

FLORIDA WEEKLY
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A SPECIAL REPORT

GROWTH

FLORIDA'S CURRENT POPULATION SITS AROUND

MILLION

FLORIDA'S PROJECTED POPULATION BY

IS

MILLION

Bad water, poor planning and a flood of people (1,000 move here every day) mean Florida is in ...

Big Trouble

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pull out section

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Market Trends paints cautiously optimistic real estate picture

BY ROBBIE SPENCER

rspencer@floridaweekly.com

In the wake of Hurricane Irma, many Southwest Floridians are asking questions about its potential effect on the real estate market. Will people stop coming here? Are we in for another crash like 2008? Is it worthwhile to sell or purchase a home right now?

Randy Thibaut hopes to put your fears at ease.

Mr. Thibaut, CEO of Land Solutions, a full-service real estate company specializing in the economics of land purchase and

development, unveiled his thoughts about the local real estate market Nov. 7 at the 7th annual Market Trends event at Miro-mar Design Center in Estero. The night is a benefit for the Lee Building Industry Association and Collier Business Indus-try Association, which provides members with education and industry resources throughout the construction industry in their respective counties.

Mr. Thibaut and Land Solutions have pored over every real estate statistic imaginable to come up with a multitude

SEE PICTURE, A14 ▶

Several hundred people attended Market Trends 2017 at Miro-mar Design Center in Estero on Nov. 7.

INSIDE

2018 Southwest Florida Physician Directory

Physician Directory

Pull this out and keep it: The only complete regional guide to physicians in the tri-county area.

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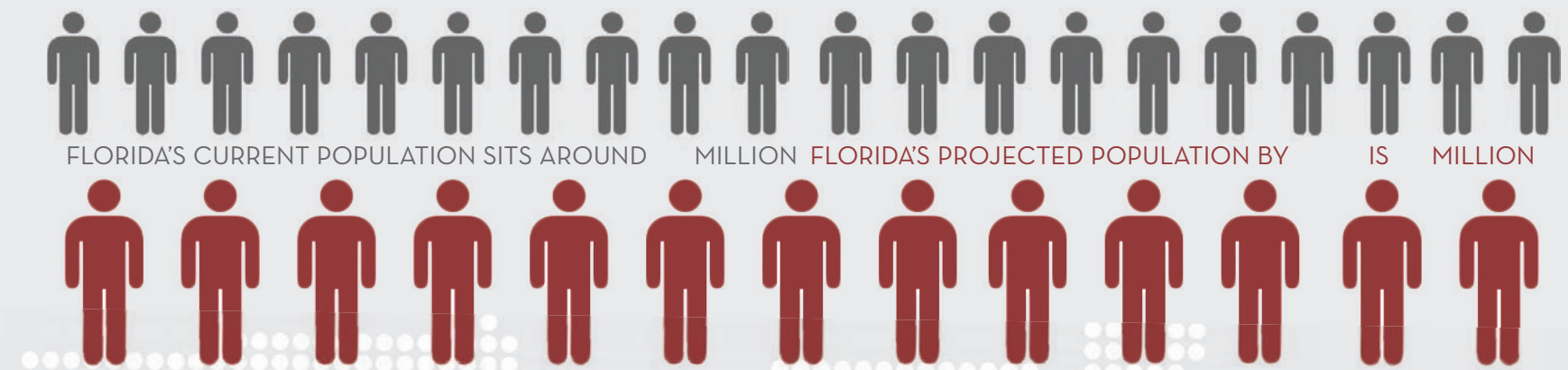
PRSRST STD	ROGER WILLIAMS	A2	BUSINESS	A26	CALENDAR	C6-11
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KEEPING YOU CONNECTED.



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Bad water, poor planning and a flood of people (1,000 move here every day) mean Florida is in ...

Big Trouble



COURTESY PHOTO
Dr. Harold Wanless among the million-dollar homes on Miami Beach after a typical Florida rain storm.

BY ROGER WILLIAMS
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ANY FLORIDA STORY BEGINS IN THE IMMEMORIAL PAST WITH the influences of three powerful rivers of change: climate, water, and the more recent flood of human beings.

Those sibling rivers happen to be converging now in our lifetimes. That's why Dr. Harold Wanless, professor and for 19 years chair of the Department of Geological Sciences at the University of Miami, found himself standing one August morning on the centerline of a street studded with well-manicured, multi-million-dollar homes in Miami Beach. Above him: a sun-splashed blue sky. At his feet: water, lots of it, lapping at his

ankles in a seemingly shallow lake that covered the street, the flawless lawns and the entire neighborhood.

Climate change and expensive but shortsighted planning had resulted in a local flood from a rainstorm the night before — a flood that swept toxic pollutants right past new seawalls and pumps and into the beleaguered eco-system of

SEE TROUBLE, 2 ►

TROUBLE

From page 1

South Florida, he said.

That's not good for the eco-system, obviously. And it's not good for property owners and taxpayers now, or Floridians in the not-so-distant future.

This week, *Florida Weekly* offers readers a sobering panorama of sometimes shortsighted environmental and urban planning that will inevitably lead to profound community challenges throughout Florida in the next few decades. Those challenges — those now apparently inescapable difficulties — stem from man-made environments in real estate and agriculture, and the influence of humans on climate.

Nearly all growth planning in the Sunshine State begins with water; if done foolishly or unwillingly, it may end with water, too.

Only time — and perhaps the Florida leaders voters choose in 2018 or 2020, and beyond — are likely to tell. ■

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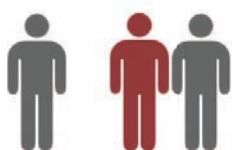
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The politics of planning

BY ROGER WILLIAMS

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URBAN OR SUBURBAN SPRAWL HAS PROVEN AN APPEALING sugarplum to local and regional governments for decades in Florida — and for decades, from the 1970s until 2010 — state regulations to control growth were also supported by many local government officials, in spite of aggressive challenges from developers.

But the regulations, based on growth planning, more or less succeeded, in the eyes of those who were there to see it happen at the beginnings of their careers. Now many of them are still fighting near the ends of their careers — fighting to make growth work by saving the environment.

It can't be done any other way, they say, and that means not everybody can get rich whenever and wherever they want to.

This is their story — the story of a decades-long planning fight.

In the eyes of Wayne Daltry, a retired planner and former Smart Growth director in Lee County who worked to harness a regional vision that would help everybody, the planning history started a long time ago with the Calusa Indians, who built the first canal on the west coast of Florida across Pine Island, connecting Charlotte Harbor on the island's west side with the mangrove-mottled waters on the east, not far from the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River.

The canal allowed them quicker and much easier access to the mainland and inland upriver. The earth-scrape of its western terminus — arguably the first real example of transportation planning and man-made alterations of natural water systems in the lower Florida peninsula — is still visible to any visitor in a little thumbprint of a park at Pineland, complete with a commemorative sign.

Although it offers only the tiniest hint of what would come, nearly every aspiration of Floridians, Indian or European, from the 15th through the 20th centuries and beyond seems to lie in that shallow Pine Island trough.

When the Calusa were doing their planning and engineering, Mr. Daltry said, "Dr. Robin Brown (a retired medical doctor and expert in the Calusa civilization) estimated the population to be 40,000. Their kingdom stretched across Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee and Collier counties, and at least as far to the east as Lake Okeechobee."

After the Spanish arrived five centuries ago, the Calusa population dropped to roughly 1,000; ultimately, they disappeared from the planet.

Not until the advent of World War II did the population of the southwest coast regain the 40,000 mark. Then the Americans moved in suddenly, not



VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Wayne Daltry traces planning back to the Calusa Indians.

just as scrappy pioneers or "Crackers," but as military personnel preparing for war.

And now climate change is here with the Americans, pounding on the door, but not only climate change: Floridians also face the consequences of reconfiguring land and water systems beginning in the 1880s in Florida in ways that might have horrified the Calusa.

The energetic new Floridians completely altered a Florida environment at once low-lying, porous, subtropical and wet across a vast block of the southern peninsula stretching roughly 200 miles south from near Orlando across Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay, and roughly 120 miles west from Palm Beach to Fort Myers or Naples.

The contemporary face of the Sunshine State grew in large part from a day in 1881 when Philadelphia industrialist Hamilton Disston purchased 4 million acres of south-central Florida for 25 cents an acre — said to be the single largest land purchase in history.



DISSTON

The dismantling of regulations and greed for more development

Although it didn't happen in his lifetime, Disston's massive move ultimately led to a growth explosion: to the draining of the Kissimmee basin and straightening of the river north of Lake O; to the connection of the lake with both the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean; to railroads created by Henry Flagler and other development that brought more people; and finally to contemporary Florida.

Only within the last 150 years, since the height of the Industrial Revolution in Europe and America, have humans significantly reshaped the geology and hydrology of Florida and, almost without recognizing it until recent years, changed the climate of the world, the continent, the country and the Sunshine State.

Disston was the Sunshine State spearhead of those people and those changes.

They did it for profit by accommodating cities, towns, suburbs, sub-suburbs, and fields for citrus, vegetable crops, sugar cane and both dairy and beef cattle.

Almost incidentally, their profit planning resulted in the loss of an Everglades so profoundly rich and lustrous that now it's almost hard to imagine — and at less than half the size of its once grand north-to-south stretch, it never can be regained, says Michael Grunwald.

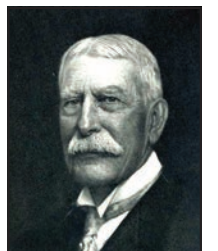
He described it this way in his widely celebrated 2007 book, "The Swamp:"

"The Everglades was the only place on earth where alligators (broad snout, fresh water, darker skin) and crocodiles (pointy snout, salt water, toothy grin) lived side by side. It was the only home of the Everglades mink, Okeechobee gourd, and Big Cypress fox squirrel. It had carnivorous plants, amphibious birds, oysters that grew on trees, cacti that grew in water, lizards that changed colors, and fish that changed genders. It had 1,100 species of trees and plants, 350 birds, and 52 varieties of porcelain-smooth, candy-striped tree snails. It had bottlenose dolphins, marsh rabbits, ghost orchids, moray eels, bald eagles, and countless other species that didn't seem to belong on the same continent, much less in the same ecosystem."

The big-time platting adventure

In effect, Floridians exchanged that natural wealth for platting profits.

After World War II, people began to move into Southwest Florida in droves, from Sarasota to Naples. They bought property and hopped on the



FLAGLER



RON MAYHEW / COURTESY OF FLORIDA WEEKLY

The politics of planning growth are seen clearly in this shot from the Florida Everglades.

planning bandwagon, either as buyers of tiny lots or as sellers of huge expanses of tiny lots, Mr. Daltry explained.

"For Southwest Florida, platting land was like placer mining for gold: You struck it rich or you went busted."

In the mid-to-late 1950s, before most communities ever heard of "growth management planning," the big-money developers arrived. The contemporary face of Florida emerged suddenly, equipped with mosquito control using the now banned DDT, and with affordable air conditioning, both of which hit the Florida scene about 1960 or a year or two earlier.

"The dream (of these developers) was to exceed the usual platting of a few acres, or even a few square miles," Mr. Daltry said. Instead, they platted vast tracts of land and sold them to north-erners on the installment plan.

"Cape Haze, Cape Coral, Port Charlotte and North Port, Port Labelle, Golden Gates Estates, Remuda Ranch, Lehigh Acres, Deltona at Marco, all gave promise of land, water, and exclusivity at a small down payment and small monthly installments for a set period of time."

For example, "\$10 down and \$10 a month, for 10 years," was an offer that became an advertising jingle.

For \$100 an acre, a platter could buy land from a lumber company, divide each acre into 4 lots and ultimately gross \$4,800 (minus some labor and machine costs) if he put in a street and drainage, explained Mr. Daltry — and creating those lots also created a lot of jobs, the bottom line in any planning in those days.

Perhaps it's true: The more things change, the more they remain the same. Once again more than half-a-century later, jobs and "the economy" are the primary reasons cited by Gov. Rick Scott's administration and many county commissions for expanding development with less regulation.

It's jobs, more jobs, they say. It's "good for the economy," a weather-worn phrase that has echoed almost unquestioned across the decades.

"Those backhoes, and those sales pitches, and those resort hotel rooms (for speculating visitors) created jobs," said Mr. Daltry. From local governments, "there was no immediate demand or much interest in regulatory controls. Heck, the counties weren't even authorized to regulate without a special act of the legislature."

By 1960, the population of Collier, Lee and Charlotte Counties combined was 82,000. In gigantic Palm Beach County with its 1,972 square miles, the western portion remained predominantly agricultural, some of it in the Everglades Agricultural Area; but the eastern half

had begun to develop like a tropical storm, serving as home to 228,000 residents.

By 1970, the population of the southwest coast was 170,000 and of Palm Beach County, 349,000; local governments then had the power, from the legislature, to do some regulating and controlling — if they wanted to. And they began to.

"Too many septic tanks discharging poorly, too much road congestion, too much flooding, too many homes and their wreckage blocking beaches, and too much land clearing," Mr. Daltry said, explaining the inclination to regulate, even a little.

Changes blowing in the wind

About that time Mr. Daltry, a newly minted graduate of The Citadel, was going to Vietnam, before coming home to Bradenton and embarking on a career as a planner. And counties were beginning to demand change across the state.

"Gov. Reubin Askew, after his election in 1970, took the problem seriously and established the Task Force on Resource Management to look at it," Mr. Daltry recalled.

