

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In 1993, the State Legislature recognized the Regional Planning Council as Florida's only multipurpose regional entity that is in a position to plan for and coordinate intergovernmental solutions to growth-related problems on greater-than-local issues.

In support of this responsibility, the Legislature is requiring each Regional Planning Council to develop and adopt by rule, pursuant to Sec. 120.54, Florida Statutes, a Strategic Regional Policy Plan (SRPP). This SRPP when adopted will replace the Comprehensive Regional Policy Plan.

The SRPP is not a regulatory document, nor does it create regulatory authority. Pursuant to state statutes "standards included in the strategic regional policy plan may be used for planning purposes only and not for permitting or regulatory purposes," ch.186.507(13), F.S. The SRPP does not establish binding level of service standards for public facilities and services provided by local governments; however, this limitation does not limit the authority of the regional planning

council to propose objections, recommendations, or comments on local plans or plan amendments.

The SRPP is a plan for the region not for the Council. The intent is to identify the key and important (STRATEGIC) issues/areas which will influence and direct northeast Florida to where it desires to be as the region moves forward into the next century. The five Strategic Subject Areas that are addressed in the SRPP — **Affordable Housing, Economic Development, Emergency Preparedness, Natural Resources of Regional Significance, and Regional Transportation** — set forth a long-range guide for the physical, economic, and social development of the northeast Florida planning region.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Participation Process

The SRPP has been developed through a collaborative process which emphasizes consensus building and coordination among the various stakeholders and numerous members of the northeast Florida regional community. The process included the bringing together of interested parties within the regional community to assist in the Plan development. State and regional agencies, local government staff and officials, and interested public, private citizens/parties were involved in each of the five strategic workgroups which guided the development of each section addressing the five strategic subject areas.

The affordable housing working group met several times during 1995 to identify strategic issues and develop goals and policies. This working group consisted of county coordinators, directors of local housing authorities, local government representatives and State Housing Initiatives Partnership coordinators.

The Economic Development Element of the SRPP was a result of two groups. A working group consisting of private practitioners, leaders of local Chambers of Commerce, Committees of 100, local economic development agencies, local government elected officials and industry representatives met to develop strategic issues and goals and policies using a collaborative process. The results of the working group were also reviewed by the Economic Development Committee of the RPC for additional comments and direction.

The working group for the Emergency Preparedness Element included all of the county emergency manage-

ment directors, representatives of private industry, media representatives, local government representatives and local emergency responders. This element was also reviewed on numerous occasions by the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). A ranking process was utilized to develop goals and policies from the strategic issues identified by the working group and the LEPC.

Representatives of local governments, the Department of Environmental Protection, the St. Johns River Water Management District, the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, large land owners, developers, local environmental groups, industry, private citizens and planning consultants comprised the working group for the Natural Resources of Regional Significance Element. This working group tried to reach consensus on strategic issues, goals and policies and maps of Natural Resources of Regional Significance. Many areas of agreement were found, although positions on some issues remained divided.

The regional transportation work group met numerous times during 1995 to identify the strategic issues facing the region regarding transportation. This work group included local government planners, transportation planning and engineering consultants, and representatives from the Florida Department of Transportation, the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Jacksonville Port Authority. Once the group identified strategic issues, a ranking process was utilized to develop goals and policies to address those issues.



After each working group had prepared a draft document, the SRPP was brought before the Northeast Florida Regional Planning Council Board for review and transmittal to the Governor's Office for comments. Notice of this public hearing and copies of the draft SRPP were mailed to all of the working groups' participants and to anyone who requested a copy of the draft document. After taking public input, the Board approved the proposed SRPP in March 1996 for transmittal to the Governor's Office and for comments from reviewing agencies and interested parties. During April and May of 1996, eight public workshops were held, at least one in every county, to receive further public input on the proposed SRPP. On May 23, 1996 the Governor's Office completed its review of the proposed SRPP and forwarded findings and recommendations, along with all recommendations and comments they had received concerning the proposed SRPP, to the NEFRPC.

Once the comments were received, each of the working groups reviewed the comments and made changes to try and address the comments. The Regional Planning Council Board approved the SRPP for rule making on April 3, 1997 during a public hearing. Pursuant to Ch. 120, Florida Statutes, seven (7) public hearings regarding the proposed rule were held, one in each county of the region. The NEFRPC approved the final version of the Northeast Florida SRPP as a rule at the regularly scheduled Board meeting on July 10, 1997.

