

**Official Minutes of  
MARION COUNTY  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

June 11, 2024

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 2:17 p.m. on Tuesday, June 11, 2024 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

**INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP BY CHAIRMAN MICHELLE STONE**

Chairman Stone advised that the workshop was scheduled this afternoon to discuss the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR).

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of our Country.

**ROLL CALL**

Upon roll call the following members were present: Chairman Michelle Stone, District 5; Vice-Chairman Kathy Bryant, District 2; Commissioner Craig Curry, District 1; Commissioner Matthew McClain, District 3; and Commissioner Carl Zalak, III, District 4. Also present were County Attorney Matthew G. Minter, County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes, Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Tracy Straub, Growth Services Director Chuck Varadin, Deputy Growth Services Director Ken Weyrauch, and Planners Kathleen Brugnoli, Eryn Mertens, and Marcus Lloyd.

The Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 11 page Agenda packet to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation.

**WORKSHOP PRESENTATION**

1. Provide an Overview and Receive Board Input Regarding the Evaluation and Appraisal Report – June 11, 2024, at 1:30 p.m.

Growth Services Director Chuck Varadin presented the following recommendation:

Description/Background: During this workshop, Growth Services staff with their consultant, Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc., will present the project strategy regarding Marion County's 2025 Evaluation Appraisal Report (EAR). Florida Statute requires a review of the Comprehensive Plan every seven years to ensure consistency with statutory requirements and community engagement. This report, the EAR, is due February 2025 with identified changes to the Comprehensive Plan to be completed within one year.

Recommended Action: Staff is seeking Board discussion.

Growth Services Director Chuck Varadin provided a brief overview of what will be addressed today relating to the EAR. He advised that Florida Statutes (FS) requires the EAR to take place every 7 years to ensure there is consistency with Statutory requirements and community engagement, noting the report is due February 2025. Mr. Varadin stated one year after the EAR is due, the Comprehensive Plan must be completed with the updates.

Blair Knighting, Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. (KHA), provided a brief overview of her work history and qualifications. She stated a Comprehensive Plan is the overview of the

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community, noting it is the “why” for the Land Development Code (LDC). The LDC is usually thought of as the “how” for land development. Ms. Knighting reiterated that the EAR is required by State Statute at least every seven years. She stated the report determines if there is a need to amend the the Comprehensive Plan to reflect changes in State requirements since the last time the Comprehensive Plan was updated and determine changes needed based on changes to local conditions. The EAR was last completed in Marion County in 2018.

Ms. Knighting advised that KHA will place every policy in the Comprehensive Plan into a spread sheet and evaluate each one to determine the following: does it meet statutory compliance; does it need to be revised; is it fine the way it is; and does the objective goal make sense for this community. This matrix will be a guiding document and assist when making changes to the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Knighting stated part of the EAR process is public engagement, noting all public comments and suggestions are documented in the matrix. She stated a lot of times community members focus on LDC items and not the Comprehensive Plan. She stated KHA is also updating the data inventory and analysis, as well as reviewing all of the plans the County has enacted or adopted over the years to ensure the goal of the County is understood and the Comprehensive Plan aligns with those goals.

Ms. Knighting advised that a Planned Service Area (PSA) is a compact, walkable, and mixed-use center or community hub where infrastructure is in place, or has the potential to be in place, and an increased concentration of residential, employment, retail, mass transit, and other uses are located, or can be appropriately located.

Ms. Knighting commented on the Public Engagement Plan for the EAR, noting there are a series of workshops with the public planned for July. The purpose of the public workshops is to understand what the community wants, what they like and what they want to see changed. She advised that stakeholder meetings will also take place. Ms. Knighting stated Quick Response (QR) Code cards have been created to be handed out to the public, which links to a website ([www.marionfl.org/EAR](http://www.marionfl.org/EAR)). This website provides information relating to the EAR, as well as two online surveys.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Ms. Knighting advised that all four public workshops will have the same presentation, noting the locations of the meetings are in different parts of the County to allow more public participation. She stated the date and times of the workshops are posted on the EAR website. Ms. Knighting advised that the EAR website will be maintained and kept up to date throughout the project.

