

SARASOTA COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Planning & Development Services Business Center

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: The Board of County Commissioners

THROUGH: James L. Ley, County Administrator

FROM: Rob Lewis, Executive Director

RE: Sarasota County's Major Employment Center (MEC)
Land Use Study

DATE: October 2, 2007

RECOMMENDED MOTIONS

- a) To accept the Major Employment Center Land Use Study; and
- b) To direct staff on topics for future Board discussion on implementation of the Study.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the Evaluation and Appraisal Report-based Comprehensive Plan Amendments, the County adopted Future Land Use Policy 3.4.9 (Attachment A) stating that the County would "conduct a study to determine the future demand for Major Employment Center land uses." In September, 2006, the Board of County Commissioners engaged EDAW of Atlanta, Georgia, and ERA of Washington, D.C. to prepare the MEC Study. EDAW/ERA was charged with the preparation of the Study pursuant to FLU 3.4.9, and to ensure land use policy for managing current and future Major Employment Centers (MEC) were aligned with the County's economic development goals. Both EDAW and ERA are recognized as international leaders in economic analysis, forecasting, planning, design, and land use policy. EDAW/ERA presented their preliminary findings to the Board at their June 26, 2007 meeting.

The goals of the October 2, 2007 meeting are to request the Board accept the MEC Study and to discuss next steps in implementation strategies with staff. There are a number of

observations and recommendations for the Board's consideration for optimal economic development based on EDAW/ERA's research and professional expertise. In addition, staff will seek direction from the Board on prioritization of outcomes and specific implementation strategies. We anticipate future meetings with the Board to talk about specific implementation measures.

There are a number of broad issues brought forward in the MEC Study that need addressing. EDAW/ERA recommends the County considers more differentiation in the character of MEC areas and look for ways to promote specific MEC areas tied to specific clusters of target businesses and that the County look at the creation of incentive programs to help stimulate and support economic development in our MEC areas. With regard to MEC acreage needs, the Study indicates that historically, we have had a less intensive pattern of MEC land usage and we need to focus on the more efficient use of MEC lands rather than the designation of more acreage. The exception would be in the South County area where additional acreage would be appropriate. In considering the more efficient use of MEC acreage, many of the same issues that we have been discussing in relation to redevelopment and mixed use are applicable, most particularly the needs to address infrastructure.

The key recommendations of the Study and action plan from EDAW/ERA are contained in Attachment B and Attachment C, respectively. The following sections of this report include summary information on the history of MEC designations and observations on MEC redevelopment from staff, as well as information from EDAW/ERA on the County's Economic Profile (Attachment D).

HISTORY OF MEC DESIGNATIONS ON THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The Major Employment Center future land use designation in the County's comprehensive plan provides locations for employment and economic development opportunities, other than those provided through commercial centers. This designation was introduced in 1989. It replaced the term "Industrial" as a more accurate reflection of the nature of employment areas found in Sarasota County. Uses typically found in MECs include light industrial, manufacturing, warehousing and office uses, with commercial activities as allowed in the implementing zoning districts. Limited amounts of residential development are also permitted and workforce housing is encouraged.

Typically, MEC capacity analysis methodologies produce outcomes solely measured in raw land acreages. This assumes an infinite supply of land and does not take into consideration underutilized lots and potential for redevelopment, particularly in a development form that better utilizes the property. Other issues often not taken into consideration are the changing trends of industries, based on technology and location preferences that vary by employer.

MEC designations on the Future Land Use map have undergone several changes over the past fifteen years through improved mapping, comprehensive plan amendments and municipal annexations by the Cities of Venice and North Port. The raw MEC acreages are illustrated on the attached graphic (Attachment E) which identifies three snapshots in time beginning with the major comprehensive plan update in 1989.

The designations on the future land use map at that time were not parcel specific and provided very general delineations. A subsequent update to the plan in 1996 (RU-27 amendment) utilized an enhanced parcel database providing detailed calculations and parcel specific mapping which represented close to 600 additional acres.

