



Legislation Text

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Strategic Ecosystems (B)

This item is a referral from the Community Development Committee recommending an alternative approach for protecting significant ecological communities and features with reference to annexation of strategic ecosystems.

In October, 2007, the manner in which the City handles the protection of significant ecological communities, particularly in regards to annexation of Alachua County designated Strategic Ecosystems, was referred to the Community Development Committee.

Over the past year, an internal staff team has worked to analyze the existing mechanism in the City's Land Development Code that is utilized to protect significant ecological communities and how it relates to the Commission's expressed desire to ensure protection of Alachua County's defined Strategic Ecosystems once annexed into the City's limits. This effort has included input from the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department and affected stakeholders in the context of several Community Development Committee and staff meetings.

As background, in 2004, the City Commission adopted a section within the City of Gainesville Land Development Code (Sec. 30-309 of Gainesville Land Development Code) to create a Significant Ecological Communities (SEC) Overlay District, which requires additional environmental review and setbacks on High or Outstanding parcels (identified in a prior study) that are rezoned into the district. However, to date, only a handful of parcels have been rezoned into the District, and the City's methodology has come under legal challenge. The SEC Overlay District is not successfully achieving the Commission's goal of protecting sensitive environmental communities and features.

Therefore, staff has recommended an approach that focuses on the preservation of significant ecological communities and features through the normal development review process rather than the existing overlay approach. The proposed approach is modeled on Alachua County's Strategic Ecosystem regime but does vary in some instances.

The Community Development Committee recommended referral of this recommendation back to the City Commission on February 26, 2009.

No immediate fiscal impact is expected with respect to moving forward with an alternative approach however in the future there may be a need for an analysis of staffing and workflow resources.

Community Development Committee to the City Commission: direct staff to: 1) generate a petition to the Plan Board adding the alternative approach to the City of Gainesville's Land Development Code and; 2) remove this referral item from the Community Development Committee referral list.