

INTRODUCTION

WASHINGTON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

I. WASHINGTON COUNTY AND THE MUNICIPALITIES

Established as a formal governmental body on December 9, 1825, Washington County became Florida's 45th County and was named after President George Washington. Through more sophisticated GIS mapping procedures and new calculations show that the County has 391,040 square acres (611 square miles), with 23,040 acres (36 square miles) being water and 368,000 acres (575 square miles) land. Originally, the County spanned more than 5,000 square miles before division to form Jackson, Walton, Bay, Calhoun, Okaloosa, Franklin and Holmes counties. Created in 1825 and located in the approximate center of the Florida Panhandle and the Choctawhatchee River, transportation for settlers in the area and transport for the lumber and wood harvested from the vast forestlands present in the area contributed to the growth of the area. Today, the County extends 41 miles north to south, and 44 miles east to west and is landlocked. Borders are shared with Holmes County and Jackson County to the north, Bay County to the south, Jackson County to the east and Holmes County, Walton County and the Choctawhatchee River to the west.

Much of Washington County is uninhabited, with most of the estimated population of 23,719 (BEBR, 2008 *Statistical Abstract*) residing in or around the municipalities of Chipley, Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau, and within the unincorporated area of Sunny Hills, and within other developments which are beginning to occur around the County's many lakes.

Washington County derives its beauty and heritage from the land and has resilient and resourceful citizens who understand the importance preserving the natural resources that are prolific within the County. Being located in the Florida Panhandle provides both residents and guests with an array in shopping, church activities, dining, recreational, and employment opportunities. Excellent schools and medical facilities are available; parks and recreational areas abound in the area. The County retains the charm of a small town and rural lifestyle.

One of the most defining features of the County are the large number of lakes that exists throughout the County, the pristine springs, and an undeveloped atmosphere that provides for a rural way of life that many of its residents prefer. Much of Washington County is undeveloped, with most of the population residing in/or around the municipalities of Chipley, Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, Wausau.

There are five municipalities within the county. Four (Caryville, Ebro, Vernon and Wausau) have chosen to partner with Washington County for growth management services. The City of Chipley acts independently with regard to planning issues, but does utilize the services of the Washington County Building Inspection Services.

A. Caryville

Caryville is located in the extreme northwest corner of Washington County on the Choctawhatchee River, with a large portion of the town located in a flood zone. Transportation routes to the town are I-10, SR 90, CR 279 and CR 173. In the past, the frequency of floods and the buyout program of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have contributed to a drop in population from 1990 and 2000. While this recent decrease in population has remained, there has been no significant growth primarily due to development restrictions on areas within the flood plains and the lack of suitable property for development, either for commercial or residential purposes.

B. Chipley

Chipley is the county seat of Washington County and is located in the northeast corner of the County. This gives the City access to markets in Holmes and Jackson Counties, as well as Washington County. The City is served by several transportation alternatives, including I-10 (with a Chipley interchange), SR 77 which travels north/south and links the Panama City area, two east/west arterials (US 90 and SR 273), and CR 77-A that acts as a major collector. The City is also bisected by the CSX railroad with Amtrak service suspended temporarily due to Hurricane Katrina. The County's major employers are located within the city limits. There are three public schools and one vocational school located within the city limits. While Chipley's Comprehensive Plan and growth management remain under the control of the City, it is mentioned here due to the significant impact and influence on the rest of the County. The County sets no goals, objectives, or policies for the City of Chipley.

C. Ebro

Ebro is located at the intersections of SR 79 and SR 20 in southwest Washington County. Washington County Kennel Club provides employment to residents of Ebro and the immediately surrounding area. Commercial development is comprised of a convenience store, motel, and restaurant. Portions of the town are in a flood plain and development is restricted to locations in higher elevations. No central water or wastewater treatment services are available in this area and this may account for the slow growth. It is expected that the future move of the Bay County International Airport to a location south of Ebro in Bay County and the widening of SR 79 to a four-lane facility will stimulate economic growth. The construction of a Lewis Bear Distribution Center warehouse was completed in 2008, with some employment opportunities being made available for Washington County residents. The proposed Knight Family Trust Optional Sector Plan for a 55,000-acre area in Washington and Bay Counties is expected to have significant impact on both the town and surrounding area.

