



\$500,000 DEVELOPMENT STUDY PROVIDES

# No Relief for Martin County Residents

Good planning builds on the vision of local residents. When Martin County adopted the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan in 1990, the wishes of residents led to rules that maintain sensible growth and limit development in rural areas. Despite recent attempts by some to weaken the Comprehensive Plan, fundamental concepts have remained intact:

*The Urban Services Boundary.* The USB allows the county to provide services like roads, water, sewer, and schools to urban areas generally east of I-95. All of our current county Commissioners have pledged to uphold the USB because it prevents sprawl, controls over-development, and reduces taxes.

*The 20-acre rule.* Currently in Western Martin, land is zoned at 1 home per 20 acres. Experts agree that the 20-acre rule has been a large factor in keeping Martin different from surrounding counties.

Over a year ago, Martin County's four developer-financed commissioners voted to pay \$500,000 for a study that may do away with the Comprehensive Plan's rules that have made our community such a special place to live.

## What does the study prescribe for Martin County?

The study's consultant, Glatting Jackson, recommends clustering homes on Western Martin's rural lands by granting density increases to developers.

The Palm Beach Post's analysis of the consultant's work stated, "The report recommends what developers want — cramming more development on vacant land inside the urban services boundary, a new town west of Palm City, expansion of the Indiantown urban boundary and clustering everywhere, including the Pal-Mar swamp, muck lands near Lake Okeechobee, and on land needed for Everglades restoration. In short, the report recommends clustered development anywhere, at the discretion of the county commission."

How large of a density increase can be expected for clustering out west? The Palm Beach Post reported, "An informal poll of developers showed that they want as much as 1 unit per acre, to make clustering economically beneficial." 20 times the current one unit per 20 acre rule.

"At one home per 20 acres, the ranchettes would add a total of 8,000 homes to the county. Changing rules to one unit per acre, for example, could add 160,000 homes. Drive south to see what exploding growth has done in western Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach, or take a look at what's happening in St. Lucie County, where existing residents are just beginning to deal with the problems a constant stream of new residents creates."

## Are western landowners entitled to density increases?

Western landowners and the development industry mistakenly say yes. Last year The Palm Beach Post reported on several landowners who will profit from density increases out west, "'Somebody might make... the right offer in the future,' said [a landowner] whose family owns [a] tree farm and ranch west of Hobe Sound. 'They should get to have maximum value.'"

Western landowners believe they have a right to density increases on their property to maximize profits, regardless of its effect on the great majority of Martin residents.

However, the law says otherwise. The March 2005 Florida Bar Journal states, "In Martin County v. Melvyn R. Yusem, the Florida Supreme Court upheld a county's decision not to 'up-zone' agricultural lands. The court held that landowners do not have a right to density increases."

Besides erroneously asserting the right to density increases, large landowners and the development industry also claim that Martin County residents must accommodate all projected growth, whether we like it or not. County consultant Glatting Jackson concurs, so the question arises:

## How much of Martin's projected growth must be accommodated?

In Martin County our population is around 140,000. Estimates for the year 2025 range from a low of 145,000 up to 242,000.

According to the Everglades Law Center, "Growth may be coming, but local communities do not need to accommodate it at all costs. Residents don't have to sacrifice upland habitats or other ecosystems to accommodate growth in the Keys, Palm Beach, Martin or elsewhere. Local communities don't have to sacrifice their quality of life. They don't have to just suck it up and take it. Make sure changes are necessary before you make them."

## What can residents do now?

February 20, 2007 is an important day for Martin County's future. At 1:30 pm, the County Commission will accept or reject their \$500,000 Development Patterns Study. The final decision lies with the county commissioners -- let them know your opinion.

Plan on bringing all your family and friends or if you can't make it contact the commission: call: 288-5420, fax: 288-5432, email: commissioners@martin.fl.us, or drop off: 2401 Monterey Rd.

Tell all of the county commissioners to reject the Glatting Jackson report and go back to local planning consistent with our comprehensive plan and, most importantly, consistent with what the people of Martin County want.

The Florida Department of Community Affairs also recently confirmed that a local government is not required to accommodate all population projections.

Martin residents are not required to "suck it up and take it" from the development industry when our quality of life is being sacrificed. Yet the study by Glatting Jackson recommends just that. Residents and officials must address some questions resulting from the Development Study's call for clustering dense rural development.

## What are the costs of clustering and who will pay them, newcomers or existing residents?

Before the consultant's recommendations are considered, the costs to existing Martin County residents must be calculated. Residents have a right to be concerned about higher taxes, more traffic and other serious over-development problems.

Consider what The Palm Beach Post recently reported about clustering out west, "Those who already live in Martin would pay higher taxes to put water, sewers, schools, roads, fire and police protection out west.

"One of the selling points for [the clustering recommendation] -- that opening western lands to uncontrolled development will ease traffic on the crowded coast -- is a lie. More people always mean more traffic, not less."

## If residents don't benefit from this clustering, who does?

Large landowners out west and the development industry benefit to be sure, but there are others. The Palm Beach Post reports that, "Friends of Martin County, a phony 'citizens committee' [is] weighted with western landowners and employees of developers and landowners... Mary Dawson, who organized the 'Friends' and owns western land, took money from a source she won't disclose to pay her group's expenses."

According to Florida Today, "Glatting Jackson [is] a design and engineering firm working with The Viera Co. on its massive development plan west of Interstate 95." Do Martin residents want "a design and engineering" firm, that profits from working on "massive development" west of I-95, planning the future of our rural lands?

## What are the views of Martin County residents today regarding growth, development, and conservation in the county's rural lands?

Two national polling organizations conducted surveys in Martin County during 2006. The results caught the interest of Jon Lerner, President of Basswood Research, who commented, "After years of conducting surveys across the U.S., I am hard-pressed to recall an issue with a stronger sentiment than this one. The voters of Martin County clearly want to preserve their surroundings and are adamant about slowing growth and preserving their open space."

The Basswood Research survey of June 2006 showed:

- 81% oppose additional residential development in Martin County
- 75% would be less likely to vote for a candidate who wants increased development

In March of 2006, a survey by Princeton International had similar results:

- 82% of respondents want to rein in growth
- 13% believe development was "too important to slow down"

## What recommendations should the consultant have made concerning the future of Martin County's rural lands?

*Continue to hold the line on sprawl.* Building cluster cities on rural land out west is the definition of sprawl. Just look at what intense western development is doing to our surrounding counties. We must maintain our strong Urban Services Boundary (USB) and associated policies designed to prevent sprawling development in rural areas.

*Increase efforts to protect our sensitive natural and agricultural lands.* We must ensure the long-term survival of our sensitive rural lands. Dartmouth Professor Donella Meadows wrote, "Open land pays far more -- often twice as much -- in property taxes than it costs in services. Cows don't put their kids in school; trees don't put potholes in the roads. Open land absorbs floods, recharges aquifers, cleans the air, harbors wildlife, and measurably increases the value of property nearby."

*Increase commitment to river restoration.* According to The Palm Beach Post, "Removing the [urban] boundaries would boost property values, which could make land too expensive for governments to buy for Everglades and Indian River Lagoon restoration." We must show the U.S. Congress that Martin County is serious about preserving sensitive rural lands needed for the Everglades Restoration Program.