

Nassau County Comprehensive Plan 2010-2030



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Nassau County is a coastal county located in the far northeastern corner of Florida. Considered part of the Jacksonville metropolitan area, it is best known for the tourist destination of Amelia Island. It has traditionally had a diverse economic base that includes timber and agriculture production, paper and high performance fiber manufacturing, a deepwater seaport and, of course, world-renowned tourist resorts such as the Ritz Carlton Hotel and the Omni Amelia Island Plantation.

A substantial amount of development has occurred in Nassau County since 2000, and while Jacksonville remains the center of population in the region, population growth in the counties surrounding Jacksonville (Baker, Clay, St. Johns and Nassau) is predicted to outpace that of Jacksonville between 2010 and 2030.

Traditionally, the center of urban development in Nassau County has been the City of Fernandina Beach and the unincorporated areas of Amelia Island. But while there are occasional opportunities for infill development, the island's land development patterns are now largely settled.

The unincorporated Yulee area, roughly defined as the eastern portion of the County between the Amelia River and I-95, is where the greatest amount of new development has taken place in the past decade. This trend is likely to continue due to its proximity to major transportation corridors and the expansion of regional water and wastewater infrastructure to this area.

The areas of the County west of I-95 remains mostly rural, but new development within the County and in the surrounding jurisdictions of Jacksonville, Baker County and Camden County, Georgia could mean that certain areas in the western part of the county may be increasingly subject to urban development pressures in the future.

While the recession of 2008-2009 may have temporarily slowed these trends, the outlook for the continued growth and economic development of northeast Florida and southeast Georgia is a positive one, and this growth will continue to shape the future of Nassau County.

Vision 2032

For the County to deal successfully with the challenges it will face in the future, it needed to develop a clear picture of where its residents want to go.

In May 2007, Nassau County, in partnership with the Amelia Island/Fernandina Beach/Yulee (AIFBY) Chamber of Commerce, hired consultants MGT of America, Inc. to begin a long-term planning and consensus building process and develop a 25- year vision (2007-2032) for the county.

The creation of Vision 2032 was a transparent process with all meetings open to the public. A Steering Committee was established to provide administrative oversight of the Vision 2032 project. A communication plan was developed and implemented to provide residents with information about Vision 2032. Input was received from stakeholder groups and residents of Nassau County through multiple public involvement opportunities.

A kick-off meeting to launch the project was held on, and eight Public Participation Sessions were subsequently held at various locations throughout the County. At each meeting, public comments were collected on a wide variety of topics. The Public Participation Sessions were used to gather the ideas, thoughts, and suggestions of Nassau County residents on their vision of how the County should look in the year 2032. The public participation process also included interviews with key stakeholders and a web site dedicated to Vision 2032 activities.

The recommended strategies of Vision 2032 reflect the community priorities identified in the visioning process. They became an primary source in the creation of the goals, objectives, and policies of the Nassau County 2030 Comprehensive Plan. A summary of the identified issues, goals and strategies is included in the technical appendix to this plan (see Appendix A).

Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR)

At the same time the County's visioning efforts were under way, the County was also preparing the state-mandated Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) to measure the effectiveness of the County's 2010 Comprehensive Plan and determine what changes needed to be made. Ten major local issues were identified that needed to be addressed in order to meet the challenges of managing growth in the next 20 years. The ten issues that emerged represent common themes and concerns heard from a variety of stakeholders and included: updating the future land use plan; strengthening long-range transportation planning efforts; promoting economic development; protecting and expanding land designated for job generating land uses; preserving rural lifestyle choices; conserving environmental resources; promoting a greater diversity of housing types and price range; enhance inter-governmental coordination; creating a financially sustainable community; and creating a first-class parks and recreation system.

Six Essential Outcomes

In analyzing the issues raised in both the Vision 2032 final report and the EAR, it was apparent that the issues and their solutions were interconnected on many levels. Six "essential outcomes" were identified that the County needed to achieve in order to manage growth effectively in the next 20 years. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan was created to ultimately achieve these six essential outcomes through the implementation of its goals, objectives and policies. A brief summary of how the Plan intends to achieve each outcome is described below.

