A Citizen's Guide to Community Planning in Lee County, Florida
Processes and Resources
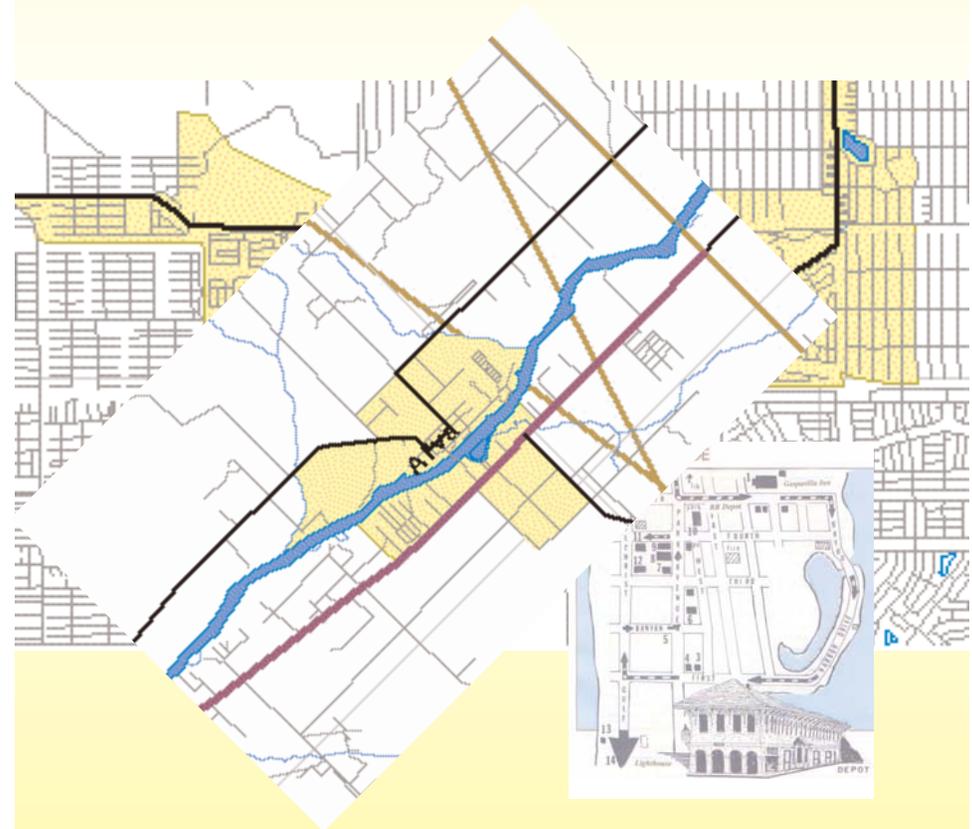
Planning: Purpose and Perspectives

Will your community have a future? Of course! The question is not whether there is a future, but if your community will be a desirable place to live in 20, 30, or 50 years. Planning is an essential part of ensuring a desirable future--a future in which citizens have a special role and responsibility. Active and organized citizens make a place for the community's voice in planning.

This guide is intended to assist citizens with the complex processes of community planning. It will give a brief overview of the elements of planning, how to organize groups around planning efforts, roles and responsibilities, involving citizens, getting resources, and where to find more information.

While this guide offers resources and information on specific topic areas, there are many more considerations a planning process should include. We encourage you to take the time to learn more about these processes by looking at the resources section in this guide.

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Elements of a Community Plan

The community plan is often part of a larger planning document, called a Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive plans are the, "only planning document that considers multiple programs and that accounts for activities on all land located within the planning area."[1]

Comprehensive plans usually cover:

Transportation	Neighborhoods
Land-Use	Historic Preservation
Environmental	Housing
Parks and Open Space	Social Services
Utilities and Infrastructure	Economic Development
School Facilities	

Learn More!!

