

## Statement of Need for RAC Expansion

### Addressing Agricultural and Equestrian Needs

The proposed expansion of the Rural Activity Center (RAC) to include a comprehensive farm supply store is essential for meeting the growing demands of the local agricultural and equestrian community. Currently, farmers and equestrians are required to travel substantial distances to obtain essential supplies, resulting in increased costs and inefficiencies created by long travel distances and multiple stops. The addition of a farm supply store, offering products such as seed, feed, fertilizer, fencing posts, tack, equestrian hay, hardware, irrigation and plumbing supplies, garden and landscape materials, and farm equipment, will serve as a centralized resource hub in a RAC which is in need of a catalytic development to spur utilization.

### Strategic Property Utilization

The designated property for this expansion is ideally suited due to its ample size, practical layout, and strategic access points. The property is approx. 34.3 acres, making it the largest property in the RAC. The substantial size of the property will allow it to accommodate a diverse range of products, ensuring comprehensive availability for all necessary supplies in one location. The size also allows for efficient layout and easy navigation for customers, enhancing the overall shopping experience and providing ample space for parking, drive aisles, stormwater controls, and buffer areas. Furthermore, the property's multiple access points from major roads and highways provide excellent accessibility and flexibility through the site plan process. The property is located at the convergence of two collectors (464B and 110<sup>th</sup>) and US HWY 27, and is approximately 0.5 miles from NW HWY 225, another collector. This location serves customers and households from the north, south, and especially from the west, as there are currently no RACs or commercial nodes between this location and the intersection of 464B and the county line ~6.5 miles to the west.

### Eliminating Urban Sprawl

Expanding the RAC to include this farm supply store will contribute to the objective of concentrating commercial activities within designated areas, thereby mitigating urban sprawl and preserving the rural and equestrian character of the region. By centralizing commercial development within the RAC, existing infrastructure can be utilized more efficiently, reducing the environmental impact associated with dispersed development.

### Utilizing an Underutilized RAC

This particular RAC is currently underutilized, offering an excellent opportunity to enhance its economic viability and community value. Developing a farm supply store within this RAC on its largest parcel ensures that the area is put to productive and beneficial use and will transform the RAC into a more dynamic and attractive destination, encouraging further investment and growth. By

## Attachment D

revitalizing the RAC, the project will foster economic development, create jobs, and provide a central location for agricultural and equestrian supplies, thereby supporting local businesses and the broader community. The current RAC encompasses approximately 32.8 acres, which is well below the Comprehensive Plan maximum of 96 acres. Going concern business uses (see table attached) account for ~23.7 acres, and the remaining ~9.1 acres consist of horse farms, vacant land, and the subject property which is not currently in use. Within the RAC's current footprint, there is a commercial utilization rate (not including horse farms) of ~72.26%. At present, the RAC could be expanded by 63.2 acres pursuant to the comprehensive plan, and the current application requests an expansion of 16.03 acres. Once the subject property's RAC portion is expanded and utilized, the utilization rate for commercial property within this RAC will be ~87.18%.

### **Supporting Fellowship, Marion County**

The Fellowship County Census Division (CCD) has a unique demographic profile compared to the broader county. According to the US Census Bureau's Fellowship CCD profile (May 2024), there are an estimated 14,934 households in the Fellowship CCD, the median age in Fellowship is significantly higher at 64.4 years compared to the county's median of 48.5 years, and those 65 and older living in Fellowship make up 48.7% of its population, as opposed to 29.1% of the county's population. This older population living in Fellowship also has an average commute time of 28.4 minutes. Adding a vibrant and comprehensive rural supply store will reduce distances traveled by the residents of Fellowship and provide them nearby services in an appropriate location, reducing traffic, emissions, and enhancing quality of life.