1: A Future Land Use Plan that is a Useful Tool for Managing Growth

One of the things that the 2008 Evaluation and Appraisal Report revealed was that the previous (2010) Comprehensive Plan and its adopted Future Land Use Map (FLUM) did not provide an overall direction as to where and how communities will develop. It provided little direction for the location and form of new developments. It offered few incentives or strategies for building road networks, extension of services or a coordinated network of conservation and recreation sites. It created an abundance of land that permitted low- density residential development which encouraged land consumption and conversion of timber growing and grazing land into residential uses.

If left unchecked, these trends will simply result in a continuation of unsustainable urban sprawl. The critical issue that must be addressed is that while standard methods would indicate that sufficient residential capacity is available on the 2010 FLUM through the planning period, the pattern of development would not be sustainable for Nassau County or the region. The County simply does not have the financial means to provide services to such a development pattern.

Because existing development rights cannot easily be retracted, Nassau County has proposed planning policies and incentives to encourage and redirect future development to more appropriate areas. Such development will include jobs and housing in close proximity to one another, and through a strategy of compact, mixed use development, will effectively retrofit the current pattern of urban sprawl.

Development and Preservation Framework

Based in part on the recommendations of Vision 2032, the Development and Preservation Framework is a visual planning exercise that attempts to lay a foundation for land development decision-making that will create a more sustainable development pattern and discourage urban sprawl. The Framework is not a regulatory document. It is simply an exercise in developing a core strategy to guide the legally binding goals, objectives and policies and FLUM designations of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. It is the “30,000 foot perspective” for assisting local decision-makers with future land use policy decisions.

The Framework seeks to direct a majority of future development to the Urban Development Area (UDA) and adjacent Economic Development Opportunity Areas (EDOAs) where adequate public facilities and services will be provided and where an appropriate jobs-to-housing balance can be achieved. The Urban Development Area (UDA) is located in the eastern part of the County, primarily between Interstate 95 and the western boundary of the Level III Hurricane Evacuation Zone. In the western areas of the County, the Framework encourages continuation and expansion of sustainable agriculture, and urban transitional areas around the Towns of Callahan and Hilliard in concentrated rural communities with supporting open space and community facilities. (This exercise is described in detail in the background data and analysis submitted for the Future Land Use Element. The resulting map is shown on Map FL-6)

East Nassau Community Planning Area

The East Nassau Community Planning Area (ENCPA) includes approximately 24,000+ acres under common ownership which lies directly inside the Urban Development Area (UDA) identified in the Development and Preservation Framework exercise. It offers a unique opportunity to master plan for future growth in an area of the County most suited for new urban development. As a state-approved sector plan, all development within the ENCPA must be processed as part of a series of Detailed Specific Area Plans (DSAPs) that will recognize the inherent, integral relationship between transportation, land use and urban design and the degree that these elements affect one another. This will ensure that development within the ENCPA provide high value regional employment and economic development opportunities through the promotion of compatible and financially sustainable land use patterns (The adopted Master Plan for the ENCPA is included in the adopted Future Land Use Map Series as Map FLUMS-6).

2: A Land Development Code that Creates More Efficient Development Patterns

Encouraging denser, more compact and more concentrated development with the right mix of uses in certain locations creates better scale economies and reduces delivery costs for public and private goods and services. A variety of methods to guide growth into these patterns can be found throughout the goals, objectives and policies of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Options that may be considered include: identifying areas where FLUM designations might be changed to increase maximum and add minimum densities; using methods to redirect growth to areas that can support the impacts of growth with adequate public facilities; and planning for a more mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development.

Recognizing the relationship between transportation and land use is essential to understanding the problems of traffic congestion. The Transportation and Future Land Use Element contain coordinated policies to enhance land use planning decisions that will positively affect the transportation network. These policies include the encouragement of master planning and design concepts that encourage internal capture of generated trips, pedestrian-friendly streets with on-street parking, and support potential transit opportunities. Other objectives and policies reinforce strategies to address long range transportation issues through regional cooperation and the creation of long range regional which promote an interconnected roadway network serving a variety of complementary uses.

