



Walton County Planning and Development Services

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Date: August 30, 2018

To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Mac Carpenter, Planning Director
Stan Sunday, Deputy County Administrator
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From: Kristen A. Shell AICP, Planning Manager

Subject: U.S. 331 Economic Development Corridor Plan Recommendations

Introduction:

With the widening and bridge improvements along the U.S. 331 corridor as well as the potential for central sewer expansion, additional development demands can be expected along the corridor. The overall intent of this project, the U.S. 331 Economic Development Corridor Plan, is to begin planning for anticipated development and economic development in a proactive rather than reactive way. This planning includes economic development, land use, and infrastructure related recommendations.

Background:

The County was awarded a \$40,000 Community Planning Technical Assistance Grant from the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity in order to complete U.S. 331 Economic Development Corridor Study. This Technical Assistance Grant was tied to a predetermined Scope of Work, which was authorized by the Board and signed by the Chairperson on November 9, 2017.

In March of 2018, the County amended an existing contract with Matrix Design Group, Inc. that allowed for an extension of the current contract for planning services that the County had entered into with Matrix Design Group. This existing contract was for work updating the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code, which is an ongoing project.

Several advertised public meetings were held during 2018 with the working group and large land owners along the corridor. These meeting were held in Freeport on the following dates: March, 28; April 17; April 24 and August 28.

In addition the Walton County Planning Commission considered the proposed recommendations at their April 16 special meeting and then recommended approval of the final Plan at their August 9 regular meeting. The Planning Commission also recommended approval of proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan on June 16. These proposed amendments were related to implementation of the Plan's recommendations.

Two workshops were held with the Board of County Commissioners on May 24, 2018 and June 12, 2018. A formal transmittal hearing was held during the July 10, 2018 Board of County Commissioners meeting. During this hearing, the Board voted to transmit proposed amendments related to implementation of the Plan's recommendation to the reviewing State and Federal agencies. Adoption of these proposed amendments is currently scheduled for the September 11, 2018 Board of County Commissioners meeting.

Key Recommendations:

The US 331 Economic Corridor Plan provides a framework to realize the economic development potential of the US 331 corridor while maintaining its role as an important transportation facility and route.

The Plan explores alternate potential build-out scenarios supported by economic development, land use policy, regulatory, and administrative recommendations to transform the corridor into an economic engine for Walton County into the future. Coupled with the assessment of economic conditions, programs, and economic development incentives, the Plan can be used to focus and unify economic development efforts to achieve the vision for the US 331 corridor.

Land Use:

- Create a Corridor Economic Development Master Mixed Use Future Land Use Category to provide flexibility to accommodate development opportunities without the need for Comprehensive Plan amendments.
- Provide a wide range of housing opportunities that encourage a range of housing sizes and costs, support telecommuting, and are available to residents of all needs and backgrounds.

Transportation:

- Preserve US 331 traffic flow and as a major evacuation route through the thoughtful planning of access management and service roads, roadway shoulders to accommodate additional lanes and critical fuel sites for sufficient fuel supply.
- Create a well-connected multimodal transportation system throughout Walton County that promotes bike route to regional bikeway connections including across Clyde B Wells

Bridge, ensures new developments provide safe and efficient sidewalks, and considers pedestrian bridges across US 331 as traffic increases with development.

Infrastructure:

- Create a thriving mixed-use corridor with central sewer, potable water and fiber optic internet infrastructure to meet 21st Century needs.

Economic Development:

- Attract and retain a robust and diverse business environment consistent with the overall corridor vision that targets high wage and innovative industries, incentivizes new and relocated businesses, and creates an identify and brand theme for Activity Centers.
- Provide incentives such as expedited permit approvals, reduction or elimination of fees, infrastructure assistance, etc. for new and relocating businesses and development projects that meet the vision of the Study Area, particularly the southern activity center.
- Expand the Tax Increment Finance Area to include the southern activity center land area.
- Maintain and protect Eglin AFB as a major employment generator through close coordination, support and attraction of defense industries and families proximate to Eglin AFB, and development of educational information to promote Eglin AFB's regional importance.