Commissioner Zalak opined that the meetings should take place in the evenings and commented on the lack of attendance there would be during the day. He stated the location may also need to be moved further out in his District. Commissioner Zalak requested the attendance numbers for the meeting in his District are reported back to the Board.

Chairman Stone stated the QR codes need to be available at all Marion County Libraries, printed on Utilities bills, and on the Truth in Millage (TRIM) notices.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Ms. Knighting advised that the survey will be open for the entire project timeline, noting the letter must be submitted to the State by February 2025. She stated the meetings will be advertised on social media, the EAR website, and announced during BCC meetings.

Commissioner Bryant suggested advertising in the Voice of South Marion newspaper. She opined that announcing the workshops at the BCC meetings and on social media may not be enough.

Chairman Stone advised that PSA's could go out on the radio stations as well. Commissioner Bryant stated it would be better not to hold these workshops during lunch hours.

Commissioner McClain questioned how the consultant determines if the community engagement is successful. Ms. Knighting advised that some communities are very active and some are not. She stated engagement from 500 people would be amazing, noting people tend to be uninterested in Comprehensive Plans until they are involved and understand the Plan.

Chairman Stone commented on the successful community engagement during the Broadband outreach, noting Ms. Knighting can touch base with Legislative Liaison Matthew Cretul to determine what was done to involve the public.

Commissioner Zalak addressed the low attendance rates at meetings and suggested sending out mailers or doing a person-to-person poll.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Ms. Knighting advised that specific stakeholder meetings will be held with local agencies and municipalities, local non-profits, and local businesses/development community.

Ms. Knighting advised that 6 display boards will be posted at each of the community workshops containing questions for attendee feedback, noting these questions are also part of the online survey.

Commissioner Zalak expressed concern with the PSA language being utilized.

Ms. Knighting advised that the language can be reevaluated to better fit the County. General discussion ensued.

Ms. Knighting stated there is PSA language in the current Comprehensive Plan, which references the PSA being within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) or outside the UGB. She advised that there are utilities outside of the UGB.

Commissioner McClain expressed concern with trying to place PSA's outside the UGB when the County is trying to get infrastructure within the UGB.

Chairman Stone advised that infrastructure is already in place outside the UGB.

Ms. Knighting advised that the Comprehensive Plan is 10 to 20 years out, noting the Board could potentially fill in the UGB and then move to PSAs.

Commissioner Bryant commented on the growth taking place in the County and questioned what the Board was trying to accomplish with PSAs that is not already happening. Deputy Director Ken Weyrauch, Growth Services, advised that Marion County is a hot bed for growth at the moment and there is a lot of development, but it requires transportation to get from place to place. He stated the PSA is intended to create a community node where someone can walk or bicycle to the location.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Weyrauch advised that the PSAs will vary in size and the locations have not been identified at this time. Staff's intention is to perform the survey to determine what the people want and review the data for the capacity of the infrastructure to ensure it is not being overburdened. He stated Marion Oaks is developing at approximately 1,000 homes annually, noting a PSA in this area could create a central node for entertainment or retail development. Mr. Weyrauch advised that the southwest corridor of the County is almost completely built out or has a development approval. He stated the intention is to determine where the next growth is coming and figure out how to guide the growth in a way to create destinations within the County.

General discussion ensued.

Mr. Bouyounes stated the PSA can be removed from the Comprehensive Plan if the Board does not feel it is beneficial.

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Commissioner Bryant commented on the importance of clarity relating to the PSA language within the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Zalak opined that the cities should be focused on PSAs and not the County, noting the County should not be trying to figure out where to place the most compact, urbanized and high-density development. Commissioner Stone concurred.

Commissioner Zalak requested staff provide a visual description of a PSA.

Mr. Bouyounes stated the Board will need to determine what a PSA will be for Marion County.

General discussion ensued.

It was the general consensus of the Board to allow Commissioner Zalak to work with the consultant to define what a PSA will look like for Marion County.

