

AT A WORKSHOP OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON JANUARY 26, 2021 AT 5:00 P.M.,
THE FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ;

Present: Brenda Holt, Chair, District 4
Dr. Anthony “Dr. V” Viegbesie, Vice Chair, District 2 – arrived at 5:05 p.m.
Eric Hinson, District 1 – appeared remotely
Kimblin NeSmith, District 3
Ronterious “Ron” Green, District 5
Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator
Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk
Hannah Pope, Clerks Office

1. Welcome

Chair Holt welcomed everyone at 5:05 p.m.

INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Holt asked for a moment of silence and led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S Flag.

Commissioner Viegbesie entered the workshop at 5:05 p.m.

CITIZENS REQUESTING TO BE HEARD (3-Minute Limit)

Due to COVID-19 and the efforts of the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners to continue the practice of social distancing, Commissioners want to continue to hear from citizens under the Citizens Requesting to be Heard section of the agenda.

If citizens have any questions, comments, or concerns, please email

CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov and anticipate receiving a response within 48 hours.

The Board of County Commissioners would like to thank everyone for their patience and flexibility during this time.

GENERAL BUSINESS

2. Presentation of the Gadsden County Comprehensive Plan Process (Diane Quigley, Growth Management Director)

Ms. Quigley started by explaining her role in the county as the Growth Management Director. Ms. Quigley stated that the purpose of the workshop was to familiarize the Board with the comprehensive plan, future land use map, and the planning functions. She explained that the comprehensive plan should contain information that allows for growth based on population projections for a 10-year period, adhere to polices set, and must be adopted by jurisdiction. The comprehensive plan must contain the following elements such as capital improvement, future land use, transportation, general water procedures, general waste procedures, conservation, recreation, housing, and intergovernmental coordination. Also, that these projects need to be consistent with the growth of the county.

Ms. Quigley stated that the future land use map identifies types and locations of land uses on how the county is planned to grow over time. All amendments to the future land use map must

be in accordance with state regulations. This is developed to show how the county plans to grow over time.

Ms. Quigley stated that the land development code is regulated by state statute. She stated after there is an update to the comprehensive plan the Land Development Code must be updated as well. The Land Development Code specifically governs when something new comes in whether it is residential or commercial and sets the physical restrictions. The Land Development Code outlines the details of the subdivision of land, design and location of structures, landscaping, how to protect the environment, parking, and sidewalks. Ms. Quigley stated that the Land Development Code is more detailed because of all of those regulations. Also, it addresses how residential and non-residential development applications are processed in the county.

When there is a development, they have to look at the big picture considerations for the comprehensive plan and look at compatibility with surrounding communities, mitigating nuisances, aesthetics, safety, improving the economic growth rate, noise, traffic, and other land use to make sure they work for the county.

The Planning Department is responsible for maintaining the comprehensive plan and the Land Development Code. The Planning Department is responsible for preparation of documents that come before the Board of County Commissioners, working with the public, facilitating the Planning Commission meetings, and working with the Planning Commission to elicit recommendation for the Board of County Commissioner's consideration.

The planning commission has 12 members who make recommendations to the Board based off of proposed changes. The Planning Commission review the work of the county staff, check to make sure land development regulations are met, and work with the county staff to address issues of public concern.

The comprehensive plan updates include an amendment to the future land use element of the text which was adopted in 2016. There have been no wholesale comprehensive plan updates since 1994 and there have only been small changes to the comprehensive plan. County employees are currently collecting data and information for making updates to the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Quigley stated that regarding data and information staff obtained the county profile from the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR). The EDR is from census date and what it tells staff is the current population, estimated population, and other demographic information. The EDR shows that Gadsden County is the 43rd most populous county, 0.2% of Florida's population, and that the land area is 516.3 square miles which is 57th out of 67 counties in the State of Florida.

