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Department of Doing

Memo

To: Mayor and City Commissioners
Via: Anthony Lyons, City Manger
From: Wendy Thomas, Director, Department of Doing
Date: July 3, 2018
Re: Joint Planning Agreement

The City Commission directed the City Manager to look at the requirements of the City of Gainesville Land Development Code (LDC) and the Alachua County Unified Land Development Code to provide a comparison regarding land development requirements to determine which code best contributes to the urban fabric. Given the complexity of the codes, the formulation of a comparison matrix was undertaken to address the commissions' direction in a very simplistic and non-comprehensive table. We also conducted research into best practice research on urban form, sustainability and mobility. This report will briefly outline research into market trends regarding development, with special regard to housing option choices, best practice standards analysis, development trends in the city, policies the city is considering adopting or re-examining and academic research on urban form and sustainability. Based on the analysis of national and local trends, we make a recommendation for moving forward regarding a Joint Planning Agreement (JPA).

On May 31, 2018, at a joint meeting of the City of Gainesville and Alachua County Commissions a jointly approved motion directed staff to continue JPA discussions and compare County and City codes to recommend a resolution that embraces the code that best contributes to the urban fabric desired by both Commissions regarding:

- Connectivity of infrastructure
- Infrastructure of all modes
- Density requirements
- Mix of uses
- Fees (transportation)
- Design Criteria including open space
- Affordable Housing

As simple as this request seems, the complexity of both codes doesn't allow for a simple comparison. As professional staff, we have examined the best possible way to compare the two codes and have found that both codes have two different requirements, a Euclidian zoning based code and a form based code. Within the form based code there are multiple options that would result in a comparison matrix that would become so complex as to not be an easy reference for policy makers. The second

motion was to develop a framework to determine how the maintenance obligations of public infrastructure transition as a result of annexations.

After the joint commission meeting, County and City staff met on June 7, 13, 22 and July 2. During these meetings we discussed creation of the matrix, annexation policies, infrastructure, and planned for presentations on July 9. State law outlines the maintenance of infrastructure and city staff recommends the City Commission continue to follow state law.

The changing trend in development in Gainesville is mirroring what is happening across the country. The adoption of a form based code in September 2017 has seen an increase in the number of multi-story buildings being proposed within the transect zones, see attachment A. The mixed use development with ground floor commercial and upper story residential units has proven to be a feasible development mix, especially close to the university. Creating student housing close to the university is the best use of infrastructure as it places students within walking distance of the University of Florida and reduces vehicle trips. Staff is recommending more property owners consider using transect zones over conventional Euclidian zoning to enhance the quality of the built environment, but also to provide the market the flexibility to adapt and change over time with regard to uses of the building. Staff has discussed with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity the ability to not have a maximum density in our Comprehensive Plan and Development Code. As we look to address housing affordability, and a housing first approach to addressing homelessness through provision of Single Room Occupancy (SROs) units, density limits might preclude the use of such housing options. Ensuring our form based code continues to create an available building envelope (height and setbacks), that the community finds appropriate, our decades old obsession with density is likely outdated. Another effort to address housing affordability is to amend the LDC provisions to allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in single family residential zoning districts. Although the City currently allows ADUs in multi-family zone districts we do not currently allow them in all residential zone districts. This code amendment is proposed for our 2018 LDC update and was presented in concept to the Plan Board where it received general support.

A proposed update to the LDC is a comprehensive update to the subdivision regulations. These provisions were not changed when the overall code was updated. After seeking stakeholder engagement we have presented concepts to the Plan Board that will allow greater flexibility with regard to the creation of new lots when there is a commitment to the provision of affordable housing. In addition, we have proposed the inclusion of greater connectivity with existing street networks as a requirement. The period when the city/county underwent a noted increase in development was during a time when cul-de-sacs were highly marketable. The lack of connectivity seems to have been appealing at the time, but has had a deleterious impact on connectivity and therefore resulted in congestion on through streets (connectors) and has had an adverse impact on response times for emergency responders.