Ms. Knighting commented on the next steps after the EAR is complete, noting the letter is due February 2025. Within 1 year the Comprehensive Plan has to be updated with all of the recommended changes. She stated typically after updating the Comprehensive Plan the LDC is updated. She provided a brief overview the current project timeline.

Mr. Bouyounes questioned when the next time information will be brought back before the Board for review. Ms. Knighting advised that the recommendations can be brought back before the Board at a workshop prior to being presented to the community.

Chairman Stone suggested the next BCC workshop be held in late September or early October.

In response to Commissioner Zalak, Ms. Knighting advised that during the BCC workshop each element can be addressed.

General discussion ensued.

Commissioner Zalak opined that at least 3 workshops need to be scheduled to review the recommended changes. He stated the workshops can be held on the first Tuesday of each month in September, October and November 2024 at 2:00 p.m. in place of the zoning meeting. It was the general consensus of the Board to agree.

Commissioner Curry questioned if the current aviation issue will be addressed by the end of the year. Chairman Stone advised that it is not defined when the aviation topic will be address at this time.

Mr. Bouyounes questioned if the matter should be included in the EAR. Commissioner Curry opined that it would make sense to have the information relating to aviation by the end of the year.

Ms. Knighting clarified that the EAR is a letter to the State, noting it is not the matrix. She advised that after sending the letter the Board has 1 year to make the changes to the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Curry stated it was his understanding that everything had to be done by the end of December 2024.

Ms. Knighting clarified that the letter is due to the State in February 2025.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Ms. Knighting advised that community outreach meetings will take place in October/November 2024. She stated the community will also be able to provide public comment at the public hearing where the Board votes to send the letter to the State.

Commissioner Zalak advised that changes to the Comprehensive Plan can be made outside of the letter.

Chairman Stone commented on scheduling conflicts with holding a workshop on the first Tuesday of September due to the Labor Day holiday that week and an existing planned workshop.

Mr. Bouyounes stated staff will target the first Tuesday of the month for the workshop, but if there is a conflict a different date will be brought back to the Board for consideration. He advised that when the letter is sent to the State the County has to be very specific about the evaluation and what will be changed, added or deleted from the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Knighting advised that the letter could be a paragraph advising the State that changes need to be made, but details are not needed. She stated the County will have one year to make changes, noting the year time frame will go by quickly.

General discussion ensued.

In response to Commissioner Curry, Commissioner Zalak advised that the consultant is reviewing the Comprehensive Plan to ensure all Statutes are being met.

Ms. Knighting advised that her team is working with staff to determine what is and is not working from a regulatory perspective. She stated they are also reviewing current policies to determine if they are being followed and if they are needed.

Commissioner Zalak commented on the buffering requirements and the lack of follow up to ensure buffer requirements are met.

Commissioner Bryant questioned if an approved PUD that has expired comes back before the Board can the Board require developer to adhere to current buffer standards.

Mr. Minter stated the Board could require the updated buffers.

Commissioner Zalak advised that the issue is the PUD extensions.

Mr. Weyrauch advised that there are two ways a developer can receive a PUD extension: 1) through a Declaration of Emergency Orders; and 2) coming back to the Board and receiving a 1 year extension at a time.

Commissioner Bryant opined that a PUD that has not been developed and comes before the Board for an extension should be required to meet the current buffer standards.

Mr. Minter advised that the PUD when approved should contain a clause similar to a Special Use Permit. He stated vested rights become an issue when people spend funds in reliance to the regulations at time of approval.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Minter advised that generally speaking, spending funds to go through the approval process does not qualify for vested rights. He suggested if a clause is put into the Conditions advising the applicant that if the PUD expires or goes before the Board for renewal the application would be subject to current standards.

Commissioner Bryant questioned whether language can be added to PUD approvals that require the developer to adhere to any new buffer requirements in the LDC, should they be updated prior to the start of development. Mr. Minter advised that the Board would have to be clear on the language.

General discussion ensued relating to buffers.

**BOARD DISCUSSION AND CLOSING COMENTS: None.**

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There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 3:28 p.m.

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Michelle Stone, Chairman

Attest:

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Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk

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