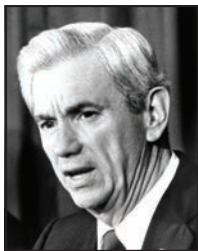
Thus were born modern times.

"The commission developed a set of recommendations, the most memorable being demanding a serious set of coordinated state, regional and local planning programs (they included land use, transportation and public services); an environmental land management program; an air and water quality management program; a coastal management program; and a statewide system of water management.

"Then and now, these are the core issues for communities, and they create a sense of regional and state identity."

Ray Judah, Lee County's first environmental planner who went on to serve as a commissioner for 24 years, helped create major environmental protec-

tions of water and land in the county. He described three governors — Reubin Askew, Lawton Chiles and Bob Graham — as "true visionaries. They understood in planning for the future that we're a high-volume growth state. Thankfully those three gentlemen helped form the landmark growth management laws that were beneficial for decades."



ASKEW



CHILES

Developers themselves were not always the problem, as Jim Beever remembers it.

A longtime county planner who arrived in the mid-1980s, Mr. Beever is now senior planner at the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, created to analyze the effects of new development across a six-county region from Sarasota south.

"Development changed because of the state's Growth Management Plan (1975), which improved to the State and Regional Planning Act of 1984, which was a big watershed. The requirements for concurrency were improved," he said.

Mandated by the state Legislature at the time, "concurrency" required county governments and planners to produce County Comprehensive Plans and update them every five years, showing what had changed and how their goals might therefore change.

"Levels of service had to be met," said Mr. Beever, with parks, with fire and police protection and schools.

"Local governments could do more than the bottom line and some did — they set their goals higher, to make a better standard of living. This occurred from Sarasota to Naples."

Almost nobody thought the state was spiraling out of control — not the planners, at least.

"So it looked like we were on a good track — we had a good rate of growth, we were prepared or preparing for what was coming, and agriculture was still doing well," explained Mr. Beever. He was sitting in a small suite of offices filled with maps and planning charts at the heart of an aging outdoor shopping and commercial center in Fort Myers, where shop-front glass windows, some with for-lease signs in their corners, peer out on pools of water and mechanical fountains flanked by narrow walkways.

Some developers embraced these ideas — a compact urban core, some areas set aside for agriculture and some for preserves — but not all, Mr. Beever said.

"While those approaches were good for almost everybody, we did have resistance from what I call speculative real estate, as opposed to real real estate."

The difference is significant, in Mr. Beever's view.

"Existing, legitimate, ongoing real estate development is a good thing. But speculative real estate goes like this. A speculator — One: finds land for the least possible price. Two: obtains permits to do the most possible development on that land. And three: then lets the public pay for the infrastructure."



VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY
Former Lee County Commissioner Ray Judah, helped create major environmental protections for Florida waters.



VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Jim Beever, senior planner at the Southwest Florida Regional Planning council, says a well-planned development is healthy but speculation is not.

Such an approach occurred on a large scale in such communities as Cape Coral, Lehigh Acres and Golden Gate, for example, with such companies as the Gulf American Corp., the General Development Corp. in Charlotte County and the Mackle Brothers on Marco Island.

"There, taxpayers have to retrofit the infrastructure," Mr. Beever said. "They used finger canals to promise everyone waterfront. And once built, you have no finances to support services. To a large extent, communities in those places had to play catch-up."

But with such companies as WCI in Pelican Bay or Bonita Bay Properties, the infrastructure was done in advance, and the companies had to recoup the money they spent doing it, he said. That was doing it the right way.

The regulations were challenged in increasingly sophisticated or forceful ways, planners say — but often they held up in court.

How it looked on the ground

Some people experienced Florida's planning and growth struggles from a boots-on-the-ground perspective — or boots in the mangrove swamp, in the case of Rae Ann Wessel. Ms. Wessel started with what was then called the Department of Environmental Regulations. Now 39 years later — a voluble apologist for water, mangroves and wetlands with a still-scrappy willingness and the fitness to wade into the political or geographical swamp, either one — she's the natural resource policy director for the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

"I cut my teeth chasing Robert Troutman out of the mangroves, in the corridor known as the estuary development (near Punta Rassa), 7,000 acres where the Kennedy-Shriver Trust had bought cheap land in the 1950s and '60s and designed a building plan," she said. "They were going to name it after something they were about to destroy."

Such naming characterized Florida development for half a century or more: Gray Oaks, Bonita Bay, Quail West, Twin Eagles, Pelican Preserve, Garden Oaks, Gardenia Islas, Magnolia Bay, Sandpiper Cove, Wildcat Run and scores more.

SEE GROWTH, 4 ►



ADAM BARON / FLORIDA WEEKLY

The population of Southwest Florida reached 348,000 by about 1980, just after Bob Graham was elected governor for the first time. It hit 600,000 a decade later.

GROWTH

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“So we took it to the state Supreme Court and won a landmark case. For the first time, the state could claim jurisdiction above the mean high-water line because of plants and soils that were biologically tied in as buffer areas — the mangrove areas, the (brackish) areas.”

Her visit to the Supreme Court, probably a wondrous adventure to a young environmentalist working for state government, proved to be far from the end of that fight, or of a larger one on-going across the region, the state and the decades, she said.

“So the Kennedy-Shriver Trust hired Robert Troutman, an Atlanta attorney who managed the lands. He was very unhappy when the Florida Supreme Court identified these lands as being jurisdictional. This landmark decision allowed us for the first time to identify critical wetlands above the mean high tide line and protect them. Everything we understand about mangroves today was codified in that decision.”

Mr. Troutman didn't like it, and he was a man of action, apparently.

“He was outraged,” Ms. Wessel recalled. “He made a commitment to cut down all the mangroves they owned, and he made it to my face. It happened during a hard rain when I gave him a ride in my car to his — that's when he told me. He was going to cut them all down.”

He wasn't kidding.

“I had an old green Valiant the state issued. So I parked and walked up to the site one day, and Troutman was out there with some work guys, and he had a chain saw in his hand. They were cutting mangroves, but they couldn't hear me coming up in the muck with those saws going.”

Since the DER had injunctions against the trust, she began to take pictures. Of the trust's Atlanta attorney wielding the chain saw — “with the goods,” as she put it.

“And when they paused and the sound went down, I called out. ‘Hey, Robert!’”

Mr. Troutman took off running.

“He ran down through one of the ditches and ended up over by Punta Rasa, where a guy was fixing crab traps.”

When she drove over, saw the fisherman, and asked if he'd seen anybody, the man looked surprised, she remembered.

“He said, ‘Yeah, this old man just jumped out of the woods...’”

That was about 1974, the year before

current Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann first put his boots on the ground of the state legislature in Tallahassee, to which he was elected by local voters in 1975.

“Reubin Askew was still governor, and in those days there was no such thing as planning,” he recalled.

“Large scale development had begun — the Gulf American Corporation and General Development were just two of the hundreds running amuck all over Florida with no thought of how communities would look, of how many lots you could assemble and how fast you could sell them, with no thought whether there would be room for commercial or industrial uses, with no set-asides for police or fire stations — none of that existed prior to the mid-'70s.”

Taxpayers are still paying for that lack of foresight, he said.

“It's expensive to retrofit — to locate commercial or industrial zones or put a police station or school in an area already filled out.”

Growing now, shaping the future

By the mid to late 1970s, however, nearly a million lots had been sold as part of the platting vision of life, only about 10 percent with construction. So retrofitting would prove to be inevitable.

The population of Southwest Florida reached 348,000 by about 1980, just after Bob Graham was elected governor for the first time, it hit 600,000 a decade later, and by 2000 residents in Charlotte, Lee and Collier counties numbered 833,000. And still, only about 33 percent of the platted lots sported homes.

In Palm Beach County, meanwhile, the population jumped from 577,000 in 1980 to 1.13 million in 2000.

“Then came the problem of success,” said Mr. Daltry. “The lots provided a relatively cheap source of land for a runaway housing market that dominated the first part of the 21st century's first decade. And the bubble burst. Rampant speculation caused the collapse, not the lack of services nor the investment in the communities and region.”

The response by contemporary governments was shortsighted, to say the least, in Mr. Daltry's view.

“They gutted most management programs at the state and regional level, and politicized what was left,” he said.

“By 2010 that process was well under-



MANN

way, the population of the three counties was 1.17 million (in Palm Beach it reached almost 1.3 million) and more than half the lots had buildings on them.”

Not only that, he added, “but the demand for transportation, water supply, public services, hazard planning, and buffering with open space has never been as great.”

And now the population is about 1.5 million in the three counties (and 1.35 million in Palm Beach), and county commissioners are about to do away with regional planning of any sort, a move that will likely raise no questions from Gov. Scott's administration or the state legislature, Commissioner Mann suggests. He echoes the opinions of many others, including former Commissioner Judah.

“It gets worse on a state and local level,” Mr. Judah said.

“Now there's an effort to eliminate the regional planning council (Jim Beever's outfit). The state has done its level best to weaken the DRIs — the Development of Regional Impacts (in which communities with updated comprehensive plans must show what impacts a development will have before it can be permitted).”

“So, by eliminating the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, the commission is putting us back in the Dark Ages.”

And not just the Lee County commission.

The Sarasota County commission kicked off the elimination of regional planning, he said, followed a month later by the Lee County Commission, both of which voted to pull out of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council of six counties next year, withdrawing funding and support.

Planning Councils provide close analyses of every aspect of a given development, transportation plan or water plan for local governments. That allows governments to work together to control and direct growth for the benefit of everybody.

But now, Collier County and others also are considering abandoning regional planning.

“Why is that bad?” asked Mr. Judah.

“Because the planning council was put in place recognizing that roads, water and development-impact in general does not recognize political boundaries.

“For instance, flow ways: Summer rains and runoff don't just stop at a county boundary. Without the Regional Planning Council to review developments on a regional basis, you run the risk of severing the flow ways that have a huge impact on rivers, estuaries and aquifers; you have a road system of six lanes than can suddenly result in two lanes — if you don't look at the big picture.”

Another example: “You even have aquifers that don't abide by political lines; so if you have one development in one county with a lot of straws in the aquifer, it affects the next county.”

The Department of Community Affairs managed much of this in the state, but it's gone, just as many regulators for the Department of Environmental Protection and researchers who once worked for the state's water management districts are gone, part of Gov. Scott's reductionist notion of government, in the eyes of Commissioner Mann.

“The legislature has undone much of the progress made in the early 1970s, beginning with abolition of the Department of Community Affairs, followed by the fact that we're not requiring developments of regional impact,” he said.

“Those efforts used to be a signifi-

cant part of Florida development. So it's been a huge reversal, where the growth industry is now the beneficiary of far fewer requirements and regulations that protect everybody.”

For Commissioner Mann, “I have great and grave concerns about what will happen in the next 25 years.”

In Lee County, his fellow commissioners have given the green light to a number of developments that would have been restricted by the county's old comprehensive development plan, usually by a vote of four to one.

Less restricted development is a detriment to protecting water quality and resources, says Commissioner Mann, often the dissenting vote in board decisions to allow “leapfrog” development on wetlands or in rural areas beyond the reach of current infrastructure, for example.

The Lee commissioners also hugely reduced impact fees that pay for infrastructure, putting that burden back on taxpayers who already moved into the region and paid those impact fees once.

Mr. Judah explained it this way: “The Lee County Commission reduced impact fees by 80 percent, and then a couple of years ago implemented a slight increase so it's a reduction of 55 percent from what it once was.

“If you look at the total dollars this community has forfeited leading up to March, 2018, it will be about \$80 million.

“So not only have we lost \$33 to \$35 million in road impact fees, but another \$45 million that would have gone to schools.”

Collier County, meanwhile, did not reduce impact fees through the recession or after — “that was just a red herring developers used, and the Building Industry Association used, in Lee,” Mr. Judah said.

Lee commissioners instead, with the strong support of the Building Industry Association, have voted to use “incremental funding” — money taken from property taxes — to make up some of the difference.

In Collier, however — where Naples ranks as one of the best-designed and wealthiest cities in the state — the judgment of county officials has sometimes been far from prescient, in the eyes of Collier Commissioner and Board Chair Penny Taylor.

“One example is beach parking. In (early '80s planning) the county commission did not plan beach access in terms of growth. So now I think we have six or seven beach accesses in the county, and the city of Naples has 42 beach accesses.

“The way the city of Naples was planned was to understand that people were coming here to enjoy the beach. So, at the end of every street was an access.

“And when a developer or Realtor came who wanted to condo-ize south of the Beach Club, all the way down to the shoreline, the people said, ‘You're not going to do this.’ They had a vision, a relaxed residential feeling that was welcoming.”

The county, instead, had a vision of money, she suggested — a vision that exists today, as well, even when it comes to developing new communities in sensitive wetlands.

“The business of Collier County is the buying and selling of Collier County. Somewhere there are owners of Collier land who all have dreams of a pot of



TAYLOR

gold, and they all believe their land will give them that pot of gold.

But it's not true if we're looking to the future — and the growth button is on. The pressure to develop, though, is enormous."

Just as it was when Naples restricted high-rises and created beach access.

"In the county they let properties go, the commissioners at the time sold the access in condo after condo from Vanderbilt going north — even at Pelican Bay," said Commissioner Taylor. "It's private, and they allowed it. It could have been different. That's a very sad story, and we're facing problems with that today."

For any region of the state, the Big Picture planners still strongly recommend regional — not just local — planning and development aimed at accommodating growth.