*Strategic
Directions is
a plan for
Northeast Florida's
future*

Affordable Housing

While low-income families in need of public housing wait an average of one year to be admitted, the area's stock of inexpensive housing continues to shrink. National surveys have shown that the Jacksonville area has one of the nation's most affordable housing markets. Local analysts concur; however, this is matched


with lower incomes. It is down payment and closing costs that limit many lower income households from purchasing homes. While state affordable housing programs are promoting home-ownership, the region's ratio of renters continues to rise. A growing segment of the area is single-mother-families-with-children, accounting for over 12 percent of all families in the region; over 40 percent of those families live below the poverty line.


While the region offers more affordable housing than other areas in Florida, construction and land costs continue to rise. Continued suburban development and increasing infrastructure and land costs restrict the ability of lower-income householders to purchase new homes. An indicator that regional incomes are not keeping up with housing costs is the increasing rate of householders spending more than 35 percent of their incomes on housing, especially lower-income renter-occupied households (42 percent in 1980 and over 51 percent in 1990).





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


The region suffers many of the housing ills as the rest of the state — more mobile homes, substandard housing conditions, an aging housing stock and blighted neighborhoods. With reduced federal revenues earmarked for housing, and stiff competition for available state funding, the local governments will benefit from developing a regional strategy for meeting future affordable housing demand in the region.

 *Increase the number of affordable housing units for very low-, low- and moderate-income households in the northeast Florida region.*

 *Improve siting of very low-, low- and moderate-income housing throughout the northeast Florida region.*

 *To reverse the trend of deterioration, develop and maintain infrastructure serving neighborhoods and target services to declining neighborhoods, as needed.*

 *Eliminate substandard housing conditions and make structural and aesthetic improvements to existing housing.*

 *Provide resources to assist local governments in their efforts to protect and preserve the historic heritage within the region.*

Economic Development

The region enjoys a generally stable, diverse and growing economy. The diversified economic

environment is based on services, wholesale trade, retail and finance industries. A military presence in the region has long been economically significant and Naval Air Station Jacksonville receives awards as the most efficient aircraft rehabilitation depot in the Navy. The recent closing of Cecil Field will have a significant impact on local contractors, services and retail businesses.

While the region's labor force has grown faster than its population, local employers and employment training programs report that much of the work force lacks basic skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment. On the positive side, costs for both housing and living are lower than statewide or national

averages, the ad valorem tax base is increasing, tourism is growing, the addition of new sports and accompanying attractions is expected to generate supporting hotels and other tourist amenities, and the expanding Mayo Clinic complex is contributing to the region's significance as a medical center. The region's two deepwater shipping ports are actively developing strategies to increase their participation in global competition, and economic experts are recommending more diversification in economic expansion for the region.

Several local "economic development" councils with individual agendas are actively competing for the same newcomers. These entities could combine efforts with a regional emphasis to develop education and training

*The plan
focuses on
five strategic
subject
areas*



programs to assure a prepared labor force, and craft strategies for regional interdependence, since relocation anywhere into the region is beneficial to the entire regional economic network.

§ *Intra-regional cooperation in the promotion of economic development.*

§ *The needs of expanding, new and changing companies are satisfied by the regional labor base.*

§ *An environment that is conducive to the creation and relocation of new businesses as well as the expansion of existing businesses in the northeast Florida region.*

§ *Enhanced and increased funding opportunities for economic development in the northeast Florida region.*

§ *Improved economic development abilities and opportunities in the rural areas of northeast Florida.*

Emergency Preparedness

With its Atlantic Ocean exposure, the region has considerable vulnerability to hurricanes, especially with over 81 percent of its population located in its four coastal counties, and the continuing influx of development drawn to the aesthetic and recreational amenities of waterfront living. Other emergencies such as freezes, floods, fires, droughts, tropical storms, tornadoes, and hazardous materials releases arise with greater frequency in northeast Florida than do hurricanes. Strategic hazards planning must include preparations for meeting other emergencies such as vehicle accidents, plane crashes, oil tanker leaks and train derailments.

A hazardous materials accident is the emergency considered to have the highest probability of happening in this region due to the local production, storage and use of hazardous substances and their daily transport in and out of the region in support of this industry. This is a growing industry generating a trend toward increased facility planning for hazardous materials incidents and increased enforcement of legislation requirements.

In meeting any disaster emergency, adequate preparedness must be in place to assist special needs populations. Evacuation routes, equipped public evacuation shelters, and animal evacuation are issues that can be better addressed with intergovernmental coordination between counties to reduce implementation times for response and backup facilities. Since most of the region's residents and visitors have never experienced a hurricane or other catastrophic event, methods of increasing public awareness and promulgation of preparation and evacuation information can better enhance public safety.