Florida Department of Community Affairs: This Florida State agency provides information on grant assistance, planning processes, and technical assistance.
http://www.dca.state.fl.us/fdcp/dcp/

Florida Chapter of the American Planning Association: This website is from a professional association and offers good information for planning in Florida and means for citizen input.
http://www.floridaplanning.org/

Planner's Web: This is a comprehensive website for citizen planners with links to numerous planning and citizen participation sources.
http://www.plannersweb.com/

Environmental Protection Agency: This website offers current thinking and practice on the environmental impacts of growth.
http://www.epa.gov/livability/

International Association for Public Participation: IAP2 is a professional association of public participation professionals. This website is a good source for creative citizen involvement technics and processes.
http://www.iap2.org/

National Civic League: NCL is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building the civic infrastructure and community decision-making processes to empower citizens. They offer good sources and well-written guidebooks.
http://www.ncl.org/

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References

[1] Kelly, D., Becker, B. 2000. *Community planning: A introduction to the comprehensive plan.* Washington, D.C.: Island Press, p. 1

[2] National Civic League. 2000. *The community visioning and strategic planning handbook.* Denver, Co: National Civic League Press.
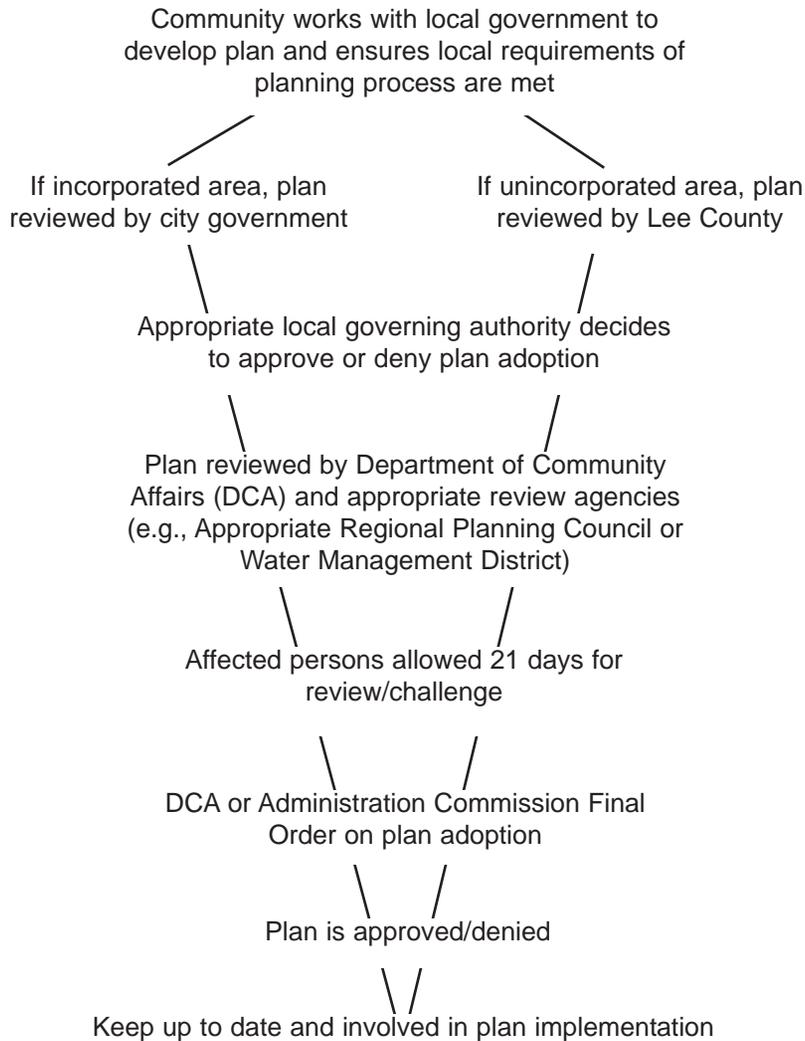
[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

Process & Flow Chart of Plan Approval*

Community works with local government to
develop plan and ensures local requirements of
planning process are met

If incorporated area, plan
reviewed by city government

If unincorporated area, plan
reviewed by Lee County

Appropriate local governing authority decides
to approve or deny plan adoption

Plan reviewed by Department of Community
Affairs (DCA) and appropriate review agencies
(e.g., Appropriate Regional Planning Council or
Water Management District)

Affected persons allowed 21 days for
review/challenge

DCA or Administration Commission Final
Order on plan adoption

Plan is approved/denied

Keep up to date and involved in plan implementation

*This flowchart of the planning process has been simplified. For more details
please refer to Lee County Government www.leegov.com and the Department
of Community Affairs Websites
http://www.dca.state.fl.us/fdcp/DCP/PlanProcessing/processinghome.htm*

Planning to Plan

Organizing a community to participate in a planning process requires that citizens become educated and learn to work together. Some of the steps you might consider are:

1) GET TRAINING. Before taking additional steps, request assistance and training from others who have done it before. Your county planning staff, local university, or extension services typically have great resources and expertise. You might also consider inviting in other communities who have led a similar process to talk about what they have learned.