The Historical population of Gadsden County is as follows; it decreased between 1980 and 1990 by 1.3%, it increased between 1990 and 2000 by 9.7%, and it slowed to 2.9% between 200 and 2010. The staff is anticipating the 2020 census data to see how the county has increased or decreased. Based on the projections from the 2010 census the population is estimated to decrease just slightly because the population has been decreasing over the past few years. The forecasted population from the EDR is estimated to increase by 2.5% over the next 20 year. Ms.

Quigley stated that the more businesses that come to Gadsden County the population will change and that these are just predictions.

Ms. Quigley stated the housing units are net total and does not account for loss of housing units or rehabilitation; which includes those that have been affected by hurricane Michael. Ms. Quigley stated that most of these housing units are rentals and new housing according to the 2010 census. Also, in updates to the comprehensive plan, a housing study needs to be done so there is a comparison of the housing units since hurricane Michael, covid-19, and other changes that this county has seen.

The Apalachee Regional Planning Council looked at the surrounding panhandle communities and the only counties to have population increase are Franklin, Wakulla, and Leon. This showed that Gadsden county has the highest poverty and unemployment in surrounding areas.

The Gadsden County Development Council (GCDC) goals are to attract and retain businesses, promote partnerships, and create new jobs for the county. The GCDC did a study that inventoried the areas that are the sites for business. Ms. Quigley suggested that when modifying the comprehensive plan that the land use allows for more business and commercial land use.

Ms. Quigley stated that urban land lots can be broken down into very small lots because of municipal water and sewer. That the larger lots are in places where wells and septic tanks are needed so the lots cannot be broken down into smaller units. Agriculture is the main use for land in the county; this allows for one dwelling for different acreage sizes and zones. Ms. Quigley stated that agriculture is 65% of county land use. That commercial zoning is used in neighborhoods, professional, office centers, public service areas, yet it is mainly outside of cities centers.

Mr. Knowles asked for clarification on coloring of the commercial map. Ms. Quigley answered that the red on the map is zoned for commercial use.

Ms. Quigley stated that industrial light and heavy only makes 0.52% of the land use which is the lowest in the county. That mining is 3.5% and silviculture is 5.69% which are other resource biased on activities in the county.

Ms. Quigley put together steps to updating the comprehensive plan on a schedule. This includes going out to the public to see what changes are wanted in future land use, housing and other growth opportunities. The estimated costs of the projects can be offset by grants by DEO. Ms. Quigley stated that changes to larger lots involves going out to see if they need changing, informing land owners, and workshops before they can be brought before the board to be changed.

Ms. Quigley stated that some benefits are a streamline commercial development, create more housing for workforce and increased densities near urbanized areas with infrastructure. That some negative impacts are change the characters of some communities, increase property tax, and increase property values. There are some major issues which includes lack of municipal water, municipal sewer, not being able to allow smaller parcels, and lack of roads.

Ms. Quigley stated that encouraging subdivision communities instead of just subdividing into large parcels would benefit citizens from being landlocked. This would elevate issues that the citizens of Gadsden county have with getting water, electricity, and sewer access in non-municipal areas. The Land Development Code allows for large parcels to be divided into acre lots which can cause the parcel to be landlocked or have issues getting water, electrical, and sewer access.

Zoning allows for subdividing into subcategories and provides land development regulations.

3. Discussion and Direction

Chair Holt stated that in areas like Friendship, Coonbottom, and Hardaway, families had all moved together so there was no urban planning done on that land. Then people in those areas did not understand the legal terms that were set in place for improvement. So, this placed urban development as a second thought. Chair Holt continued to explained areas history on development.

Commissioner Viegbesie stated this is an issue that is present in his district among farmers and those who inherit land. Commissioner Viegbesie stated that there is a family who are having issues with the ability to spit up inherited land that was left to multiple members of the family. They are having issues with creating roads within the inherited land. Commissioner Viegbesie stated that he would like for there to be something the county could do to educate the public on how to handle these situations.