### **Supporting the Equestrian Community**

Providing accessible equestrian supplies is crucial for supporting local horse farms and equestrian activities, which are integral to the area's culture and economy. The project aligns with the preservation goals of the Marion County Farmland Preservation Area (FPA) by supporting agricultural activities and ensuring that commercial development is compatible with the rural and equestrian character of the region. There are no other farm/equestrian stores within the Fellowship RAC, nor are there any within 3 miles. The nearest stores with some overlapping offerings are: Ocala Breeders' Feed & Supply (3.4 miles away in HWY 225A RAC), Berrettini Feed Specialists, Larsen Farms, and United Hay Sales and Equine Supplies (~4.5 miles in Blitchton RAC), Rural King (~8.1 miles away), Seminole Feed – 40 West Location (7.5 miles). It is worth noting that those distances are from the subject property to the other businesses, and do not account for additional travel required to get from surrounding landowners to those locations, which in many cases is significantly farther, or requires driving to the Fellowship RAC to then use Hwy 27 to access those stores.

### **Proximity to Equine Performance Center (EPC)**

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The RAC's proximity to the Equine Performance Center (EPC) further enhances its strategic value. The EPC, known for its state-of-the-art rehabilitation and conditioning facilities for horses, attracts numerous equestrians to the area. The addition of a farm supply store nearby will provide convenient access to essential supplies for EPC visitors, strengthening the overall appeal and functionality of the RAC. This synergy will support the local equestrian industry, enhancing both the economic and practical aspects of the community's agricultural and equestrian activities.

### **Compatibility with Farmland Preservation Goals**

The expansion of the RAC aligns with the mission of organizations like Horse Farms Forever, which emphasize the importance of maintaining the unique agricultural and equestrian heritage of the region. These organizations advocate for thoughtful, well-managed growth that protects farmland while enhancing the local economy. The farm supply store will support the preservation of agricultural lands by providing necessary resources for their maintenance and improvement and by concentrating the commercial services useful to the Farmland Preservation Area within well defined nodes at consequential intersections, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability of the region's farming and equestrian activities.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the expansion of this RAC to allow the subject parcel to be developed addresses the needs of the agricultural and equestrian community, promotes sustainable development, concentrates commercial activities to reduce sprawl and traffic, and enhances the economic vitality of the rural area. This project represents an efficient utilization of an underutilized RAC, meets the practical needs of the local community, and aligns with Marion County's objectives for farmland preservation and thoughtful growth. The development will serve as a key resource hub, supporting the agricultural economy and preserving the unique rural character of the region.

## Attachment D

PARCEL	NAME 1	SITUS	TOTAL ACRES	USE	RAC ACREAGE	
12518-000-00	FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH OF OCALA INC	10500 N US HWY 27	7.14	Church	7.14	Commercial
12522-000-00	FRIENDSHIP LODGE #53	10420 N US HWY 27	1.05	Masonic Lodge	1.05	Commercial
12528-000-00	HUDSON CHARLES F JR	10337 N US HWY 27	7.14	Commercial - PRC 6-10-2 RES IS BEING USED AS OFF, AND STORAGE FOR INSECTICIDE FOR AG.	7.14	Commercial
12528-001-00	SHELTERING HANDS INC	10397 N US HWY 27	2.9	Not-for profit	2.9	Commercial
12528-003-00	MADHAV ONE LLC	10317 N US HWY 27	0.93	Gas Station	0.93	Commercial
12542-000-00	ECLIPSE HOLDINGS LLC	10261 N US HWY 27	2.13	Horse Farm, owned by LLC	2.13	
12544-000-00	GREEN LANE FARM SOUTH LLC	10023 N US HWY 27	30	Horse Farm & Track	1.49	
12550-000-00	MERIDIAN LAND HOLDINGS INC	5465 NW 110TH AVE	34.31	Subject property, not used currently	3.26	
12554-001-00	CANTRELL SUZANNE GAY TRUST	10479 N US HWY 27	2.05	Vacant	2.05	
12576-002-01	MOORE ACRES LLC		14	Horse Farm - Non Commercial	0.17	
12518-001-00	FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH UNINCORP		2.51	Cemetery	2.51	Commercial
12554-000-00	BRASWELL ANNE STUBBS AMENDED		2.03	Commercial - Office building perhaps	2.03	Commercial