

NORTH RANCH SECTOR PLAN

THIRD PUBLIC WORKSHOP SUMMARY: CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY POLICIES

The third public meeting for the North Ranch Sector Plan process was held on September 10, 2014 between 4:00-7:00 pm at Osceola Heritage Park. The purpose of the Public Workshop was to present the highlights and key policies in the Draft Master Plan. The meeting was open house workshop format, with informational boards for participants to review and give feedback. Close to 40 people participated, representing public, private and non-profit interests. The Plan's highlights and key policies were presented by framework; Economic, Environmental, Transportation, Urban Form and Water & Public Facilities. Additionally, several boards highlighted the policies that influence implementation of the plan and subsequent development.

In order to notify stakeholders and residents of the meeting, the county employed a 4-pronged approach: direct e-mails were sent out to specified agencies with interest in the North Ranch; two newspaper advertisements were published in the Osceola Gazette; 620 postcards were mailed to residents within 300' of the property; and the North Ranch Sector Plan page on the Osceola County website was updated with materials and meeting information.

To extend the reach of the third Public Meeting to those unable to attend, the meeting information and Draft Plan was also posted on the Osceola County North Ranch Master Plan and the Strategic Initiatives webpages, and through an online questionnaire. The survey included the same material presented at the public meeting and solicited open ended comments. As of September 17, no responses have been collected, though a handful of people viewed the online material. The survey will be available online until the Planning Commission meeting on October 2, 2014.

The comments and feedback from participants will be provided to the Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners prior to the public hearings in October, with any additional responses from the questionnaire included.

The comments that were collected at the public meeting are listed below. Three letters were received during and directly after the meeting, outlining additional perspectives. Those letters are attached at the end of this document.

ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

- What comes first - the rail lines or the employment opportunities?
- Do you put the people in first - or put the highways/rail lines in and hope they materialize?
- Where are the jobs at Deseret?
- Where is the actual wildlife corridor(s)?

- Is the intent to be self sufficient?

ENVIRONMENTAL FRAMEWORK

- 370,000 people turn the faucets on at the same time -and there is a giant burp - but do we think we can capture enough water for this area while everyone else is drinking as well?
- Lots of significant conservation lands exist but may not be "regionally" significant - some are very small parcels with rare plants, animals and habitat. Will any of these be saved?
- Tampa is out of water and drained Green Swamp in the process. Adrena Ranch plans to draw 5.1 mil gallons from Silver Springs Basin which is already down 65% flow from 50 years ago. Allowing a .5 million people in this fragile north/south basin will suck this area dry in 50 years. This is head water of the St. John River Basin which is going to dry up as well.
- Where is the St. Johns River Protection Zone?
- No-Build.com
- Separate conservation lands from agriculture lands
- How much uplands are being conserved?
- Where is the woodstork rookery and is it being saved?
- Save/rescue our native plants before development
- Replace our native plants after development
- Plant native plants around all ponds to filter water and provide needed wildlife habitat
- Agricultural lands may not be conservation -the "habitat"/rare things may already be destroyed
- Wildlife corridors should be wider east and west and exclude people trails for the most part
- Re: Policy 6.14: "Development shall minimize encroachment into [upland] wetland/habitat..."

TRANSPORTATION

- Do not put transportation systems through conservation areas!
- Do not drain stormwater into our lakes, streams, waterways
- High-speed elevated rail? or ground level?
- Does this plan look at an extension of I-95 into the property?
- Is there a southern connection from I-95 to I-4?

URBAN FORM:

- Bird/wildlife friendly buildings - non-reflective glass
- Wildlife proof garbage cans
- Recycling everywhere
- Use native plants
- No invasive plants
- Wasn't this framework the basis of Poinciana - 40 -50 years ago?
- While the concept looks nice and practical - what happens to the people who buy in and then wait for the "promised" amenities to arrive?

- Trails, walk ways, bicycle, horse trails should not go through the middle of conservation/wildlife areas, thus disturbing and polluting the wildlife habitat. Put trails along edges if you must have trails, and make them minimal impact.
- Though the clustered developments look separated on the map, you must realize that they are only around .5 miles apart in most instances and are mainly sprawl!

WATER AND PUBLIC FACILITIES:

- Re: Policy 3.2. "Use of drought-tolerant plants [and non-invasive] and/or native plants..."
- Re: Policy 3.2. [No or little lawn turf]
- Reduce landscape irrigation
- Use appropriate Florida native plants
- No invasive plants
- No decision regarding .5 mil additional people in 13 new planned communities should be made until full completion of a water study that includes central Florida land specifically the North Ranch area. This study should highlight if the area is to this specific areas water use and if it "protects" the current flow of the St. John River head water.