"Local communities are starting to understand the realities, but sometimes the politicians refuse, Democrat or Republican," noted Steve Bourassa, professor and director of the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Florida Atlantic University, one of the most celebrated planning departments in the United States.



BOURASSA

"I'd say this about planning in Lee County or anywhere," he added: "What's needed is a broadly regional approach to planning. One issue is transportation. There's a real need to integrate land use and transportation more effectively and on a regional scale."

"So doing away with a regional planning council is not a good move. Also, we need to think about land use patterns consistent with public transportation, with walkable communities, with community water and sewer infrastructure, not septic, which is so much worse for the environment — with something other than traditional suburban track housing."

"But that's what most development in recent decades has consisted of."

Modern times

A great deal — the shape of the future in Florida — depends on who takes the reins in Tallahassee and what future governors and legislatures may require of local governments and of citizens.

"Florida has been pinched between two definitions of 'What is Florida?'" said Bob Graham, the state's 38th governor and retired U.S. senator, who stepped out of Washington in 2005 after 18 years in the Senate. He now heads the Florida Conservation Commission.

"One group says it's a commodity of no distinctive value, and therefore undeserving of our protection. If you want to fill in a wetland to build a shopping center, or build a marina on a dry land, you can do it."

"The other group sees it as a treasure, and serves each generation's efforts to protect and pass it on to the next generation."

"The commodity side was in control for most of the 20th century, and is now in control again."

Elections in 2018 and 2020 will decide how Floridians see their state going forward — either as a commodity, or as a treasure, he added.

Many hope for a return of the sometimes feisty, sometimes careful system optimists of once upon a time who could work across party lines in government to make decisions that would help future Floridians, they say.

Commissioner Mann, now a Republi-

can, was a Democrat and state legislator at the time who helped implement state rules that controlled growth at the county level for decades — a witness to those heady planning days.

In one case when he was governor, Bob Graham recalled, a group of legislators backed by prominent business owners made a strong bid to build a cross-state canal project that would have started near Cedar Key and infused major aquifers with salt water, ultimately destroying part of the Everglades.

"We killed that sumbitch," Commissioner Mann said, describing how he worked closely with Republicans to do the right thing — including the late Sen. Warren Henderson, from Sarasota.

Meanwhile, growth development continues anew, sometimes with little seeming regard for what's about to happen in the next 30 years.

About 230 new condominium buildings came under construction last year in Miami-Dade alone, many along Miami Beach, noted Dr. Wanless.

Across the state, high-rise condominiums continue to appear on the Caloosahatchee riverfront in downtown Fort Myers, where streets were completely submerged at the end of August after a few inches of rain (that was before Hurricane Irma); in Collier County north of Naples, where commissioners for years have permitted high-rises and other development on or near the beach; and at such massive development sites as Babcock Ranch in Charlotte County, where the first of 1,900 homes are rising east of I-75 on a 17,600-acre sprawl that will include 6.5 million square feet of commercial space — but all of it wrapped into less than half of the development footprint. Although Babcock Ranch is a self-sustaining town in design, it will nevertheless require huge changes to regional roads, among other accommodations for infrastructure.

At build out, Babcock could include 50,000 residents.

Whether the planners have anticipated its full impact on regional infrastructure remains to be seen; but taken at a glance, observers say, it's the best-planned development in Florida history, with sophisticated infrastructure and state-of-the-art technologies including solar and smart-vehicle use built into the plan.

But in any development, the proof is in the pudding, suggested Mr. Daltry.

"It doesn't matter how high you are in a condo building, or how well designed it is. If it floods below you, you're in trouble," he said.

On deck

Adam Putnam, the leading candidate for governor next year, a Republican and now Commissioner of Agriculture, did not respond to *Florida Weekly* requests for an interview to ask him how he planned to manage money, water resources and growth if elected governor.

A Democratic opponent, former state legislator Gwen Graham, daughter of Sen. Bob Graham, said planning is essential.

"That's the key word — planning. It's the responsibility of the governor to look forward and anticipate challenges a state will face. Rick Scott's dismantling



CAROLYN ALLEN / FLORIDA STATE ARCHIVES

Gov. Rick Scott in Miami in 2015. Jobs and "the economy" were the primary reasons cited by his administration and many county commissions for expanding development with less regulation.

of our growth management laws has resulted in a failure of planning. A healthy economy in Florida goes hand-in-hand of with a healthy environment."

That may be where the problem becomes complicated.

"We have to get back to making smart state government decisions," she said. "We're going to have 15 million more people in Florida than today in the not-so-distant future. We have to plan this so we aren't overwhelming Florida's unique quality of life."

"Water, beaches, springs, state parks — I am proud to be someone who recognizes that growth is positive. But we need to be managing this growth in a smart way, with regulations that have buy-ins from those being regulated so we have benefits for all."

And time is pressing.

"You only have one chance to do this right, in terms of reversing some of the damage that's been done. We're not going to stand in the way of growth, but we won't let it (destroy) us."

For Dr. Wanless, the first step in good planning is to face reality.

All the evidence points to what is now an inescapable tsunami of environmental change and growth bearing down on the Sunshine State. Nothing like this has happened either in the memory or the history of any humans here. Not, at least, since the first Europeans arrived and ultimately destroyed the Calusa.

In fact, he insists, some contemporary beachfronts will become future shallow marine environments, as hard as that may be to accept, now. And they can have the potential to spawn a healthy ecosystem — if they're cleaned up starting now.

"Without intense and responsible effort (those waters) will become highly polluted from inundated waste disposal sites, polluted ground on industrial sites, and pollution released from inundated buildings and infrastructure," he predicted.

We are too late to alter the inevitable change, but we can adapt to it if we confront the realities now and with transparency: Our state and regional growth planning must become more rigorous and better coordinated. And our on-going efforts to clean and prepare the environment elsewhere, especially across the entire Everglades system from Orlando south, must be hastened, experts say.

"I'm almost 81, and I have been an optimist all my life," said Sen. Graham, who grew up on a dairy farm near Coral Gables.

"I have seen Florida when it was on

its knees, particularly after devastating climactic events, primarily hurricanes. And I've seen it on its knees after economic collapses that have seemed to occur on roughly 20-year intervals," he recalled.

"In all these cases it's recovered with a stronger sense of its future and a stronger economy. But I am concerned now. Things are different." ■

"The Lee County Commission reduced impact fees by 80 percent, and then a couple of years ago implemented a slight increase so it's a reduction of 55 percent from what it once was. If you look at the total dollars this community has forfeited leading up to March 2018, it will be about \$80 million. So not only have we lost \$33 to \$35 million in road impact fees, but another \$45 million that would have gone to schools."

— Ray Judah, former Lee County Commissioner

Climate change

When it comes to our receding beaches, the struggle is real

BY Nanci Theoret

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ONE MORE MAJOR STORM AND DRAKE BLISS'S Manasota Key home likely will be a little closer to the beach. Since purchasing the property 12 years ago, Mr. Bliss has watched the Gulf of Mexico claim most of the 30- to 40-foot-wide swath of beach and a man-made sand dune he estimates was once 20 feet tall.

"When I first bought the property there was a large beach there," said the Cape Coral Realtor. "A half-mile or more has just disappeared in the last three years. All that's left is riprap and rocks where the dune used to be. Every major storm started taking swipes at it."



BLISS

And that was before Hurricane Irma took out a 200-foot section of Manasota Beach Road.

Mr. Bliss's home, a vacation rental built in 2011, is safe. It's on the eastern side of the island's major roadway and built to stringent hurricane codes. The owners of condos and a single-family home right on the beach haven't been so lucky. After Tropical Storm Colin and Hurricane Hermine dealt a one-two punch last summer, their homes were deemed uninhabitable with cracked foundations and waves lapping at the back door.

"It was ground zero," Mr. Bliss said. "Storms come in, breach the seawall and trash the place. My house is designed to take the flood. It's new construction. But the 1950s homes are way below the flood zone and people can't afford flood insurance."

Along Southwest Florida's beaches, erosion is one of the many sides of climate change caused by growth and the "hardening" of the coast — seawalls, riprap and other structures designed to protect multi-million dollar manses, waterfront businesses and municipal recreational facilities. Scientists say climate change will lead locally to increased hurricane events, extended droughts and shorter but more intense rainy seasons and the introduction of tropical diseases to livestock and humans.

Those flooding rains in August and Irma in September were just a harbinger of what's to come.

Southwest Florida and Florida, for that matter, are among the most susceptible areas in the world threatened by rising seas. The Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council has been tackling climate change for two decades, studying the area's vulnerability and how policy changes can reduce

the acceleration of the inevitable.

Back in 2009, when Jim Beever, a geobiologist and the council's principal planner, began assessing the impact of climate change, the general consensus estimated a 1.2-degree temperature increase and a 12- to 18-inch rise in sea level by 2100.

"The acceleration to higher temperatures seems to be coming on faster than previously thought," he said. "It looks like we'll get there sooner, around 2080. It's getting hotter sooner. The rate of sea level rise for our region has been about the thickness of a Velveeta cheese slice, each year. It doesn't seem like much, but stack it up and you get a Velveeta box before long."

Internationally, the just-released and most comprehensive study of climate change ever, the Climate Science Special Report, outlines in over 600 pages a 1.8 degree Fahrenheit increase in global temperature since 1902 and a sea level rise of 7 to 8 inches during the past 117 years with a 3-inch increase since 1993. It also attributes these changes to human activities.

Just as growth is inevitable for Southwest Florida, so too, is a changing climate which will unleash a range of complications and challenges. While it's impossible to stop this natural process, it can be slowed down through smarter planning, better building codes and land development, an emphasis on green building, reduced vehicular emissions and a host of other measures.

"It's important to make it clear you cannot stop this," Mr. Beever said. "But we can adapt. We can slow the acceleration. The only thing humans can affect is manmade."

Left to run its course, Mother Nature would shift barrier islands and deal up beach-claiming storms, redepositing them elsewhere. But now, cities and counties are shelling out millions of dollars to keep beaches in the same place, reactively re-sanding them to stay on top of storm surge and armoring the shoreline with seawalls, which impact turtle nesting and pose other adverse environmental consequences.

Collier County renourished its shoreline to the tune of \$3.9 million in 2016. Charlotte County is facing a potential \$30 million project to save its shoreline, part of which could include reclaiming Manasota's disappearing beaches and creating a natural underwater barrier to tame waves. Storms have scraped away sand, leaving four acres of bare, hard limestone.

Nearly 44 miles of Southwest Florida's beaches are critically eroded, according to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Erosion is considered critical if there's a threat to or a loss of upland development, recreation, wildlife habitat and important cultural resources.

Threatened beaches remain on the list despite renourishment projects to aid the state in acquiring future federal funding for larger scale projects. More than 14 miles of Collier's beach fall in the category. In Lee County, 22.4 miles of its 47 miles of coastline is considered critically eroded and those portions of former beachfront along Manasota Key toward Charlotte's northern boundary are among the county's 6.5 miles of shoreline rated as critically eroded.

Eight critically eroded areas in Palm Beach County span 33.6 miles, with a 1.5-mile section from Tequesta and Jupiter Inlet Colony threatening private developments and recreational facilities at Coral Cove Park.



COURTESY PHOTO

Collier County renourished its shoreline to the tune of \$3.9 million in 2016.





COURTESY PHOTO

On both coasts, water is claiming beachfront. Cities and counties are spending millions of dollars to protect and renourish beaches.

“The rate between renourishing and renourishing again is getting shorter and shorter,” Mr. Beever observed. “We’ve spoken up in meetings but engineers, renourishers and some politicians deal with facts not approached by science.”

The regional planning council cites three reasons why communities have failed to address climate change: “uncertainty over or denial of climate change and its implications; failures to include the true economic, social, and environmental costs of present policies that encourage, allow and subsidize such risky development; and legal tenets of private property rights.”



CRIST

On the flip side are the naysayers who believe the environment-friendly agendas of liberal state and national government are crying wolf. During the administrations of former Florida Gov. Charlie Crist and President Barack Obama, the Environmental Protection Agency generously doled out grants to fund climate change vulnerability studies and money for resiliency implementation.

“At one time the federal government was much more interested in this,” Mr. Beever said. “But then we changed governors and we changed presidents. There were mandates and programs encouraging planning and funding that planning but they went away.”

Climate change’s impact on Southwest Florida won’t be the stuff of an apocalyptic movie. No coastal cities underwater or high-rise towers swept into the ocean (although it might make it easier for some to step out their door and fish, Mr. Beever quipped).

“The issue of doom is overdone on this,” he said. “We want to be able to live in a way that makes sense.”

According to the planning council’s research, climate change impacts of sea-level rise are already evident throughout the region — salt marshes have moved inland about the length of a football field since the 1950s, coastal flooding has increased and storm surge is more pronounced during tropical storms. And it’s not just coastal communities that will incur the complications of climate change.

“Inland, Labelle is experiencing major

water-quality issues,” Mr. Beever said. “Its water supply, increased droughts and shifts of temperatures will affect agriculture and the types of crops that will grow. We anticipate more tropical products and also increased tropical diseases in cattle. Zika, dengue fever and other tropical diseases are showing up in small amounts in all communities of Southwest Florida.”

Mr. Beever sees evidence some local cities and counties are taking climate change seriously. “Municipalities are more a leader on this than the state,” he said. “One reason is mayors have to get things done. They can’t just sit around and talk philosophy.”

He’s completed 15 climate control resiliency studies, having just wrapped up one for Cape Coral.