D. Vernon

The geographical center of the County is Vernon located on Holmes Creek at the crossroads of SR 79, CR 277, and CR 279. Vernon faces many changes with the Florida Department of Transportation's four-lane project of SR 79. This project will result in the taking of property

from the downtown business district, creating the need for the town and merchants to look elsewhere for accommodations for a grocery store and other shops. The largest employer within the town is the Washington County School District with three schools located in the immediate area. Other than small businesses, restaurants, gas stations, and a few small shops, there are no major businesses offering employment in Vernon.

E. Wausau

Wausau is located approximately 6 miles to the south of Chipley on SR 77 and CR 278. The surrounding community is largely residential. Although there are no major employers within Wausau, the Washington County Correctional Institute is located to the south of Wausau and provides employment to some residents within the Wausau municipal limits. Construction funds have not been allocated for the Washington County SR 77 four-lane project. In the event that this project is funded, it is expected that the widening will have minimal impact on the town, as FDOT will utilize a bypass

F. Unincorporated Washington County

The unincorporated sections of the County are experiencing steady growth, especially in the southeastern section of Washington County around the many lakes and the unincorporated areas of Sunny Hills. Many residents of Bay County choose to live a more tranquil life style while commuting to their workplaces in the adjacent County. Some retirees are choosing the County to build their new retirement homes. While the rural attraction of the County is one reason to live Washington County, economic development opportunities are limited allowing limited employment of residents. There are no major employers located in the unincorporated areas of Washington County other than the Washington County Correctional Institute.

III. THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROCESS

This Comprehensive Plan has been developed pursuant to the requirements of Chapter 163, Florida Statutes, and the "Local Government Comprehensive Planning and Land Development Regulation Act of 1985," as amended, and pursuant to the requirements of Chapter 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code, as amended. As required by Chapter 163, Part II, this plan has been reviewed by the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR), and amended to be consistent with the EAR findings. The EAR, adopted by the governmental entities of Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau and Washington County on July 28, 2008 by Ordinance 2008-5, was found to be sufficient by the Department of Community Affairs on October 6, 2008.

As development occurs and suburban oriented growth emerges, there will be an increased demand to build infrastructure to the growing population. Along with meeting the basic needs of an urban planning framework, the County and the municipalities will look ahead toward additional goals that focus more on quality of life issues and sustaining the livability of the community.

A. Elements of the Plan

The Washington County Comprehensive Plan includes the following statutorily required and optional elements:

| | |
|------------------|---|
| <u>Section A</u> | <u>Future Land Use Element</u> |
| <u>Section B</u> | <u>Transportation Element</u> |
| <u>Section C</u> | <u>Housing Element</u> |
| <u>Section D</u> | <u>Infrastructure Element</u> |
| <u>Section E</u> | <u>Conservation Element</u> |
| <u>Section F</u> | <u>Recreation and Open Space Housing</u> |
| <u>Section G</u> | <u>Intergovernmental Coordination</u> |
| <u>Section H</u> | <u>Capital Improvements Public Facilities</u> |
| <u>Section I</u> | <u>Concurrency Management</u> |
| <u>Section J</u> | <u>Public Participation</u> |
| <u>Section K</u> | <u>Monitoring and Evaluation</u> |
| <u>Section L</u> | <u>Public School Facilities Element</u> |
| <u>Section M</u> | <u>Economic Element (optional)</u> |

B. Supporting Documents

Supporting Documents has a new definitions section. The Economic Element is optional and has been added to the Plan. Each element contains goals, objectives, and policies. The objectives serve as benchmarks against which progress toward the goals can be measured and the effectiveness of the policies can be established. Plan elements are supported by the best available data and analysis from County, regional, State, Federal, and other units of local government and various agencies. The Technical Support Documents published with this Comprehensive Plan contains the supporting data and analysis used to develop the Goals, Objectives, and Policies described herein. The Technical Support Document shall be used, where appropriate, to assist in the review of proposed 2020 Comprehensive Plan EAR-based amendments and revisions. The Technical Support Documents shall not be adopted and shall not require any amendment pursuant to Chapter 163.3187, Florida Statutes.