IMPLEMENTATION:

- Go slow on major roads; lovely secondary roads there do not encourage rapid development!! This is ranch land and farm country

- (a) New Centers shall have compact urban densities. In general, density in Centers will be greater than 5 units per acre ranging upward. Adjacent lower density "suburban" areas will have densities of at least 3 units per acre.
- (b) Land forms for Centers and adjacent "suburban" development will follow a traditional town design rather than a "subdivision" design. Residential and commercial uses will be integrated. Examples of the land use character which should be achieved in areas to be developed are exemplified by the "Celebration" community at Disney and the "Baldwin Park" community in Orlando.
- (c) Advanced water conservation methods will be employed across all development forms. Landscaping will be designed so that supplemental irrigation is not needed after initial establishment. Irrigation systems will be precluded by covenants and restrictions in all residential and commercial areas. Drought tolerant "Florida Friendly" native species plant landscaping will be utilized in all developed areas. Reclaimed water will be reserved for "non-irrigation" uses in commercial, industrial, and agricultural uses. Reclaimed water not needed for the above purposes will be diverted back to wellfield sites to mitigate the cone of depression.
- (d) All agricultural lands outside areas designated for urban development will continue in agricultural use in perpetuity through permanent recorded conservation easements removing other development rights.
- (e) All conservation lands shall be protected by perpetual conservation easements. All conservation and agricultural lands conservation easement will have a minimum of two grantees, one of which is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 conservation organization. There will be a definitive schedule for recording conservation easements and agricultural easements. At least 25% of the lands designated in a sector plan for conservation and agriculture will be protected by recorded easements within 180 days of the approval of the sector plan. The remaining 75% of easement areas will be recorded on a specific schedule relating to the approval of Detailed Specific Area Plans.

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North Ranch Sector Plan Creates Giant Traffic Dump onto Narcoossee from the Proposed OCX toll Road!

IS THE DEVELOPER PAYING FOR the Osceola Parkway Extension to connect their North Ranch Sector Plan development to Medical City and Orlando? Are they contributing any impact fees? What will happen to the wildlife corridor? What about the headwaters of the Econ and St Johns Rivers?

Lets just all call this what it is, shall we? An attempt to connect all the potential development North Ranch Sector and North East District Plans to Medical City / Orlando. The OCX Osceola Parkway Extension will enable Osceola County and their developer friends to develop tens of thousands houses as a part of their community development plan in the eastern part of their county. This monster highway will dump more cars onto the Narcoossee residential areas at Eagle Creek and Laureate Park by routing all of that traffic off the Toll Rd interchange at Narcoossee rd, clogging the two lane Laureate Park entrance to Medical city. Narcoossee will become a parking lot then IF this OCX expressway, aka free road for North Ranch Sector Plan, is built. Leave the Narcoossee residential zone alone and take your traffic elsewhere!

Environment:

The US Army Corps of Engineers has stated they will seek to begin the dispute process if alignments continues East past SR 15 (Narcoossee Rd) leaving you without a access rd for your master plan.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife, and the Water Management District all stated during the agency comment period for the ETA summary review that they have serious concerns about any OCX toll road alignments East past SR 15 due to the threats of significant degradation of wetlands, fish and wildlife resources. Sierra club is against this project as it cuts in half the Split Oak Mitigation Preserve and harms a statewide wildlife corridor program. The Audubon Society has won a lawsuit against Osceola for the irreparable harm their new community development plan (that depends on this highway) would cause in removing all environmental protections for the county - importantly the OCX highway and this North Ranch Sector Plan, severing and damaging the headwaters of the Everglades.

You need to consider the damaging effects and serious environmental impacts, endangering protected wildlife, increasing air, noise and groundwater pollution this project will bring. This Jewel of Florida would be irreversibly and forever damaged.

Amy Stiling
10524 Moss Park Rd
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September 13, 2014

Osceola County
Attention: Mr. Jeff Jones
Director of Strategic Initiatives
1 Courthouse Square, Suite 4500
Kissimmee, FL 34741

Subject: North Ranch Sector Plan, Third Public Meeting

Dear Mr. Jones:

I am writing to comment on the North Ranch Sector Plan material that was presented at the third public meeting. I am concerned about this plan as I own property on the east shore of the St. Johns River, directly across from the North Ranch. I am also the Florida Trail Association Section Leader responsible for the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) segment in Tosohatchee WMA that abuts Deseret property to the north (comments herein are mine and not a position of the FTA).

Here are my specific comments.

