



CITY OF LABELLE, FLORIDA

Planning Staff Report For City of LaBelle Comprehensive Plan Update

TYPE OF CASE: Comprehensive Plan Amendment

STAFF REVIEWER: Rhea Hunter, AICP & Alexis Crespo, AICP

DATE: September 10, 2026

APPLICANT: City of LaBelle (City-Initiated)

AGENT: City of LaBelle City Commission

REQUEST: Consideration of amendments to the City of Labelle Comprehensive Plan based on the City's Evaluation and Appraisal of the Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Section 163.3191, Florida Statutes. Amendments will be transmitted to the Department of Commerce for Coordinated State Review prior to final action/adoption.

LOCATION: City-wide

PROPERTY SIZE: City-wide

STAFF NARRATIVE:

Background

The City's Comprehensive Plan is the long-range framework for the planning of activities that affect the local government – the City's "blueprint" for growth and guiding future decisions. It is the foundation upon which all land use decisions in the City are based.

The principles and strategies contained in the Plan are expressed through goals, objectives, and policies (GOPs), which inform the City's decisions as well as implementing land use regulations. The GOPs in the Plan ensure that the City is prepared to strategically accommodate growth while maintaining its small-town character, protects its natural resources, and assets, and ensure infrastructure paces with development both today, and in the future.

The City's Plan should provide for sound land use planning from a long-term perspective, which is a minimum of 20 years per Florida Statutes. This includes the provision of public services and infrastructure to maintain and improve the City's natural and built environments and residents' quality of life. The Plan's alignment with the City's vision is critical as it provides the means by which to achieve its goals.

RVi Planning and Landscape Architecture was hired by the City in 2025 to complete an update to the City's Comprehensive Plan ("Plan") to address changes since the Plan's last major update in 2010.

Prior to drafting the proposed amendments to the Plan, a Preliminary Assessment Report/Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) was completed to analyze the Plan's compliance with Florida Statutes (see "Preliminary Assessment with Appendices" provided as an attachment to this report). This Report provided a full analysis of the City's demographics profile (existing and projected through the long-range planning horizon), land uses, infrastructure, as well as an analysis of all the existing Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives and policies for consistency with State law based upon legislative changes since the last update in 2010. A community workshop was conducted in May 2025 to receive public input on the Comprehensive Plan Update, specifically aspects of the Comprehensive Plan that must be reviewed to align with and implement the community's vision for their City.

A summary of the EAR was presented to the Board of Commissioners over workshops in June 2025, December 2025, and February 2025. To ensure consistency with SB 180 and allow for additional community input opportunities, updates to the Comprehensive Plan will be made in two (2) stages.

- Stage 1: Amendments for Consistency with State Statutes and evolved Community Priorities
- Stage 2: Additional Amendments to further refine Community Vision

This amendment is related to Stage 1 of proposed updates, which includes changes required to address mandatory updates per changes to Florida Statutes since 2010, and additional refinement of GOPs to address the evolved priorities of the City, including enhancements for housing, economic development, and resource protection. Additional, minor "housekeeping" amendments are also proposed to address current status of plans/studies and maps, and update timeline/deadline references throughout the Plan. Significant changes are not proposed due to SB 180, preventing the City from adopting any changes deemed more restrictive until July 2027.

Key findings of the EAR include:

- The long-range planning horizon must be updated from 2045 to meet the minimum required 10- and 20-year planning period per Sec. 163.3177(5)(a), Florida Statutes – a planning horizon of 2050 is recommended and analyzed;
- While projections show a modest increase in population by 2050 (14.5%), development of South LaBelle could cause sharp additional population growth.
- Almost 50% of the population is in their prime working age between 25-64 years old, making diverse employment and housing opportunities within the City a critical need.
- Homeownership rates are high within the City (70%). However, a majority of housing comprises single-family detached homes, which can limit affordability.
- Median household income in LaBelle at \$49,385 is considerably lower than the national average (\$78,538) and also lower than that of Hendry County (\$53,044).
- Educational attainment is also lower than the national average, and also lower when compared with neighboring Cities like the City of Clewiston.
- 73% of the City's land is vacant (56.4% within South LaBelle), indicating sufficient land being available to accommodate population increases, as well as potential for attracting additional employment, educational and economic development opportunities.
- Multiple annexations have occurred since 2010. Based on the City's boundary, there is potential to define priority areas for future annexations. There are currently ongoing discussions with Hendry County on this matter.

- The City owns and maintains both water and wastewater facilities servicing its limits. While adequate capacity is available for water and sewer service for the designated service area, the City is still working on private well and septic conversions.
- The City has an interlocal agreement with Hendry County, the City of Clewiston, and the School Board of Hendry County to address adequacy of school facilities.

Second Community Workshop

Following the drafting of Stage 1 Amendments, a second community workshop was held on July 30, 2026, at the LaBelle Civic Center to provide an update to the community on the Comprehensive Plan Update process and discuss key amendments. Feedback from the community workshop has been incorporated into the latest proposed amendments.

