



MEMORANDUM	
TO	Francine Ramaglia, Interim Town Manager Town of Loxahatchee Groves
FROM	Kim DeLaney, Ph.D. Director of Strategic Planning and Development
DATE	June 27, 2022
RE	Resident Listening Workshops - Summary

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*NOTE TO READERS: This memorandum provides summary information regarding two Resident Listening Workshops focused on the Okeechobee Boulevard corridor and associated Okeechobee Overlay that were organized by the Town of Loxahatchee Groves in May and June 2022. For more information, contact Kim DeLaney, Ph.D., Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, [kdelaney@tcrpc.org](mailto:kdelaney@tcrpc.org).*

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## OVERVIEW

For the past several years, the Town of Loxahatchee Groves has been evaluating land use/transportation patterns along the Okeechobee Boulevard Corridor, including consideration of an overlay zone to help guide land development activity. The Town's efforts include draft amendments to the Town's comprehensive plan (Future Land Use and Transportation Elements) to create a new "Okeechobee Rural" (OR 5) overlay zone for properties along Okeechobee Boulevard. The Overlay defines "low-impact non-residential" land uses and includes locational and site design criteria. Key components of the OR 5 Overlay would include:

- List of permitted "low-impact non-residential uses"
- Minimum 5-acre parcel size
- Maximum floor-area ratio (FAR) of 0.10
- Design and architectural standards to control the allocation, location, appearance, and scale of development along the corridor
- Compliance with the Town's Agricultural Residential zoning district regulations unless otherwise specified
- Staff coordination protocol for addressing non-conforming uses

The draft amendments have been reviewed by the Town’s advisory committees and Town Council and were adopted on first reading and transmitted to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) for review in August 2020. DEO’s review was completed in September 2020, and the Town has continued to evaluate the draft amendments since that time. DEO has indicated the Town must either complete second reading by July 2022 or begin a new series of hearings for consideration of the amendments. It should be noted that Florida Statutes require the Town to complete an “evaluation and appraisal” of its comprehensive plan that is anticipated later in 2022, and the OR 5 amendments could otherwise be included as part of that process.

Prior to the Town’s incorporation in 2006, the Loxahatchee Groves Rural Vista Committee developed the “Guidelines for Loxahatchee Groves’ Non-Residential Projects,” which provide design guidance intended to protect and enhance the area’s agricultural/rural identity. The guidelines include general architectural standards addressing building exteriors (e.g., roofs, windows, porches) and site design elements (e.g., signage, lighting, parking, landscaping) as well as photographs of both desirable and undesirable examples of development. These guidelines are voluntary and referenced in the Town’s Comprehensive Plan, Unified Land Development Code (ULDC), and the draft OR 5 amendments. The Town also developed a more detailed version of the guidelines in conjunction with the OR 5 amendments called the “Architectural Design Guidelines for Commercial Projects”. This more advanced set of guidelines is more specific regarding building and site development standards; however, they were not adopted into the ULDC and therefore are only advisory in the Town’s decision-making process.

Okeechobee Boulevard is a component of the Palm Beach County thoroughfare network. Through the Town limits, the roadway right-of-way varies from 100’ to 120’, and it is currently a two-lane paved facility. There has been extensive Town/County coordination regarding roadway configuration, posted and design speed, traffic controls and calming (e.g., roundabouts, stop signs, traffic signals), bicycle/pedestrian facilities (e.g., multi-use paths, unpaved paths), and beautification. Several years ago, the Town was awarded grant funding from the Palm Beach Transportation Planning Agency to construct various traffic calming and bicycle/pedestrian/equestrian amenities. However, in May 2022, the Town Council rejected the grant award. While there is no immediate funding for roadway improvements, discussions with Palm Beach County Engineering Department staff indicate the roadway is anticipated to be widened to four lanes within a ten-year timeframe.

## RESIDENT LISTENING WORKSHOPS

To solicit additional public input regarding the OR 5 Overlay, the Town requested TCRPC provide meeting facilitation assistance for two “Resident Listening Workshops,” which were organized by the Town on May 25 and June 11, 2022. In coordination with Town staff and the Town’s planning consultant (Jim Fleishmann, Land Research Management, Inc.), TCRPC developed an overview presentation (included as Attachment 1) that integrated Mr. Fleishmann’s materials and led discussions at both workshops. The workshops were well-attended, with more than one hundred participants in all. A significant majority of participants in both workshops indicated they were homeowners within the Town. Further, nearly a quarter of participants in both workshops indicated they operated businesses in the Town as well.