Policy 5.1 Transportation

Regional Expressways – The two proposed expressway alignments present a devastating fragmentation of sensitive habitats and an unwarranted intrusion into public conservation lands. The included Map 2. North Ranch Framework Plan identifies major portions of these expressway corridors as “Planned” as opposed to proposed. The term “Planned” carries the connotation that these corridors have received approval of various agencies and are ready to move into the preliminary design phase. This conveys the impression of official approval when, in fact the corridors are notional proposals being considered East Central Florida Corridor Task Force. The map should be amended to indicate that the corridors are “Proposed”.

The proposed north-south expressway seems to follow a narrow upland ridge that is immediately east of the Econlockhatchee River Swamp and west of a swamp system that includes the Bee Tree Swamp, Four Mile Swamp, and John H Bay. Swamp dependent wildlife need an associated upland system in order to maintain their breeding and foraging strategies. The expressway would essentially eliminate the habitat functionality of this upland ridge. Additionally, this expressway effectively severs east/west wildlife corridor connectivity.

The proposed Airport to Melbourne expressway effectively severs north/south wildlife corridors and passes through a wide swath of protected conservation land associated with the St. Johns River. Specifically, this corridor sticks a multilane expressway through the heart of the River Lakes Conservation Area and the approved West Viera Wilderness Park. Also, a major concrete structure would be thrust across the St. Johns River where no bridge currently exists.

At the public meeting, I questioned the planning consultants about the need for this road and was treated to two specious rationalizations. The first rationalization was that at some point early in the last century there was a wagon road that forded the St. Johns at a narrow point in the swamp, just south of Lake Winder. Inspection of Google Earth shows no remnant of this road, but it is now claimed that this previous tenuous existence has established a legal entitlement to a road and bridge at this point. In the era before built infrastructure in Florida, such low water fords were commonplace in Central Florida, and I

hate to think of the environmental devastation if every property owner with a historic river ford claimed the right to build a bridge.

The second rationalization plays on the fact that there is a 19 mile gap in Brevard County in roads leading to the west; i.e., between SR 520 and US 192. This gap was posited as a burden to citizens wishing to drive east or west. I have lived in Brevard since 1960 and never have heard citizens complain about this gap. If it is perceived that residents of South Brevard need quicker access to air transport, then maybe a more energy conserving and environment conserving strategy would be to work for more robust airline service at the Melbourne Airport.

I have concerns about how the proposed expressways would be paid for. This Policy provides no statement that the developer is offering a proportionate fair share toward paying for road infrastructure. The Policy statement that "A funding mechanism will be identified, which could include federal, state, and local transportation revenues, tolling and other user fees" gives the impression that the developer plans on lining up at the public funding trough to pay for the proposed road infrastructure. There should be a requirement that the developer make significant and early contribution to the cost of road infrastructure.

The proposed east/west expressway does not appear to serve any transportation need. It only serves to create its own traffic demand by throwing open the North Ranch to development. It is a circular phenomenon where a road is built to foster development, which in turn creates the need for the road.

Regional Railroads – The proposed rail alignments follow the expressway alignments, so my concerns presented above are equally applicable to the rail alignments. All Aboard Florida is proposing to construct a passenger rail line within the SR 528 right of way that would connect the Orlando Airport to the FEC mainline in Brevard County. If an additional railroad is needed to service freight traffic, then it should be routed along one of the existing road rights of way, such as SR 528, SR 520, or US 192.

Greenways and Trails Network - The Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST) is a component of a trail system that was established under the National Trails System Act of 1968. This national trail system consists of over a dozen trails that include the Appalachian NST, the Continental Divide NST, and the Pacific Crest NST. I am pleased to see that the North Ranch Framework Plan, Policy 5.1: Transportation under Greenways and Trails Network acknowledges the FNST and the attached map presents some notional trail alignments. I ask that the draft plan contain explicit language for inclusion of the FNST. I also request vigorous effort to firmly flesh out the details of the FNST corridor in the lower tier plans that implement the Sector Plan. The FNST is a recreational asset for all the citizens of the United States.

The Conceptual Master Plan (CMP) states that hunting will be allowed in the conservation areas. Here in Florida, the prime hiking season is from October to April and as such, overlays the hunting season. Consequently, it is imperative that the FNST corridor be free of hunting with a safety buffer on each side. It is also imperative that the FNST not be closed to accommodate hunting. According to Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission statistics, less than 1% of Florida residents have a hunting license, so it is likely the residents of the planned communities would not be interested in hunting but would have great interest in passive outdoor recreation opportunities.

I ask that the FNST be routed on terrain that is substantially dry for at least three seasons of the year and minimizes the need for boardwalks or other elevated trail.

