



US 17 CORRIDOR PLANNING STUDY *Contract 08-94 Deliverable: TASK 4*

TASK 4 **Community Catalysts, Opportunities and Challenges**

TRANSMITTED VIA EMAIL TO jie.shao@charlottefl.com

Date: February 10, 2009
To: Jie Shao, Planner III, Charlotte County Growth Management Department
From: Mary Anne G. Bowie, FAICP
Re: US 17 (Duncan Road) Corridor Planning Study
TASK No. 4: US 17 Community Catalysts: Opportunities and Challenges

Introduction

Task 4 provides a description of the US 17 Community Catalysts that are geographic land use areas that provide the focus for sustainable planning solutions. Within the Community Catalyst descriptions are found the Opportunities of the study area; the Challenges of the study area are described in a separate concluding section.

Based upon input from County lead public meetings, a series of interviews with diverse stakeholder groups over the past several months, and work conducted by the DeLisi Fitzgerald team and Bowie Urban Planners, a clear overall sustainable vision for the US 17 Planning Area is emerging. This vision for a sustainable future has four components:

- 1) create business development;
- 2) stimulate redevelopment and enhancements of existing neighborhoods;
- 3) provide public access to the waterfront; and
- 4) create and preserve wildlife corridors.

This Task 4 elaborates on the community catalysts and describes opportunities to meet the components of the sustainable vision for the US 17 Planning Area. The final section of Task 4 provides an analysis of the study area's constraints, described as challenges. Input for Task 4 includes: 1) The US 17 Area Visioning Summary prepared by the DeLisi Fitzgerald team based on input from the public and stakeholder community meetings; 2) county's analysis of existing conditions; and 3) Bowie Urban Planners regulatory and other research and analysis of sustainable solutions.

Definitions

The following four definitions are included to guide the reader in understanding this Task 4.

Community Catalysts In the US 17 Planning Study, this phrase is being applied to specific geographic land uses. Within the US 17 Planning Study, community catalysts are defined as those locations and/or resources that inspire and are located at the center of the cause of the creation of community. These are the opportunity areas where people have traditionally gathered, or where they are expected to gather in the future. Each community catalyst is unique; it may include a single or several built features or natural features or it may be a combination of both built and natural features. Because the primary foci of this study are community creation and environmental preservation, and not purely economic development, the term “community catalyst” has been selected. In this task, **Community Catalysts are also described as the Opportunities.**

Sustainable development is a pattern of land and resource use that aims to meet human social and economic needs, while preserving the environment; so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but in the indefinite future. Sustainable development seeks to balance environmental, social and economic factors.

Opportunities are the existing conditions, **described as the Community Catalysts** that are helpful in creating land uses that will lead to sustainable development.

Challenges are constraining conditions in the study area that might hinder the creation of land uses that would lead to sustainable development. These challenges may include physical, economic, planning or regulatory constraints.

Community Catalysts

Ten community catalysts are identified. These areas and resources provide a meaningful framework for looking at the study area. The community catalysts include the following:

1. US 17: the highway;
2. Solana and US 17 study area nearest to the City of Punta Gorda;
3. I-75 Interchange Area;
4. Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park (ECAP) mixed use area;
5. Existing commercial development located at the Bermont/US 17 intersection;
6. Cleveland;
7. Peace River, Shell Creek, Prairie Creek and their tributaries;
8. Railroad corridor; and
9. Northernmost Charlotte County developed and undeveloped properties influenced by the DeSoto County Fort Ogden Commerce Park.

Community Catalyst No. 1: US 17: The Highway

Community Catalyst No. 1: US 17 highway has recently been widened to four lanes within the study area and has adequate capacity to serve existing development. US 17 is a state road and major arterial and is in the Strategic Inter-modal System (SIS) that encourages a multi-modal transportation approach. US 17 is also part of the Florida Intrastate Highway System (FIHS), which includes arterials that are important for emergency evacuations and the movement of primary goods. US 17 serves as the arterial connector from the City of Punta Gorda to DeSoto County, and provides access to urban lands nearer the City of Punta Gorda and rural lands closer to DeSoto County. The major intersections of US 17 with I-75 and Bermont Road (CR74) provide important east-west connections to the rest of the state.

As new development occurs along US 17, there are opportunities to connect land use developments that occur through such methods as connected parking lots, a frontage road system, or a reverse frontage road system that would connect adjacent uses to minimize curb cuts on US 17. Because US 17 is within the strategic inter-modal system that encourages multi-modal transportation, this also creates an opportunity to consider the pedestrian, the bicyclists, buses and other public transportation solutions. In addressing the needs of pedestrians, there is an opportunity to consider street tree planting and buffers that provide visual and safe landscaping along the US 17 highway corridor.