Commissioner Green stated that he was grandfathered into land that was owned by family along with brothers and sisters. Commissioner Green stated that with the help of Mr. Dixon he got to see a large portion of undeveloped land. Also, that this starts the conversation for land changes that can help the citizens of Gadsden County. That information was brought to the Board of County Commissioners attention to start a conversation on how to inform the citizens of Gadsden County. Commissioner Green stated that there needs to be development off of I-10 since Gadsden county is at the bottom of the property level.

Commissioner NeSmith stated that he had several questions. He asked Chair Holt if there was water and sewer lines at the interchange off of I-10 in Midway.

Chair Holt answered yes there is.

Commissioner NeSmith asked Chair Holt if it were the same for Quincy.

Chair Holt answered yes, and that she believed that they had been placed there in 2006-2007. She stated that the water comes from Talquin Electric and the sewer services are provided by the City of Quincy.

Commissioner NeSmith asked do they need additional infrastructure for that area to be developed.

Chair Holt stated that they did not unless they wanted to update the sewage lines.

Mr. Dixon stated that historically that they did the same thing at 267 is what they did in Midway on the city's sewer lines regarding the development of infrastructure near I-10. He stated that the county tried to get the city of Greensboro to extend their infrastructure to I-10 and so the county invested those resources into Gretna.

Chair Holt stated working with the municipalities can lead to county development as well. Chair Holt stated that she wants to look at funding for infrastructure development and look into working with the cities to increase infrastructure. She stated that there is no infrastructure at the Chattahoochee exit.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if the Chattahoochee I-10 exit was county property.

Chair Holt answered yes it was.

Commissioner NeSmith stated that he wants to know what plans that are being looked at for the planning sessions that the board is addressing in the future.

Chair Holt answered that they have to look at both the comprehensive plan and the strategic plan so they know what money needs to be addressed. She stated that the community could have maps in businesses that allow for community involvement for acquiring new businesses.

Ms. Quigley stated that she had done strategic planning before and that the comprehensive plan is part of the strategic plan. She also stated that the county is extremely behind on the comprehensive planning.

Commissioner Green asked Ms. Quigley about the where the comprehensive plans funding is coming from. Ms. Quigley stated that there is already money in the budget for some of the comprehensive plan, yet the bigger steps of the comprehensive plan need grant funding.

Mr. Dixon stated that the process no longer fits the community. The process becomes complicated and that the county cannot just work off of just grants without additional help. That in the past the plans were done to get people to the farms. That the county has more options for businesses that are willing to come to Gadsden County yet the infrastructure is not there to accommodate them.

Commissioner Green stated that process does not fit the community and that means that the board of county commissioners must change the policies to fit the community.

Commissioner Viegbesie stated that Mr. Knowles was asked to pull all of the county ordinances that are impeding growth.

Mr. Knowles stated that was all of them.

Commissioner Viegbesie stated that the Board of County Commissioners need to have a workshop to look at all of them. He also stated that the comprehensive plan and strategic plan planning needed to be done in partnership so that the comprehensive plan can be done on an incremental pace.

Chair Holt asked that if someone needed work done right now what was the process.

Ms. Quigley answered that it needs to go through Building and Zoning.

Chair Holt asked the price of the process.

Ms. Quigley stated that it depends on that situation. She stated that law clerks are a possibility to help with the situations.

Mr. Dixon state that this is a problem with land rich, cash poor situations that the county is facing. He asked how we could help the citizens of the county.

Commissioner Viegbesie asked Ms. Quigley what if a member of a family refuses to sign papers, what would be the solution. Also, regarding the heir and probate issue the law clerks is a wonderful thing but before COVID-19 there was a workshop scheduled for this issue. First Baptist Church and New Bethel were just two of the locations across the county that was where citizens could be invited to receive legal aid. This could be readdressed as soon as COVID-19 leaves. After his statement he readdressed his question.

Ms. Quigley stated that she sends them to Mr. Knowles.

Mr. Knowles answered that you would have to go to partition which causes the immediate sale of the property. This is a problem because the families could sue one another due to the partition. Yet, the problem is that this does not happen because the families do not have the money to go through the legal system.

