



Envision Alachua

Summary of Community Workshop #1

October 5, 2011

prepared by

MIG, Inc.

October 2011

in support of the Envision Alachua
process convened by Plum Creek



Background

On October 5, 2011, Plum Creek hosted a community workshop to solicit public input for the Envision Alachua planning process. Approximately 75 community members attended. The meeting was held from 6:30 - 8:30 pm at the Springhill Missionary Baptist Church in East Gainesville. A buffet dinner was served an hour before the workshop, and child care was provided to make it more convenient for people to attend the meeting.

This was the first of two community workshops that will be held to support the Envision Alachua planning process. Envision Alachua is a community planning process to discuss future economic, environmental and community opportunities in Alachua County on lands owned by Plum Creek. Plum Creek is the largest private landowner in Alachua County, with 65,000 acres. Nearly 24,000 of these acres are permanently conserved. The company's holdings are located throughout northern and eastern Alachua County. Plum Creek is considering future uses for its lands that could be aligned with community needs. The Envision Alachua process will explore potential opportunities for lands in East County that are suitable for uses other than timber.

Plum Creek commenced the Envision Alachua planning process in June 2011 when it hosted the first meeting of the Envision Alachua Task Force. Since then, the Task Force has met three times, with meetings held on June 27, July 25 and September 7. Plum Creek has also hosted two educational forums as part of its Models of Innovation series. All Envision Alachua activities are open to the public. A complete schedule, meeting locations and other details can be found at www.envisionalachua.com.

The objectives for the first Community Workshop were to:

- Provide an overview of the Envision Alachua planning process
- Encourage community members to share their ideas on a vision for Plum Creek lands in East Alachua County

This document summarizes the general discussion and comments made by the facilitator, presenters and community members during the October 5th workshop; it is not intended as a transcription of the meeting. Meeting materials, information about the process and a videotape of the meeting can be found at www.envisionalachua.com.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Daniel Iacofano, Principal, MIG and Lead Facilitator for the Envision Alachua planning process, started the meeting and briefly introduced Todd Powell, Director, Real Estate, Southwest Region for Plum Creek. Todd welcomed the group and thanked everyone for their participation. He then introduced Rose Fagler, Manager, Community Relations, Plum Creek, who provided an overview of Plum Creek.

Plum Creek is the largest private landowner in the nation with approximately 6.7 million acres in 19 States. The company's core business is timber, but it also manages some of its lands for conservation, recreation, natural resources and community development. The company owns 590,000 acres in 22 counties in Florida. Nearly 95,000 acres of those lands are permanently conserved.

With 65,000 acres located throughout northern and eastern Alachua County, nearly 24,000 of which are permanently conserved, Plum Creek is the largest private landowner in Alachua County. Plum Creek is a publicly traded Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) and its practices are certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI).

II. Overview of the Envision Alachua Planning Process

Following Rose's presentation on Plum Creek, Daniel identified some elements that are key to the process, noting that:

- Plum Creek is the single largest land owner in the county
- Alachua County has a history of innovative planning, development and land conservation
- The University of Florida (UF) is an intellectual powerhouse and a source of invention and discovery
- Jobs are needed for ALL our residents
- Alachua County has unique environmental resources which are worth protecting

Daniel reviewed the meeting agenda, summarized the planning process and identified some upcoming events that may be of interest to participants. He noted that the next Task Force meeting is November 9 and that the third Educational Forum, "Innovations in Community Design," will be held on November 15. He also called out the project website at www.envisionalachua.com.

Following this overview, Daniel introduced Gerry Dedenbach from CHW, Inc. and Albert White, consultant to Plum Creek. Their presentations provided a description of the history and settlement patterns of the county, and identified accomplishments of some key leaders who influenced the landscape and economy. Both Gerry and Albert highlighted leaders who have embraced innovation to shape and grow Gainesville's economy throughout its history. They called out achievements in agriculture and other industries and noted the development of key facilities such as the University of Florida. Gerry highlighted state and local land use policies that have shaped current development patterns and will inform future opportunities.

