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Leon County Board of County Commissioners Cover Sheet for Agenda #25

January 27, 2015

To:	Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board
From:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Title:	Acceptance of a Status Report on the Fairgrounds Sense of Place Initiative

County Administrator Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department/Division Review and Approval:	Alan Rosenzweig, Deputy County Administrator Wayne Tedder, Director, Planning, Land Management & Community Enhancement Cherie Bryant, Planning Manager
Lead Staff/ Project Team:	Barry Wilcox, Division Manager Brian Wiebler, Principal Planner Daniel Donovan, Urban Design Senior Planner Joshua Pascua, Management Analyst

Fiscal Impact:

This item has been budgeted and adequate funding is available. The Board previously allocated \$50,000 to support the initiative for the fairgrounds. These funds are being used to conduct the market demand analysis described in this item.

Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Accept the status report on the Fairgrounds Sense of Place Initiative.

Report and Discussion**Background:**

This item provides an update on staff actions and planned efforts to address the Board Strategic Initiative to institute a sense of place initiative for the fairgrounds.

The North Florida Fairgrounds site is owned by Leon County and operated by the North Florida Fair Association through a lease agreement that extends to the year 2067. The Board of County Commissioners has previously explored the possibility of relocating the Fair Association activities as a tool to allow for more development and economic activity on the site. Such options have not been financially feasible. At the December 9, 2013 Board of County Commissioners Strategic Planning Retreat, the Board adopted a Strategic Initiative to institute a sense of place initiative for the fairgrounds and subsequently allocated \$50,000 to support the initiative. The analysis section of this report reviews the staff actions and planned efforts to address the initiative.

These actions are essential to the following FY2012-2016 Strategic Initiative that the Board approved at the January 21, 2014 meeting:

- Institute a Sense of Place initiative for the fairgrounds (2014).

This particular Strategic Initiative aligns with the Board's Strategic Priorities – Economy and Quality of Life:

- Integrate infrastructure, transportation, redevelopment opportunities and community planning to create the sense of place which attracts talent. (EC1 – 2012)
- Grow our tourism economy, its economic impact and the jobs it supports, including: being a regional hub for sports and cultural activities. (EC4 - 2012)
- Enhance and support amenities that provide social offerings for residents and visitors of all ages. (Q4 - rev. 2013)

Analysis:

The Planning Department is engaged in initiatives to help foster a 'sense of place' through quality-of-life enhancements that promote private investment in the surrounding

area. Past and ongoing sense of place initiatives have taken place in districts such as the Huntington Town Center at Lake Jackson, the South Monroe-Adams Corridor, Gaines Street, Midtown, and Market District. The Fairgrounds site is unlike these other commercial districts and includes unique complications and opportunities. As such, the resulting initiative developed for the fairgrounds does not follow the same pattern as other districts.

While developing the scope of work to identify the types of activities that might be appropriate for a sense of place initiative at the Fairgrounds, a potential \$12 million capital investment project for the Fairgrounds was identified by the Leon County Sales Tax Committee. Staff felt it was important for the efforts in the sense of place initiative to recognize this large potential investment. The Fairgrounds sales tax project was included in the Interlocal Agreement for the Blueprint 2020 Infrastructure Surtax (penny sales tax) by the Board on May 13, 2014 (Project #23- Beautification and Improvements to the Fairgrounds). The penny sales tax extension was subsequently approved by voters in November 2014.

As the sales tax project identification process moved forward, Planning Department staff coordinated with County Administration regarding appropriate use of the \$50,000 allocated to the initiative. Through this coordination, it was determined that the existing sense of place funding could be used to begin the process of identifying future improvements to be funded through the Fairgrounds sales tax project. This was judged to be a more appropriate investment than using the \$50,000 for shorter term aesthetic improvements.

A market demand analysis was identified as a key first step to identifying what additional opportunities could be supported at the Fairgrounds. The study will include an analysis of existing fair operations and facilities and opportunities for new facilities and uses. This information can then be utilized to help shape a more specific development program that could be implemented with the sales tax dollars.

The following provides a timeline of key events and decisions that have shaped this initiative:

- **July 16, 2014:** During the process of determining the scope of work for the sense of place initiative, staff invited a consultant specializing in fairgrounds development to provide a presentation on emerging trends in fairgrounds and event centers. Fairgrounds stakeholders were invited to attend (North Florida Fair Association, County Extension, City Parks, Leon County Schools, Economic Development Council, County Tourism Development, County Public Works, County Administration).
- **August 1, 2014:** Based on recommendations provided by the consultant at the July 16th presentation, County Administration approved utilizing the Fairgrounds sense of place funding to move forward with a market demand analysis and a workshop on site analysis and general redevelopment alternatives.
- **August 11, 2014:** Staff attended the North Florida Fair Association Board meeting and provided an update on the direction for the Fairgrounds sense of place initiative.
- **September 2014:** Based on a request for proposal (RFP), the team of Markin

Consulting and POPULOUS were selected to conduct the market demand analysis and site analysis workshop.

- **December 2-4, 2014:** Rod Markin from Markin Consulting conducted site visits and interviews as part of his research for the market demand analysis. In person and phone interviews were organized with the following stakeholders:
 - North Florida Fair Association
 - Market Days
 - Tallahassee Boat Show

 - Dale Earnhardt Jr. Auto

 - Big Bend Bird Club

 - Ochlockonee River Kennel Club

 - Tucker Civic Center

 - FSU Finance & Administration

 - Visit Tallahassee

 - City of Tallahassee Parks & Recreation

 - Leon County Schools

 - County Office of Resource Stewardship

 - County Extension.

- **December 3, 2014:** Completed a site analysis workshop with Charlie Smith from POPULOUS. The analysis included a small technical group working with the consultant to review over twenty different site parameters, ranging from topography and environmental features to vistas and livestock movements (Attachment #1). This information will be used in the market demand analysis to understand any limitations of the site. Additionally, this information was used to discuss very preliminary concepts for future development of a multipurpose event center.

The final market demand analysis report is scheduled to be complete in April 2015. Staff will review the report and prepare recommendations to be presented to the Board in the summer of 2015. The goal of this effort is not to generate a final development plan for the Fairgrounds, but to gather the necessary information to position the Fairgrounds for future enhancement when penny sales tax funds become available and full site and facilities planning and design can occur. Staff has already begun identifying shorter term actions, such as rezoning, that can be addressed sooner to help prepare the site. Initiation of such shorter-term recommendations will mark the completion of the sense of place initiative for the Fairgrounds. The next phase will be as a sales tax project.

Options:

1. Accept the status report on the Fairgrounds Sense of Place Initiative.

2. Do not accept the status report on the Fairgrounds Sense of Place Initiative.
3. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1.

Attachment:

1. [North Florida Fairgrounds Site Analysis Figures by POPULOUS](#)

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