

# MEC Land Use Study

## Attachment B

### Major Recommendations

## **MEC STUDY MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION PLAN**

The attached Final Study includes detailed findings and explanations for recommended action plans. The following is a brief synopsis of some of the major recommendations and action plans taken from the Study. A map featuring the MEC Zones is attached (Attachment C).

### ➤ **SOUTH COUNTY MEC EXPANSION**

South County MECs are faced with different challenges than North County MECs. In general, there is a lack of well-placed MEC land in South County, and existing South County MEC lands lack adequate infrastructure. Expansion of South County MECs and the provision of adequate infrastructure to incentivize employment-oriented development are the primary recommendations for South County MECs.

**ACTION PLAN:** MEC Area 12 is one of the best situated MECs in South County. It is recommended that MEC Area 12 be expanded significantly southwards to Venice Avenue as far east as Fellsmere Road. Within the expansion area for MEC Area 12 parts can be designated a Mixed Use Center, parts as a general MEC, and parts Exclusive Industrial District.

For example, the intersection of Venice Avenue and Jacaranda Boulevard may be appropriate for a Mixed Use Center. However, large parcels should be reserved for the development of major employment. Infrastructure provision and/or incentives are highly recommended to facilitate development of this area.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS:** Road Impact Fee Mitigation Program and the Economic Development Transportation Fund could provide funding for road improvements. A Water and Wastewater Capacity Fee Mitigation Program would provide grants towards water and wastewater treatment capacity and would provide incentives for businesses to locate in areas that do not yet contain appropriate infrastructure for increased densities.

Capital Investment Tax Credit Program and Industrial Development Bonds may also be utilized to encourage the relocation of specific types of businesses to MEC Area 12. Site-specific studies may be used to determine necessary preparation and constraints for development of parcels, particularly larger parcels reserved for major employment.

➤ **EXCLUSIVE INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS AND APPROPRIATE ZONING**

The County's industrial areas are threatened by incompatible uses such as housing and commercial development. To respond to these "reverse" incursions, it is recommended that the County designate certain areas as Exclusive Industrial Districts, preventing future land use incompatibilities.

**ACTION PLAN:** Revise Land Use Categories. Land use policies need to be reformed in order to promote greater intensity of land uses, redevelopment in selected areas, and protection of industrial districts. The following is a list of specific actions the County can take towards these goals:

1. Encourage IR as the preferred and default zoning category within designated Exclusive Industrial Districts.
2. Reform PED zoning to be more flexible with regard to urban design but maintain basic standards on maximum block length, required pedestrian amenities, and pedestrian-oriented building design (much like PMI prescribes).
3. Review current zoning codes and allow flexibility in open space requirements, parking requirements, front and side buffers, and allowable heights.
4. Establish a development review process and criteria for a new floating business park zone based upon current Planned Commerce Development (PCD) zoning standards. Ensure that the floating zones avoid becoming a nuisance to surrounding land uses. Development review should address issues such as adequate infrastructure, traffic patterns, environmental impacts, and adjacent land compatibility in the requirements.

➤ **PROMOTE REDEVELOPMENT IN CERTAIN MEC AREAS**

Research from the Study indicates that land use intensities in most existing MECs are very low – less than 10% floor area ratio (FAR). This suggests that land is being used inefficiently, with too much open space and undeveloped land relative to building area. Typical FAR in a suburban setting are between 20 to 30 percent. If the County is running out of employment land, it makes sense to use existing employment lands as efficiently as possible.

The County may wish to begin development of a long term strategy to transition from a Greenfield development to a redevelopment paradigm. As with other MEC lands, greater density and intensity of land use should be permitted, especially on areas where redevelopment is being promoted.

**ACTION PLAN:** A thorough redevelopment master plan is the recommended tool for facilitating redevelopment. Redevelopment planning captures the attention of land owners and developers and lets them know the County is seeking to promote redevelopment in a given area. Redevelopment planning can explore the depth of the real estate market and facilitate research on potential incentives, which help serve as a catalyst to promote redevelopment in certain areas. Redevelopment planning is greatly facilitated by having detailed, accurate, and timely information on land use, building size and use, and other vital business information such as sales receipts.