Community Catalyst No. 2: Solana and land near City of Punta Gorda

Community Catalyst No. 2: Solana and US 17 study area property adjacent to the City of Punta Gorda and west of I-75. Currently the City of Punta Gorda US 17 street frontage is well landscaped with street trees and lighting. There is an opportunity to beautify and revitalize the US 17 travel corridor with attractive landscaping and lighting to be consistent with adjacent Punta Gorda street frontage. The US 17 business area and Solana residential areas are places where the community fabric can be enhanced. In order to create more mixed use and urban choices, the existing set of land uses and streets can be revitalized with sustainable planning solutions,

In the Solana and US 17 study area west of I-75 there is an opportunity to beautify the roadway with landscaping, by approaching it with a “main street” revitalization perspective. This will lend support of the existing businesses in the corridor. In this area, several historic structures have been designated on the State’s registry. This study will explore opportunities for preservation and enhancement of the existing historic structures. This study provides an opportunity to increase the sense of identity in the Solana area, capturing its history and reducing trip generation by encouraging a diversity of uses in a village-like atmosphere. There is an opportunity to create an overlay district that would allow for more permitted land uses, such as live/work, bed and breakfasts, accessory dwelling and working units, mixed uses and pedestrian friendly solutions.

Community Catalyst No. 3: I-75 Interchange Area

Community Catalyst No. 3: I-75 Interchange Area has the potential to become a cohesively developed commercial or industrial property that will take advantage of its geographic market advantage provided by I-75 and US 17 traffic. Most of the properties that are in this area are zoned commercial intensive or highway commercial, but some are still zoned AE. Several of the parcels that exist were originally severed by right of way needed for the intersection and secondary development serving roads have not yet been developed. There are opportunities to create marketable parcels with good cross circulation between the parcels, leading to opportunities for employment.

This intersection is located in close proximity to the Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park (ECAP) and would be an appropriate location for an office park and/or mixed use development. The opportunity exists to create such an office park and/or mixed use development as a significant job center for the area.

Community Catalyst No. 4: Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park (ECAP)

Community Catalyst No. 4: Enterprise Charlotte Airport Park (ECAP) mixed use area was designed to attract new jobs to the area surrounding the airport, capitalizing on air transportation availability. The ECAP area provides a wonderful opportunity area to provide business, commercial and industrial development; the specific allowable permitted uses could be expanded and the regulatory constraints can be resolved to expand opportunities in this area. In Florida, heavy industrial needs are not being met and major industries are relocating to the Carolinas and other states. There is an opportunity for a coalition of urban planning and economic development professionals to create strategy to capture these industries at the ECAP area.

One of the best opportunities to provide new business development is to attempt to capture every business and/or industry that makes an inquiry. Oftentimes, that is not possible, due to regulatory constraints, perhaps restricting the intensity of the industry that is permitted. With green sustainable land use policies, even heavy industries can be good neighbors to the environment and to other land uses. If a business is being unsuccessful in its attempt to relocate to Charlotte County, there is an opportunity to use that data as important input in making regulatory changes, so there is an opportunity to understand and respond to the market needs through strong information coalitions.

Community Catalyst No. 5: Commercial at Bermont/US 17

Community Catalyst No. 5: Commercial development located at the Bermont/US 17 intersection exists within a patchwork of zoning categories. In the long term, as market forces dictate, this area will

expand to meet community and regional shopping needs of the US 17 study area, the Babcock Ranch Community development and existing and new developments located on Bermont. This intersection has an opportunity to be one of the most important intersections on the US 17 corridor, as Bermont connects US 17 with east-west traffic across the state. There is an opportunity to create consistent zoning and a master commercial development plan with the several large parcel owners, who own properties on both the east and west sides of US 17 at Bermont intersection.

Community Catalyst No. 6: Cleveland

Community Catalyst No. 6: Cleveland is an existing traditional neighborhood community that is platted into residential lots and is served by a few highway located commercial uses. There is an opportunity to enhance this area with better code enforcement or County investment in landscaping, signage or identify creating features. The area could be revitalized by applying traditional neighborhood development (TND) village principles. There is an opportunity to revitalize and increase the commercial and business development of Cleveland by expanding it with a pedestrian and bicycle friendly mixed use village approach. Existing residential and business owners are interested in enhancing the identity of the Cleveland area.

With a concerted village plan for this area, there is an opportunity to reduce trip generation by encouraging a diversity of transportation modes and permitted land uses in a village like atmosphere. There is an opportunity to create multi-modal (bike and pedestrian) transportation corridors both along US 17 and throughout Cleveland. To encourage the mixed use character of the area, there is an opportunity to allow accessory work units, where people can expand their work from inside the home and can have signage and connection with customers and other work/live business owners. This strategy is quite effective when encouraging artist colonies and additionally, it opens up jobs for apprentices to work and learn from existing business owners.

