



County, City Cooperation and Citizen Engagement Key to Consistent Environmental Standards for Community

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Support for economic development. Protecting the environment. Engaging the community. County and City cooperation. A proposed ordinance on countywide environmental regulations will go before the City and County Commissions this week to help accomplish all those objectives. As the County Administrator and City Manager responsible for the ordinance's ultimate implementation, we believe this is a story worth telling.

The new environmental ordinance is designed to help protect our environmental assets while supporting economic development. The City and County have been partners in the development of this new ordinance. There has been a healthy exchange of ideas and the necessary give and take to arrive at what is in the best interest of the entire community. Both of our staffs worked in the spirit of cooperation, and we are extremely proud of their efforts – with leadership from David McDevitt of the County's Development Support and Environmental Management Department and Karen Jumonville of the City's Growth Management Department.

Critically important was the leadership and direction from the City and County Commissions and the spirit of cooperation that these seated commissions brought to the table. And, perhaps, most important of all was the support and engagement of the community. The official process began with the approval in November 2010 by Leon County voters of an amendment to the County's charter on environmental regulations. That amendment was proposed by a Citizens Review Committee, which represented a diverse, cross section of our community, following many hours of testimony and input from the public.

To assist in the development of the environmental ordinance, a Citizens Committee was created. It consisted of individuals selected due to their extensive knowledge of County and City environmental regulations. Through their efforts, issues were vetted and improvements were made to the proposed ordinance.

One of the issues the committee tackled was balancing environmental protection and development. Though they might seem at odds on the surface, these concepts are not mutually exclusive. The establishment of countywide environmental standards helps simplify the compliance review process associated with development proposals by reducing the overall time it takes for review and approval.

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The expression “water knows no political boundary” drove a significant portion of the initial efforts. The community’s environmental resources and natural systems, especially surface water systems, cross political boundaries and, therefore, should be consistently and uniformly protected and preserved regardless of artificially drawn jurisdictional lines.

The first phase of implementation in March 2011 established uniform countywide stormwater management standards for water quality in drainage basins and/or special study areas (e.g., Bradfordville) that bisect jurisdictional lines.

The proposed ordinance being considered by the County Commission on Tuesday evening and by the City Commission on Wednesday evening (“Phase II”) reflects standards that are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the characteristics of geographically defined areas where they would apply. For example, the proposed ordinance incorporates redevelopment standards for urban and non-urban areas delineated by the Urban Service Area (USA), as opposed to being delineated by the City limits and the unincorporated areas of the County.

The ordinance being considered next week is the culmination of over 18 months of effort by numerous individuals – engaged citizens and County and City staff alike. We are confident that these efforts will only serve to enhance our community’s quality of life. From the protection of the environment to support for economic growth, it is clear that when we work together, the entire community benefits. And that is a story worth repeating.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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