

# ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES REPORT

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES REPORT OVERVIEW

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### INTENT AND PURPOSE

#### COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

New Horizon 2035 is Lee County's planning effort to evaluate and improve the county's comprehensive plan—The Lee Plan. The goal is to establish an updated comprehensive plan that addresses the broad array of challenges facing Lee County in the next 25 years. These challenges include protecting community character, promoting economic development, conserving environmentally sensitive lands, accommodating future growth, providing public infrastructure, strengthening connections within the county, managing change, and improving mobility and access.

### COMMUNITY VISIONING AND PUBLIC INPUT

#### ISSUE IDENTIFICATION PHASE

The first phase of this planning effort is to identify issues and opportunities that currently face Lee County. The county worked with residents, business owners, public representatives, appointed and elected officials, and other Southwest Florida agency partners to identify what issues the county will need to address to achieve its vision. The result of this phase is a concise list of issues the county will use to evaluate and update the Lee Plan. This list of issues is being distributed to Lee County community members, business owners, public officials, stakeholders, and the State Department of Community Affairs to ensure that Lee County addresses local as well as current state priorities.

#### VISIONING WORKSHOPS, MEETINGS, AND PRESENTATIONS

In April and May 2010, the Lee County Planning Division hosted a series of 12 public visioning workshops, public board meetings, and stakeholder presentations. The visioning forums informed community members, business owners, public officials, and stakeholders about the comprehensive plan update and engaged them in a dialogue about what issues, challenges, and opportunities will affect Lee County's future. The meeting locations were geographically distributed throughout the county with the intent of reaching out to all communities in Lee County.

At each of these meetings, participants formed small groups and engaged in a facilitated discussion to identify their future visions for Lee County. Each group identified issues they felt the county needs to address to achieve its future vision. The discussions centered on the following five talking points:

- **Community Vision** (quality of life, community character, community features, lifestyle)
- **Land Use/Development** (design characteristics, urban form, agricultural preservation, rural land)
- **Parks/Conservation** (parks and public spaces, conservation areas, built and natural environment, access and location)
- **Transportation** (sidewalks/trails, bikeways, greenways, blueways, waterways, transit, roadways)
- **Public Services** (utilities, infrastructure, public amenities, energy, schools, cultural resources)

For more information on the specific locations and dates of the meetings and a summary of the input provided, please refer to the New Horizon 2035 website: [www.lee.gov/dcd/EAR2011](http://www.lee.gov/dcd/EAR2011).

### **INTER-AGENCY SCOPING MEETINGS**

In addition to learning about the community's aspirations for the county, the Lee County Planning Division hosted three scoping meetings with local, regional, and state government agencies, including Lee County departments. The focus of the scoping meetings was to identify critical issues that these public representatives deemed important to address through the update to the plan. The New Horizon 2035 website provides lists of issues that were generated from these scoping meetings.

### **REPORT ORGANIZATION AND TOPICS**

A variety of issues emerged from the discussions of the five talking points. The issues that emerged have been summarized into a cohesive framework organized into four topics:

- Livability
- Strengthening Connections
- Community Character
- Sustainability

These four topics will serve as the framework for the issues of local concern that the county will address through this Lee Plan review and update. This framework will continue to be refined as the process moves forward and ultimately will be reviewed by the Lee County Local Planning Agency and the Lee County Board of County Commissioners. The proposed process for this refinement is described in greater detail at the conclusion of this report.

## TOPIC #1 – LIVABILITY

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### GENERAL TOPIC OVERVIEW

Livability describes the qualities that promote Lee County's character, identity, and lifestyle that enhances the quality of life for its residents. A truly livable community evolves in order to ensure that the county's vision addresses current values, needs, and priorities. Through the New Horizon 2035 planning effort, the county can become aware of and evaluate the specific attributes that will help create a sense of place in the community.