Mr. Dixon stated a there is the FLAP Program (Florida Legal Assistance Program) in the courthouse for legal help on Tuesdays. Mr. Dixon stated that he wanted to make it a part of every workshop on Tuesday so it could be available to the citizens.

Mr. Knowles stated that FLAP aids in everything but criminal proceedings.

Commissioner Green stated that he would like to see the workshop happen even before COVID-19 leaves. He stated that they need to invite the churches to invite their members so the public can address their concerns. He asked about the DEO grant timeline.

Ms. Quigley stated that there are several different time lines.

Mr. Dixon added they are starting the processes and that there are different programs that they are applying to.

Ms. Quigley stated that there are grants that would aid in the damage from hurricane Michael that would be for housing units.

Commissioner Viegbesie stated that there was a workshop for the comprehensive plan for that had contacts for grants that were in the past and that staff should look into those contacts.

Chair Holt stated that they needed to look at grandfathering in some of the communities, hire consultants, and have workshops for the communities. Start looking at the GCDC sites for development along I-10 and highway 90. Also, looking at utilities for development and for community businesses such as county's stores. She stated that many can not reopen once changed because of zoning issues.

Commissioner Hinson stated do we have proper infrastructure near midway. He stated that there is only minimal infrastructure around the interstate and that those holes need to be patched. Like how Mariana did not seek instant gratification with their projects.

Commissioner Viegbesie stepped out at 6:39 pm

Commissioner Hinson stated that some projects can take up to 6-12 years.

Mr. Cunningham stated that grandfathering in property and heir property that are all over the county are issues. That houses are not on the correct property is another issue that the county is facing. These are just legal issues that need to be straightened up in the county because it is in multiple areas.

Commissioner Viegbesie returned at 6:41 pm

Mr. Dixon stated that one of the things that are being looked at is future land use and how it would change the categories. Also, if it is our choice to change the property and not the citizens what do we do about tax codes. Those kinds of things cause issues with change.

Chair Holt stated that it is all in working it out.

Commissioner Hinson stated that the board should study the issues so that they would be prepared for the meetings. That infrastructure is important for the economic development and not to give money to the businesses but place it into infrastructure. Commissioner Hinson asked when are they going to discuss when they are going to talk about CARES Act funding.

Mr. Dixon stated that they were going to look at it in January and now it is going to be in February.

Commissioner Hinson stated that he would love to have a meeting again on that funding.

Commissioner NeSmith asked about the estimated costs and other issues that have not been addressed. He asked why is there costs on the other side, was it because in-house staff could not do the job?

Ms. Quigley answered they had three planners and there were consultants that could help with those issues.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if it were more fiscally sound to...

Mr. Dixon stated that it would take staff another 12 years.

Commissioner NeSmith asked if there was a schedule for these changes.

Mr. Dixon stated that commissioners need to stay in their seats so that stuff can get done. That staff can do issues in 12+ years without other responsibilities or duties.

Commissioner Viegbesie stated blueprint 2000 is where Leon County and Tallahassee worked on the plan together and that now every year, they work on the 5-year plan. That strategic plans on what the citizens would want and that Gadsden County should base its templates off of them and other counties.

Commissioner Hinson stated the issue in Leon County and Gadsden County have blue print 2020 on what the citizens want.

Chair Holt stated that we should look at other venues so that it can be socially distanced so there could be more public involvement.

Mr. Dixon stated that the commissioners need to do the work to get money needed by working with departments to get grants.

Chair Holt stated that they need to work on annexing the roads as well. So, citizens do not have to go back in forth between the cities and the county to get stuff done.

Ms. Quigley wanted clarification on that they should look into getting law clerks for family and heir properties, getting DEO grants, and look at the Land Development Code so they could possibly loosen those up. Then start putting together the workshops with communities and the commissioners.

Chair Holt thanked Ms. Quigley and let them know when the community workshops are planned.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, CHAIR HOLT DECLARED THE WORKSHOP ADJOURNED AT 7:15 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

BRENDA A. HOLT, Chair
Board of County Commissioners

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk