

# Board of County Commissioners

## Agenda Request

Date of Meeting: February 13, 2007

Date Submitted: February 7, 2007

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Parwez Alam, County Administrator

Vincent S. Long, Deputy County Administrator

Wayne Tedder, Planning Department Director

Subject: Authorization to proceed with acquisition of properties located within the Fred George Basin (identified as Map 1 on the Blueprint 2000 Project Definitions Report), and to seek Blueprint 2000 funding for same

### **Statement of Issue:**

This agenda item requests the Board to authorize staff to negotiate the purchase of properties located within the Fred George Basin (identified as Map 1 on the Blueprint 2000 Project Definitions Report), to seek authorization of the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency to initiate the process required to realize BP2000 funding for said acquisitions at the Blueprint 2000 Intergovernmental Agency meeting of February 26, 2007, and to submit a Florida Communities Trust (FCT) Grant Application for the required match to be reimbursed to Blueprint 2000.

### **Background:**

The Board of County Commissioners and County staff have been actively engaged with developers/property owners, neighborhood representatives and the Trust for Public Land on issues related to the preservation of properties located within the Fred George Basin (identified as Map 1 on the Blueprint 2000 Project Definitions Report), since late July 2006.

At its regular meeting on December 12, 2006, the Board unanimously directed staff to pursue immediate acquisition of the 78-acre Ghazvini tract, the most environmentally sensitive of the two largest parcels comprising the wetlands surrounding Fred George Sink at the bottom of the Fred George Basin (Attachment #1), and to acquire the adjacent Maples property at a future time. This acquisition was made contingent upon the withdrawal of the request to rezone the Ghazvini tract. At that time, staff was directed as part of this decision to pursue City of Tallahassee and Blueprint 2000 funding for the acquisition of this parcel and two additional parcels for a total of approximately 158 acres.

This agenda item seeks authorization to pursue the acquisition of these properties and two small adjoining parcels containing significant environmental features.

**Analysis:**

The three initial subject properties, comprising 158 acres, are located north of Fred George Road, between Capital Circle, NW, and the CSX tracks that run parallel to and west of Old Bainbridge Road. These properties include the 78-acre Ghazvini tract, the 76-acre Maples property, and the four-acre Schwartz property.

Fred George Sink is located on the four-acre Schwartz property, which is a residential lot in the subdivision immediately north of the subject properties' northern property line. It is not part of the rezoning request, but the Sink is hydrologically connected to the properties selected for acquisition, receiving runoff from these adjacent properties. It is also part of the same karstic depression and contains wetland vegetation that is part of the larger wetland community of the subject parcels. Planning staff are recommending the acquisition of a conservation easement over approximately half of the Schwartz tract, which would protect the sink and adjacent hillside, yet allow the construction of a home, which is the intent of the property owner.

The two additional parcels recommended for acquisition include the 13-acre Cavanagh tract located east of the Ghazvini tract, and the three-acre Christine Maples tract. The Cavanagh tract, recommended for fee simple acquisition, is part of the natural wetland system contributing surface water runoff into Fred George Sink, and it would be an important connection for establishing a greenway trail connection from the CSX crossing at Fred George Road to the Ghazvini tract. This greenway and greenway trail is identified in the adopted Tallahassee – Leon County Greenways Master Plan.

The Christine Maples tract, embedded within the Maples tract, is currently developed with a single-family house. However, the owner has made the fee simple purchase of it as a condition of acquiring the larger 76-acre Maples property.

**Acquisition Approach:**

It is important to note the ongoing property tax reform efforts and significant budget impacts that could result when deliberating significant county expenditures. Property tax reform became a focal campaign issue during the 2006 gubernatorial campaign, and the elected Governor, Charlie Crist, has made property tax reform one of the cornerstones of his tax cut proposals for the FY08 state legislative session. In addition, the legislature will be proposing their own reform packages as well as revenue and/or expenditure cap proposals. The Board of County Commissioners has clearly stated that they are in support of property tax relief, however, in needs to be targeted to those most in need and it should not come at the cost of providing services to their citizens.

Any change in the property tax structure, while providing relief to individual homeowners and businesses, will have a corresponding decrease in revenues to local governments, and limit funds available for providing current operating service levels, and future capital projects. Contained within the Governor's proposal are a series of specific recommendations. These recommendations include doubling the homestead exemption, capping non-homesteaded property at a 3% growth rate, portability of homesteaded property's save our homes values and a \$25,000 exemption on tangible personal property. If this proposal had been in place last year, not taking into consideration any of the impacts of portability, the reduced revenue to the County would have been **\$17.4 million** or a reduction of over 15% of all ad valorem revenue. Without new construction, the impact would have been a reduction of over **\$20 million**. This amount will be significantly larger if unlimited statewide portability is implemented.

In light of the above, the recommended approach for acquiring interest necessary to protect and preserve the aforementioned properties includes the following components:

(1) Seeking the funding necessary from Blueprint 2000. The acquisitions described above are estimated to cost over \$4.6 million. These acquisitions were not identified in any County program and costs were not contemplated as a part of the County budget. Blueprint 2000, however, identified these properties specifically in Map 1 of The Blueprint 2000 Project Definitions Report. It is important to note that the County committed 80% of all available proceeds from the 2000 sales tax extension totaling, over \$750 million, to fund the projects identified. This is a Tier 2 Blueprint project which will require Intergovernmental Agency members (County and City Commissioners) to give Blueprint 2000 staff the direction to initiate the process to move this project to Tier 1 at the February 26, 2007 Blueprint 2000 IA meeting.

(2) Pursuing a Florida Communities Trust (FCT) grant. If successful, FCT will provide a 40 percent reimbursement in the form of a grant. All FCT funding will be reimbursed to Blueprint 2000. There are no guarantees that the project will be approved by FCT. Competition for funding through that agency has increased. Last cycle, communities requested over \$260 million in support while the agency dispenses roughly \$66 million per year. Pre-acquisition of the properties will enhance the competitiveness of this grant;

(3) Pre-acquiring the five properties that comprise this project prior to the grant application deadline in early May in order to receive maximum FCT grant points;

(4) Purchasing less-than-fee ownership for one of the five parcels in the project (the Schwartz). This is a cost-effective approach which provides for the protection of the environmental features.

A summary of the parcels proposed for acquisition and their costs is included in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of Proposed Acquisitions.**

Property	Tax ID	Acres to be Acquired	Interest in Property	Estimated Cost	Estimated Cost to Blueprint 2000*
Ghazvini	2108206060000	78	Fee Simple	\$1.6 million	\$840,000
Maples	2108206020000	76	Fee Simple	\$2.6 million	\$1,560,000
Cavanagh	210851 Y1020	13	Fee Simple	\$165,000	\$99,000
Christine Maples	2108206040000	3	Fee Simple	\$200,000	\$120,000
Schwartz	210515 A0080	4	Less-than-Fee	\$60,000	\$36,000
TOTAL		174		\$4,625,000	\$2,775,000

\* Assumes 40 percent reimbursement by FCT.

It is important to note, that if a project is approved for funding by the FCT Governing Board, the State will only pay the requested percentage of the "maximum approved purchase price." The MAPP is developed through a state-structured and reviewed appraisal process. Should the MAPP be less than what the grant recipient pays for the land, the grant recipient will be responsible for 100% of the difference between the MAPP and the purchase price. (FCT will still contribute its share).

The acquisition of the Fred George Sink property and the adjoining undeveloped portions of the Fred

George Closed Basin is included as Map 1 of the Blueprint Project Definitions Report. Implementation of Map 1, however, is currently a Tier 2 Blueprint project, and therefore not presently funded in the Adopted Blueprint Master Plan. Due to the pressure of impending development on these environmentally sensitive properties, the County is scheduled to request at the February 22, 2007 Intergovernmental Agency (IA) meeting that the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) recommend the IA to initiate the required process (including CAC/Technical Coordinating Committee/Intergovernmental Management Committee recommendations, two public hearings, and an IA super-majority vote) to move Map 1 from a Tier 2 project to a Tier 1 project in order to allocate funding. The acquisition of these parcels is intended to support the BP2000 mission by preserving, protecting, and enhancing the community's quality of life through the implementation of holistic and coordinated planning, transportation, water quality, environmental, and green space projects.



**Options:**

1. Obtain Blueprint 2000 funding for (Requires County and City Commission action on February 26, 2007 Blueprint 2000 IA meeting) the pre - acquisition of a fee and less-than-fee simple interests in the Ghazvini, Maples, Cavanagh, Schwartz, and Christine Maples properties listed in Table 1 within the Fred George Basin.
2. Direct staff to submit a Florida Communities Trust Grant application in May 2007 (or in May 2008 if all properties are not closed by May 9, 2007) for the matched reimbursement for all five properties in Table 1 within the Fred George Basin and reimburse Blueprint 2000 any FCT funds received.
3. Board direction.

**Recommendation:**

Options #1 and #2

**Attachments:**

1. Map of Fred George Basin
2. Map of Properties

PA/WT/CD/smh