Daniel provided a description of current conditions in Alachua County and highlighted maps which show how the location of key community assets such as major roads, rail lines, conservation lands, industries, the airport and other features reveal the "Geography of Innovation." By building upon and taking advantage of the opportunities provided by these features, the

Envision Alachua process can help shape new opportunities that improve economic, environmental and community conditions for residents in East County and throughout the area.

Daniel noted that the work of the Task Force has been to develop a draft Vision, Goals and Planning Principles document that will be used by Plum Creek to inform its planning efforts. He briefly described the goal topics that have been identified to date. These include: economic development, environmental conservation, transportation, energy and utilities, water, land use, agriculture, social and cultural development, the Envision Alachua planning process, recreation and education.

The presentations were intended to provide background information for participants to draw on as they started their group discussions.

III. Community Visions for Plum Creek Lands in Alachua County

Daniel directed the participants to break into five groups based on an assigned number on their nametag. Each group had 10-15 participants and a facilitator. After conducting self-introductions, the facilitators led each group through a discussion of three questions designed to stimulate thinking about each person's vision for East Alachua County, focusing on the economy, environment and community. Participants were encouraged to share their ideas with each other verbally and by writing them on a comment card. Comments were recorded on flip chart paper. Participants were not required to come to consensus or set priorities; the exercise was intended to serve as a broad discussion that surfaced multiple ideas for a future community vision. The three discussion questions were:

- 1. Economy:** What do you see as potential economic development opportunities for Plum Creek lands in East Alachua County?
- 2. Environment:** To allow development on some of its lands, Plum Creek would be willing to consider protecting other lands for wildlife, recreation and open space. What natural resources do you believe should be conserved in East Alachua County?
- 3. Community:** Plum Creek believes that future development on some of their lands could provide the impetus for improved community services in East County such as schools, parks, health care, etc. What types of services do you believe are most needed in East Alachua County?

IV. Group Reports and Discussion

Following the discussion, each group was asked to select a reporter to share the highlights of the group's discussion. The following themes emerged from the group reports and a review of the flip chart notes from each group.

1. Economy: What do you see as potential economic development opportunities for Plum Creek lands in East Alachua County?

Employment Opportunities

All groups reported a strong desire for the Envision Alachua process to provide new jobs. Participants also emphasized that employment opportunities should be available at a wide range of skill and wage levels. Jobs for youth should also be provided. These opportunities should be inclusive, and technical and training opportunities should be provided to prepare East County residents for these jobs.

Industrial Opportunities

Lands near Hawthorne are well-suited for industrial uses, and any economic development strategies should include manufacturing and industrial uses. Many production processes have improved significantly and are less impactful to communities. If done properly, these uses can be developed in a way that maintains the rural character of the area. The process should also explore opportunities to develop jobs in the woods.

Large Employers

Many participants called out the need for large employers (300+ employees) to move to the area. Companies such as Apple, General Electric, Hewlett Packard, IBM and others were suggested. Some participants suggested that the county regulations would need to be more "pro-business" to attract these opportunities.

Small Businesses

While there was significant interest in attracting large employers to the area, several groups noted that it was important to support and strengthen local business opportunities. The process may want to consider ways to provide incentives for small businesses. The county has a history of growing and maintaining its own businesses, and this should be encouraged throughout the process.

Business Incubators

The region needs to expand its abilities to incubate new businesses so they can grow and expand while remaining in the area.

Agricultural-Related Businesses

Some participants suggested there were opportunities to strengthen the agricultural economy by creating local food production opportunities involving

local crops such as blueberries. East County has some of the best agricultural lands in the county.

Job Training

There should be job training centers linked to area education providers that train the local workforce at all levels for the new jobs that will be created by future economic development opportunities. Programs should include internships and apprenticeships to support training at various skill levels.

University of Florida

Participants recognized the strong contribution that the University of Florida makes to the economy. Its research and development activities are significant and need to be supported so the University can maintain its top tier status as a leader in research and development and education.

“Brain Drain”

Some participants noted that employment opportunities are needed to help retain graduates from the University, Santa Fe College, and other educational institutions. Many people are trained and educated in the area, but have to leave to find employment opportunities.

