

THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY

IN BALANCE

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GUARDIANS OF MARTIN COUNTY



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Comp Plan - Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR)

The State of Florida requires that every seven years each local government analyze and make necessary changes to its Comprehensive Growth Management Plan (Comp Plan) as part of an "Evaluation and Appraisal Report" (EAR) process. The Guardians of Martin County were pleased there were over 100 people in attendance at the EAR scoping workshop regarding Martin County's Comp Plan back in August. The clear message from participants was that the County should not make changes that would weaken the Comp Plan

- protections of our environment and our essential quality of life.
- The Guardians believe that our Comp Plan differentiates us from other counties in the state; and that in keeping with our plan there should be:
 - No reduction in the protection of our wetlands;
 - No waivers or exceptions to the four-story height limit;
 - Continued vigilance in avoiding expansion of the Urban Services District boundary and several-fold increases in

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Update on Rural Lifestyle Zoning and Construction Underway at Discovery/Atlantic Fields

After several years of contentious public hearings and legal considerations, on September 18, 2023, Governor DeSantis and the Florida Cabinet approved an order that overturned Administrative Law Judge Francine Ffolke's 2021 finding that the Rural Lifestyle Amendment to the Martin County Comprehensive Plan was inconsistent with state law.

- **Land Conservation:** The Guardians believe that modifications to the proposed new zoning classifications could have had some positive benefits for the County, particularly if a portion of the anticipated new tax revenues could have been earmarked for

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Water Issues



Update on Rural Lifestyle Zoning and Construction Underway at Discovery/Atlantic Fields

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acquisition of conservation lands and proper provisions be made to identify and connect conservation corridors for people, wildlife and the environment. We believe that the new zoning proposal was passed by our Commission prematurely, as we were led to believe it was a “work in process” and it is our opinion that, instead, with continued negotiations, a win-win could have been the ultimate result.

Water: The Guardians are concerned about the lack of conditions regarding water for new projects otherwise eligible for approval under the Rural Lifestyle Zoning code. In this new zoning proposal, there are no provisions regarding water supply for projects that are proposed for locations outside the urban services districts. Furthermore, implementation of the new Code will allow the construction of golf courses and other potential sources of pollutants



Aerial Photo of Discovery Land (foreground), and Loxa-Lucie (background).
 Photo: Geoffrey Smith

without requiring monitoring or retrofits if the projects negatively impact water quality in downstream water bodies.

Sustaining Agriculture: The Guardians believe that non-polluting, sustainable agriculture should continue to be a viable component of Martin County’s economy. We supported the need for a study that would analyze how adoption of this

new zoning code on more than ten thousand acres of agricultural lands would affect this business, but the Commission moved forward without that analysis.

To read the Guardians’ Position Paper on the Rural Lifestyle Comp Plan Amendment, see <https://theguardiansofmartincounty.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Guardians-position-paper-on-RLZ-Amendment-rev-4-15-22-w-Exec-Summ.pdf>

Finally, without any notices to the public, or opportunities for the public to comment, the Discovery team’s request to increase the number of “golf villas”, which are counted as dwellings, was recently approved by the Local Planning Agency and the County Commission. ■

Preserving Paradise, a half cent at a time



For several years, Martin County residents have been lamenting that the County has no dedicated source of funding for the acquisition of conservation lands. Jim Snedeker, chairman of Martin County Forever and a Guardians Advisor, has been working with other colleagues and community leaders to analyze how to obtain such funding. In the September 17, 2023

issue of his “Friends and Neighbors” online newsletter, Tom Campenni provided an excellent summary of the status of this initiative. Click here to access the Campenni article: <https://www.friendsandneighborsofmartincounty.com/issue/47/sep-17-2023/?sq=sales+tax#section-20> ■

<https://www.martincountyforever.com/>

Harmony Ranch/Storie

A flash-point in growth management in Martin County for over a decade has been what should be done to develop several thousand acres on all four corners of the intersection of Bridge Road and Pratt-Whitney Road. On the positive side, the owners sold a southerly portion of the site to the South Florida Water Management District for land and water conservation. On the negative side, however, a costly lawsuit followed a decision by the Martin County Commission to reject changes to the County's Comprehensive Plan that would have allowed thousands of homes on the parcels for which the current land use is only designated Agricultural, allowing one residence per 20 acres.