The regional planning council has presented to Charlotte County and completed the Lee County Resiliency Plan in 2010. The latter included more than 70 suggestions for educating the public, reducing fleet emissions, incorporating climate control measures in building and land codes, and protecting and enhancing key environmental areas. In November 2010 the county also lauded its involvement as one of the eight inaugural adaptation communities in the country to participate in the Climate Resilient Communities program.

Yet despite all the fanfare, the county has yet to implement a single recommendation or take steps toward adopting a

climate resiliency plan and reducing its vulnerability, which were also outlined in its CompleteLee sustainability plan. Jonathan Romine, a principal for EnSite, a Fort Myers design firm specializing in sustainable planning, civil engineering, urban design and landscape architect, worked on the plan, which took three years to develop. He reads aloud the recommended actions outlined in the document.

“Nope, that didn’t get done,” he said. “No, that one didn’t happen either. They didn’t do that ... We prioritized goals, conducted public workshops on climate adaptation and the steps they could do to adapt.”

There was also funding available to help with implementation, Mr. Romine said.

“Coastal communities need to be doing things to address climate change,” he said. “One thing the county was supposed to do as a priority was to improve facilities so they would be better prepared for a natural disaster. There were things they could have been doing that would have better prepared the community for Irma. Imagine if it had landed in Estero, Cape Coral or Fort Myers.

“Charley wasn’t the hurricane. It was just an example.”

Collier County has been taking steps to address climate change. Before breaking for summer recess, commissioners learned the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration had approved a \$1 million grant for Florida Gulf Coast Uni-

versity Professor Michael Savarese and his colleagues from the University of Florida to map out and analyze sea-level rise risks throughout the county. “It’s a way of providing Collier County, its municipalities and managers of urban and natural resources an understanding of what our region might look like in the future as sea level rise continues and as storms continue,” Mr. Savarese told the board.

Funded by BP monies under the RESTORE Act following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the three-year web-based project will create maps, simulations and animations illustrating and predicting the impact of sea level rise in 2030, 2060 and 2100 using a variety of magnitudes and storm scenarios. “It provides a suite of possibilities for what the future might hold for us,” said Dr. Savarese. “It’s \$1 million in new science available to us. It requires the county and its municipalities to have some kind of planning effort ... that moves in concert with this project.”

The Naples-Based Southwest Florida Nature Conservancy is also actively involved in climate change, conducting a systematic internal assessment to identify existing gaps in Southwest Florida and use its expertise in policy, science and education to develop solutions, said President and CEO Robert Moher.

“We have core expertise in critical ecological infrastructure, notably mangrove forests that are essential bulwarks against sea level rise.”

In October, a summit on sea rise organized by Naples City Councilwoman Linda Penniman and Commission Chairwoman Penny Taylor attracted 200 and included presentations by government officials from Miami-Dade County. The South Florida county, along with Palm Beach and Broward counties, formed the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact in 2010 to coordinate mitigation and adaptation activities across county lines.

Its ninth annual climate leadership summit in December will focus on engaging businesses and the community in critical decisions on adaptation, climate and energy solutions, and resilience.

Of the three counties, Palm Beach has the highest elevation, at about 15 feet. Miami-Dade and Broward average six feet. The Breakers rises 13 feet above sea level; the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts towers at 33 feet.

Punta Gorda is well ahead of the climate change curve, its city council unanimously approving the incorporation of the Punta Gorda Adaptation Plan into its comprehensive plan in 2009. The city was able to piggyback onto the regional planning council’s comprehensive vulnerability assessment of Charlotte Harbor through the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, which targeted Punta Gorda as among the first regional cities likely to suffer negative effects of climate change. It identified 246 management adaptations that would help the entire Southwest Florida region and also noted the loss of mangrove forests along the harbor, the degradation of water quality and geomorphic changes to barrier islands.

“Jim was looking for a partner for his estuary work and came to us,” said Joan LeBeau, Punta Gorda’s interim urban manager, who was the city’s chief planner at the time. “We thought it was a great idea and an important planning tool. As a small city, this wasn’t something we could do on our own. They planned the majority of the work. It makes sense if you’re near water; you have to plan for issues.”

Critical to the city’s success, much as its unprecedented recovery from Hurri-



COURTESY PHOTO

Under Barack Obama’s administration, the Environmental Protection Agency doled out grants to fund climate change vulnerability studies and money for resiliency implementation.

cane Charley, was community and business involvement — a commitment from all stakeholders.

From the beginning of its climate change discussions the city involved the public who knew all too well the power of the sea and hurricanes. About 100 people attended the first of a three-day workshop.

“A lot of times you start talking climate stuff and people start politicizing,” Ms. LeBeau said. “You have to introduce and explain the science first and start with baby steps to help move and get people realizing this is coming. Having buy-in made a world of difference. The plan came to council with the backing of the community.”

The city’s final adaptation plan identified several strategies for addressing climate change at little to no cost. The city has implemented all but two or three. Components of the document call for building infrastructure on higher ground, restoring oyster bars and mangrove fringes to add structural integrity to weakened shorelines, and trumps federal and state building codes to push foundations an additional .25 inches higher.

“There are both positive and negative impacts,” Ms. LeBeau said. “Updating the building codes and raising the base flood elevation is more costly to developers who have to add another quarter of an inch but in the long run it buys you time.”

She points to Tangier Island, Virginia, as a dramatic example of sea level rise.



DANIEL DI PALMA / COURTESY PHOTO

Coastal erosion during a king tide at Dania Beach south of Fort Lauderdale.

Since 1850, the island’s landmass has diminished 67 percent, cemeteries are underwater and moderate sea-level rise models project the town will likely be abandoned in the next 50 years.

Ms. LeBeau’s department also is working with the Southwest Florida Conservancy to determine the feasibility of creating a living shoreline on the northwestern side of the city and hopes to present the project to council soon. Implementation would help soften wave action on sea walls.

“The reason we’re pushing ahead on this is because one of the businesses in town is excited by the stuff we’re doing in climate change and sea level rise,” she said. “We want something more natural that helps soften the hard edge. We spent a million dollars on Harbor Walk and want to protect it.”

Fertilizer, however, remains the city’s — and the entire Southwest Florida region’s — most challenging panacea, contributing to algae blooms in waterways throughout the area and impacting overall water quality.

Punta Gorda was named one of the most progressive cities in the world by the 2014 National Climate Assessment and the CHNEP was cited by the EPA as one of the six initial Climate Ready Estuary pilot programs in the country.

“Punta Gorda is the very best example,” Mr. Beever said. “When a critical facility reached the end of its life, it was moved to a safer inland location. The city has a whole new building code everyone is doing and being consistent. There are no exemptions. One of the things that will make a plan not work is if everybody can get out of it.”

A living document, the plan will be updated continuously. “Any course we take, we’re going to vet first and make sure it’s the right thing for Punta Gorda,” said Ms. LeBeau. “We’re dealing with things our current population might not see in their lifetimes. We have a group here that is progressive and sees it as:

‘My kids will be here and I want to do something.’”

Meanwhile, Charlotte County is dealing with the plight of its shoreline, putting together a 10-year feasibility and management plan after state legislators denied funding. How and who will pay for beach restoration is one of the key unknown factors.

“We’re in the public workshop stage right now,” said county spokesperson Brian Gleason. “We’re working through identifying the scope of the project and funding.”

Charlotte County’s comprehensive plan doesn’t reference climate change specifically, however it does address coastal erosion and sea level rise through zoning and its coastal management plan, Mr. Gleason said. The only way property owners can circumvent the county’s prohibition of hardscaping on its barrier islands, is by emergency declaration from the state, likely after a significant storm.

“We don’t allow any type of construction or development in areas susceptible to storm surge,” he said, adding it’s simply impossible for builders to bypass codes or flood-level requirements. Buildings are inspected by the county several times before a certificate of occupancy is issued. “It’s inconceivable that much of an epic fail could occur.”

Without enacting climate control measures, coastal communities could be forced to armor up against flood waters and sea level rises or retreat to higher ground. Back in 2009, Mr. Beever priced out alternative climate change controls for Punta Gorda, estimating construction of a surge-blocking bulkhead at \$381 million; a view-blocking earthen dike with pumps as high as \$3.8 billion; and the “Venice approach” of raising buildings above storm surge zones at \$1.2 billion and already underway in Galveston, Texas.

“The take home message is there is time to do a climate adaptation plan and if you plan ahead you’ll be happier,”

said Mr. Beever. “Those that don’t do anything aren’t necessarily doomed but they’re going to be pretty miserable. They could become communities left behind.” ■

“The rate between renourishing and renourishing again is getting shorter and shorter ... We’ve spoken up in meetings but engineers, renourishers and some politicians deal with facts not approached by science.” — Jim Beever

BY THE NUMBERS:

12-18

Possible rise in inches of sea level by 2100 in Florida.

44

Miles of Southwest Florida’s beaches critically eroded.

\$3.9 million

What Collier County spent to renourish its shoreline in 2016.

1.8

Degrees the global temperature has increased since 1900.

6-8

Feet of sea level rise estimated on the planet by 2100.

in the know

The Toll of Climate Change

Even under the least impactful scenario, Southwest Florida will experience:

- Increased climate instability
- Increased coastal erosion
- Continuous sea-level rise
- Wetter wet seasons
- Drier dry seasons
- More extreme hot and cold events
- Shifts in fauna and flora
- Increased tropical diseases in plants, wildlife and humans
- Destabilized aquatic food webs including increased harmful algae blooms
- Increasing strains upon and costs in infrastructure
- Increased uncertainty concerning variable risk assessment with uncertain actuarial futures.

Water.

The key to
Florida's future is
pretty clear.
Or is it?

BY ROGER WILLIAMS

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WHEN A STRONG SUMMER SQUALL FLOODED Miami Beach one day in August, the incident was a harbinger of what's to come, not an anomaly, said Dr. Harold Wanless, a University of Miami geologist and climate change expert.

The local flood will be repeated many times elsewhere in coming years, just one of many environmental challenges Floridians have never faced in such large degree, he predicts.

One of the biggest problems: the nearly half-million acres of sugar cane planted mostly south and west of Lake Okeechobee in land known as the Everglades Agricultural Area, a barrier roughly 20 miles deep that blocks the traditional flow of water southward into the Everglades.

The 143-mile, 30-foot-high dike around Lake O that protects the big farming interests and some 40,000 people living near the lake is crumbling and it offers no major southern spillway. Without a spillway on the south, water can't pass southward into the now off-limits Everglades Agricultural Area, the Everglades and Florida Bay, as it once naturally did.

"Since the dike was built, when water in the lake was held at or below 15 feet, the lake's marshes generally thrived," according to Audubon Florida's official account. When water goes higher to a consistent 16 feet, "plants begin to die in the 65-square-mile submerged marsh zone." Ultimately, that kills everything else up the food chain, including wading birds and alligators and even tourism, on which resident human life here sometimes depends.

"After hurricanes raised the lake levels in 2004 and 2005," reports Audubon, "the crappie fishery took about eight years to recover."

Meanwhile the dike continues to be ranked one of the most dangerous sites in North America — one of the most likely to fail, a one on a scale of one to five — by the international insurance firm, Lloyd's of London.

Since 2000, Americans have spent

\$870 million to repair that 80-year-old dike in an ongoing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project likely to cost at least another \$1.5 billion, officials now say, ranking this at the high end of the most expensive jobs ever shouldered in North America by the Army Corps.

As things stand now, those challenges and others will paint the Florida landscape of the near future far and wide with scores of local and regional floods resulting not just from rainstorms but from normal or king tides — not to mention more significant floods from future hurricanes that resemble Charley (2004) or Irma (2017) but worse: they are likely to bring life-altering storm surges.

Over time, not a long time, they'll defeat infrastructure and hugely reduce the quality of life in the Sunshine State.

"Buying a Prius and planting a couple of trees isn't going to change this. It's going to happen," Professor Wanless said.

Those floods may come with a flip side, as well — but the flip-side of a proverbial coin with no heads, only tails: Hugely destructive droughts, to name one. Polluted or salt-spoiled drinking water and compromised wastewater treatment facilities near the coasts, to name another.

Lacking restorative quantities of fresh water inflow from the north, Florida Bay is dying. Its alarming increase in salt — now twice the traditional natural level — coupled with rising sea levels also now threatens the vast Biscayne Aquifer, the subterranean source of drinking water for roughly 8 million residents of the southeast coast and the Florida Keys.

Unfortunately, that's not all. Nightmarish blooms of algae also infest Lake Okeechobee and its tributaries — a suffocating cyanobacteria that kills plants and animals from Charlotte Harbor on the west to the once super-fecund Indian River Lagoon on the east, which stretches south more than 150 miles from the Ponce De Leon Inlet in Mosquito Lagoon to the Jupiter Inlet north of West Palm Beach.

Not only did that entire water system endure the "lost summer" of 2013, it suffered a disastrous algae bloom in 2016 that covered almost 240 square miles of Lake O as well, threatening the fisheries on both coasts, along with the tourist industry.

Now as 2017 winds down, the spec-

ter of such catastrophes looms large again.

"This is Florida so we average 60 inches of rain a year, but it isn't that. It's 40 inches or 80 inches and sometimes there's only a 30-mile distance between them," said Marty Baum, born and raised in the region to a long line of pioneering Florida families, and now Riverkeeper on the Indian River Lagoon.

"So the water has to go somewhere and now it's polluted, and the system is overloaded."

The effect is dire from east to west and on both coasts. The problem is neither parochial nor local. It's regional and peninsular.