Research into the development of the urban form points overwhelmingly to the importance of the street network to the development of cities. *Planning Problems of Town, City and Region, Papers and Discussions at the Twenty-Second National Conference on City Planning* held in June 1930, Jacob L Crane Jr. the Town Planner for Chicago called subdivisions the "...courageous attempt to apply human reason for the control of human destiny." Referring to the street system as the structural skeleton of the city, the planners of the late 20's and early 30's knew the importance of connectivity and ensuring roads are placed where they serve the city for generations to come. A remarkable example is shown on Attachment B, where the transformation of a first tier suburb shows that what remained constant was the street network. The remarkable urbanization that occurred here is attributed to the construction of a metro line and the community having mixed-use zoning in place to allow the creation of this dense urban form. After reviewing the purpose and general content of Joint Planning Agreements throughout the state and knowledge about the transformation of cities, and suburbs, over time lead staff to focus the JPA discussions on mobility infrastructure.

Mobility has one of the greatest impacts on the creation of a sustainable city. In *A 'sustainability window' of urban form*, Lohrey and Creutzig posit urban form is the nexus between city-transportation-climate. As Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and low density residential subdivisions have shown there is a correlation between urban form and mode split. Interestingly, as density increases data supports a rising correlation in the cost of living and air pollution. Although not consistent from researcher to researcher, a density (or address) minimum per acre has been shown to be supportive of alternate mode splits. The range in academic research is large, from 10 units per acre to 27 or higher. Transit utilization is a factor of income, transportation costs and availability of alternate modes of transportation. Eminently clear from all the research is the correlation between income and transit use. The higher the income the lower the utilization rate of transit. The conclusion is income and not density is the determining factor in transit usage. As reported in *The Future of Cities*, June 27, 2018, *The Wall Street Journal* reports that driverless cars could mean more urban sprawl and greater inequality. In *An empirical analysis of urban form, transport and global warming* Grazi, van den Bergh and van Ommereen conclude urban form and transportation planning deserve attention when focusing on a sustainable city. A study performed based on neighborhood type found that only extremely high density urbanites had a measureable difference in travel patterns from all other residents of the seven neighborhood types studied. In *Synergistic neighborhoods relationships with travel behavior: An analysis of travel in 30,000 US neighborhoods*, Voulgaris, Taylor et al, found that transit usage was relatively consistent across neighborhood types except within the older areas of a city.

Neighborhood Type	Percent of total transit trips
Mixed Use	10
Old Urban	32
Urban residential	20
Established suburbs	17
Patchwork	10
New development	10
Rural	0

The goal of the study was to remove the socio-economic factors in understanding travel behavior and to focus on land use/urban form. The unexpected conclusion of the research team is that modest changes to the built environment to slightly higher densities, added mixed-use development, modest addition to public transit service, etc. are unlikely to have much effect on travel. The potential nugget of improved transit usage may be the Old Urban neighborhoods, like Arlington, VA. Focusing redevelopment in these areas is one of the keys to the creation of a sustainable city. Given the increasing migration into cities, we are seeing a compression of what had been a century of change into a generation. "Ordinary cities resembled trees that grew haltingly, matured slowly and decayed imperceptibly," *Instant Cities* by Gunther Barth. There is an urban tradition of expansion which can be documented from the Hellenic city on the Mediterranean to growing urban cities of today.

Many factors contribute to the success of the built environment. Housing choice, self-selection of housing type, income, and educational attainment are factors in neighborhood selection that extend beyond the policy realm. As policy makers we cannot ignore the personal economic decisions that individuals make. In fact trends that we see change with time, as the latest Census data shows that Millennials are moving to the suburbs, a demographic shift that was unanticipated 10 years ago as we saw increasing market interest in central city living.

Policy makers often look to density, diversity and design to address the development of the built environment. Including transportation, such as destination accessibility and distance to transit are also important considerations when looking to develop policy to support a sustainable city. These are the reasons why professional staff focused on the framework of a city, the roads and transportation routes, as the foundation for a Joint Planning Agreement between the City of Gainesville and Alachua County. By strategically planning this important foundation of the community together we create a city that provides elasticity and adaptability for future continual (re)development of a thriving sustainable community.

Citations:

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