Policy 6.1 Regionally Significant Conservation Lands

The North Ranch Sector Plan appears to be an attempt overlay high intensity development on a property that is a mosaic of many wetlands interspersed with some uplands. This results in a development concept where development is spread out over the landscape in clusters where uplands exist. For the sake of habitat and wildlife corridors, it is usually advised to cluster development on one part of the property and leave the balance for conservation. I looked at topographic maps, aerial photography, and floodplain maps of the property. I saw a wide distribution of wetlands and 100 year

floodplain areas that reveal the property to be inimical to extensive high intensity development. I will not repeat the environmental concerns articulated in my comments on the Regional Expressways and Regional Railroads, but they apply here.

Policy 6. Reservoir Resources

Pennywash/Wolf Creek Reservoir – The North Ranch Plan proposes to reactivate a significant portion of Jane Green Reservoir that was a component of the Army Corps of Engineers Upper St. Johns Project as defined in the ACOE's General Design Memorandum (GDM) of 1967. The Jane Green Reservoir project included construction of the L73 levee and water control structures at Wolf Creek and Pennywash Creek, two tributaries of the St. Johns River. The levee and the two water control structures were completed except for filling the construction bypass channels. Before the bypass channels could be filled, Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which required the ACOE to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Project.

The EIS, released in 1973, found that the Jane Green Reservoir would result in significant negative environmental impacts. Specifically, the reservoir would have flooded thousands of acres of freshwater forested wetlands. In Florida, forested wetlands are considered an important and relatively rare vegetative community that merits special protection. The fact that forested wetlands would be drowned by the reservoir was considered by the EIS to be a negative impact. As a consequence of the EIS, the State of Florida cancelled support and the ACOE ceased work on the 1967 GDM. Thus the bypass channels were never filled and the reservoir never retained water.

Now, in 2014, little has changed in the area. L73, water control structures, and bypass channels are still there. If the bypass channels at Wolf Creek and Pennywash were filled and water was impounded behind L73, it seems logical that the environmental concerns that killed the reservoir in 1973 would still exist today. Additionally, the Upper St. Johns River is suffering from water quality degradation and issues with minimum flow levels, so the impounding of two tributaries will exacerbate those problems.

The bottom line is that the Pennywash/Wolf Creek reservoir is a bad idea and should be stricken from the North Ranch Sector Plan.

Policy 6.5 Conversion Ratio for Conservation Easements and Agricultural Restrictions

The Comprehensive Plan Amendment Application says that the North Ranch Sector Plan covers 133,000 contiguous acres. The Plan Executive Summary states that the "Plan preserves 48,300 acres of wetlands, habitat, agriculture, and other environmentally sensitive land" "in perpetuity." This works out to a rather anemic 36% in long term protection. This percentage should be greatly increased and the conversion ratios should be deleted from the plan until a significantly higher percentage is established..

Policy 6.12 Conservation Lands

Given the proposed clusters of intensive development that would be spread out over the North Ranch property, the proposed conservation lands should be governed by a management philosophy that embodies the principles of an environmental preserve. There is no hunting permitted on state managed environmental preserves except for the management of feral hogs by professional hunters. Such a policy should be adopted for the North Ranch conservation lands.

Policy 6.14 Wetlands and Floodplains

The requirement that road crossings be sited at the narrowest point of a wetlands, while good in theory, tends to eliminate flexibility in routing roads in a way that minimizes overall environmental impact. For example, threading a road through the narrow gaps in wetlands may result in a proportionally greater environmental impact to uplands. Wetlands do not survive in a cloister, but need an associated healthy

upland system to remain vital. Minimizing wetlands impacts is highly desirable, but not at the expense of compromising uplands environmental functionality.

Additionally, impacts should be minimized within the 100-year floodplain area depicted on the most recent FEMA maps. That is, compensatory storage needs to be provided when fill is introduced into any floodplain area. The proposed policy currently only requires compensatory storage for the Econlockhatchee floodplain. The pertinent sentence should be expanded to state:

No net floodplain encroachment (fill) shall be permitted within the 100-Year Floodplain of the Econlockhatchee Swamp (as adopted by FEMA) and within any 100-Year floodplain area depicted on the most recent FEMA maps.

Policy 7.2 Eastern Agricultural area (EAA)

The last paragraph of this policy says that restrictive covenants shall reserve a corridor for the proposed east-west expressway so that it could connect to the Pineda Extension in Brevard. As mentioned in my comments on Policy 5.1, such a corridor would negatively impact the preserved lands of the River Lakes Conservation Area and the approved West Viera Wilderness Park. The Conservation area and the approved Wilderness Park ostensibly are preserved in perpetuity, so the proposed corridor carries the odor of a violation of public trust. Citizens tend to believe that the term "in perpetuity" means just that. The proposed corridor should be eliminated.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the North Ranch Sector Plan. Please give my comments the fullest consideration.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Douglas H. Sphar".

Douglas H. Sphar