Policies promoting mixed-use projects and incorporating effective traditional neighborhood development (TND) and “village center” design concepts throughout the elements of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan will lead to more sustainable and cost-effective development for the County as a whole. Such development practices can significantly reduce the costs of infrastructure. In the long term, encouraging mixed use and transit-oriented developments preserves valuable open space, expands housing choices, and improves the County’s jobs-to-housing balance.

3: A Coordinated Economic Development Program

Economic development is a high priority issue in Nassau County that is linked closely with several of the other key issues explored in this Plan. While participants in the Vision 2032 process frequently cited “quality of life” as a benefit of living in Nassau County, they also cited shortcomings such as long commute times and traffic congestion, both of which are directly related to a lack of high-paying jobs within the County. The need for specific incentives and policies that support economic development is a top priority.

When it was originally adopted in October 2010, The Regional Coordination Element of the 2030 Comprehensive Plan contained policies which recommended that the County adopt an Economic Development Element in order to provide a central policy statement for economic development in the County. This Element was created in conjunction with the Nassau County Economic Development Board with substantial input from a variety of community stakeholders and was adopted by the County in May 2012.

One of the major economic development issues confronting the County is the protection and expansion of land designated for job-generating land uses, especially industrial and business park-type uses that typically provide higher wages. A key initiative of the County is to provide additional non-residential sites that will attract or retain targeted industries and businesses. The goals, objectives and policies of the Future Land Use Element reflect the County’s strategy to establishing a stronger presence in the region by designating adequate land for economic growth and diversification and significantly improving the countywide jobs-to-housing balance.

A significant amount of future office, commercial, and industrial and development will be concentrated within the ENCPA, which contains the largest of the Economic Development Opportunity Areas (EDOA) identified in the Development and Preservation Framework exercise, located along the intersection corridors of State Road 200/A1A, Interstate 95, and U.S. Highway 17 (see Map FLUMS-6). On the west side of the County, a high priority will be given to the development of the Crawford Diamond industrial park, an 1800+ acre site uniquely situated at the intersection of the CSX and the Norfolk Southern rail lines.

Other policies are included in several elements that encourage increased public-private partnership activities with the County’s local and regional economic development organizations, business organizations and major landowners.

4: A Land Acquisition/Management Program for Recreation and Conservation

From coastal dunes and tidal marshes to pine forests and pristine rivers, Nassau County has an amazing variety of natural features. Protection of these unique natural features is seen as critical for maintaining the vitality and unique character of the county, and the Northeast Florida region.

As the County grows, additional pressure will be placed upon vacant and undeveloped lands which are in close proximity to natural and environmental resources. The conservation of natural resources across the county needs to remain a top priority in order for these areas to sustain the long-term environmental and economic viability of the community.

Just as growing communities need to upgrade and expand their transportation and utilities infrastructure, they also need to upgrade and expand their "green infrastructure" -- the network of open space, woodlands, wildlife habitat, parks and other natural areas, which sustain clean air, water, and natural resources and enrich their citizens' quality of life.

The goals, objectives and policies of the Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, and Future Land Use Elements encourage the development of long-range, financially feasible plans for the identification and management of environmental resources. The strategies include: an inventory of countywide environmental resources; a priority ranking and criteria of areas for public acquisition, placement in conservation easements, or other conservation techniques; investigating methods of funding land acquisition, including coordination and partnership with public and non-governmental organizations; and coordinating conservation efforts with the goals of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

5: A Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Parks and recreation facilities not only enrich the lives of those in the community, but also can improve the aesthetics of neighborhoods, increase property values, generate tourism, and enhance the overall image of the County. The County acknowledges the need to phase in parks and recreation facilities in order to keep pace with its population growth. The goals, objectives and policies of the Recreation and Open Space Element require the County to prepare, in cooperation with appropriate agencies, a Parks and Recreation Master Plan to guide the development and maintenance of County parks and recreation facilities. This plan is to be completed by January 2014.

