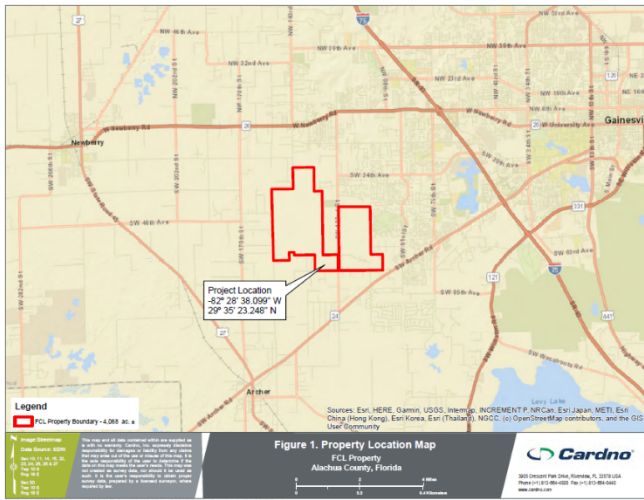


## Lee Property/Hickory Sink Development



Sometime in November or December, Alachua County Board of County Commissions (BoCC) will vote on whether planning for a proposed development on 4,068 acres in southwest Alachua County, known as the Lee Property, can proceed.

On September 27<sup>th</sup> the Board of the League of Women Voters of Alachua County unanimously agreed that the League would oppose the development and support an all-out effort to find funding to protect the environmentally-sensitive property through some combination of land purchase and easements thereby preventing its development.

The League's Board has voted to oppose this multi-use development for three reasons:

1. Approximately 2,278.9 acres of the Hickory Sink Strategic Ecology Area are within the 4,068-acre property and the entire property helps maintain the Sink's flora, fauna, and the Floridan Aquifer.
2. The property is zoned Rural/Agriculture and is outside the Urban Cluster boundary, but the proposed development would create housing and commercial densities similar to developments such as Haile and Oakmont (which are inside the Urban Cluster boundary) in clear violation of the County's Comprehensive Plan.
3. The proposed development would require other substantial changes to the County's Comprehensive Plan which would weaken protections of sensitive ecosystems throughout the County.

### Background on Reason 1:

The Hickory Sink Strategic Ecology Area was one of 47 environmentally sensitive areas identified in Alachua County during the 1996 KBN study. The purpose of the KBN Study was to "identify, inventory, map, describe, and evaluate the most significant natural biological communities, both upland and wetland, that remain(ed) in private ownership in Alachua County and make recommendations for protecting these natural resources... The Hickory Sink project was ranked 36th of 47 projects... and categorized as above average."

According to the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan, strategic ecosystems are communities that have the potential to promote connectivity and minimize fragmentation of natural systems, and to protect wetlands, floodplains, and associated uplands..." More specific criteria include species variability, significant plant and animal habitat, and protection of water resources.

The Hickory Sink meets these criteria to this day as recent direct observation of the property, known as "ground-truthing" has identified sandhill oak-pine-hickory forest areas, more than 1500 gopher tortoises, and rare flora such as the Woodland Poppy-Mallow.

As critical to quality of life and health in Alachua County are this property's geologic features that make development a threat to the Floridan Aquifer. According to the Hickory Sink Rapid Ecological Project Assessment in 2005, The Lee Property project is located in the unconfined aquifer zone of Alachua County. This is an area where the Floridan aquifer system is overlain by highly permeable, and generally thin, undifferentiated sands. **It is a low, flat area of high aquifer recharge that allows pollutants direct access to the aquifer** (high lighting added).

#### Background on Reason 2:

Owners of this property are proposing a development resembling that of Haile, Oakmont and Town of Tioga which are all within the Urban Density boundary. The Lee Property is outside the Urban Cluster boundary and zoned Rural/Agriculture.

The Urban Cluster Boundary was established in 1991. Among its goals was encouraging clustered development of housing and businesses to allow efficient and cost-effective development of public services including utilities and transportation. The boundary was expanded to accommodate many years of future development within the urban core while simultaneously preserving Urban/agricultural lands for their intended uses.

In defense of allowing intensive development on this rural and agricultural land, supporters of the Lee Property/Hickory Sink development constantly warn audiences that Alachua County can expect substantial growth as other parts of the state become uninhabitable. They fail to mention the numerous sites presently eligible for efficient, cost-effective development within the Urban Cluster boundary

To legitimize their proposal, they recommend creating a new future land use category, potentially named Mixed-Use Village (MUV) and a complementary implementing zoning classification, such as Mixed-Use Village – Planned Development (MUV-PD) with specific qualifying criteria limited to large tracts proximate to the Gainesville's growing urban core. These changes to the County's Comprehensive Plan are but a portion of the changes required to accommodate this development.

#### Background on Reason 3:

The League opposes this development because of the substantial changes in the Comprehensive Plan its approval would require. Alachua County staff says it this way: The Study's land use recommendations would have far-reaching implications for other goals, objectives, and policies throughout the adopted Comprehensive Plan, and particularly those relating to land use, development, and the provision of infrastructure for areas within the Urban Cluster versus those for the Rural/Agriculture area.

Specific policies likely requiring change include Transportation Mobility District policies and boundaries, limitations, and standards for extending central potable water and sewer lines outside the urban cluster, and level of service standards and guidelines for storm water and solid waste management and arterial and connector roads management. The list goes on. The governmental administrative and other cost implications are difficult to exaggerate.

#### Conclusion

The League recognizes land-owner rights including the property owner's right to profit from this property's sale. We strongly urge a renewed effort to find a mechanism for funding some combination of land purchase and easements thereby preventing its development.

## Footnotes

### *From the Staff Final Report*

*The Urban Cluster also helps to protect the County's valuable agricultural lands and large-scale natural resource conservation areas from encroachment by urban development.*

*The subject property currently has a Future Land Use designation of "Rural/Agriculture". Within Rural/Agriculture areas, the Comprehensive Plan generally limits allowable land uses to agriculture, silviculture, residential at maximum densities of 1 unit per 5 acres, preservation, heritage and ecotourism, and limited commercial uses related to agriculture activities. T*

### *From Comp plan*

*COSE Policy 3.6.3 Parcels that include or are adjacent to conservation or preservation areas shall not receive planning and zoning designations that are higher in density or intensity than the currently adopted designations unless adequate natural resources protection is ensured.*

*OBJECTIVE 4.10 - STRATEGIC ECOSYSTEMS Protect, conserve, enhance, and manage the ecological integrity of strategic ecosystems in Alachua County. Policy 4.10.1 Conserve strategic ecosystems that are determined through ground-truthing using the KBN/Golder report as a guide to maintain or enhance biodiversity based on an overall assessment of the following characteristics: (a) Natural ecological communities that exhibit: (1) Native biodiversity within or across natural ecological communities. (2) Ecological integrity. (3) Rarity. (4) Functional connectedness. (b) Plant and animal species habitat that is: (1) Documented for listed species. (2) Documented for species with large home ranges. (3) Documented as a special wildlife migration or aggregation site for activities such as breeding, roosting, colonial nesting, or over-wintering. (4) High in vegetation quality and species diversity.*