### SUMMARY OF TOPIC ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

#### APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT FORM

- **Traditional Development Pattern** - foster opportunities for a more traditional development pattern throughout the urban and suburban areas of the county by designing developments to fit within the established context of the community in terms of walkable neighborhood character, scale, and roadway and pedestrian/bicycle connectivity.
- **Walkable Neighborhoods and Centers** - plan neighborhoods to be walkable, interconnected with other neighborhoods and activity centers, and accessible to facilities and services.
- **Delineate Between Different Areas** - prevent further sprawl development through enforceable delineation between urban, suburban, and rural areas.
- **Community Centers** - promote redevelopment to encourage walkability, connectivity, and an integration of uses.
- **Public Spaces, Parks, Open Spaces, and Conservation Lands** - review opportunities to provide an array of active and passive public resources including parks, public and open spaces, historic resources, cultural centers, walking trails, and conservation areas.
- **Transit-Supportive Development Patterns** - promote the development of compact mixed use centers and activity centers at transportation hubs.
- **Cohesive Approach to Platted Lands** - develop formal solutions to address vacant and fragmented development of platted lands.

#### PARKS, PUBLIC SPACES, OPEN SPACES, RECREATIONAL, AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

- **Enhanced Parks, Public Spaces, Open Spaces, Recreation, and Cultural Facilities** - foster the development of parks, public spaces, open spaces, recreation, and cultural facilities to meet future needs of county residents.
- **Neighborhood Community Spaces and Gathering Places** - foster community social activities by incorporating neighborhood community gathering places.
- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Connected Parks** - develop parks, open and public spaces, and recreational amenities with direct pedestrian and bicycle connections.
- **More Accessible Facilities** - encourage parks, public spaces, and recreational facilities that serve multiple neighborhoods and interconnect communities while discouraging resources that serve a single neighborhood or development.

## **PUBLIC SERVICES**

- **Public Service Provision** - continue to provide and support high quality public services that foster the county's high quality of life including emergency management, public utilities, health and human services, and community planning.
- **Community-Oriented Public Services** - promote improved access to public services that improve access to public services through such practices as local satellite centers, on-line government services, local meetings, and other service delivery options.
- **Mixed Use Community Centers and Local Service Provision** - enable community members, business people, and visitors to access public services within their local communities by fostering mixed use activity centers that integrate residential, commercial, professional, and public services.
- **Schools as Community Centers** - work with the Lee County School Board to integrate schools into communities and neighborhoods and to make facilities more available for increased non-school activities.

## TOPIC #2 –STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

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### GENERAL TOPIC OVERVIEW

Strong connections — as established by the county’s land use patterns, transportation resources, and public facilities — are essential to Lee County’s quality of life, identity, and sustainability. Connected land use patterns emphasize compatibility between places where people live, work, shop, and play; provide access to public spaces and activity centers; and support a greater variety of housing and lifestyle choices for all age groups. Transportation resources that focus on connectivity have street and transit networks that provide multiple options for travel and interconnected pathways for pedestrians and bicycles that link neighborhood-oriented residential, commercial, and public spaces. Public facilities such as schools, recreation centers, parks and other civic uses, tie all of our communities and neighborhoods together and provide places for residents to gather and interact. By strengthening the county’s connections, Lee County will enable all community members to move through the community with ease, improve the linkages between different land uses and community areas, and promote a unified county identity.

### SUMMARY OF TOPIC ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

#### A CONNECTED DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

- **Connected Neighborhoods and Activity Centers** - strengthen connections within and between neighborhoods and activity centers that feature commercial, civic, employment, and mixed use areas.
- **Activity Centers in Key Locations** - evaluate priority locations for mixed use activity centers (universities/colleges, airport, employment and major transportation intersections) and focus on interconnected development patterns and transit opportunities to serve these areas.

#### MOBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION

- **Stronger Linkage between Land Use and Transportation** - strengthen the relationship between land use and transportation planning to emphasize better connections between destinations and limit roadway expansion in locations where it would be detrimental to community character and livability.
- **Complete Streets Design** - evaluate the complete streets transportation design approach for roadways, streets and other public rights-of-way (both new and retrofit of existing streets) to accommodate transit, cyclists, pedestrians, landscaping, and automobiles.
- **Funding for Transit** - explore appropriate innovative strategies for funding transit.

