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INTRODUCTION

EVALUATION AND APPRIASAL

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Washington County's Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) was delivered to the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA) for a consistency review on April 1, 2008. The Objections, Recommendations, and Comments report (ORC) from DCA was received by the Washington County Planning Office and the West Florida Regional Planning Council (WFRPC) on May 12, 2008. A response was formulated and reviewed by the Washington County Planning Commission during a public hearing on July 8, 2008. Based on the Planning Commission's recommendation for approval, the EAR was subsequently adopted by Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, Wausau and the Washington County Board of County Commissioners.

The report represents an evaluation of the past seven years of implementation of the existing Comprehensive Plan (Plan). The purpose of the EAR is to provide a summary analysis of the successes and failures of the Plan, to identify major issues of concern, and to identify proposed changes to amend and update the Plan. The Plan was evaluated through the collaboration of county staff, state agencies, other units of government, and the general public.

Many issues were identified during the evaluation process, some of which are new and some that are already being addressed in existing policies and programs. The issues that were identified as of primary importance all deal with accommodating growth in some form or manner, while affording as much protection as possible for conservation areas, open spaces, and agriculture lands. As growth occurs, effort is necessary to reduce conflicts between adjacent land uses and meeting the demands made upon roads and other infrastructure within the County and the visual degradation of the community indicates a potentially declining quality of life.

The implementation of the Plan generally has been good; however, some programs and policies have not been implemented. On-going implementation of the Plan is proceeding and most of the programs eventually will be implemented. The EAR process has resulted in renewed vigor and interest in adopting an improved plan to guide the County's growth through 2025.

The entire Plan will be updated with the best available data and analysis and will be edited to ensure accuracy and consistency. Goals, objectives, and policies also will be updated to reflect new information but major policy revisions are not expected except as noted in this report. Some policies and programs will be revised with more achievable implementation time frames. When completed, the revised Plan is expected to be a much better Plan, which will be able to better accommodate both the expected and unexpected growth and maintain the quality of life and ambiance of the County.

The EAR identifies major issues that the County will address in the EAR-based Plan Amendments. One of these issues results from recent legislative requirements directing local governments to address coordinated school planning and development. County residents and

staff identified eight issues and the Department of Community Affairs recommended one additional issue. Each issue and proposed actions are briefly summarized below.

Issue 1 -- Transportation: Increased demands on the local transportation system caused by growth needs evaluation and reviewed as to responsiveness to land uses and ability to meet future traffic needs; evaluate effectiveness of transportation system as evacuation routes; Establish policies that will serve to assist in alleviating disruptions in transportation services to all municipalities during the four-lane projects of SR 79 and SR 77; Evaluate the transportation levels of service transportation service developed by GASB 34 clerk; assess and evaluate the need for increased pedestrian and bicycle corridors in rural settings; and develop policies and procedures to ensure that all transportation infrastructure and other improvements are added to the CIE schedule.

Issue 2 - Affordable Housing: Establish policies that encourage public and private initiatives in providing affordable housing; evaluate the Fair Housing Ordinance and incorporate any needed changes into the Comprehensive Plan; review, evaluate and update all housing data in the Housing Element; assess the age of mobile homes and mobile home standards with regard to providing affordable housing; evaluate the possibility of offering a bonus density for affordable housing.

Issue 3 - Urban Sprawl: Reevaluate the urban sprawl issue in relation to density currently allowed under the clustering provision of the Comprehensive Plan; revise if and when necessary; direct development and growth to those areas where urban services exist.

Issue 4 - Economic Development: Develop Economic Element for the Comprehensive Plan; recommend a formal creation of one entity that will address economic concerns for the county instead of various ad hoc committees.

Issue 5 - Urban Services: Establish policies to provide for evaluations of the need for urban services for identified areas of the County that would normally be expected to have those services; one area is the Town of Ebro who will be affected by the new Bay County International Airport; establish policy to cooperate with the City of Chipley in providing urban services (water/wastewater services for the area south of I-10 on SR 77; establish policies that will serve to assist in alleviating disruptions in urban services to all municipalities during the four-lane projects of SR 79 and SR 77.

Issue 6 - Protection of Open Spaces and Natural Resources: Establish policies that will ensure compatibility between environmentally sensitive areas and residential subdivisions; develop policies that will protect water supplies, with special emphasis on the Econfina Watershed Area. Policies for the protection of the groundwater and springs need to be reviewed and revised as required.

Issue 7 - Land Use: Examine impact of residential development on agricultural land; identify and evaluate methods to preserve and support the agriculture land uses; determine if there is a need for a Agriculture Element for the Comprehensive Plan; develop a mixed use category that is responsive to development needs; evaluate the intensities of Neighborhood Commercial uses and transfer the more intense uses to the General Commercial category; assess the impact of general

commercial development along the SR 77 corridor and develop policies to promote a commercial district along the roadway as opposed to having residential and general commercial uses intermingled; focus development away from wetlands and conservation areas by evaluating and changing setbacks and buffers as needed.

Issue 8 - Update the Comprehensive Plan (and Land Development Code as needed): Review the Comprehensive Plan for confusing language and policies, and update as necessary; policies need to be established that will increase the level of cooperation between the County and municipalities to improve all aspects of growth management.

Issue 9 - Public Schools Facilities Element Intergovernmental Coordination: While not identified as an issue in the Scoping meeting, the Intergovernmental Coordination Element was affected as a result of legislative changes pursuant to the 2002 Senate Bill 1906 that requires local governments and the School Board to enter into a mandatory interlocal agreement that addresses school siting, enrollment forecasting, school capacity, infrastructure, and safety needs, and Senate Bill 360 that addresses school concurrency. A draft school element was adopted in May 2008 and is currently undergoing final review by DCA.

Based on a recommendation by the Washington County Planning Commission, an additional issue has been identified pertaining to the Visioning Process. Therefore, it is added at this point to complete the list of Identified Issues, though it was not included on the original list as submitted to DCA.

Issue 10 – Visioning (Added to this Section). The visioning process of the Committee for Sustainable Emerald Coast Visioning began in 2008, with the West Florida Regional Planning Council as facilitators. The process began after the major work was accomplished on the Evaluation and Appraisal Report. As such, this particular process was not discussed or included in the Identified Issues. It is felt that this is an appropriate place to discuss visioning and it is added as an additional issue in Section I- Identified Issues of the EAR. This an on-going process involving government officials, the general public, the business community, agricultural and environmental interests, and the development community. While the scoping process was utilized as the basis for the EAR, the value of this visioning opportunity cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is recommended that the County develop a visioning statement based on the resulting issues arising out of Sustainable Emerald Coast Visioning process and, where deemed appropriate by the Washington County Planning Commission these issues will be considered for incorporation into the EAR-based amendments. A policy to this effect (Policy 1-1-h) will be incorporated into the Future Land Use Element.

II. LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING

On October 9, 2007, the County was issued a Letter of Understanding from Mr. McDaniel, Chief of Office of Comprehensive Planning. That letter is included in this section. A delay in the issuance of this letter was the result of personnel changes at DCA.

