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#### DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

## County-growth plan is tall order

Faced with a growing population and scarce land, Broward is looking to adjust its growth management strategies.

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With state approval in hand, Broward County is preparing to overhaul its long-range growth-management plan, a lengthy process that could dramatically affect the rules that govern what gets built and where.

Proposed changes are outlined in a thick report shaped by two hard facts: The county's population is expected to swell by nearly 1 million people by 2030, and its stock of undeveloped land is expected to disappear by 2015.

County planners say smarter land-use policies will help make room for newcomers while guarding against clogged roads, constricted beaches, crowded schools and impossibly high home prices.

For a start, planners say, new residential development must be driven to places that can accommodate more people: along public transportation routes, above commercial development, in place of failing strip malls and shopping centers. Conversely, they say, growth must be controlled in sensitive areas such as the beaches and older neighborhoods of single-family homes.

"That's the central theme of the whole thing," said Peter Ross, assistant director of the county's Office of Urban Planning and Redevelopment. "This additional population is coming, and we have to plan for and manage it or it's going to cause a lot of problems."

The first major changes to the county's key growth-management document -- its "Comprehensive Plan" -- are expected this month, when commissioners are scheduled to vote on new "transit-oriented" land-use categories designed to spur redevelopment along major routes, including U.S. 441.

The move would allow cities to create a dense mix of housing and businesses near bus and rail stops. That way, the thinking goes, residents could leave their cars behind and walk or ride to work, limiting congestion.

#### UPCOMING VOTE

Commissioners also expect to vote on a measure that would change the way traffic fees collected from developers are used, directing money to public transportation projects instead of new roads.

Additional changes will follow as commissioners and planners develop policies to match dozens of goals listed in the growth management report.

They include: promoting clever urban design, ensuring that school capacity is a key factor in development planning, setting rules for redevelopment of beach properties, encouraging water conservation, and providing incentives to increase construction of affordable housing.

The county also hopes to promote building and design standards aimed at creating neighborhoods with distinctive characteristics -- the "sense of place" that goes missing in so much modern development.

Last year, commissioners hired architect Anthony Abbate, a professor of architecture and urban design at Florida Atlantic University, to help craft a "County-wide Community Design Guidebook" that will serve as a reference for local governments looking to change their codes. The work is almost complete and Abbate is expected to make a presentation early next year.

#### SEVEN-YEAR PLANS

The state requires its cities and counties to review their comprehensive plans every seven years or so with an eye to making improvements. Broward has been working on its review for more than two years, airing ideas for change at public meetings and workshops.

Early drafts of the report ignited intense opposition from several Broward cities, where local leaders accused the county of mounting a

power grab.

Broward is one of the few counties in the state that exercises broad development control over its cities, and local leaders argued that the county should loosen the reins a bit.

Caps on density, restrictions on land-use changes, and endless hearings and reviews only slowed progress and jeopardized important projects, they said.

"We understand our cities and know what they want and need," said Lauderdale Lakes Commissioner Hazelle Rogers, president of the Broward League of Cities. "Who best to determine where we should have housing? Where we should have redevelopment?"

County leaders countered that oversight from a countywide perspective remains as important as ever with the place getting more crowded and infrastructure and resources more strained.

#### **CAPITAL REJECTION**

The fight reached Tallahassee earlier this year when the cities pushed unsuccessfully for legislation that would have given them the right to opt out of county land-use restrictions.

Since then, communication has improved and compromise is brewing, officials on both sides agree.

The county is moving to give city governments greater freedom to increase the number of homes allowed per acre in areas eyed for redevelopment, for example, and to speed up consideration of small-scale land-use amendments.

"We are beginning to dispel this myth that we are attempting to play Big Brother with the cities," said County Administrator Roger Desjarlais.

#### **STICKING POINT**

A county push for more control over beach development remains a sticking point, however.

The courts recently upheld a measure capping density on the beach at 25 units per acre and requiring county hearings and approval for exceptions, Ross said.

And county officials are considering a proposal to require an evaluation of a beach project's potential effect on traffic, school attendance, and water supply for any increase in density, even below the 25-unit cap, he said.

"The whole concept of a countywide land-use plan is that there are certain issues of regional importance," Ross said. "Development on hurricane-prone barrier islands requires regional oversight."