



Presentation script for Planning Horizon 2025

A comprehensive plan is the foundation for local planning as it acts as an outline of the community's vision and priorities.

A relatively new idea to Florida, the comprehensive plan can be an effective tool in controlling growth. With the state's population rapidly increasing in the 1980s, the Florida Legislature enacted the Growth Management Act in 1985. It required growth management in Florida to be implemented through the local comprehensive plan. Today, every local government in Florida — municipal and county — is required to create a local comprehensive plan that “attempts to address the community's current and future plans for land use, natural resource protection and provision of infrastructure.”

Lake County compiled its first Comprehensive Plan in 1991. While somewhat antiquated, the document served its purpose after a tumultuous time when the dominant landscape of the County switched from agriculture fields to neighborhoods and commercial corridors.

The task of drafting the 2025 Lake County Comprehensive Plan will be a partnership between Lake County citizens, municipalities, county government and other local and regional entities. Upon completion, the new plan titled “Planning Horizon 2025” will provide flexible guidelines for policymakers, land managers and land users about how to conserve, rehabilitate or develop an area. Planning Horizon 2025 will stipulate the ultimate goals of efficient transportation, adequate employment, affordable housing, needed capital improvements and access to clean air, water and open space for the next 20 years.

A host of data will be used in developing the plan, including census figures, demographics and economic factors. Demography and population predictors will guide the stakeholders in formulating decisions on how to develop the comprehensive plan. But to understand where Lake County will be heading in the 21st century, it is imperative to understand how Lake County has changed.

As the state adjusted to a population increase of 45 percent during the 1980s, three catastrophic freezes forever changed the economic direction of Lake County during the decade. The third and most destructive freeze occurred on Christmas Eve 1989. Lake County citrus growers lost more than 110,000 acres of groves, an astounding 90 percent of the total orange grove acreage. After the series of freezes, most citrus growers decided any attempt to replant orange trees in Lake County was too risky.

With the citrus growers looking to recover from their losses and move farther south to replant groves, property values plunged to all time lows in the County. Typically, during the apex of citrus production in Lake County, one acre of “productive grove land” went for \$10,000 to a post-freeze low of \$2,000 or less.

However, growers realized that the ruined orange groves created an opportunity for development.

Services needed for citrus groves were starkly different than those needed for the new home and business developments. Through the Growth Management Act, the state requires “elements” to be addressed in each comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan’s element is similar to a chapter in a novel. Each element addresses one specific item such as future land use, transportation and capital improvements. All elements must take into consideration “all relevant capital costs, operation and maintenance expenses, and the available revenues to support them, as well as the affect the development will have on sensitive environmental areas.”

Some of these elements will contain level of service standards and require that development be managed to maintain the adopted standard. This is called concurrency. New development must be concurrent with the ability of local government to provide government services, According to provisions in the state’s Growth Management Act, there are six different public facilities that must be provided at level of service standards: potable water, sanitary sewer, storm water drainage, parks, solid waste and transportation. When these six public facilities do not reach the adopted level of service standards, the proposed development must be denied, as required by concurrency.

A comprehensive plan also contains several optional elements that are not subject to concurrency, but which are included in the plan to meet important local needs. In addition, the comprehensive plan includes an implementation element, which establishes how and when the goals, objectives and policies are to be achieved, and who is responsible for the associated implementation.

Proposed elements of the 2025 Lake County Comprehensive Plan are: future Land Use, intergovernmental coordination, conservation, housing, public facilities (sanitary sewer, solid waste, stormwater management, potable water, natural groundwater aquifer recharge), capital improvements and transportation. Four optional elements are being considered for inclusion. These elements are public safety, education, recreation and open space, economic and cultural.

In the 1990s, while Lake County was building infrastructure and working to meet service needs of their new residents, population continued to boom with new home construction as the turn from agriculture to residential was at full steam. An increase in population continued throughout the decade almost exponentially. Today, Lake County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state — from a 1970 population of 69,303 to an estimated 2004 population of 251,878.

Comparing population statistics and other growth estimators will prepare the community and government leaders for the process of developing the new comprehensive plan. Understanding and defining where the population centers are in Lake County will be an important task with developing Planning Horizon 2025, as it will assist with controlling urban sprawl. However, other economic factors, such as the need for commercial and industrial jobs and balancing the economy of Lake County, will be equally important.

With Lake County quickly becoming a suburban area for the Orlando-area economic engine in the 1990s, County leaders stressed the need to diversify the economic base. The Christopher C. Ford Commerce Park has been a successful endeavor for Lake County leaders, however, more industrial and business ventures are needed for the next decade. During the process of developing Planning Horizon 2025, another task will be identifying the best places for new private industrial and commercial centers to locate.

No different than when hundreds of residents packed the Lake County Commission Chambers to discuss the 1991 Comprehensive Plan, the detailed manner of drafting Planning Horizon 2025 will include many participants. The process of gathering the needed data began last year with planners from the Lake County Department of Growth Management. The initial process was recently explained to County committees and boards; and to other stakeholders such as municipal government officials and local elected officials. The most important segment of the beginning phase of Planning Horizon 2025, however, begins today with you — the citizens of Lake County.

It is your dreams, desires and concerns for the community that staff will seek out as they develop the next comprehensive plan for Lake County. Through a series of six public meetings with different communities in Lake County between Feb. 7 and Feb. 17, 2005, facilitators of the plan will be asking for the public's input. Together, all the stakeholders will play integral parts in shaping what Lake County will look like 20 years from now. Staff from the Lake County Comprehensive Planning Division will integrate the input received from all stakeholders to develop a draft of Planning Horizon 2025 in June 2005.

The first draft of Lake County's comprehensive plan will enter an arduous phase during the remainder of 2005 when the stakeholders shape and provide more input about the proposed document. In the summer of 2005, County staff will prepare for another round of public meetings to gather input on how the community views the initial draft of Planning Horizon 2025.

More changes may be proposed by the Local Planning Agency — a board of citizens appointed by the Lake County Board of County Commissioners tasked with advising the Board on land planning issues — as they review data and input from stakeholders. The planning agency will also formulate policy regarding the comprehensive plan. The plan will then proceed to the Board of County Commissioners, but Planning Horizon 2025 will have several more steps before final approval.

The Board of County Commissioners will further guide policy development and provide resources necessary to fulfill Planning Horizon 2025 or prioritize to make the new comprehensive plan financially feasible. The Board will then consider transmitting the document to the Florida Department of Community Affairs for review.

The Department of Community Affairs will review Planning Horizon 2025 and provide recommendations and comments to the Board of County Commissioners. Barring any final changes or additions to the plan, County Commissioners could approve the final edition of the 2025 Lake County Comprehensive Plan in early 2006.

The goal of the Lake County Department of Growth Management during the process of developing Planning Horizon 2025 is to respect private property rights and preserve the natural beauty of Lake County while simultaneously utilizing government to guide the quality and acceleration of growth. It is the aim of Lake County to compose a 2025 Comprehensive Plan that will balance increased demand for public utilities, development and conservation; and provide concurrency provisions for infrastructure, transportation and public education while attaining adequate revenue to finance these demands.