2) ESTABLISH THE "RULES OF ENGAGEMENT." Credible leaders should assemble a broad and diverse set of stakeholders. This group should agree on the process of selecting a representative community panel. The panel will then guide the planning process and community input. It is essential to establish widespread agreement on the process before moving forward. This will demonstrate buy-in and commitment to the process in the long run.[2]

3) FORMAL ORGANIZATION. There are a variety of ways to formally organize a planning committee. Often groups form non-profit corporations that allow businesses and individuals to make tax-deductible donations. This will require that the group write Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws defining Rules of Order and Officers. These should be reviewed by an attorney before proceeding. If your group will take any public funds, it mush follow the State of Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law. A manual and frequently asked questions can be found at: http://myfloridalegal.com/sunshine

*TIP: BUILDING AGREEMENT
Unless your community has widespread consensus
on planning and growth, count on a lengthy organizing process. While this may seem burdensome at
first, it will save time later.*

Roles and Responsibilities

Participants in the planning process have a distinct set of responsibilities that help shape the community plan. Clarifying and documenting these responsibilities in the beginning can help to recruit and select members and consultants. Some options include:

CITIZEN PLANNING BOARD: Manage the process of planning, put aside personal interests for the community good, guide the planning schedule, serve as liaison with stakeholders, serve as subcommittee chairpersons, and coordinate fundraising.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON: Chair meetings, serve as spokesperson, resolve internal disputes, work with facilitators and consultants, stay abreast of committee rules and requirements, (e.g. Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law and your organizations By-Laws).

FACILITATOR: Assist in process design, ensures process stays on schedule, facilitate large stakeholder group meetings, stay neutral in process.[3]

CONSULTANTS: Gather information and data, write planning code, may act as facilitators in process, keep planning process on schedule.

Involving Citizens

The role of a citizens planning board is to facilitate the input of citizens. Successful planning processes all share one thing in common: the involvement of the entire community as equal partners in making decisions.[4]

To ensure involvement, consider:

--MEETING LOCATIONS. Where do you hold meetings? Are meetings accessible to people without cars and/or with disabilities?

--GET CREATIVE! Create a speaker series or hold forums in schools, senior centers, churches, or civic organization meetings?

Involving Citizens, Ctn.

--DIVERSE LANGUAGES. Should forums for community input in a variety of languages be held? Do you provide large type or sign language options?

--HONEST INVOLVEMENT. When citizens do give their input, is it incorporated into the planning documents? Are all options fully considered?

--USE WRITTEN MATERIALS. What kinds of community surveys or focus groups might be effective? Identify newspapers or other organizations that are willing to distribute surveys. How will this information be incorporated into the final plan?

Obtaining Resources

Community Planning can be financially costly. Estimates range from \$45,000 to \$200,000[5] to fund advertising, technical assistance and community involvement.

Community organizations should seek donations and commitment from internal and external sources. Some suggestions are:

--SEEK HELP FROM CITY AND COUNTY STAFF. Local government officials may be able to identify sources available to assist with the planning process.

--SEEK REGIONAL AND STATE ASSISTANCE. The Florida Department of Community Affairs offers assistance in identifying funding sources for community plans. In addition their Division of Community Planning offers technical assistance grants. For State assistance see http://www.dca.state.fl.us/fdcp/dcp/planninggrants/index.cfm and Regional Assistance: www.swfrpc.org .

--APPROACH LOCAL BUSINESSES. Your community may be able to obtain in-kind or cash donations. A local printer, for example, might donate flyers to advertise community meetings. The local chamber of commerce may be a good resource for connecting with business.