

Editorial: Big ideas that benefit us all

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University of Florida officials seem to view Gainesville as both a strength and a challenge.

Some faculty, staff and students are attracted to Gainesville's environment, culture and quality of life. But Gainesville lacks a major corporate employer or institution such as a state Capitol, which can provide jobs to graduates or a potential professor's spouse.

In the jargon used by UF consultants, this extra element of what a university city offers is called a "+1." Figuring out that "+1" for UF is part of what the university is doing in a nine-month, \$1 million planning process.

Through the process, UF seeks a few big ideas that would make for a more preeminent campus and community. UF Chief Operating Officer Charlie Lane recently met with The Sun's editorial board to discuss some possibilities.

While they included the off-campus proposals that have been debated on these pages in recent months, much of Lane's focus was on campus. The spread-out, 2,000-acre campus can be difficult to navigate and limits interaction, he said. Addressing that problem could pull UF in different directions.

It might mean a better transportation system or requiring more students to live in campus. Some of UF's land might be turned over to a big employer or other private development, offering research opportunities and a place to work right on campus. Or UF might take a more active role in developing the periphery of campus.

Some of these ideas might cause owners of apartments and other businesses in the area to shudder. A more insular campus would mean less tenants and customers for them. UF-driven development off campus might bring more national chains at the expense of locally owned businesses.

Upscale development is hardly the kind of thing that would set UF apart. Other ideas would offer wider benefits for the community, but present other challenges.

UF officials had suggested an agricultural campus in the proposed Envision Alachua project, but that plan has faced community opposition. The Tacachale center for the intellectually disabled has been proposed as an alternative that might involve UF, but the center isn't currently available and advocates for residents rightly say any plan must consider their futures first.

Some plans would mean building on existing strengths. UF is already developing Innovation Square as a home for technology startups and other entrepreneurs. Lane said UF's "+1" might simply be cementing Gainesville's identity as a center for startups.

We hope UF's plans go further than that. A better transportation system would benefit students as well as other residents. But the university should also embrace the idea that its service mission starts in Gainesville.

UF's East Campus was a positive addition to the east side, but it is one of the only walled-off parts of the university. If UF students and faculty want to tackle the

world's problems involving issues such as education and health care, they could get training in doing so by reaching more into the community through new UF facilities or partnerships.

Residents need to offer their own ideas. Some community members have already provided input but more should get involved. A public meeting on the plan will be held Monday from 6-7 p.m. in the Warrington Room at UF's Emerson Hall.

Readers should share their ideas on these pages by writing letters and columns to letters@gainesville.com.

Gainesville's environment, culture and quality of life make this a great place to live, but it could be even better. If UF's plan works out as it should, it will help attract people to the university as well as benefit the residents already here.