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan will analyze level of service standards and inventory the County's current parks system. It will recommend guidelines for the size, timing and phasing of parks in the County by using population trends and projections. It will also consider what types of parks and recreation facilities are most appropriate in individual communities based on public input.

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan should be the basis for a long-range financially feasible plan for the identification and acquisition of land for recreational purposes. The plan will include criteria for, and priority ranking of, lands for acquisition and development. It will consider existing and potential funding sources as well as programs for implementation and capital improvements for future parks and recreation facilities.

6: A Leadership Role in the Northeast Florida Region

As mentioned previously, population growth in Clay, St. Johns and Nassau Counties is predicted to outpace the traditional regional center of Jacksonville in the next 20 years. As population shifts to these areas, greater consensus and cooperation will be essential at all levels of government in order to implement regional policies and practices that will support the economic vitality and livability of the Northeast Florida region. The County needs to define itself within the Northeast Florida region and take a leadership role in regional planning efforts. This will ensure that while the County and the region continue to grow, the quality of life that stimulates this growth will be sustained.

Many of the issues facing Nassau County today and in the foreseeable future will require a higher level of coordination with public agencies and also non-governmental agencies at every level. The County's rate of growth and development places a great deal of pressure on the delivery of core public services and infrastructure to residents. Effective coordination with governmental and non-governmental entities will play a crucial role in the County's overall approach to meeting existing and future challenges.

Long-Range Transportation Planning

The goals, objectives and policies of the Regional Coordination and Transportation Elements require the County to coordinate long-range transportation planning with its municipalities, the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization the Florida Department of Transportation, the Jacksonville Transportation Authority and other transportation providers. This includes the review of routes and appropriate land uses for potential public transit corridors, and coordination with adjacent jurisdictions to develop strategies which will promote future mass transit services for the region.

Coordination with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are increasingly important in shaping the economy, environment and quality of life in a community. They include a diverse group of organizations that represent a wide range interests including business, economic development, environmental and social services, academia, professional and trade organizations, neighborhood and civic groups, and nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. It is important to recognize the role such organizations play in the community and the opportunities for partnership with the public sector. The goals, objectives and policies of the Regional Coordination Element and other elements support and encourage the creation of appropriate public-private partnerships as a model for structuring, funding and operating certain public facilities as well as the identification and acquisition of environmental resources.

Regional Visioning

The Northeast Florida Regional Council, through the non-profit Regional Community Institute of Northeast Florida, Inc., has embarked on the creation of a regional vision for the future of the seven-county Northeast Florida region. Beginning with the ULI's "Reality Check" exercises in 2009, The First Coast Vision will culminate in 2012 with the update to the Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP). The goals, objectives and policies of the Regional Coordination Element actively support and encourage County residents to participate in efforts undertaken by the Northeast Florida Regional Council and the Northeast Florida Regional Community Institute to develop a regional vision for northeast Florida. The County shall cooperate with the Northeast Florida Regional Council, adjacent local governments and other public and/or private agencies to find the most appropriate and feasible strategies for implementing the guiding principles of the regional vision.

List of Commonly-Used Acronyms and Abbreviations

AADF	Annual Average Daily Flow
AADT	Annual Average Daily Traffic
ADF	Average Daily Flow
AGR	Agriculture (Land Use category)
AHAC	Affordable Housing Advisory Committee
AHCA	Agency for Health Care Administration (Florida)
AIWW	Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway
ALF	Assisted Living Facility
AMI	Area Median Income
AQI	Air Quality Index
BEBR	Bureau of Economic and Business Research
BFE	Base Flood Elevation
BMP	Best Management Practices
BOCC	Board of County Commissioners
C&DD	Construction and Demolition Debris
CDD	Community Development District
CEMP	Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
CGRC	Coastal Georgia Regional Commission
CHHA	Coastal High Hazard Area
CHN	Conservation Habitat Network
CIP	Capital Improvements Plan
COE	(U.S Army) Corps of Engineers
COFTE	Capital Outlay Full Time Equivalent (schools)
COM	Commercial (Land Use category)
CR	County Road
CSA	Concurrency Service Area (schools)
CSV	Conservation (Land Use category)