#### ACCESS

- **Evacuation Planning** - assess the county’s roadway network and land use connections to ensure proper capacity, efficiency, and accessibility during tropical storm events.
- **A Connected System of Parks, Public Space, Recreation Facilities, and Open Space Resources** - utilize the county’s park, public space, and open space resources to connect neighborhoods, commercial areas, activity centers, and public service facilities through an interconnected land use and transportation network.
- **Public Resource Access** - provide access to the county’s rivers, waterways, beaches, and open spaces through an array of regional, community, neighborhood, and linear parks.

## TOPIC #3 – COMMUNITY CHARACTER

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### GENERAL TOPIC OVERVIEW

Lee County is comprised of diverse local communities, each with their own distinct character and identity. The character and identity of each community are defined by their unique attributes including their location (coastal, river, or inland), development features (urban, suburban, or rural), community design/master planning attributes (streetscape, architectural, and transportation systems), and history. Lee County citizens have a strong desire to preserve and enhance the attributes of their local communities. Participants expressed support for the county's community planning and conservation efforts which enable local community members to steer the planning and development efforts. Additionally, they desire county-wide strategies that encourage community-oriented land use, connectivity, and sustainable development practices.

### SUMMARY OF TOPIC ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

#### COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND APPEARANCE

- **Reinforce Distinct Community Character** - maintain and enhance the distinct character of individual communities within the county with emphasis on a local vernacular reflected in buildings, community design, and architectural features; especially foster small town character in the county's rural communities.
- **Open Spaces** - reflect community character through appropriate open and public space requirements (i.e.: urban, suburban, and rural) that a one-size-fits-all approach will not meet the needs of varying areas.
- **Public Facilities as Community Shapers** - utilize local community resources and facilities (i.e.: neighborhood parks, schools, and public spaces) to reinforce the identity of each community area.
- **Enhance Landscaping and Buffering** - improve landscaping and buffering to better transition between different land uses and to make transportation corridors greener.
- **County Sense of Place – Unique Local Community** - improve the county's sense of place by fostering the unique characteristics and attributes of the many communities in the county.

#### REGIONAL AND LOCAL IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY CHARACTER

- **Integrated Development** - encourage regional master planning strategies that integrate local land uses together, provide for interconnected neighborhoods, activity centers, and public spaces, and link the local community together through a variety of transportation alternatives.
- **Regional Development Coordination** - be attentive to whether development practices of other local, regional, and state agencies and jurisdictions are consistent with Lee County goals for land use, growth management, environmental resources, and transportation and encourage our neighbors to consider their impact on Lee County.
- **Streetscape Design** - design streets and highways to have a positive impact on community character, including landscaping, street graphics, street cross-sections, and traffic-calming measures.
- **Placement of Major Facilities** – consider community character impacts of the design and placement of essential infrastructure facilities and services and alternative energy generators such as utility pipes, wind turbines, and solar energy panels.

## RURAL AREA TOOL BOX

- **Development Standards to Preserve Rural Character** - focus land development policies on the preservation of rural character in order to maintain a strong distinction between rural communities and urban and suburban areas.
- **Preserve Open Lands** - conserve rural lands by developing a comprehensive rural preservation strategy that includes a diverse array of programs such as conservation land purchase programs, transfer of development rights, purchase of development rights, and farmland trusts.
- **Transportation Standards for Rural Areas** - standards for transportation and other infrastructure facilities in rural areas should maintain rural character.
- **Agricultural Conservation** - expand the practice of conservation to protect agricultural lands.
- **Economically Viable Agriculture** - explore and encourage innovative solutions to protect the economic viability of rural areas and agricultural lands such as sustainable agribusiness, community gardens, farmers markets, and farm-to-table programs.

## TOPIC #4 – SUSTAINABILITY

### GENERAL TOPIC OVERVIEW

Sustainability is a balanced approach to development that considers community well-being and equity, environmental resource conservation, and economic resilience and vitality. It is characterized by a development pattern that promotes living within the community's inherent limits, understanding the interconnections among economy, society, and environmental conditions. The community has expressed concern over development patterns that lack connectivity, economic resilience, and environmental responsibility and detract from community character. Many in the county have expressed support for a more sustainable approach to planning in Lee County that integrates essential social, environmental, and economic factors. A sustainability-based approach to planning in Lee County can foster cultural diversity, expand the local employment base by focusing on clean industries and a diversified economic base, improve environmental stewardship, promote redevelopment and green building design, provide new opportunities for cleaner alternative energy sources, and promote the unique qualities that comprise Lee County's character and sense of place.