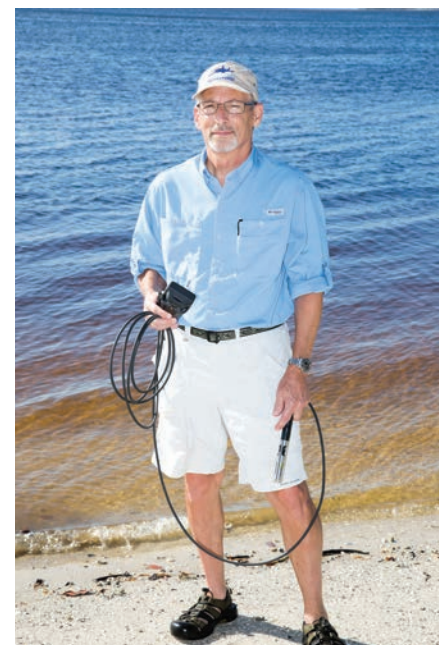
"The water management in Florida absolutely defaults to agriculture, specifically Big Sugar, which holds the plug to solving our discharge problems," Mr. Baum said.

"There is no other viable solution than to buy some land south of the lake, put the water in the system, and send it south, clean. The management of dirty water is killing us. The algae is the new normal. It's here to stay. And it's only going to get worse."

Almost a month after Hurricane Irma — early in the second week of October — water levels in Lake O had risen to more than 17 feet. And that was after the Army Corps had been releasing vast quantities of polluted, nutrient-rich water downstream, both east and west, a fact many seemed to ignore as October waned and the sunny, cooler days of November approached.

On the west side of the lake, flow through the Caloosahatchee Estuary was 14,732 cubic feet per second at the Franklin Locks in Lee County, a panic

SEE WATER, A12 ►



VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Calusa Waterkeeper John Cassani is one of 11 Florida members of the Waterkeeper Alliance.

"Buying a Prius and planting a couple of trees isn't going to change this. It's going to happen."
— Dr. Harold Wanless

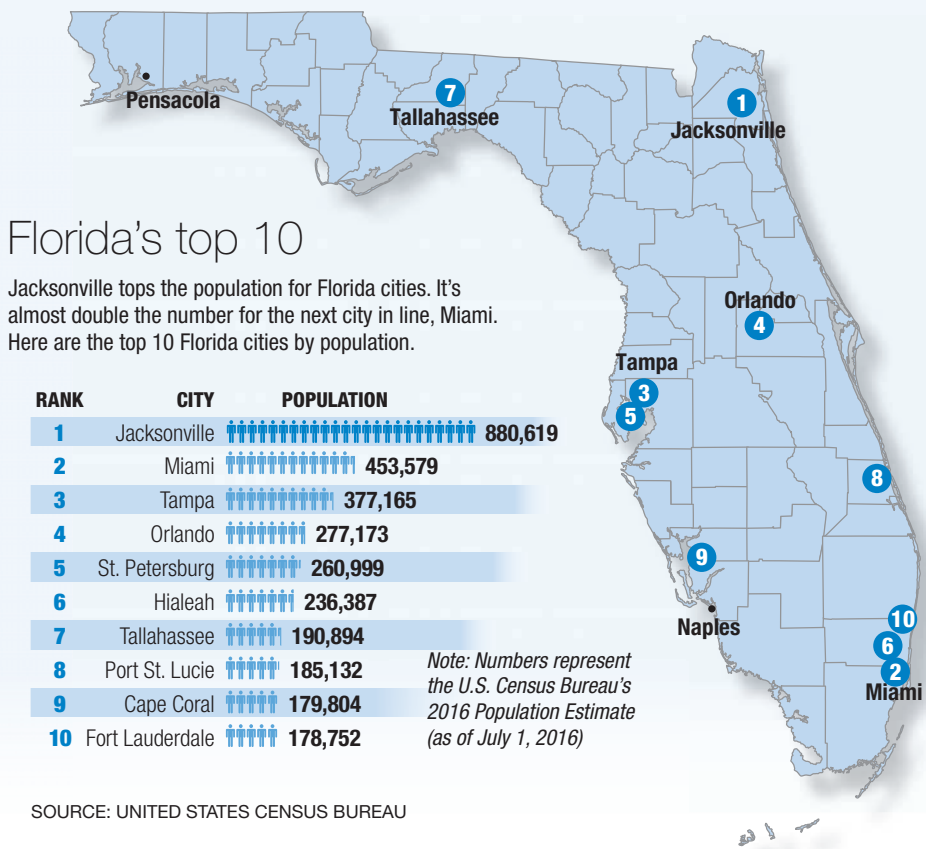


The data.

Inhabited Florida: From the International Space Station, it becomes very clear which portions of Florida are populated at night. This will change in future decades.



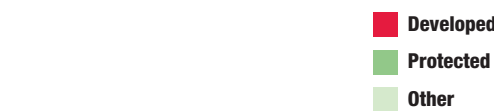
COURTESY PHOTO



2010 land use

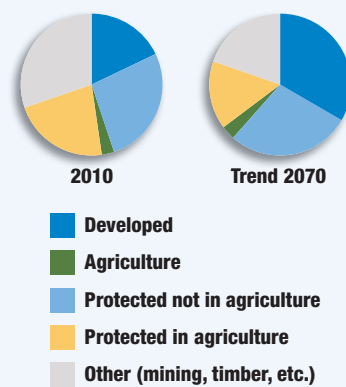
Sprawling population

If Floridians continue developing land as we traditionally have been, more than a third of the state will be paved over by 2070. Millions of acres of agricultural and natural lands, which affect our quality of life, jobs, water supply and more, will be lost. The map to the right shows land use areas for 2010. The map below illustrates the projected land use for 2070 if we continue to develop along the current trend.

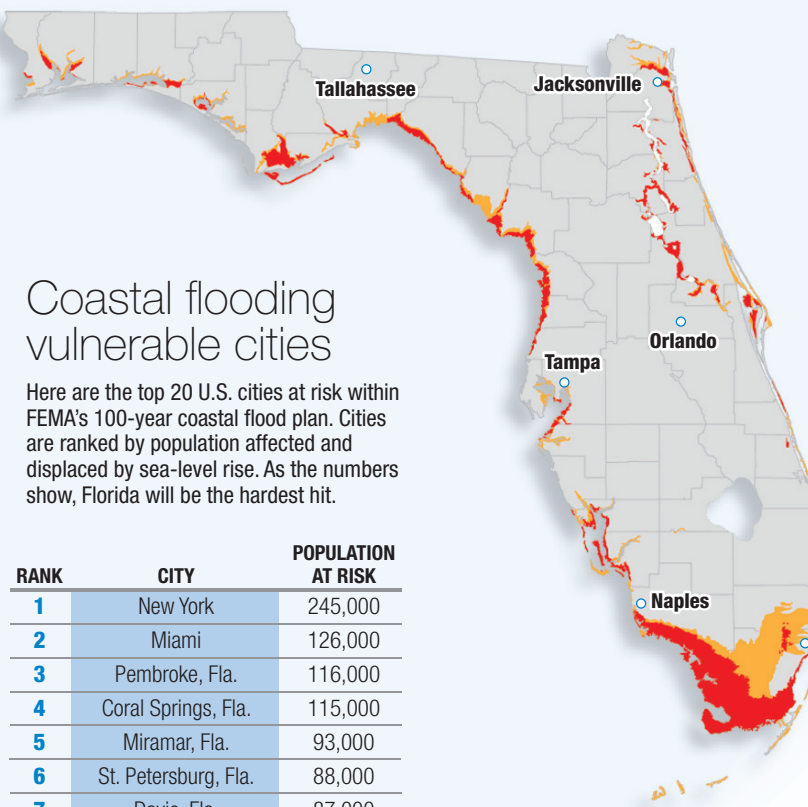


2070 trend

Florida 2070 comparison of statewide developed, protected, agricultural and other lands



SOURCE: 1000 FRIENDS OF FLORIDA



Coastal flooding vulnerable cities

Here are the top 20 U.S. cities at risk within FEMA's 100-year coastal flood plan. Cities are ranked by population affected and displaced by sea-level rise. As the numbers show, Florida will be the hardest hit.

RANK	CITY	POPULATION AT RISK
1	New York	245,000
2	Miami	126,000
3	Pembroke, Fla.	116,000
4	Coral Springs, Fla.	115,000
5	Miramar, Fla.	93,000
6	St. Petersburg, Fla.	88,000
7	Davie, Fla.	87,000
8	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	85,000
9	Miami Beach, Fla.	85,000
10	Hialeah, Fla.	76,000
11	Sunrise, Fla.	74,000
12	Pompano Beach, Fla.	73,000
13	Hollywood, Fla.	69,000
14	Lauderhill, Fla.	66,000
15	Charleston, S.C.	64,000
16	Cape Coral, Fla.	59,000
17	Tamarac, Fla.	58,000
18	Margate, Fla.	50,000
19	Tampa, Fla.	50,000
20	Fountainbleau, Fla.	48,000

SOURCE: CLIMATE CENTRAL

Rising water

Global warming has raised global sea level about 8 inches since 1880, and the rate of rise is accelerating. As global warming continues millions of people will be impacted as low lying coastal areas become unusable. The map at the left shows how areas are affected with a sea level rise of 3 feet and 6 feet.

SOURCE: CLIMATE CENTRAL

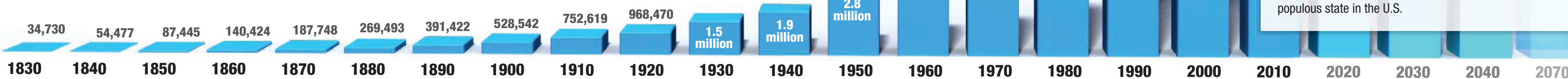
Florida's historical growth planning

Florida has grown much more inviting since its early days of 'growth planning.' In 1513, Ponce de Leon encountered the inhospitable Calusa Indians, was wounded by a poison-tipped arrow and retreated to Cuba, where he died. Now it is estimated that Florida grows by 1,000 people a day. That's the equivalent of adding a city the size of Tampa every year.

The large chart shows Florida's population since 1830, the projected growth through 2040 and the estimate for 2070.

The timeline below highlights some of the important points in Florida's growth to become the third most populous state in the U.S.

SOURCE: BUREAU OF ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS RESEARCH, 1000 FRIENDS OF FLORIDA



1845: Florida becomes a state. Federal and state officials create the first-ever plans to drain parts of it and control water.

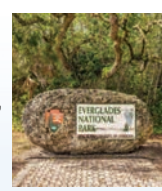


1893: Henry Flagler plans West Palm Beach and begins constructing the Florida East Coast Railway.



1937: The Herbert Hoover Dam surrounding Lake Okechobee is finished in a footprint of its current form, but work continues into the 1960s.

1947: President Harry Truman dedicates the original Everglades National Park, now about 1.5 million acres, a quarter of the original Everglades.



1960: Platters and speculative developers are arriving. They buy large tracts of land, selling it in quarter-acre lots to would-be residents aiming to build homes, without thought of significant infrastructure.



1975: The legislature establishes the Growth Management Plan, the first significant effort to control growth. Reubin Askew is governor.

1999-2000: Congress passes the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, designed to alter the 20th-century management of water from near Orlando south to Florida Bay, saving the Everglades. The projected date of completion: after 2030.



2006: Syd Kitson buys more than 90,000 acres of the timber, crop and cattle operation, Babcock Ranch. He sells 72,000 acres back to the state. The town will be created on about 17,600 acres.

2012: Under the Scott administration, the budget for the SFWMD is cut roughly in half.



2015: Population Southwest Florida: 1.25 million. Palm Beach County population: 1.43 million. Florida population: 20.24 million. Florida becomes the third most populous state in the nation.

2017: Commissioners in Sarasota and Lee counties vote to withdraw from the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, a six-county think-and-planning tank that analyzes the influence of any new development on a region, not just a single county.

1870s: West Palm Beach, first known as "Lake Worth Country," is founded by a few hundred people.



1917: The West Palm Beach Canal is connected to Lake Okechobee, creating the first version of the Cross-Florida Waterway.



1947: Marjory Stoneman Douglas publishes "The Everglades: River of Grass," warning of its potential destruction. The book creates a widespread national awareness of catastrophic environmental damage.

1960: Air conditioning becomes affordable to middle-class residents, and mosquito control, using the pesticide DDT, becomes an essential part of local-government service.



1960s: The Army Corps straightens and dredges the Kissimmee River, creating a 30-foot-deep canal out of the one-time headwaters of Lake O. and the Everglades. It also straightens and dredges the 60-mile Caloosahatchee River and basin west of the Lake.



1984: The legislature passes the State and Regional Planning Act of 1984, requiring County Comprehensive Plans updated every five years by commissioners. Bob Graham is governor.



2005: Ave Maria is conceived and building begun to develop a city in eastern Collier County far from any urban core.



2011: Gov. Rick Scott disbands the 42-year-old Department of Community Affairs, tasked with monitoring home and commercial development in Florida. He creates the Department of Economic Opportunity.

2015: The legislature does away with the 40-year-old "Development of Regional Impact" process requiring big developments to be vetted by both state and county governments.

2017: The first homes at Babcock Ranch are built and sold, with a "downtown" commercial center in operation. Growth in Florida continues, with the population of the Sunshine State expected to reach almost 21 million by year's end.

WATER

From page 9

flood maintained by the Army Corps to prevent a dike collapse. The last time so much water came down the estuaries was July, 1973, said John Cassani, the Calusa Waterkeeper.