Proposed Text amendments

The following is a high-level summary of the state-required changes to the Plan's goals, objectives and policies (GOPs) per changes in Florida Statute since 2010, along with other requisite changes to improve flow of the document and capture the evolved priorities of the City. These changes are shown in ~~strike-through~~/underline format based on the current Plan.

As noted above, the planning horizon is proposed to be extended to 2050 to comply with state law's minimum 20-year horizon. While there are no explicit GOPs that address the planning horizon, the data and analysis of available land and infrastructure address the population growth through 2050. Additionally, the planning horizon is proposed for amendment on the Plan's cover page.

Introduction

- Eliminated all background information/data that is subject to relatively constant change, such as vacant lands analyses. This information is best maintained in the Evaluation and Appraisal Report and not the Comprehensive Plan itself, as it quickly becomes outdated and can be cumbersome to the reader that wants to identify adopted Goals, Objectives and Policies.
- Added a Vision Statement added to frame the intent and purpose of the document and the City's vision through the long-range planning horizon.

Future Land Use Element

- Updated Goal to emphasize balancing development with maintenance of small-town character, protection of existing residential neighborhoods, promotion of the Downtown for economic development, and protection of natural and physical resources.
- Addressed density vesting in the R-2, R-2T and R-3 zoning districts within the Residential future land use category.
- Removed Agricultural Use Category.
- Added an Objective and Policies related to Future Annexation Areas.
- Minor modifications throughout the emphasize neighborhood protection, compatibility and balanced growth patterns.

Traffic Circulation Element

- Renamed to Mobility Element.
- Enhanced focus on multimodal connectivity throughout.
- Updated Roadway LOS per Chapter 9, Concurrency Management for consistency.
- Transportation concurrency is maintained, and GOPs are added/amended for ensuring consistency with Section 163.3180, Florida Statutes.

Housing Element

- Updated to emphasize prioritizing diversity of housing opportunities within the City including affordable and workforce housing, special needs housing.
- Modifications to Accessory Dwelling Unit policies for consistency with the LDC.

Infrastructure Element

- Updated utility LOS standards per current practice.
- Added policies related to the Caloosahatchee River, prioritizing potential public access to this shared resource.
- Updated references to the Water Supply Facilities Work Plan.

Conservation Element

- Added Oak Tree Protection Policy.

Recreation and Open Space Element

- Parks LOS is retained; LOS standard is updated to improve accountability and implementation, and GOPs are added/amended for ensuring consistency with Section 163.3180, Florida Statutes.

Intergovernmental Coordination Element

- Added policies for annexations, emergency management consistent with current practice.

Capital Improvements Element

- Updated LOS Standards for Potable Water, Wastewater, Schools, Parks.

Concurrency Management Element

- *No major changes.*

Public School Facilities Element

- Updated per the Interlocal Agreement for Hendry County, the City of Labelle, the City of Clewiston and the School Board of Hendry County.

Economic Development Element

- Updated Goal based on current priorities.
- Added GOPs related to diversification of the tax base
- Added policies to focus on expansion and retention of local businesses
- Added policies that emphasize meeting the needs of an attractive workforce, including enhanced housing opportunities, diversified recreation, social and cultural opportunities, early childhood care, and family support.
- Added policies for target industries, noting healthcare specifically to be provided with the highest degree of incentives and support for relocation and retention.

Property Rights Element

- *No changes.*

Proposed Map Amendments

The proposed Comprehensive Plan map amendments accompanying the text amendments reflect updates since the adoption of the existing comprehensive plan from 2010 and ensure uniformity, generally relating to changes to the municipal boundary and other updated data from regional partners, as follows:

- Map 1: Future Land Use Map – Updated to reflect current boundaries and map amendments.
- Map 2a: Traffic Circulation (Level of Service) – Updated to reflect accurate LOS for roadways within the City's boundaries only.
- Map 2b: Traffic Circulation (Maintenance Responsibility) - Updated to reflect accurate maintenance responsibility for roadways within the City's boundaries only.
- Map 3a: Water Service Overlay – Updated to show the existing and proposed service area.
- Map 3b: Sewer Service Overlay - Updated to show the existing and proposed service area.
- Map 4: Floodway - Removed
- Map 5: Soils - Removed
- Map 6: Historic Locations – Updated for legibility.
- Map 7: Hendry School District Location Map, LaBelle Area - Removed

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

- Staff recommends **APPROVAL TO TRANSMIT** the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendments and finds them consistent with Florida Statutes.

SUGGESTED MOTION(S):

APPROVAL:

I make a motion to recommend **APPROVAL** to transmit the EAR-Based Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to the Department of Commerce as proposed.

DENIAL:

I make a motion to recommend **DENIAL** to transmit the EAR-Based Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to the Department of Commerce as proposed.

Due to the following reasons:

1)

APPROVAL WITH CHANGES:

I make a motion to recommend **APPROVAL** to transmit the EAR-Based Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to the Department of Commerce with the following changes:

1)