

To: Wayne Bennett

From: Michael F carey

RE: Oct 5<sup>th</sup> deadline for comp. plan concerns

Let me state from the outset that there are many positive aspects of this plan, but that is not the subject of this communications. I'm simply responding to your request for LPA members to convey our pressing concerns by October 5, 2006. My concerns have been expressed numerous times during our deliberations, and I fully recognize that I'm expressing a minority point of view.

Let's begin with the purpose of a comprehensive plan which should reflect a broad cross-section of citizen input into a plan which will provide a greater certainty and predictability as to how when and where development will occur. It should be a realistic vision, not a wish list. It should represent the interest of all Lake County residents and not be overly influenced by a vocal, active and persistent interest group.

I will characterize this comprehensive plan update as a wish list simply because we have ignored affordability and we failed to look at a built-out scenario to determine the financial and social impact of the plan. To adopt this plan without regard to the fiscal and social impact would be unwise. Hopefully, our elected officials will examine the cost and the impact before endorsing or approving this 2025 revision.

This plan focuses on a wide variety of critical elements, but there is little if any joint planning with Lake County municipalities and the Lake County business community. Both, in my opinion, should be more involved in the process. This plan will, in my opinion, have a significant impact on some of these municipalities because most of the growth is being funneled into the higher density urban areas. Now some municipalities may welcome the high density development, but they will need to rely on annexation to accommodate any significant growth. Other municipalities will prefer to maintain a small town character which will be a real challenge in light of the fact that there is a concerted effort to have a clear demarcation between rural and higher density areas. It's important to note that no one foresees a significant decline in population or the pressure to accommodate this new growth.

The Rural Areas Plan should be examined more closely. The plan often refers to the preservation of rural areas, but it is not a preservation plan; it is a reservation plan that reserves rural areas for those who can afford five acres of land for their home site. This is, in my opinion, elitist zoning which says, in effect, if you can afford five acres of land, you can live in the country and enjoy the rural lifestyle. If you cannot afford five acres and you wish to live in Lake County, then you will need to look in the more densely populated urban areas. This scenario could become a reality if we fail to identify higher density areas (clustering) within the rural area to accommodate a more economically diverse population.

So the Rural Plan, as it now exists, is not going to preserve the rural area. It simply turns over a very valuable resource to a relatively small number of affluent citizens. Higher income home-buyers will take up residence in the rural areas while lower middle income earners, lower income earners and minorities will take up residence in the more densely populated areas. This could lead to allegations of exclusionary zoning unless we make specific provision for higher density locations in the rural area and memorialize those locations on the FLUM. Lake County's social fabric will be strengthened by an inclusive rural policy.

Studies over the past 30 years have concluded that when development is spread out at low densities, the cost of construction and maintaining public facilities becomes more costly, requiring more miles of roads, remote school locations and the delivery of essential services over a larger geographic area.

Now some will say that it will not build out that quickly, that this 1-5 zoning will slow the growth in Lake County and preserve the rural areas. Unfortunately, polls show that most Americans prefer to

live in lower density, large lot development. A home in the country is always perceived as a better investment than one in a city or high density development. There is less traffic, fewer crimes, more space, fresh air and privacy. If we doubt the probability of a 1-5 build-out in Lake County, then we need to focus on the following facts:

- \* The State of Florida continues to support growth and encourage migration from other states.
- \* 90% of America's more than two million farms are small family farms which contribute little to agricultural output. Wannabe farmers and 1-5 zoning is a good match, but it may prove to be a very costly match.
- \* Ford and General motors are planning massive buy-outs and layoffs. A good many of these workers will find their way to Florida.
- \* Outlandish insurance rates are chasing South Florida residents inland.
- \* Corporate headquarters and research installations are moving to rural sites beyond the more densely populated areas, and their employees will follow.
- \* Florida ranks third among the fifty states in attracting undocumented workers.

If the elite prevail and we build out to this 1-5 scenario, there will be no rural preservation. True, we will not have urban sprawl, but we will have sprawl. I'll call it 1-5 sprawl, which is just as insidious as urban sprawl. Rural land users will be using up more land per person than urban dwellers while they benefit from lower taxes and higher property values. There will be a proliferation of hobby farms, farmettes and Ranchettes. As the countryside is parceled out, wildlife habitat will shrink even if zoned 1-5. Large lot zoning, in the opinion of many planners, remains the primary culprit in generating sprawl.

There is a way to preserve the rural area and avoid the allegations of exclusionary zoning. Rural lands can be zoned exclusively agricultural but it would be costly; it is not exclusionary because there is no residential development favoring one economic group to the exclusion of another. As with many other preservation options, it is costly because rural land owners must be compensated. If preservation is our objective, then let's preserve it, and incur the cost. But 1-5 zoning will not preserve the rural area, it simply creates a playground for the privileged. Yes, it will prevent urban sprawl, but it will foster 1-5 sprawl. More importantly, it will not preserve the rural area.

If our objective is to preserve the rural area then let's do it. If that is what we (the public) truly wants, then let's figure out the cost of preservation and plan accordingly to raise the funds (taxes) required to purchase or conserve the rural lands. But let's not presume that preservation can be achieved through 1-5 exclusionary zoning. Areas not targeted for preservation should contain a healthy mix of low density and high density zoning so that living in the rural area is not a condition of wealth or income.