Unfortunately, the water is untreated after decades of environmental, agricultural and urban growth planning that created the problem, and then subsequent decades of planning that has failed to solve the problem, he explained. So, it's polluted with high-nutrient agricultural waste and leeching septic systems, the powerful stimulants of cyanobacteria.

Like Marty Baum, Mr. Cassani — an affable water scientist and 60-something distance runner for whom marathoning is a form of meditation — represents the Waterkeeper Alliance (www.waterkeeper.org), an international non-profit organization of experts and activists based in the U.S. aiming to protect water in various regions of the world and the nation.

The Alliance has 11 waterkeepers working in Florida (sometimes called riverkeepers or coastkeepers). Those include the Indian Riverkeeper, Marty Baum, a Miami Coastkeeper, and a Collier County Waterkeeper, among the others north to south.

"At this rate of flow," Mr. Cassani noted of post-Irma water releases from Lake O by the Army Corps, "the C-43 reservoir would fill in just 5.5 days, assuming it was empty to begin with."

The C-43, a companion idea to the C-44 on the east of Lake Okeechobee, doesn't exist. Like the recently approved SB10, a reservoir fast-tracked by the legislature and governor to someday store water on public lands south of Lake O, the C-43 is merely a plan — a water-storage reservoir yet to be built along the Caloosahatchee in Hendry County.

Meanwhile, the dirty water keeps coming.

It's a long downward spiral that can stretch from boyhood into manhood. The kind of fishing Capt. Daniel Andrews, a guide, did as a boy in the Caloosahatchee estuary and Charlotte Harbor over prolific beds of sea grass



COURTESY PHOTO

Algae blooms in May 2016 killed marine life for miles along the Caloosahatchee River.

and oyster banks is "all but gone," he told *Florida Weekly*. Now he often has to take his clients 25 or 30 miles offshore just to find fish.

The experience encouraged him to co-found the organization that champions the cause, Captains for Clean Water. It makes good economic sense, to start with: Sport fishing alone in Florida stimulates \$9.3 billion in economic activity and creates 123,000 jobs, according to the American Sportfishing Association.

Rising sea level warnings

On that wet August morning when Prof. Wanless stood in a sunny, flooding Miami Beach neighborhood, the \$500 million effort of taxpayers to stiff-arm flooding with seawalls and pumps had failed. And not after a king tide or big storm, he said, but following a merely energetic rain squall.

It put everything in perspective, for him and others.

"The mayor of Miami Beach told us we're going to fix Miami Beach so you can enjoy it 1,000 years from now as you do today," he said. "That's almost criminal, to say that. That's buying into it. Miami Beach won't survive the century, maybe not the middle of the century. But government officials are concerned about holding on to tax rolls. And nobody wants to needlessly scare people."

On the other hand, he added, "it's also a horrible thing to lie to them."

The underlying reality of flooding and infrastructure collapse isn't complicated: By 2048, sea level rise on the planet is expected to be two feet above the current level, with three feet of rise by 2063,

according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration — which issued an addendum to that estimate in January that could take it higher.

And by 2100, when this year's crop of newborns turns 83 — men and women destined to live with the consequences of today's decisions — conservative estimates put sea level rise at 6.6 feet (NOAA's addendum now says it could go to more than 8 feet).

Here's what that means.

"A two- to three-foot rise of sea level will make nearly all of the barrier islands of the world uninhabitable, initiate inundation of a major portion of the world's deltas, and make low-lying coastal zones like south and central Florida increasingly challenging communities in which to maintain infrastructure and welfare and to assure protection of life and property during hurricanes and other extreme events," Professor Wanless wrote in July.

Such infrastructure failure, therefore, is destined to happen many other places besides Miami Beach in the next three or four decades, he warns, noting that Marco Island, Naples, Fort Myers and Sarasota are particularly vulnerable on the west, along with many oceanfront and island communities along the east coast. And not just after a major storm event such as Hurricane Irma.

Bottom line: Things are going to get rougher than they have been; we're going to leave our children with that reality. Planning therefore becomes essential, say the experts. The decisions of voters and current political leaders will either inhibit the worst of this outcome, or let it happen in ways that change Florida forever.

What can we do?

"So what can we do?" asks Mr. Cassani, who spent a first career as a hydrologist in Lee County.

Now as the Calusa Waterkeeper he finds himself working at the crossroads of the lower west coast's three greatest planning challenges: First, to overcome pollution from decades of agricultural waste flowing into Lake Okeechobee, most of it from cattle ranches and dairy farms north of the lake in the now-restored Kissimmee River basin, and from the vast cane fields around the lake owned by Florida Crystals' Fanjul brothers, and by the U.S. Sugar Corporation. (Added to that "legacy pollution" are toxins from old septic systems and urban drainage in the Caloosahatchee basin.)

Second, to encourage elected and appointed officials to aggressively protect the waters, and thus the land, the people and the economy, with sensible development that preserves wetlands and water.

And finally, to restore sufficient quantities of timely fresh water flowing from Lake Okeechobee west down the estuary and south into the southern Everglades, thereby maintaining a healthy estuarine system and bay on the Gulf of Mexico.

The same challenges exist for waters in the St. Lucie estuary flowing east out of Okeechobee and into the southern terminus of the Indian River Lagoon on the Atlantic coast, Marty Baum points out — once one of the most fecund fisheries on the planet. And so does the same question: What can we do?

No one works in a vacuum.

No one produces crops and meat, or builds new developments, or serves visitors in restaurants and hotels, or fishes, or lives here as a permanent resident, in a vacuum, he explains, echoing the opinion of many others.

Fixing the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries will also require connecting other fixes in the Everglades system and restoring both water quality and appropriate seasonal quantity — not just along the Kissimmee River north of Lake Okeechobee to the lake itself, but throughout the Okeechobee basin and all the way south through public and private lands to Florida Bay.

That's not happening now at a pace that can accommodate growth, even though the fixes have been identified. The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan enacted by the U.S. Congress 17 years ago has made little progress in water storage, acknowledged as the key to Everglades and estuary restoration.

"We have the know-how, but not the political willpower," Mr. Cassani said, adding his voice to a chorus of observers citing the same problem.

"The problem is our elected government," added Mr. Baum.

"The current administration (of Gov. Rick Scott) has gone out of its way to support agriculture and big oil and all of these polluting entities. They deregulated, so the state isn't really managing our natural treasures in a manner that is sustainable. They chip away and chip away, and they're not alone. The federal government is dismantling the EPA as we sit here. As a waterkeeper, I find that pretty grim."

Those opinions have been echoed in part by many others, including the University of Florida Water Institute's Dr. Wendy Graham, co-author of a seminal 2014 study analyzing water problems and solutions in Florida — a study disputed by virtually no one.

Water storage that does not now exist is the key to the practical side of the

"Everyone now acknowledges that Florida's water problems and the Everglades have to be fixed, and restored. On every political side of the issue — the left- wingers, the right- wingers and the Buffalo-wingers — they know there's no other choice. So the pressure to make the fixes will mount"

— Michael Grunwald,
Everglades expert



Blind Pass after an early 2016 rain event shows discolored water with low salinity coming from the Caloosahatchee River into the gulf.

JOHN MORAN / COURTESY PHOTO

planning problem, with estimates put at an additional 1 million to 1.4 million acre feet required, she noted (an acre foot is one acre of water, one foot deep; or a half acre of water, two feet deep, and so on.)

“Our report said, this is a big problem with hydrologic, legal, and infrastructure constraints, and there is no silver bullet that will solve the problem.

“We’ll need storage — north, south, east and west — and probably more storage in the lake to make it work.”

As for water moved south, into the ‘Glades, into Florida Bay assuring that 8 million people with more coming can keep drinking from the Biscayne Aquifer — “not only do you have to store it, but you have to convey it to where you want and treat it to legal standards,” explained Dr. Graham.

Ingenuity coupled with greed

Michael Grunwald is an Everglades expert and heir to the environmental legacy of Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who published the most celebrated book in the history of environmental apologists here: “The Everglades: River of Grass.”



GRUNWALD

That was 70 years ago, in 1947. Mr. Grunwald, who wrote the forward to the 60th anniversary edition of her book, authored a groundbreaking book of his own now a decade old: “The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida and the Politics of Paradise.”

A senior staff writer for *Politico Magazine*, he lives in the Miami area with his wife and two young children. That fact shapes what he sees now, he says — which includes a darkly comic and troubling interpretation of Florida’s growth appearing under his byline on the cover of the November-December edition of *Politico*.

He calls his piece, “The Boomtown That Shouldn’t Exist,” explaining a classic Florida story in the subtitle: “Cape Coral, Florida, was built on total lies. One big storm could wipe it off the map. Oh, and it’s the fastest growing city in the United States.”

Mr. Grunwald spoke with Florida Weekly not long before his story appeared in print.

“Central and South Florida used to have this fantastic water control district — it was called the Everglades,” he said.

“It rained a lot, water sat on the wetlands and trickled down, in the dry season there was enough and in the wet season it didn’t cascade on top of everything.”

But that changed.

“Then half the Everglades was paved and drained, much of the rest was dammed and ditched and diverted, and now you have 2,000 miles of levees and canals and engines cannibalized from nuclear submarines for pumps, they’re so powerful. That screwed everything up.”

Decades of American ingenuity coupled with greed has not resulted in our control of the water; on the contrary, it controls us, he acknowledged.

“Now in the wet season when Lake O gets high you have to blast it out (down the estuaries east and west). And in the dry season you get these horrible droughts.”

None of that’s natural, that’s for sure.

Like Dr. Graham and John Cassani, Mr. Grunwald suggests everyone knows the practical answer to the problem.

“The answer to all of this is storage,” he said. “So you don’t have to dump water where you don’t want to in the wet season, and you have enough in the dry for agriculture, bugs and bunnies, and the 8 million people who live around here.”

Mr. Grunwald is an optimist, he insists — in part because of his children, ages 9 and 7.

“Everyone now acknowledges that Florida’s water problems and the Everglades have to be fixed, and restored. On every political side of the issue — the left-wingers, the right-wingers and the Buffalo-wingers — they know there’s no other choice. So the pressure to make the fixes will mount” — and mount because his children with many others may encourage voters to pay more attention, and elected leaders to do the right thing.

If that’s not a justifiable cause for optimism, there’s another: Some progress has been made, he said.

“The water is cleaner than it used to be. It’s still not quite clean enough, but over 30 years, and continuing over the

last 10, there has been real improvement. That’s something people should feel really good about. In a sense, we’re poisoning the Everglades a little more slowly. But that’s real progress.”

Pocked by terrible periods of regress.

“The obvious moment that showed how dysfunctional the ecosystem is was the sort of stinkification of the Treasure Coast (first, in 2013). One of North America’s most bio-diverse estuaries looked like guacamole and smelled like crap.

“That’s (a result of) the main plumbing problem in Everglades, which the massive restoration project now 17 years old was supposed to fix. And it has done virtually nothing. We still have the same problem.”

Mr. Grunwald was describing the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, first presented in 2000.

“So now, the Everglades is a \$16 (to \$20) billion water-storage project going on for 17 years, that has provided nothing. Not one reservoir has been completed. Storage wells? There were supposed to be 330 (many north of the lake). We’re no longer even thinking of them.”

There are other missed opportunities staring at the sky, too.

“The rock quarries you see when you fly into the Miami airport? The idea was, when we’re done mining for highways and driveways we’ll provide storage for water in those quarries. But that’s not going to happen anymore.”

So, it comes down to politics, he says. At least in part.

“We’re getting nothing done, and it’s partly because of politics, and partly bureaucratic inertia. There are powerful interests standing in the way of getting things done the way you might want to.”

Know-how isn’t willpower, it seems. The real solution to the environmental problems in Florida is something besides knowledge and technical savvy, longtime observers agree.

“The solution is political and we have a broken political system in which big money has corrupted policy making at the state level and other levels,” said Mr. Cassani, again echoing the voices of other scientists who have realized politics, not just science, is the answer to a better quality of life, and a less expensive way of life, for future Floridians.

“But in politics,” Mr. Cassani concluded, “the greater public interest is often subordinate to the interests of the biggest water consumers and biggest polluters.” ■

“Central and South Florida used to have this fantastic water control district — it was called the Everglades ... It rained a lot, water sat on the wetlands and trickled down, in the dry season there was enough and in the wet season it didn’t cascade on top of everything.”

— Michael Grunwald, Everglades expert



Algae blooms devastated environments on the Caloosahatchee River last year.

COURTESY PHOTO

Affordable housing

Finding it is becoming harder and harder

BY Nanci Theoret

ntheoret@floridaweekly.com

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON TO HEAR LONG-TIME LOCALS REMINISCE about the days when Corkscrew Road was lined with sweeping ranches, Estero was just a blip on the Trail between Fort Myers and Naples, and how unlikely it was for development east of U.S. 41 to continue its eastern march past I-75.

In Palm Beach County, the opposite was true: Who could ever imagine living west of U.S. 441/State Road 7 except equestrians and farmers?

Fast forward 20 years and Estero is now an incorporated village, gated communities and neighborhoods have popped up in the exurbs miles east of the interstate, and a drive along any major roadway or backroad is likely to reveal a new community under construction, sometimes where it once seemed impossible.

Examples of such development: The 20-home Hill Tide Estates being built on nearly 10 acres on the southern tip of Boca Grande and plans for a restaurant, retail, 148 residences and a hotel that will forever erase a slice of old Florida at the historic Placida Fishing Village. Arden, just east of Twenty Mile Bend in rural Palm Beach County, is planned for 2,000 homes and dubs itself as nature-friendly and an 'agri-hood' because of its onsite community farm.