From 1996 to date, approximately 1,563 acres of MEC designation were lost through annexations in the south county area, with an additional 480 acres removed by comprehensive plan amendment redesignations in the south County area. It is in this area where the MEC Study has identified the need for bolstering employment balance in the County through additional MEC land use opportunities. There is also a recently approved 276 acre redesignation from MEC in north County, somewhat offset by gains of 78 acres that have also been realized through amendments in the area along Fruitville Road east of I-75.

The Study's future employment forecast (detailed further below and in the attached Study) suggests that there is adequate land for the County through 2030. However, the premise of this forecast recommends that the County use its land more intensively (see below and attached Study).

MEC LAND USE STUDY POLICY REVIEW

The MEC Study included a thorough review of the County's land use policies. After review, it was determined that the County's land use policy for MECs may present unintended consequences.

The Comprehensive Plan states that MECs are for employment based land uses, and that other uses should be accessory. But in subsequent language relating to other MEC policies, encouragement for developing affordable housing and mixed-use development is also mentioned. While these policies do not directly conflict, there is some tension since all land developed into other land uses may be lost to employment-based uses. The nuances incorporated into the County's land use policy with regard to MECs may be indirectly undermining and/or obscuring the primary goals of the MEC future land use designation.

The Sarasota 2050 Plan identifies areas which may be appropriate for mixed-use development (including MECs through the Economic Development RMA). The MEC Study further refines that identification. Through this refinement, Planned Economic

Development (PED) and Planned Mixed-Use Infill (PMI) can be used to implement areas appropriate for mixed-use development. Industrial and Research (IR) is by policy the preferred zoning district to implement areas appropriate for single use employment intensification. This zoning district was added to address concerns about the breadth of commercial uses allowed in implementing zoning districts such as the ILW (Industrial, Light and Warehousing) district.

STRATEGIC REDEVELOPMENT

There are MEC parcels that are ready for redevelopment. As such, the Study analyzed possible redevelopment scenarios, redevelopment policies and procedures, and their potential impact on the County's MEC areas. Some of the same challenges that affect County efforts for redevelopment will affect redevelopment or intensification of MECs. Infrastructure, particularly how we currently evaluate roadway capacity is an issue.

The County's Comprehensive Plan states that redevelopment should be a partnership between the private and public sector. It also calls for increased densities and intensities as a means to encourage the redevelopment of aging and underutilized properties. The results of this Study provide data that reinforces those assertions and can augment the County's current redevelopment efforts, which have focused on commercially designated lands.

In August 2007, the County adopted the Planned Mixed Use Infill (PMI) Zone District as a tool to help promote redevelopment. This district was adopted with the flexibility to be applied to both Commercial and Major Employment Land Uses, and the flexibility to be used solely by a private developer or in partnership with the County. PMI can be used in conjunction with Future Land Use Goal 4, which provides a framework for the implementation of some of the redevelopment recommendations contained in this report.

The results of the MEC Study will also be incorporated into current redevelopment analysis, providing the basis for a redevelopment plan that can increase the effectiveness of all County land use designations. Increased effectiveness will be achieved through the coordinated application of land use and infrastructure improvements.

Future Land Use Goal 5 creates the Strategic Initiatives Planning Program, which can provide a vehicle through which the results of the MEC Study are integrated with other County land use, transit, and infrastructure improvements. These improvements can include changes in land use that provide for population and workforce in close proximity. This proximity gives the County the ability to more efficiently serve development with other infrastructure, such as central utilities and transit service.

Additional recommendations, action plans, best practices, and detailed analysis of each MEC can be found in the attached Study.

Attachments:

- A – Future Land Use Policy 3.4.9
- B – Major Recommendations
- C – Specific Action Plan
- D – Economic Profile and Target Industry Recommendations
- E – MEC Raw Acreage Map
- F – MEC Zone Map

Cc:

- Stephen DeMarsh, County Attorney
- Gary K. Oldehoff, County Attorney
- James L. Ley, County Administrator
- David R. Bullock, Deputy County Administrator
- Susan M. Scott, Deputy County Administrator
- Rob Lewis, Executive Director
- Anne McClung, Planning Director
- Scott Heinig, Planning Manager
- Brian Beatty, Principal Planner
- Chris Kohatsu, Planning & Development Services