

VIII. Human System

1. Conditions in the Region at the Time of Adoption of the SRPP

In 1995 the *Strategic Regional Policy Plan for South Florida (SRPP)* contained a number of observations relating to the human system that have been more clearly delineated with the passage of time. Underpinning all of these observations at that time was the issue of population growth in the Region. The SRPP noted an expected 30% increase in population by the year 2015, which would be led by international migration. Vulnerability to hurricanes, lack of a quality workforce, persistent social and economic disparities and lack of a meaningful mass transit system were all trends that were associated with the projected growth and change in population. *Without appropriate policy, our potential to be a premier region might not be realized and the quality of life might even decline.* This gloomy scenario was reinforced later in the same year when the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida concluded in its Initial Report the following:

If we continue down the current path of divided special interest groups fighting each other over scarce resources, South Florida's future is grim. That path leads to polluted waters; droughts and floods; fouled beaches; and loss of plants, animals, and reefs. It leads to an increasingly divided society with ethnic and racial tensions, economic disparity and crime. It also leads to overcrowded schools with students that cannot compete in a global economy.

2. Intervening Events - 1995 to the Present

The five years that have passed since the adoption of the *Strategic Regional Policy Plan for South Florida, 1995* have provided an opportunity to witness first-hand the effects of rapid population growth and to assess how well regional policies have served to manage that growth and its resulting development impacts. Actions of the Region's citizens, both individual and corporate, during this period provide an indication of where change is needed. A number of things have occurred that call attention to a need for a more people-oriented approach to our planning:

- **An emphasis on a change in governance** Six new municipal incorporations have occurred since the adoption of the SRPP, three in Miami-Dade County, and two in Monroe County and one in Broward County. Local governments throughout the Region are reviewing their political structure and considering change. Neighborhood and civic associations are taking a more forceful hand in guiding their own destinies through attempts to influence local government actions to discourage crime and improve aesthetics and quality of life;

- **An increase in local government strategic efforts** Local governments in the Region and throughout the state have become actively involved in strategic planning efforts that are directed at articulating a vision for the future and reshaping planning efforts to ensure that vision will be realized. This, combined with a greater focus on the part of the governor and the state legislature to reassess the growth management laws present an opportunity for the *SRPP* to illuminate and expand on the human perspective in planning efforts.
- **A specific interest in planning for people** In an environment of growing needs and shrinking resources local governments, individuals and human service provision agencies are increasing their efforts to collaborate in their attempts to meet human needs. This has been evidenced in an increased concern about the impacts of development on schools; the deteriorating quality of life in the Region, especially in the older urbanized areas; failure to meet Regional affordable housing goals; the general diminution of funding for human services and changes in state and federal laws regarding welfare; and the expanding cultural diversity in the Region

3. Conditions in the Region at the Time of the *SRPP* Evaluation and Appraisal Report

When the South Florida Regional Planning Council convened the *SRPP* Human Systems Work Group in July 1999 the regional human system trends that were identified to a large extent mirrored those noted in 1995. The current discussions however, have sharpened the focus and provide greater insight into the issues resulting from the trends. Close to a million new residents are expected in the next 20 years, more than 125 per day. International migration continues to be the largest factor contributing to population growth in South Florida, with 7 out of 10 new residents from abroad. Added to this is the growing ethnic and racial diversity of the population, enriched by continued in-migration from the Caribbean and Latin America. Finally, there is a gradual decrease in the median age of the population as younger international migrants assume a dominant role previously sustained by domestic retirees.

The Human Systems Work Group identified several trends, of which three stand out as key regional trends. These are:

- Increasing cultural diversity of the population;
- Continuing/persistent disparity in access to essential services; and
- Emerging/persistent issues related to children and families.

A detailed discussion of each of these trends will help to underscore the reasons that they have been identified as key regional trends. It is important to note however that the overall reason that these trends stand out is that they present a logical sequence of trends identified in the *SRPP* in 1995, they impact very strongly on the issue of sustainability, and they surfaced routinely in the recent Human Systems Work Group discussion.

Increasing cultural diversity of the population

As documented in the section on demographic trends, South Florida's mix of cultures and languages continues to expand as the racial and ethnic composition of the population grows more diverse. This has been recognized as a critical issue in the work of The Coordinating Council of Broward. *The "Introduction" to The Broward Benchmarks, February 1999* states, *diversity is not so simple as language and origin, but encompasses myriad cultural beliefs and ways of being, experiences, expectations and priorities. Its significance is clear in all domains: health, education, employment, communication, safety, laws and governing.*

South Florida's growing role in the larger region that encompasses the island nations of the Caribbean and much of Central and South America creates many opportunities for taking advantage of the rich cultural and linguistic base. A growing and sustainable multinational component of the regional economy will depend on a well-educated, healthy and safe population. There also are many adjustments that will be necessary to ensure the provision of health, public safety, education, economic and human services in a culturally sensitive manner that reflects and respects the needs of the population.

Continuing/persistent disparity in access to essential services

One of the most obvious effects of high population growth, international migration and the change in the make up of the Region's population is the trend toward greater disparity in the job market, personal income and access to services in general.

The service sector makes up the largest segment of the job market in South Florida. A recent study by the SFRPC and the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Districts 10 and 11 reveals a disconnect among lower income workers in the region, their job location, available public transit and child care. This serves to demonstrate the need for greater access to essential services. The impending loss of benefits through the Work And Gain Economic Self Sufficiency (WAGES) program will likely exacerbate the problem.

Social and economic disparity continues to mark the South Florida landscape. Estimates of the number of people in poverty in South Florida for 1993 and 1995 suggest that poverty levels increased after the 1990 census, and are now declining, but are still higher than at the time of the last census. Also, South Florida poverty rates are higher than those for the rest of the state - almost 670 thousand persons were members of households in poverty in 1995 (18.7 percent). While regional levels of unemployment have fallen along with the rest of the state and the nation (to 5.1 percent in 1998), indicating that the South Florida economy has kept pace with the growth of population and the labor force, levels of per capita income have remained essentially flat in the 1990s (\$23,065 in 1990, \$23,029 in 1997, in constant 1995 dollars).

Access to essential services continues to clearly demarcate the Haves from the Have Nots . This can be seen in the quality of the educational environment (public vs. private schooling/overcrowding), the ability to get and hold good jobs, health care, etc. As noted above, the impacts of the failure of the Region to develop a regional meaningful mass transit system has been underscored in the recent SFRPC DCF study.

Children and Families

As noted earlier the Region's population is getting younger overall, and the median age, already lower than the state's, may fall below the national median. This changing picture from retirees to families combined with the growing gap between rich and poor combine to place children in an especially perilous position. Likewise, as the composition of the family changes from the traditional family to a more amorphous unit issues relating to the established methods of providing services will continue to arise.

4. Conclusions

The continuation and persistence of the human systems issues in the region in the past five years creates a need to provide more focus on them in the context of regional planning. The issues of increasing cultural diversity, continuing disparity in the access to essential services and the continuation of children and families issues should be more explicitly addressed in the Strategic Regional Policy Plan for South Florida, especially in the areas of economic development, regional transportation, affordable housing and emergency preparedness.