CUP	Consumptive Use Permit
CUVB	Conditional Use and Variance Board
DACS	Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services (Florida)
DCF	Dept. of Children and Families (Florida)
DEM	Division of Emergency Management (Florida)
DEO	Dept. of Economic Opportunity (Florida)
DEP	Dept. of Environmental Protection (Florida)
DOE	Dept. of Education (Florida)
DOH	Dept. of Health (Florida)
DOS	Dept. of State (Florida)
DRI	Development of Regional Impact
DWSA	District Water Supply Assessment
DWSP	District Water Supply Plan
EAR	Evaluation and Appraisal Report
ENCPA	East Nassau Community Planning Area
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (U.S.)
ERP	Environmental Resource Permit
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FAC	Florida Administrative Code
FAR	Floor Area Ratio
FDOT	Florida Dept. of Transportation
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHFC	Florida Housing Finance Corporation
FHP	Florida Highway Patrol
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FIHS	Florida Intrastate Highway System
FIND	Florida Inland Navigation District
FIRM	Flood Insurance Rate Map
FISH	Florida Inventory of School Houses

FLUM	Future Land Use Map
FMSF	Florida Master Site File
FNAI	Florida Natural Areas Inventory
FQD	Florida Quality Development
FS	Florida Statutes
FSCJ	Florida State College at Jacksonville
FWC	Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
FY	Fiscal Year
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOPs	Goals, Objectives and Policies
HDR	High Density Residential (Land Use category)
HES	Hurricane Evacuation Study
HUD	Housing and Urban Development (U.S. Dept. of)
HVZ	Hurricane Vulnerability Zone
IND	Industrial (Land Use category)
ISR	Impervious Surface Ratio
ITE	Institute of Transportation Engineers
JAA	Jacksonville Aviation Authority
JTA	Jacksonville Transportation Authority
LDC	Land Development Code
LDR	Low Density Residential (Land Use category)
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
LHAP	Local Housing Assistance Plan
LID	Low Impact Development
LMS	Local Mitigation Strategy
LOS	Level of Service
LPA	Local Planning Agency
MDR	Medium Density Residential (Land Use category)

MGD	Million Gallons per Day
MMTD	Multi-Modal Transportation District
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
MSW	Municipal Solid Waste
MU	Multi-Use (Land Use category)
NAU	Nassau Amelia Utilities
NCEDB	Nassau County Economic Development Board
NCSB	Nassau County School Board
NCSD	Nassau County School District
NEFRC	Northeast Florida Regional Council
NFIP	National Flood Insurance Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NPS	National Park Service
NPS	Non-Point Source (of pollution)
NRPA	National Recreation and Parks Association
OSTDS	On-Site Treatment and Disposal System
P&Z	Planning & Zoning (Board)
PBF	Public Buildings and Facilities (Land Use category)
PD&E	Project Development and Environmental
PDRP	Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan
PHT	Peak-Hour Trips
PUD	Planned Unit Development
PWRCA	Priority Water Resource Caution Area
REC	Recreation (Land Use category)
SAISSA	South Amelia Island Shore Stabilization Association
SCI	Schedule of Capital Improvements
SCORP	State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

SHIP	State Housing Initiatives Program
SIS	Strategic Intermodal System
SJRWMD	St. Johns River Water Management District
SMRMC	St. Mary's River Management Committee
SR	State Road
SRESP	Statewide Regional Evacuation Study Program
SRPP	Strategic Regional Policy Plan
TAZ	Traffic Analysis Zone
TIP	Transportation Improvement Program
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
TND	Traditional Neighborhood Development
TOD	Transit-Oriented Development
TPL	Trust for Public Land
TPO	Transportation Planning Organization
ULI	Urban Land Institute
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
VMT	Vehicle Miles Traveled
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WRF	Water Reclamation Facility
WTP	Water Treatment Plant
WWTP	Wastewater Treatment Plant

List of Maps

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