Community Catalyst No. 7: Peace River, Shell Creek, Prairie Creek

Community Catalyst No. 7: Peace River, Shell Creek, Prairie Creek and their tributaries provide the most powerful environmental and economic opportunities for the US 17 Study area. Here, Charlotte County has a magnificent location that can provide water access and vistas to eco-savvy tourists interested in a natural, environmentally sensitive vacation. The land adjacent to the waterways also provides opportunities for additional creation and preservation of wildlife corridors. With the right strategy and planning solutions, this area can become a significant eco-tourism destination. There are opportunities to provide additional public and private water access points for kayaks, canoes and motorboats to supplement the few existing ones and to create a “blueway” for canoes and kayaks. There is an opportunity to create natural pedestrian paths along the waterfronts that can be interconnected for

nature tourists, with certain areas remaining protected for wildlife. Day trip, short term and seasonal visitors could be attracted to this area, providing meaningful employment for area residents.

There is an opportunity to provide incentives for low impact development (LID) site solutions in these sensitive water front developments that will decrease the amount of disturbed land and will increase the amount of nature that is protected on every developed site. The public agencies responsible for wildlife protection see an opportunity to connect possible wildlife corridors with preserve areas from the Babcock Ranch purchase and other properties to the east of US 17. There is an opportunity for Shell Creek to become a major focus for an east-west wildlife corridor.

The predominant zoning along the water frontage is residential zoning, permitting mostly low density development. There are opportunities to permit these residential properties to become the core of an eastern eco-tourism center for Charlotte County by allowing bed and breakfast establishments, small cafes, nature centers and other eco-tourism facilities, such as kayak and bicycle rental and repair shops. This would create an opportunity for seasonal Florida residents to have additional rental choices.

As the area is treasured by the residents, it can also be treasured by eco-tourists, seeking a quality of tourism that is becoming more attractive to a larger number of people. Examples of eco-tourism that Charlotte County may want to model include Palm Island, President Truman's former fishing camp in the Florida Keys, which is now a destination wedding site with cabins and dinner location, accessible only by boat. Another excellent eco-tourism model is the Steinhatchee Landing Resort that focuses on attracting meetings, destination weddings and tourists to this rental residential village; most units are individually owned and leased through the on-site lease manager. That facility has a conference/retreat center, a wedding chapel, boat docks, small store, and breakfast area and is very pedestrian and bicycle oriented. An eco-tourism approach would create more business opportunities, while enhancing and respecting the natural environment.

Community Catalyst No. 8: Railroad Corridor

Community Catalyst No. 8: The existing CSX railroad corridor provides an opportunity to develop industrial uses that are served by the railroad for transportation of products and supplies. Certain industries rely on such rail facilities. Some areas of the railroad corridor are located in residential and natural areas. In those areas, it may be appropriate to buffer the railroad from adjacent development. Within the buffer areas, there is an opportunity to encourage development of bicycle and pedestrian trails that could parallel a portion of the rail corridor and provide a recreational use for residents and ecotourists.

Community Catalyst No. 9: North Study Area Charlotte County Properties

Community Catalyst No. 9: Just to the north of the US 17 study area is Desoto County's Fort Ogden Commerce Park that includes the Walmart distribution center and provides jobs for nearby Charlotte County residents. The plans of Desoto County to expand their Enterprise Zone will create a need for a diversity of appropriate and affordable housing choices to serve existing and future residents of the US 17 Corridor who may be employed within Desoto County. This provides an opportunity for Charlotte County to create new residential developments and also to create new industrial, commercial and mixed use developments to compete with Fort Ogden Commerce Park, if the urban service area is expanded to the east of US 17. Charlotte County has the opportunity to provide a variety of affordable and appropriate housing choices to serve existing and future residents of the US17 Corridor Area. There is an opportunity to encourage and permit intergenerational.

Currently, there are existing mobile homes that provide affordable housing for workers in Charlotte County that, like any mobile home, can suffer the devastating effects of hurricanes. The lot sizes are small and can be considered urban sized lots. Now that structural insulated systems kit homes and other modular homes are available that can be constructed in a matter of days, there is an opportunity to allow more durable, hurricane proof, low cost homes to be used as replacement or new homes on the mostly small mobile home lots. Charlotte County has the opportunity to allow traditional, kit and modular homes in mobile home developments by changing it to Mobile Home Conventional (MHC) zoning.

