be addressed;
- Opportunities for substantial infill or redevelopment are present;
- Opportunities arise to influence site selection, development or major expansion of a single large activity generator; or
- Transit station development opportunities

<http://www.denvergov.org/planning/HowWePlan/SmallAreaPlans/tabid/431849/Default.aspx>

h. Gainesville, FL: Neighborhood Planning Program

Gainesville has an established Neighborhood Planning Program in which City staff works with individual neighborhoods to develop neighborhood action plans and to assist in implementing those plans. Neighborhoods that are interested in the neighborhood planning process are required to submit an application to the City. A staff-level committee would then review any applications and rank them based on factors such as historic significance and need for neighborhood improvements. The results of the staff committee's review and recommendations on these applications would be presented to the City Commission, which would make a decision on which applications to approve for neighborhood planning. A small amount of funding may be made available for the neighborhood plan which has been typically used for neighborhood beautification efforts.

i. Minneapolis, MN: Neighborhood Revitalization Program

Minneapolis has a long standing funded neighborhood revitalization program, now managed by the city's Neighborhood and Community Relations Department housed within the City Coordinator's office. There is a formalized community engagement process for developing and maintaining neighborhood plans and in July 2013 a policy was adopted by the City Council regarding the preparation and processing of neighborhood priority plans. This policy includes a standard for "broad-based neighborhood support" that consists of one or more of the following: an area wide meeting is held with adequate advertising throughout the community in advance of the meeting where a recorded vote on the plan is taken; at least three focus groups have met that adequately represent the population of the neighborhood; a survey of neighborhood households is conducted with at least a 20% response rate; and/or an interview or survey has been conducted with a minimum of 350 randomly selected households with at least a 70% response rate.

<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/ncr/programs/cpp/npp>

<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@ncr/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-113022.pdf>

<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/ncr/programs/nrp/index.htm>

j. Palm Beach County, FL: Neighborhood Plans

Neighborhood plans in Palm Beach County are not regulatory in nature, but rather serve as guidance to the County Commission when making future decisions in a given neighborhood or area. Anyone can propose a neighborhood plan. Staff gives an applicant a copy of an existing plan and provides technical assistance to the person or group preparing the plan. Once the plan is completed, the action taken by the County Commission is to receive the report and file it. It is not adopted by the Commission.

http://www.pbcgov.com/pzb/planning/neighborhood_planning/index.htm

k. New York, NY: Community Based Planning

New York City has a longstanding community planning program. There are 59 community districts and each has a governing board called a Community Board. The city's Division of Community Planning has offices in each of the five boroughs. There are three primary options for community based planning. First, a rezoning can be prepared and submitted by staff in collaboration with the community and at no cost to the community, but the Community Board can expedite the process by assisting with the work. Second, communities may prepare a 197-A plan. Any neighborhood group may draft a neighborhood plan, but it must be approved and submitted to the City Council either by the Community Board, the Borough Board, or the Borough President. Planners provide technical assistance throughout the multiple approval steps of this process. The final option is for an interagency task force to be established by the Division of Community Planning to deal with broader neighborhood issues such as jobs, housing transportation or infrastructure.

http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/community_planning/index.shtml

Appendix B: Selected Policies from the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan Relating to Special Area Planning

Future Land Use Element

Urban Activity Centers:

Policy 2.1.10: The County shall initiate master plans for Activity Centers where necessary to promote redevelopment in accordance with Objective 2.1 and Policies 2.1.1 through 2.1.8. An Activity Center master plan shall include a generalized site plan for the entire Activity Center with related policies and standards to address allowable land uses, site and building design, transportation circulation and connectivity, parking, natural resource protection, public civic space, stormwater management facilities, and specific redevelopment considerations. Activity Center master plans shall include a public participation process incorporating neighborhood meetings or charrettes, notice to property owners, and other components. The County shall explore potential opportunities for public/private partnerships in developing Activity Center master plans.

Master plans for Activity Centers shall include the following components:

- (a) A range of permitted land uses, residential densities, and non-residential intensity standards.*
- (b) Dimensional standards for building height, scale, and orientation relative to adjacent streets.*
- (c) Parking standards which establish maximum limits on parking for various land uses, and include opportunities for shared parking arrangements where adjacent land uses within a mixed use area have different peak usage hours.*
- (d) Identification of conservation areas to be protected in accordance with the Conservation and Open Space Element.*
- (e) Identification of the location and function of roads, bicycle routes, pedestrian routes, and transit facilities within the development site, and interconnections of these transportation facilities with the surrounding existing and planned transportation network.*
- (f) Provision of a range of housing types and sizes to provide for affordable housing.*

Rural Clusters:

Policy 6.4.2: The Rural Clusters identified in Policy 6.4.4 are generally depicted on the Future Land Use Map. The boundaries of these Rural Clusters shall be updated as part of an evaluation of the designated Rural Clusters based on the sub-area planning process identified in Policy 6.4.5.

Policy 6.4.5: As part of the evaluation and update of the designated Rural Clusters the county shall prepare sub-area plans to explore the carrying capacities for appropriate levels of nature and heritage tourism in rural clusters, including those with historic or natural resources which give them special attractiveness. Such sub-area plans shall incorporate the local neighborhood and community vision and goals, and shall include provisions to ensure consistency of the Rural Cluster with policies for the surrounding Rural/Agricultural area, and:

- (a) enhances the community's livability.*
- (b) protects rural character.*
- (c) provides amenities for residents.*
- (d) protects natural resources.*
- (e) Special consideration shall be given to linking these communities through the use of heritage or nature trails, bikeways, etc.*

Community and Neighborhood Planning Program:

Policy 7.1.28: A planning framework that includes geographically focused special area plans shall be implemented to promote and provide cohesive communities. These plans shall include both rural and urban areas, and utilize neighborhoods (including village centers), districts (including activity centers), and corridors as basic planning components. This planning framework shall be implemented through a Community and Neighborhood Planning program, which empowers communities and neighborhoods to develop plans that address the specific needs and circumstances of their area. The County shall provide guidance to the program to assure that county-wide comprehensive planning goals are met. These plans shall incorporate the community and neighborhood vision and goals and shall include provisions to:

- (a) Enhance the community's livability*
- (b) Protect the character of the neighborhood*
- (c) Provide amenities for neighborhood residents*
- (d) Plan for neighborhood traffic management*
- (e) Protect natural resources*

Conservation and Open Space Element

Strategic Ecosystems:

Policy 4.10.2: Strategies shall be implemented through the land use planning and development review processes to ensure that each strategic ecosystem is evaluated and protected based on the integrity of the ecological unit.

- (a) The County shall create special area plans in cooperation with landowners to establish specific guidelines for strategic ecosystems prior to approval of land use change, zoning change, or development approval.*
- (b) The County shall devise a schedule for creating special area plans, based on current development pressures and anticipated priorities.*
- (c) The County shall create special area plans for each strategic ecosystem, in accordance with the schedule and with the standards under Objective 3.6.*

Policy 4.10.3: If an applicant seeks development prior to the County's creation of a special area plan for a particular strategic ecosystem, the applicant has two avenues for pursuing development. A special area study may be conducted at the applicant's expense. Alternatively, if the applicant demonstrates that the ecological integrity of the strategic ecosystem will be sufficiently protected, the applicant may proceed according to the clustering provisions in policies under Objective 6.2 of the Future Land Use Element.