C. Intent

The Washington County Comprehensive Plan is a policy document designed to guide the growth and development of the County to the Year 2020. The authority or mandate for this plan comes from the Local Government Comprehensive Planning and Land Development Regulation Act of 1985 and subsequent amendments.

The Comprehensive Plan shall be construed broadly to accomplish its purpose and its intent. Terms not otherwise defined in the definitions section shall be interpreted first by reference to the relevant provisions of the Local Government Comprehensive Planning and Land Development Regulation Act; secondly, by reference to generally accepted engineering,

planning, or other professional terminology if technical in nature; and otherwise, according to common usage, unless the content clearly indicates otherwise. Any term still in dispute after the above remedies have been exhausted shall be resolved pursuant to the procedure presented below.

Where administration of this Comprehensive Plan includes the interpretation of a specific policy, and where such interpretation is reasonably debatable after considering the language contained in the related objective and goal, an "aggrieved or adversely affected party" (as defined in Chapter 163.3215(2), Florida Statutes) may request an official interpretation of the policy by the Board of County Commissioners. Any such interpretation shall be rendered by the Board of County Commissioners within thirty (30) days of the receipt of a written request for official interpretation and shall be final. Any such final interpretation shall be subject to further action only as described in Chapter 163.3215, Florida Statutes. Other specific Comprehensive Plan interpretation procedures, including procedures for interpretation of the Future Land Use Map, are contained in the Future Land Use Appendix.

D. Conflicting Policies

The Comprehensive Plan has been written in order to achieve internal consistency between the Goals, Objectives, and Policies; however, circumstances may arise in which the application of two (2) or more statements result in a conflict or uncertainty as to which statement most appropriately applies. The problem may be resolved by the Washington County Planning Administrator using procedures as established by the Florida Statutes, the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code. If the Planning Administrator is unable to make a decision, the Board of County Commissioners will be presented the supporting documents for the conflict.

E. Land Development Code Update

There are several elements in the 2020 Comprehensive Plan that provide for proposed changes to the County's Land Development Code to further implement the Goals, Objectives, and Policies in the plan. These proposed changes can be found in the policies of the elements.

F. Public Participation Process

These public participation procedures are developed to meet the requirements of Chapter 163.3181, Florida Statutes, and Rule 9J-5, Florida Administrative Code, as amended. These sections of the State law and rules require the adoption of public participation procedures designed to provide effective public participation in the comprehensive planning process and to provide real property owners with notice of all official actions that will regulate the use of their property. These public participation procedures, in addition to any other procedures required by statute, will be followed whenever an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan is proposed. All comprehensive planning and related documents, reports, studies, and agendas shall be made readily available for public viewing pursuant to the adopted Public Participation Resolution adopted on May 17, 1990.

G. Revisions to the Comprehensive Plan

The revisions and changes to the 2010-2020 Washington County Comprehensive Plan are based on the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) and the Sustainable Growth and Development amendments. Many of the issues identified during the visioning were the same as those identified during the EAR. During both the EAR process and the Visioning process of the Committee for a Sustainable Emerald Coast Sustainable Growth facilitated by West Florida Regional Planning Council (2008), the public had two opportunities to participate in establishing the policies for future growth. Participants included representatives of city councils, civic organizations, local businesses, Chamber of Commerce, elected officials, the Washington County Planning Office, regional and state agencies and private citizens. The public had the opportunity to complete an online survey expressing their opinions and identifying the most important issues facing the County's future development.