There are a few very large properties located on the east side of US 17 that are suitable for long term mixed use development or possible creation as village and/or development including research centers and medical facilities. Having such parcels available creates opportunities for a variety of uses, as well as new job creation, as the market dictates. The County has an opportunity to require that green building standards are met and that low impact development techniques are required for any new developments, setting a standard for future excellence that will lead to a sustainable future. To allow for new development on the east side of US 17, the Urban Service Area (USA) boundary would need to be extended to include those lands.

Challenges

This US 17 Corridor Planning Study is conducted in relation to the overall vision of achieving sustainable development. The sustainable vision for the US 17 Planning Area has four components:

- 1) create business development;
- 2) stimulate redevelopment and enhancements of existing neighborhoods;
- 3) provide public access to the waterfront; and
- 4) create and preserve wildlife corridors.

There are a variety of physical, economic, planning and regulatory challenges that stand in the way of achieving that sustainable vision for the US 17 Planning Area. These challenges are described below.

Challenges: Physical

The size and diversity of the US 17 Planning Area is large and complex: eight miles in length and two to several miles in width. In terms of complexity, there are thousands of individual private and public property owners, multiple zoning districts, major environmental features, an airport, a railroad, an interstate highway intersection, platted and unplatted residential, commercial, preservation and industrial lands.

Public water and sewer utilities are provided by the City of Punta Gorda in the south part of the study area and by North Fort Myers utilities in the north part of the study area. There are major gaps in the area that is currently provided with public water and sewer service.

From a transportation perspective, there no road that provides parallel access to US. 17. There is little east west road circulation, thus there are no alternative transportation networks to US 17. In Solana and around the I-75 intersection area, a challenge is the one way character of certain roads and no clear traffic circulation patterns available to serve potential development parcels.

In all areas designated for commercial, there could be much better circulation and parcel development with cross parcel connections provided.

For the water frontages of the rivers and tributaries, there are few public access points for kayaks, canoes, motor boats and walking visitors.

Challenges: Economic

The CSX rail road corridor is an active corridor; the Florida Department of Transportation's ultimate goal to purchase the railroad line for future multi-modal use will require extensive funding.

Even though many properties are mapped to be within utility franchise areas, financial constraints have kept certain areas without water and sewer lines.

Challenges: Planning and Regulatory

US 17, between DeSoto County Line and S. Washington Loop Road, with the exception of Ridge Harbor Subdivision, is the line that currently serves as the Urban Service Area (USA) boundary. Properties on the west side are allowed by regulation to develop more intensely than properties on the east side of US 17. The result is that one side of the street may develop urban land uses, while the other side must remain rural, causing US 17 to become a great divide between land uses. Another result of US 17 as USA boundary is that any infrastructure costs, for example, the cost of extending water and sewer lines, will be paid for only by property owners on the west side of the street, making extension of utility lines more costly per unit.

According to stakeholder interviews, some people are comfortable with the location of the Urban Service Area boundary where it is; other people believe it should be expanded to the east. At the present time the USA boundary does not consider the development potential of both sides of US 17. There is an opportunity to remedy this by expanding the boundary and the area that can be served by the capacity of the highway and future utility infrastructure. Such an expansion of the USA boundary increases the properties that could be served by new infrastructure and thus reduces the economic impact for the western properties by spreading it to properties also located on the east. This will make utility infrastructure more economically feasible and most likely cause it to occur sooner, rather than later.

There is no cohesive master development plan, including cohesive zoning and traffic circulation at US 17 and Bermont.

There is no cohesive master development plan, including cohesive zoning and traffic circulation for the I-75 interchange area.

There is no frontage road, reverse frontage road or commercial parking lot connectivity requirement for US 17 Study Area.

Existing regulations do not require applying traditional neighborhood development (TND) principles over existing communities.

Existing zoning regulations are challenging; for instance existing ECAP regulations restrict certain uses and lot sizes. Only mobile homes are permitted in certain of the mobile home zoning districts. There is no zoning code that encourages co-housing developments.

There are no land uses policies in place that will stimulate new jobs focused on green technology and educational opportunities, including a university with research capabilities or a hospital/medical site.

The County has not yet adopted green building incentives, including low impact development techniques, although these are being considered in various departments.

There are no green industrial development requirements that would protect property owners adjacent to the ECAP area and other areas, so that concerns about heavy industrial development could be resolved. Specifics of an eco-tourism strategy have not yet been established and no public/private coalition has yet been established.

Local, regional and state existing zoning and land development regulations sometimes have unintended consequences and restrict sustainable development solutions. There is currently no review clearinghouse for overly restrictive regulations that stop business development, reduce public access to the waterfront or stop redevelopment and enhancements of existing neighborhoods. Some places, like the City of Toronto, have a long history of considering every government action within the framework of its long term consequences on sustainable development.