## FINDINGS

A considerable majority of participants in both workshops voiced concerns regarding the draft amendments, citing desires to limit commercial, industrial, and other non-residential development along the corridor and protect the Town from commercial encroachment. A general summary of public comments is provided below:

- Desire to protect and enhance the agricultural/rural character of Town
- Desire to keep Okeechobee Boulevard as a two-lane road
- Concern regarding increases in traffic, light pollution, and noise generated from new development
- Concern and confusion regarding Town's regulations and code enforcement activities relative to existing non-conforming commercial and light industrial uses (e.g., mining, rock crushing)
- Desire to retain tree canopy and native landscape
- Concern regarding clearing of properties
- Concern regarding businesses operating without permission from Palm Beach County and ability to continue as historic "legacy business"
- Desire to limit commercial encroachment and uses that would be regional in scale and market area rather than neighborhood-serving
- Objections to commercial uses being allowed on Okeechobee Boulevard
- Confusion regarding ability of businesses to continue operations if they cannot demonstrate continuous operations since the Town's incorporation
- Desire for expanded code enforcement by the Town
- Mixed comments regarding addition of roundabouts, multi-use paths, and beautification along Okeechobee Boulevard
- Desire for crosswalks on Okeechobee Boulevard with equestrian features
- Desire for Southern Boulevard to further develop as the Town's commercial corridor but for Okeechobee Boulevard as an agricultural/rural (neighborhood) corridor
- Suggestions that the Town review continued commercial development along Southern Boulevard prior to making changes along Okeechobee Boulevard

## POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

The Town of Loxahatchee Groves represents a vestige of Palm Beach County's historic agricultural/rural heritage in an area of the County that has become increasingly urbanized in the past twenty years. In the area immediately surrounding the Town, the County and adjacent municipalities have approved dozens of large and medium-scale residential and mixed-use development applications that could produce more than 15,000 new residential units and millions of square feet of non-residential development. Over time, new development and redevelopment outside the Town will likely influence land development patterns and transportation demands on the roadway network within the Town, including the Okeechobee Boulevard corridor.

The Town has undertaken considerable effort and public outreach to develop the draft OR 5 Overlay and define and detail potential non-residential uses by type, style, and character. The previously adopted Rural Vista Guidelines provide thoughtful design guidance with a goal of protecting and enhancing the Town's agricultural/rural heritage. The Architectural Design Guidelines for Commercial Projects go further in addressing the scale and compatibility challenges of potential commercial development on the corridor. However, based on input derived from the resident listening workshops, there appears to be considerable concern regarding changes that are perceived to threaten the Town's agricultural/rural character.

To address these concerns, it may be appropriate for the Town to revisit the list of non-residential uses contained in the draft OR 5 Overlay regarding compatibility, appropriateness, and anticipated market area (regional versus neighborhood-serving). Additionally, it may be beneficial for the Town to codify all or a portion of the architectural design guidelines to strengthen their implementation and further address resident concerns regarding design aesthetics and scale.

Residents indicated confusion regarding the continuation of non-conforming uses that existed prior to the Town's incorporation. Due to the complexity of this issue, it may be beneficial for the Town to develop a simplified, resident-focused explanation that can help clarify this challenge and what the Town can and cannot legally do regarding this issue.

In summary, the following recommendations are provided:

- Further evaluate the list of allowable "low-impact non-residential" uses for agricultural/rural compatibility and scale and eliminate those that are not appropriate for the corridor or those that could generate, with particular consideration of the potential for unforeseen impacts and detrimental interpretations.
- Consider simplifying terminology to refer to "neighborhood serving uses" in place of "low impact non-residential".
- Consider codifying portions or all of the "Rural Vista Guidelines" or "Architectural Design Guidelines for Commercial Development" into OR 5 Overlay Zone as a component of the Town's ULDC with reference in the Comprehensive Plan and require the guidelines be followed to enable utilization of the overlay.
- Develop a simplified, concise, resident-focused explanation of the status of non-conforming uses along the corridor and the code enforcement process for distribution to residents and property owners.

- Make the “Rural Vista Guidelines” and “Architectural Design Guidelines for Commercial Development” available to the public and developers on the Town’s website.
- Incorporate site lighting regulations into the ULDC that address light pollution and “dark skies,” limit light trespassing across property lines, reduce light fixture heights, and narrow the allowable color spectrum.