Previously known as "Harmony Ranch", the project has returned under a new name ("Storie") and with a more environmentally-friendly marketing campaign. Application materials for project approval were transmitted to the County in September, which included the site plan provided next to this article.

There will be numerous opportunities for public comment at future meetings of the Local Planning Agency (LPA) and the Martin County Board of County Commissioners. Just as Newfield, the new mixed use development approved by the Palm Beach County Commission will forever change western Palm City, Storie, if approved, will forever change the area west of Hobe Sound. For the developer's artist's renderings and more information see: <https://storiefl.com/> ■



Source:<https://storiefl.com/>

Comp Plan - Evaluation and Appraisal Report

residential densities;

- No creation of new free-standing Urban Services Districts;
- More reliance on green infrastructure and low-impact development;
- Development and implementation of a land conservation strategy that will acquire unprotected ecologically valuable lands and link public lands and preserves through creative greenway corridors; and that
- A study of lands outside the Urban Services District is both necessary and

timely in order to develop strategies to maintain non-polluting agriculture as a sustainable component of Martin County's economy.

A portal on Martin County's website through which the public can provide comments regarding potential changes to our County's Comp Plan during the EAR process allows public input through December 31st. We ask that interested people weigh in at: <https://www.martin.fl.us/evaluation-and-appraisal-report-ear> to reinforce these and other possibilities

that will help maintain our county's unique character and quality of life. Scroll down to the box labeled "Take the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) Community Survey" and click to get started. The survey is critically important and will only take about 10 minutes to complete. **Please submit your comments.** ■

Water Update

Today Lake Okeechobee sits at a high of 16.21 feet and the St. Lucie River has not had heavy discharges in five years. Seagrasses are recovering and since 2019 water quality has ranged from excellent to poor depending on rainfall and runoff.

At the 10-26-23 Rivers Coalition meeting, South Florida Water Management District, Executive Director, Drew Bartlett and his executive team presented on "Moving Water South." They explained that although the dry season has officially started, no Lake Okeechobee water can be sent south to lower the lake because the Water Conservation Areas south of the lake are overflowing due to rain, and runoff from the Everglades Agricultural Area. Conditions are threatening sacred tree islands and fur bearing animals.

As the District is in the process of slowly lowering the water, creating capacity, there is hope Lake Okeechobee's

high waters can be sent south in December. The District also noted that all Storm Water Treatment Areas, the filters to the Water Conservation Areas and Everglades National Park, are finally replanted and no longer off-line as they partially have been over the past two years.

The District did not mention its own recent Water Resource Forum that documented the presence of a strong climatic pattern, El Niño, that is predicted to bring above average rainfall December through February that could add water to the lake and the Water Conservation Areas in spite of all efforts.

Lake Okeechobee remains under LORS operational guidance of the Army Corps of Engineers as the new lake schedule, LOSOM, has been delayed by NOAA researching toxic algae effects on west coast sea turtles. The Army Corps are

using adaptive protocol to deal with the situation making use of CERP's Indian River Lagoon South's C-44 Reservoir to clean water in the C-44 Canal, but not to the extent planned. Due to seepage issues, the reservoir is only at 7, not 15 feet, and is not expected to be working fully until 2026. At this time the C-23/24 Reservoir and Storm Water Treatment Area for the North Fork of the St. Lucie River is under construction with an estimated completion in 2032.

~Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch

Read more on Jacqui's Blog, at

https://search.aol.com/aol/search?q=Jacqui%20Thurlow%20Lippisch%20blog&s_it=loki-tb-sb ■

Our Mission

The Guardians of Martin County is a 501(c)3 organization committed to helping shape a positive future for Martin County, by educating residents about the value of balancing natural and man-made resources to enrich the quality of life in our communities.

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