It is recommended that the County start to track redevelopment activity, vacancies, underdeveloped lands, and other signs of ripeness for redevelopment on a regular basis as an aid to future redevelopment planning, and to assist in determining those areas that are most appropriate for targeting redevelopment planning. The Economic Development Corporation of Sarasota County would be an ideal participant in this effort.

DRI agreements, a necessary part of state planning requirements, often effectively cap the intensity of land use between 7 to 14%. It is recommended that the County use creative strategies to increase effective and permitted land use intensities. Strategies can include reducing open space and setback requirements, increasing height requirements, and even requiring a minimum intensity for new developments. Height requirements can be made more flexible by allowing tiered heights, with greater heights away from the MEC boundary. The introduction of mixed use into DRIs and increased transit service can help reduce automobile use and possibly allow for more efficient uses of land within DRIs.

One of the most important incentives the County can provide is a full service infrastructure to lands that are designated for employment-oriented developments. Industries of all kinds are attracted to land that has sufficient water and sewer service and a high level of transportation access. Other priority infrastructure areas may include full service electrical utilities, information technology infrastructure, and, for certain bulk industries, railroads and ports. Providing the full range of infrastructure before development is in place is one of the best ways to stimulate desired development.

Most typically, local governments use tax incentives for job creation to provide support for infrastructure, capital equipment purchases, and even

facility upgrades. In some instances, local governments will invest in the infrastructure themselves to prepare a site for a new or expanded facility.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS:** Redevelopment policy is a fairly new field for many suburban communities, and the number of approaches seen across state and local governments is varied. Redevelopment strategies include redevelopment planning, tax incentives and abatements, public sector land assembly, infrastructure provision, and regulatory flexibility.

#### **Best Practices in Redevelopment**

In the state of Maryland, a site that qualifies for remediation assistance from the Department of Business and Economic Development's Brownfield Revitalization Incentive Program (BRIP) is eligible to receive a real property tax credit as well. The site must be located in a jurisdiction that has elected to participate in the BRIP, must be owned by an inculpable person, and participate in the Maryland Department of the Environment's Voluntary Cleanup Program.

In the state of Washington, King County waives part of the impact fees for redevelopment in designated areas.

Financial incentives such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) are often used to promote redevelopment in key areas. Since redevelopment usually increases the tax base of local government, promoting redevelopment often leaves local government better off in the long run.

#### ➤ **PROACTIVE ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The County is generally less aggressive in its offerings of economic development incentives. For example, the County does not market the use of Industrial Development or Revenue Bonds (IDBs or IRBs) to assist businesses with the purchase and preparation of land for industrial development.

**ACTION PLAN:** Economic development and land use policy can be coordinated by promoting industries which are employment-intensive over low density employment industries. The basic issue is one of land scarcity; if land is scarce, it is better to attract industries that have a high number of employees per acre. This will allow the County to attract the highest number of jobs from its limited employment-oriented lands. This strategy suggests that incentives should not be used to attract low employment density industries such as warehousing and distribution.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS:** IDBs or IRBs are traditionally supported through an Industrial Development Authority, as a low-interest, or no-interest bonds provide a low-interest opportunity for manufacturers and other capital-intensive businesses to expand locally. Such programs offer an opportunity for businesses to borrow directly from the local government at a below-market rater.

Through an Industrial Development Authority, an economic development agency will install basic infrastructure and/or services to the site so that it is immediately ready for development or occupancy, or the agency prepares a detailed report assessing the necessary steps that will be required to prepare the site and an approximate timeline for development.

The goal of such a program is to prepare sites for the relocation of specific targeted industries and to signal to these industries that the jurisdiction has sites available to them with an outline of exactly what needs to happen to make the sites ready for use.