☪ *The region will be prepared to respond to and recover from the impacts of all hazards.*

☪ *Direct future development away from the areas most vulnerable to storm surge and flooding.*

☪ *The region shall be prepared to deal with hazardous materials incidents.*

☪ *Decrease risk to hospital patients and special needs populations due to an emergency.*

☪ *Ensure that evacuation routes are identified and clearly designated and are at the capacity and quality needed to carry the expected number of evacuation vehicles.*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

☪ *Develop coordinated plans between all levels of government to ensure adequate and timely shelter capacity within the region for those residing in the hurricane evacuation areas.*

☪ *Complete emergency related post-disaster redevelopment and economic recovery as quickly as possible while mitigating future risk.*

☪ *Increase awareness of the potential impacts of disasters among the public and among elected and governmental officials in the region.*

Natural Resources of Regional Significance

As is happening elsewhere in Florida, the region's natural resources are being impacted by continued development. The St. Johns River is the region's dominant natural resource and is lined in varying densities with residential dwellings, government offices, hotels, private clubs, marinas and docks. The region's potable water source is the Floridan Aquifer, with the surficial aquifer also supplying a significant portion of potable water in St. Johns and Flagler counties. The supply is generally of good quality. The region as a whole increased its water consumption during the period from 1990 to 1994.

Land use managers acknowledge the many impacts of development on the region's animal species and habitat; however, the extent of the losses is not known. An important need in northeast Florida is a comprehensive analysis of the habitat types that are being converted to suburban and urban uses, and the development of accurate information about existing locations of rare, endangered, threatened, and species of special

concern. The region will adopt the state trend of implementing "ecosystem management" strategies toward producing collaborative solutions to environmental problems.

While the region lags behind other Florida regions in land acquisitions for conservation, it has taken the lead in an off-site mitigation program for habitat protection by acquiring significant habitats before they become subject to development pressures. The region's planners and growth managers, in identifying its natural resources of regional significance, must develop similar aggressive strategies for continued and future protection of these natural resources.

≈≈≈ *Improve water quality in surface waters identified as Natural Resources of Regional Significance in the region to meet human and ecosystem needs and to achieve state water quality standards.*

≈≈≈ *Assure an adequate supply of water both in quantity and quality for present and future human, economic development, and ecosystem needs.*

≈≈≈ *Conserve, and where opportunities exist enhance, the functions of Natural Resources of Regional Significance while protecting private property rights.*

≈≈≈ *Protect the populations of state and federal threatened, endangered, and species of special concern found within the region.*

≈≈≈ *Protect the functions provided by beaches, dunes and estuaries as they relate to habitat, storm protection and economic values afforded by these areas.*





Regional Transportation


Transportation planning affects aspects of the four previous strategic elements of the region and is also driven by the dynamics of those elements. The region's growing population uses less public transportation and shuns car-pooling, generates automobile registrations at a rate faster than population growth, and is increasing vehicular miles traveled to the suburban employment centers. Increasing traffic congestion impacts negatively on the region's economy, costing residents time and money. This congestion affects our air quality and new road development can disturb natural systems. The success of evacuation practices and emergency preparedness rely on a viable regional transportation system.


As a result of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and in an effort to direct transportation priorities toward a more efficient transportation system, the region must integrate land use planning and transportation planning processes. In order to optimize emergency evacuation capabilities and provide for a regionally coordinated transportation system minimizing planning barriers, maximizing funding efficiency, and achieving consistency, strategies must be developed to increase mass transit usage and improve the regional multi-modal transportation system

Our northeast region, along with the rest of Florida, must prepare for continuing change and certain growth. Our population is living longer and demanding more services for fewer tax dollars. Progressive and innovative strategies must be implemented to assure quality of life amenities and expand the region's economic competitiveness while guaranteeing protection of the region's irreplaceable natural resources.

 *To develop a regional transportation system which optimizes the movement of citizens and goods in northeast Florida while protecting the environment.*

 *To protect the region's investment in transportation facilities by managing growth to use existing facilities and developing high-density multi-modal corridors.*

 *To minimize transportation and land use planning barriers, maximize transportation funding efficiency, and achieve overall planning consistency.*

 *To enhance the regional transportation system's ability to provide for adequate evacuation times in the event of an emergency evacuation situation.*

*The SRPP
will guide
Council
decisions and
activities*