Transportation

Alachua County has a strong transportation network and is fortunate to have established rail connections such as the CSX rail spur, which will provide significant opportunities for low-cost shipping of goods and materials to other parts of the state and to connect to international markets. Participants encouraged the process to support activities that would use the region’s established transportation infrastructure.

Additional Businesses and Services

Several groups reported they hoped the process could help stimulate and attract more diverse retail opportunities, restaurants, churches, health care services, grocery, movie theaters and other additional businesses and services.

2. Environment: To allow development on some of its lands, Plum Creek would be willing to consider protecting other lands for wildlife, recreation and open space. What natural resources do you believe should be conserved in East Alachua County?

Balance Economic Development and Conservation

The process should ensure there is a balance between economic development and activities that conserve the natural environment, provide recreation opportunities and maintain the rural character of the area.

Recreation and Tourism

Some participants suggested that conservation activities can also include recreation opportunities that contribute substantially to the local economy.

Water Quality

Groups commented that water quality was a significant issue, and that significant conservation activities are needed to protect overall water quality and water flow and positively impact natural areas such as Newnan's Lake.

Water and Energy Conservation

Plum Creek should consider incorporating sustainable development practices such as clustering, LID (Low Impact Development) and other techniques to conserve water and energy and limit the development footprint.

Natural Areas

Some participants noted that conservation activities could help improve water quality and related conditions at Newnan's Lake and Lochloosa Creek.

Wildlife Corridor

Some groups mentioned the importance of conserving lands that help maintain connectivity of wildlife corridors and create greenways.

Environmental Education

Some participants suggested that an environmental education center be established to help the community learn about conservation activities.

Agriculture

Some participants suggested that proposed development include opportunities for urban agriculture and gardens that allow local residents to "grow their own."

3. Community – Plum Creek believes that future development on some of their lands could provide the impetus for improved community services in East County such as schools, parks, health care, etc. What types of services do you believe are most needed in East Alachua County?

Support for Seniors

Development opportunities should provide a place for seniors, including related services, medical support and assisted living opportunities.

Community Services

Participants identified a list of services they hope Envision Alachua can bring to East County. The services identified across the groups include: affordable housing, community centers, parks and trails, financial institutions, medical and emergency care services, dry cleaners, training centers, malls, grocers,

restaurants, transportation services, day care centers, mortgage payment assistance, and others.

Arts and Culture

Some participants suggested the process should help create programs for youth such as arts, technology, music (hip hop, for example) dance (ballet, for example) and gymnastics.

Participants also reiterated the need for job training and educational services.

V. Summary and Next Steps

Daniel closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation, and encouraged everyone to continue their involvement in the process by doing the following:

- Send us your comments on the Draft Vision, Goals and Guiding Principles document
- Attend the November 9 Task Force Meeting
- Attend the November 15 Educational Forum
- Visit the website (www.envisionalachua.com) for more information and calendar of activities

A meeting wallgraphic and written comments provided by members of the public are attached at the end of this document.

ENVISION ALACHUA

OCTOBER 5, 2011
SPRINGHILL
MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

NEED A STRATEGY
ECONOMY

PRO-BIZ

- ▷ USE THE RAIL
- ▷ BIZ RAGE
- ▷ TAXES OF SERVICES
- ▷ BIZ INCUBATOR

NEED OFF HERE

NO MORE ON LAND

NEED A STRATEGY

PROTECT WATER RESOURCES
E.G. WATER RESERVES

LOOK FOR COMMUNITY

MAINTAIN RURAL CHARACTER

PROTECT LIVES

USE THE EXISTING TRAIL

TEACH EQUALLY

FEED WITHIN

MAKE THIS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

▷ JOBS

- F/ALL
- LIVING WAGE

▷ USE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

- SEWER/WATER

▷ GROW - LET'S EXPAND

▷ SKILL BIZ

- ↳ PROVIDE INCENTIVES

▷ LINK TO EDUCATION

▷ CREATE WORK IN-THE-WOODS

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