### SUMMARY OF TOPIC ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

#### ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

- **Expand Local Economic Opportunities** - improve the county's economic sustainability by fostering new and expanding existing industry clusters such as ecotourism, higher education institutions, international airport, medical services, and other sectors.
- **More Diverse Employment Mix** – evaluate the county's employment center to incorporate a more diverse mix of employment generators.

#### ENERGY CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP, AND GREEN DESIGN

- **Avoid Development in Vulnerable Areas** - continue to direct development away from areas vulnerable to tropical storms, storm surge, sea level rise, flooding, and wildfire hazards.
- **Prioritize Water Conservation** - focus on potable water efficiency in development, water reuse/reclamation, and improved irrigation and stormwater best management practices.
- **Energy Conservation** - implement standards for energy conservation, including renewable energy resources such as solar and wind energy.
- **Conservation of Natural Vegetation** - protect trees and other areas of natural vegetation during the development process and preserve and protect coastal resources, native habitats, and landscapes.

#### SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION

- **Coordinate Location of Services with Growth** - focus infrastructure in areas where growth can best be accommodated within the county's desired development pattern and aim for that infrastructure to be in place at the time that it is needed.
- **Plan Services to Support Compact Growth and Redevelopment** - develop solutions for utilities and public facilities needed to support compact development and redevelopment in identified areas.
- **Stable Funding Sources** - identify and secure sustainable revenue sources to finance the construction, maintenance, and operation of existing and future public services.

- **Water Quality** - improve water quality control through enhanced stormwater management.
- **Enhance Recycling** - improve recycling efforts as part of solid waste services.
- **Manage Airport Impacts** - address and minimize growth impacts from the airport on adjacent development, including both noise and safety considerations.
- **Groundwater Impacts in Rural Areas** - promote innovative, sustainable, and environmental-friendly designs and processes to limit impacts on water resources.

### **SOCIAL ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY**

- **Community for All Ages** - emphasize activities that will attract and retain a diverse population by continuing to improve community resources, facilities, and services.
- **Sustainable Building Standards** - design buildings for long life, adaptability, and lower resource consumption.
- **Provide Housing Opportunities** - consider the needs of all income levels, ages, and lifestyle needs, including those with physical disabilities, through innovative economic incentives to encourage home ownership and community stability.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

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### PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS FOR ISSUES OF LOCAL CONCERN

#### EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL REPORT (EAR)

In the second phase of the New Horizon 2035 process, the planning team will develop strategies to address these identified issues and opportunities in light of the provisions of the current Lee Plan. As solutions are developed, additional community workshops will be held to inform the public and receive further public input. The end result of this phase will be an Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) that identifies how and where the Lee Plan should be amended to address these issues during the 2035 planning horizon. The EAR will be reviewed at one or more public hearings before the Local Planning Agency (LPA) in December 2010 for a recommendation and for final action by the Board of Lee County Commissioners in early 2011.

#### UPDATED LEE PLAN AND REGULATIONS

The final phase of New Horizon 2035 will include the development of revised visions, goals, objectives and policies that will provide the basis for amendments to the Lee Plan. Once the Lee Plan has been adopted, the county will update its land development code.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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### ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES REPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

The issues provided in the final version of this report will serve as a guide for making necessary adjustments to the Lee Plan and to corresponding policies and regulations. Please let us know how well we have captured the ideas presented through the visioning forums by visiting the New Horizon 2035 online report questionnaire at [www.leegov.com/dcd/ear2011](http://www.leegov.com/dcd/ear2011). You may also get a copy of the questionnaire by contacting Kathie Ebaugh at 239.533.8313 or [KEbaugh@leegov.com](mailto:KEbaugh@leegov.com).