Since the Great Recession spun Southwest Florida into a real estate downfall, the building boom has returned with a vengeance. Florida's continued growth is creating the need for more homes; however, today's building frenzy is pricing many out of homeownership. Home prices are up. Rents are also on the rise. Salaries aren't. And the majority of these planned new developments are well beyond the means of the average employee.

The issue is particularly pronounced in Naples and Collier County, where luxury homebuilders cater to an affluent clientele of second-home and vacation-home owners. Except for teardown properties, there's no real buildable land in the city limits. In the county, upscale gated golf communities have risen out of abandoned quarries several miles east of I-75 and an entire town — Ave Marie — is some 20 miles farther out. Commercial corridors have followed. And with all this demand there's little reason for developers and builders to reinvent their business model, although, as Palm Beach County Mayor Paulette Burdick points out, their own employees also are priced out of the market.

"Affordable housing is Palm Beach County's No. 1 leg-

islative issue," says Mayor Burdick. "Every county in the state has a desperate need for workforce housing. It's a crisis situation in the state of Florida."

That's also how the Urban Land Institute and the National Association of Home Builders categorize the dire need for affordable housing.

Prices in Naples Park, once the neighborhood for the working class, have more than doubled since buyers discovered its proximity to the beach. Resident and builder Edward Armstrong remembers when lots sold for \$1,200 in 1971. He's built as many as 75 homes in the neighborhood, including one that sold for \$28,000, as well as the first house with a swimming pool.

While he expressed some surprise at \$800,000 sales in the community, he calls Naples Park "a sleeping giant. It's so close to the water."

Locally, the inability to afford a home close to their workplace is forcing mid-level employees, firefighters, teachers, law enforcement and other professionals to live elsewhere. Some Collier County firefighters commute from as far away as Fort Lauderdale, said Christopher Spencer, president of the North Collier Professional Fire Fighters & Paramedics Local 2297 and a long-time advocate for affordable housing.

"Some of the younger guys live with their parents," he said. "Others are living out in Lehigh or Cape Coral and have to calculate what they're saving versus tolls, time and fuel. It's painful to see how expensive it is to live in Naples and how far behind the curve we are. They're making their money here and investing it back in Lee County, Arcadia and Hendry County. They can work in Lee County and make less but they don't have the tolls or travel time. A dollar in Lee County goes further than a dollar in Collier County."

Not only does Collier County miss out on the economic impact of workers spending their money in the county and paying taxes, those daily drives by an estimated 16,800 commuters increase traffic congestion and physically strain infrastructure and roads.

"Affordable housing is one of the larger barriers to economic prosperity we're going to experience," said Eric Berglund, executive director of the Southwest Florida Economic Development Alliance. "Teachers, firefighters, police officers and nurses can't afford to buy houses. That impacts what the community looks like."

"Our hospital CEOs are expressing their concerns because they can't hire nurses and other healthcare professionals," said Mayor Burdick. "The top tier for workforce housing in Palm Beach County is \$120,000 for a household. I don't know too many planners, firefighters or nurses who make that kind of money. Schools are having a tough time recruiting teachers because they can't afford to relocate here."

Groups in Southwest Florida's three counties — ranked among the fastest growing areas in the country according to recent Census data — are researching options to include workforce development in the mix. Previous attempts have failed. During the height of the last building boom, Collier County required developers to pay into an affordable housing trust based on the size of their proposed new development. The county collected \$604,581 of an anticipated \$8 million from 2005 to 2007, and then stopped as the market collapsed. In 2011 it ended the program and refunded developers for homes or lot sales that never happened.

Palm Beach County adopted a workforce housing program in 2006, requiring developers who were granted increased density to allocate a percentage to workforce housing. There also was a buyout option.

"They have an \$80,000 buyout when the median price of a home is \$340,000," Mayor Burdick said. "Since 2006, zero workforce homes have been built."

Collier County is delving deeper this time around, tasking nonprofits, city and county officials, affected employees and citizens to devise solutions based on recommendations from a visit earlier this year by ULI planners who outlined the economic impact and human toll on communities that lack affordable housing. The organization made 35 recommendations, including zoning changes, increased density, improved access to transportation, creating revenue streams, using available public land or vacant and underused retail sites, and forming a housing trust fund.

"Affordable housing impacts nearly every element of the local economy," said committee member Michael Dalby, president and CEO of the Greater Naples Area Chamber of Commerce. "It impacts businesses' ability to attract and retain workers. It's the chamber's No. 1 priority."

For affordable housing to happen, many contend solutions must involve a concerted effort between public, private and nonprofit initiatives addressing policy changes, incentives for developers and out-of-the-box thinking — ideas as novel as converting long-vacant strip malls into affordable housing and increasing the emphasis on mixed-use development. One ULI recommendation rejected by the commission called for increasing minimum wage, a concept



BURDICK



supported by Mr. Berglund and others intent on preventing brain drain.

"We have to develop a high-quality workforce to make sure everyone gets a step ahead in life," he said, referencing the FutureMakers Coalition's goal of increasing college degrees, certifications and quality credentials in Southwest Florida's workforce. "Quality of life begins with a good job."

After 18 months of exploring the issue, Collier County's Community Housing Plan Stakeholders Committee presented its recommendations to a lukewarm commission in late October. The committee is advocating for establishing an affordable housing trust financed by linkage fees, a square footage-based assessment representing the additional housing needs created by new or redeveloped commercial property. It would generate an estimated \$2.5 million annually to provide grants and awards to developers building workforce housing.

Key components of the recommendations also include developer incentives such as increasing certainty of approval, streamlining the permitting process, reducing development costs and adopting an affordable housing density program. The proposal calls for a mixed-income ordinance to promote developments identified by the ULI as vibrant and attractive to a variety of demographics. It would also continue the county's efforts to reduce reliance on impact fees.

Members of the committee expected some of the recommendations to be controversial and require courage from commissioners to make difficult and unpopular decisions for the county's future and ultimately the greater good.

Affordable housing — whether mortgage or rental payments — is defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development as 30 percent or less of a household's gross annual income. Those spending more than 30 on housing costs are considered "cost-burdened" while a household shelling out more than 50 percent is considered severely cost burdened.

Entry-level employees and those earning median incomes in healthcare, public safety and professional sectors are more likely to "experience a cost burden than are the people holding executive, management and supervisory positions," the ULI noted in its Collier County study. "Collectively the employment sectors that are the most at risk to incur a significant cost burden represent more than 50 percent of the local labor force."

More than 61 percent of jobs in Collier County pay less than \$33,250 a year.

"The affordability spectrum covers a wide range of people," said Nick Kouloheras, president of Habitat for Humanity of Collier County, who's the chairman of the stakeholder committee. "The public has the perception that affordable housing is for those working in the hospitality or farming industry or construction labor force. But housing affordability in Collier County touches everybody's life. It's employees who provide services like first responders and landscape maintenance. There's a huge lack of decent affordable housing for retirees and people with disabilities."

Under current housing scenarios, a household needs to gross about \$128,000 annually to afford the county's median home price.

"There are stereotypes but the reality is that affordable housing in Collier County is a household making a six-figure salary," Mr. Kouloheras said.

Committees in Palm Beach County also are researching options for attracting workforce housing and are expected to report to the board of commissioners by summer.

"In areas that need affordable housing we're considering increased density," said Mayor Burdick. "We're looking at waving permits fees and hookups to bring down the costs for a developer to build workforce housing. It costs \$10,000 to hook up to water and sewer. We're sitting down with everyone at the table to come up with new solutions as a county to this significant problem."

Because developers often have little to gain financially in creating workforce housing, any plan in any county is almost guaranteed to include sprawl-containing higher densities and government subsidies. Speaking before the U.S. Senate Finance Committee in August, Granger MacDonald, chairman of the NAHB and a Texas developer and homebuilder, urged passage of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act to promote construction of affordable rental apartments. He cited a Harvard University Joint Center of Housing study which determined the number of renter households considered severely cost burdened is at an all-time high of 11.4 million or more than one in four U.S. renters.

"Fees, regulatory compliance, modern building and energy codes, building materials, land and labor costs determine whether a project is financial viable," he said. "If we want to provide affordable rental housing for lower-income households, we cannot do so without a subsidy."

In Florida, money to create workforce housing is already in place, according to Mayor Burdick. "For the last 10 years Tallahassee has been swiping money from the Sadowski Trust Fund to balance the budget," she said. "I am hoping all of our 67 counties will support workforce housing as the No. 1 legislative priority and let Tallahassee know we need those Sadowski funds."

The William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act was established in 1992 in honor of the Florida Department of Community Affairs secretary who died in a plane crash. The act increased the state documentary stamp tax collected during a real estate sale and channeled the additional revenue into trust funds overseen by the Florida Housing Finance Corp. Ideally all the extra doc stamp money should benefit programs that lead low- to moderate-income families to home ownership, help senior citizens age in place, retrofit homes to accommodate those with special needs and create competitive incentive loans for developers to build low-rent apartments.

Legislators, however, have swept out nearly \$1.3 billion since March 2007. Fighting these annual decisions is the Sadowski Housing Coalition, comprised of 30 statewide organizations, including Florida Realtors, the state home builders association and advocates for the homeless, elderly, veterans and people with special needs. The coalition projects \$314 million for fiscal year 2018-19, noting a full allocation of the trust to affordable housing would create 30,000 jobs and a \$4 billion economic impact in just one year. It could result in over 12,700 homes been built and housing for over 93,000 people.

Since the recession, more Florida households are renting. Homeownership fell from 71 to 65 percent between 2007 and 2014 and included low- and high-income families, according to a 2016 Florida rental market study. About 32 percent were cost-burdened by rents.

The average rent is \$1,900 in Palm Beach County.

Southwest Florida's three counties don't have enough affordable rentals to meet the growing demand. A study by Estero-based John Burns Real Estate Consulting determined Charlotte County needs to

add 219 market-rate apartment units during the next five years.

County commissioners took steps last year to make that happen, revising a portion of the 2050 comprehensive plan to allow "incentive density" to speed up the construction of moderate income, workforce housing as well as units for those with low and very low incomes. Already underway is Charlotte Commons, a 50-acre development along Peachland, Loveland and Veterans boulevards which will add 256 apartments and 119 townhome villas.

The county's lingering Murdock Village is also planned for 2,400 residences.

John Burns also projects a 4.4 percent increase in rental households nationally during the next five years due to demographic changes, convenience, mobility and the lack of financial commitment.

Punta Gorda recently turned over city-owned land and earmarked four vacant commercial buildings to nonprofits, which have created affordable housing units, said City Manager Howard Kunik.

"Affordable housing remains an issue," Mr. Kunik said. "In order to attract working families, this is something we have to do in the long run to be sustainable."

As development consumes land closest to the urban core and coast, it's shifting to the east in Southwest Florida and the west in South Florida, where agricultural lands have been abandoned and those that aren't include zoning for ranchettes and offer the potential for subdividing plots. Of course, a pro-development board of commissioners or city council could approve zoning changes that forever impact community character.

A number of rural properties in Southwest Florida currently on the selling block include the zoned 154-acre Coral Creek South on Burnt Store Road approved for up to 999 housing units and 20,000 square feet of commercial development; 37 acres in Alva that under its current rural zoning allows one home per acre; a 78-acre palm farm on Pine Island; and in Collier County's rural fringe mixed-use district, the 956-acre HHH Ranch, three miles east of CR 951 with a maximum density of 115 units.

In Palm Beach County, growth is creating pressure to develop in the west, including the 21,000-acre Agricultural Reserve and the rural central western Loxahatchee region, said Commissioner Steven Abrams. The Ag Reserve was established in the county's comprehensive plan to preserve unique farmlands and wetland with provisions for low-density residential development.

"The challenges to support development have always involved having infrastructure in place," Mr. Abrams said. "It's been a particular challenge over the past several years since the legislature has greatly loosened growth management laws."

Because of existing high-end residential in the southern portion of the Ag Reserve, the infrastructure is already in place to support development, including the "mega swap of development rights" between the reserve and Loxahatchee being proposed by GL Homes. The developer wants to build 2,315 homes on 738 acres in the reserve in exchange for saving nearly 2,900 acres in Loxahatchee as farmland.

"It's an interesting proposal the board will be considering at the beginning of next year," Mr. Abrams said. "GL Homes has holdings in both areas and is willing to give up development in a more rural area.

Farmers will tell you farming is more productive in the central western region. It's not a question of if it's going to be developed but when. Property owners have a constitutional right to do it."

Lee County's comprehensive plan mentions affordable housing 29 times, allowing for increased density near Florida Gulf Coast University for student housing, identifying potential sites for pilot and demonstration projects, incentives for mixed-use development and forming public-private partnerships.

The latter is being spearheaded by the Southwest Florida Community Foundation which has assembled an attainable housing coalition comprised of community stakeholders. Members Kitty Green and Mike Quaintance say policy change is necessary to make it a reality.

"We're going to have to intensify builder incentives to provide product 20 percent below market value," said Mr. Quaintance, a professor at Keiser University. "We have to make it financially palpable to garner support from the private sector. As a college professor I see students struggling every day to work full-time, pay for college and find affordable housing. We have to figure out how to incorporate affordable housing into the urban centers to reduce the impact on transportation. We continue to perpetuate the problem by pushing (development) out to Lehigh."

