

Washington County, Florida  
Planning Department  
1331 South Boulevard, Chipley FL 32428  
Phone – (850) 415-5093 Fax – (850) 415-5094

## BUYERS – BEWARE

### HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF WHEN PURCHASING LAND IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, FLORIDA

SOURCE: Florida Attorney General's Office and Washington County Land Development Code

**Before purchasing land, take the following steps:**

- Look at the property
- Do not buy over the phone or by mail.
- Do not buy based on a friend's recommendation.
- Look at the fee amounts required for purchase and development (real estate taxes, community or homeowners' assessment fees, building permit fees, deposits with electric companies, and septic tanks fees).
- Talk to residents that live in the area.
- Talk to other real estate agents in the area and ask how long it took to sell similar property.
- Check with the County Planning Office to see what new development is planned for the area that might affect land value.
- If the land is undeveloped, find out who will be responsible for the costs of building roads, utilities, or sewer. Talk to the utility companies to find out what the cost will be to place power poles and lines into undeveloped land.
- Ask what percentage of the property is within environmentally protected areas. These areas are designated by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) as well as county-level government and may require FDEP or county government approval when developed. This includes any clearing, road building, or placement of structures.
- If property is offered in **less than 4.5- acre parcels**, inquire as to the process taken to divide into smaller parcels. Generally, a variance from the Planning Commission is required to develop or build on land divided into less than 4.5 – acre tracts.
- Know what the zoning is. Do not buy property zoned agriculture and expect to place a Recreational Vehicle Park on it. Do not buy residential property with plans of placing a junk yard there.
- Ask the seller to provide you with DEED RESTRICTIONS. They should also be available at the Clerk's office at the courthouse. **It is the property owner's responsibility** to be aware of deed restrictions. Deed restrictions generally override the Washington County Land Development Code.
- Ask the seller whether there is a homeowner's association or architectural review committee that will have final approval for any development.
- Always insure that your deed is recorded as soon as possible. If someone else files it for you, it is your responsibility to ensure that it is done.

- Do not begin any development without prior approval from the County Planning Department.  
Mobile homes cannot be moved to or relocated in Washington County without prior approval.

### **Roads and Legal Ingress/Egress in Washington County:**

- It is the responsibility of the developer to construct new roads servicing any new development.  
Washington County taxpayers are not obligated to build roads for new development.
- Never buy property located off of a newly constructed dirt road without asking about the background of the road.
- **All** roads built after February 1999, must be paved.
- All newly constructed roads must have a development plan filed and approved at the County Planning Office.
- Generally, property to be developed **must** abut an existing county road, paved or unpaved or a state road.
- In some cases, an exclusive easement into property may be obtained, but may serve only one parcel of land and may not be used to provide an ingress/egress to additional parcels that result from subsequent subdivision.
- Beware of easements placed adjacent to each other in an attempt to circumvent building a road into a new development.
- There are some existing subdivisions where the owner has failed to bring the roads up to county standards or has chosen to continue maintenance themselves. The responsibility for maintaining these roads rests with the developer. If the developer fails to maintain the roads, it then becomes the residents' responsibility to maintain them. The county will not assume maintenance on these roads, until such time as they are brought up to County standards, approved by the county engineer, and approved by the Board of County Commissioners.
- Beware of promises from the seller that the roads will be paved in the near future. Budget shortfalls at local and state levels preclude paving of the majority of roads in Washington County.

### **Questions? Call the Washington County Planning Office:**

- If possible, fax your questions along with a description of the property, including the road location, to (850) 415-5094.
- Or, you may e-mail to [mderuntz@washingtonfl.com](mailto:mderuntz@washingtonfl.com) .
- Or phone Michael DeRuntz at (850) 415-5093.
- Your questions will be researched or you will be referred to another agency that will provide the information needed.