Affordable diverse housing is among the 10 principals the Urban Land Institute touts as essential to smart development as growth impedes on the urban fringe. "Of critical importance ... is a mix of housing types, price points, and uses offering a more vital and diverse community. The need to direct growth to walkable mixed-use neighborhoods rather than to conventional subdivisions offers the opportunity for more diverse housing types. Rental and ownership single-family houses with yards, townhouses, and multifamily apartment buildings are all needed to meet the varied lifestyles of people living in the suburbs."

Providing these options, it concludes, will entice those teachers, service workers and first responders to live where they work.

Those trying to shape the future of affordable housing in South Florida are hopeful of a resolution, although caution it's going to be a long time in the making.

"This is one of the few times there has been so much interest from so many areas," said Ms. Green, president and CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Lee and Hendry Counties. "It's going to take all areas in the community to make any kind of impact."

"There's no one answer," added Mr. Quaintance. "It's not going to be easy. We have to look at multiple solutions to embrace the new economy and what it takes for someone earning a living to survive in Southwest Florida. We have to be open-minded and work together to resolve this issue." ■

"Affordable housing remains an issue ... In order to attract working families, this is something we have to do in the long run to be sustainable."

— Howard Kunik,
Punta Gorda city manager



KUNIK

Getting there

It's about where we live and work, and creating alternatives to get there

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

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PLANNERS SAY WE NEED MORE TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS that lessen our reliance on cars — along with affordable homes in compact, mixed-use communities — to preserve our quality of life in a fast-growing region.

"You can live in your car, but you can't drive your house," an old saying goes. Besides its dark-humored, hard-times wisdom, it suggests the inextricable relationship between transportation and real-estate, a relationship that determined how we grew in the past, and how we will grow in the future.

Petroleum-powered cars are the raison d'être for vast swaths of suburban real-estate and roads after World War II. Suburbia is out of fashion but still blankets South Florida and other parts of America such as Denver and Los Angeles, with sprawling oases of single-family homes and condos disconnected from shopping malls and employment destinations. To get where we wanted to go required ever more and wider roads supported by business, financial, and government systems that took deep root.

Now, the center cannot hold, urban and transportation planners warn. The old way is not sustainable. The new relationship between transportation and real-estate should look something like this: a mix of residences and businesses in compact, pedestrian-friendly communities that offer multiple, connected transit options such as trains, trolleys, buses, "connected" and driverless cars, bikes, and your feet. One example of such communities are New Urban and "transit-oriented developments" or TODs, with homes and amenities clustered within a half-mile of transit services.

"We're kind of hitting a capacity issue with automobiles," said John L. Renne, director of the Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. "So, the growth of our region does depend on finding alternative solutions to complement cars, not replace cars."

In fact, planners have been warning us to contain sprawl at least since the 1970s when Florida's Growth Management and later Smart Growth and Complete Streets policies were created, and often ignored by political leadership and developers.

"So Florida has always been in the vanguard of not only growing badly, but trying to control and manage better growth," said Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, an urban planner and architect based in

Miami who is renowned as one of the parents of the New Urbanism, an anti-sprawl movement that began nearly four decades ago.

Evidence of its effort to remake suburbia, urban and downtown areas — and even build entire cities — can be found in places such as Cape Coral's entertainment district, Punta Gorda's Sunloft Center, 5th Avenue South in Naples, CityPlace in West Palm Beach, and the city of Seaside in northwest Florida.

Now with new people flocking to regions such as Southwest Florida's coastal Collier, Lee, and Charlotte counties, an area that could rocket from 1.2 million residents toward the 2 million mark in the next quarter century, those warnings to change the way we build transportation infrastructure and living spaces have become more urgent. On the east coast in Palm Beach County, more than 300,000 new residents are expected during that time to boost the population to 1.7 million.

Adding to the influx will be seasonal travelers. The number of people coming and going from Southwest Florida International Airport, for instance, is projected to rise from 8.6 million in 2016 to 14.3 million in 2040.

Without public and private investment in new types of transportation and urban development, planners tell us, we face increasingly congested, dangerous intersections, long commutes and loss of the natural beauty and resources that make South Florida special.

"The question is, where do we build and what kind of communities do people want to live in?" asks FAU's Mr. Renne, who in addition to his position at the school is managing director of the TOD Group, a private real-estate development company that builds and invests in transit-oriented development.

"The research and the data about where people want to live is beginning to say that people want walkable communities where they can have transportation options to be able to get to other places," he said. "And it could be jobs, it could be places for recreation, to go out to dinner, to go shopping, wherever. But South Florida is really built around automobiles and low-density, single-family communities and we've separated shopping from living. So if we look to the fu-



PLATER-ZYBERK



RENNE

ture, in several decades down the road, what we're starting to see is there's a great opportunity to rebuild South Florida to try to create more of these transit-oriented development opportunities."

And while widening and building new roads has helped ease congestion, it is by itself a failing long-term solution, said Bill Spikowski, a veteran urban planner on Florida's southwest coast. He believes passenger rail will be a key addition here as it was on the east coast years ago.

Mr. Spikowski adds that widening surface roads to more than four lanes can increase congestion because it creates more conflict between drivers, and is unappealing and dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists.

"The truth is they (public transportation planners) can't afford to keep doing what they're doing because it's more expensive to build roads to serve sprawl," he said. "The pain isn't immediate, but the long-term cost is actually more. It happens 10 years from now when the roads go from congested to really congested."

Official county Metropolitan Planning Organizations or MPOs are required to develop long-range plans that look ahead 25 years at transit plans. The most recent were created in 2015 and look to 2040.

Among the challenges they and other planners face are creating genuinely competitive alternatives to cars; paying for expensive new high speed transit such as trains and busses; and building transit-oriented or New Urban-style developments with affordable housing for families on working-class wages.

Driverless and "connected" car technology is also being widely studied and developed, but how it will affect practical transportation planning is at this point "largely conjecture," said Gary Harrell, principal planner for the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda MPO. He speculates that one day self-driving cars could illuminate the need for parking garages.

Michael Masanoff disagrees. The developer of a planned TOD in West Palm Beach called Transit Village, he says they could worsen traffic if fleets of empty, driverless cars are roving our roads in between picking up passengers.

Collier MPO executive director Anne McLaughlin says the cars could mean "fewer crashes, fewer injuries, fewer fatalities... It could be a marvelous change of direction."

Fortunately, MPO officials, Smart Growth and New Urban advocates, developers, politicians, and other planners all have plenty of ideas about how to build better living spaces and transportation, even if they don't all agree on how to get there. Here's a look forward at how they're planning the future.



A Complete Streets philosophy that purports to accommodate all modes of transportation has been widely accepted. But state and local governments have often not aligned when it comes to policy, and cyclists and pedestrians have gotten most of the attention.

“(C)onventional wisdom of widening streets and adding lanes is under strict scrutiny right now with Complete Streets and other programs going on,” said Bonita Springs Mayor Peter Simmons. “So the city of Bonita Springs is looking at all the approaches to not only move cars, because that’s where everybody wants to start, but we also need to look at how to move pedestrian traffic and bicycles and walkers and joggers, so we’re taking that holistic view on everything.”



SIMMONS

Controlling sprawl and congestion in fast growing regions of South Florida, planners such as Mr. Renne and Mr. Spikowski say, also involves greater investments in passenger rail, busses, and the dense real-estate that makes them financially viable.

With Lee County alone set to welcome some 300,000 new residents by 2040, Mr. Spikowski urges taking steps now toward developing commuter or light rail. Doing so could in turn spur the density of homes and businesses built near such a rail line that is needed to sustain it.

There is an ideal opportunity to do that, he said, on the CSX/Seminole Gulf Railway line where it runs for through the heavily traveled heart of Southwest Florida: from northern Collier County through the historic centers of Bonita Springs and downtown Fort Myers in Lee County. The line continues across the Caloosahatchee River, though Charlotte County and up to Arcadia.

Mr. Spikowski analyzed state employment data showing how the CSX line runs directly through Lee County job centers, “a rail road in the most perfect place you’d want it to be” for commuters, he said. He envisions the line with stops in key areas including downtowns, transit-oriented developments, park-and-ride lots, and feeder bus lines that could move riders across the county and connect to places like the airport and Florida Gulf Coast University.

While it is not the sole solution to transportation growth, “It’s one essential part,” he said, “and there’s really no like second choice for that. We need better bus systems and we probably have some places for street cars, but those run on roads and as the roads get crowded those slow down, too. This is one way to make transit fast, without adding to the roads.”

Lee County’s MPO in 2013 completed a rail “feasibility” study which recommends that the county and state purchase the right of way along a 37-mile stretch of the CSX/Seminole line that could — at some point — be used for commuter or light rail, as well as bus rapid transit, and a multi-use bicycle and walking path.

Lee County commissioners, mayors and city council members, who make up the MPO board, roundly endorsed the study’s conclusion but have yet to work with the state to purchase the right of way.

“I think certainly (the Florida Department of Transportation) will be open to looking” at that purchase and developing passenger rail, said FDOT spokesperson Zac Burch. “Like we said, there’s a limit to how many roads and how big a roads you can build. Anything to take pressure off the state highway system is certainly something we’re willing to have a conversation about.”

Buying CSX’s rail corridor is complicat-



PASON GADDIS / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Traffic in Collier County on Immokalee Road and Interstate 75 is just one place that gets extremely congested during peak times in Florida.

ed by the fact that the property is leased to Seminole Gulf Railway for the next 30 years, which allows them to use it for freight and The Murder Mystery Dinner Train. The county and state have several options, including buying the right of way and negotiating with Seminole Gulf to add passenger service. Otherwise they’d have to wait until Seminole’s lease runs out to use it.

Lee County commissioner Larry Kiker said he has not approached CSX or Seminole Gulf about the rail line.

“But our board, from what I am able to gather, is very interested in looking into those possibilities and I think it would be very exciting to do something like that,” he said. “The idea is intriguing, it’s exciting and it would certainly help our transportation model. It would absolutely be beneficial in my opinion.”

Buying the right of way is not especially expensive; it could cost up to \$15 million, the study found, and at least allow the public to hold on to what planners consider an irreplaceable asset. On the other hand, building a commuter rail along it could cost \$10 million to \$20 million per mile.

The Denver model

The first rail line in the Denver, Colo. area’s Regional Transportation District opened in 1994. It now serves a population of 2.9 million in an eight-county region with 87 miles of commuter and light rail track connected to a fleet of more than 1,000 busses with 9,000 stops.

Mr. Renne and others point to it as a model for how fast-growing areas with large swaths of suburbia develop and pay for rail or other new, potentially pricey modes of transportation.

Like South Florida, the Denver area was blanketed with suburbs after World War II and has experienced rapid population growth. Later, rail spurred billions in private development along its line, and proved an indispensable way to reduce congestion on roads, said RTD spokesperson Nate Currey.

“It’s not something you’re going to see immediate dividends,” he said, “but the economic development that goes along with these (rail) lines is unreal.”

Like areas of South Florida, the sprawling 2,342-mile RTD was originally built out for cars.

“We were built on the automobile post-World War II,” Mr. Currey said. “That’s how this place really expanded. But we’ve still done it. We’ve built out a ton of rail and people are using it really well.”

“Denver’s a growing city and it has been since the ’60s. People thought the first section of light rail we built that we were crazy. No one was going to invest in it, no one was going to ride it. But once ridership was there, interest really picked up. Public sentiment went along with it as well as investment along the corridor.”

Officials here, especially on Florida’s west coast, are also skeptical that rail is financially viable. They contend that people and businesses in the region are too spread out and “low density” to support rail or even significantly expand the bus system, while others contend that if you build it, the population density will take care of itself.

“We’ve looked at (passenger rail) and we’ll continue to look at it,” Bonita Springs Mayor Simmons said. “We continue to hear that we simply don’t have the density of people on the Southwest coast of Florida to make it economically viable.”

In Collier County, “In the transportation world, we’re at the baby steps stage,” said MPO director Ms. McLaughlin. “We just don’t have the density to be talking about light rail unless someone wants to bring it here and add a few stops for Collier.”

But that could change as Southwest Florida’s population grows.

“You can induce higher density,” said urban planner Ms. Plater-Zyberk. “The transit and development is always a chicken and egg thing. You wait for development then there’s no place to put the transit; you put the transit in and nobody’s riding it for a while so you subsidize it; you never get it exactly right.”

Mr. Spikowski believes developers would be willing to build along a planned passenger rail line in a fast-growing county such as Lee, as they have in Denver, on Florida’s east coast, and elsewhere.

“They flock to those areas to build higher density housing even if it’s not going to

be there for five years,” he said. “Because if it’s something that’s in the works, first of all they can use it as a sales point. That’s why it’s so frustrating when people talk to me here: ‘well, no developer would...’ Well, actually they would if there’s a reason to.”

The streets and developments around the stations would also need to be pedestrian friendly to gain ridership, said FAU’s Mr. Renne, as many people would walk or bike the last quarter or half mile or more to and from home.

“(The station areas) need to be places where people feel comfortable walking and don’t feel like they’re taking their life in their hands when they’re walking across the street,” he said. “The last leg of your trip needs to be a pleasant experience and if it’s not people will revert to driving their cars.”

Unaffordable housing

Transit-oriented developments around stations, and other New Urban, mixed-use types of communities that have popped up around Florida, have been criticized for not offering affordable housing for families.

“You look at something like Coconut Point (a mixed-use shopping mall with residences in Estero),” said Lee MPO executive director Don Scott. “But those places aren’t where it’s that affordable for a family to live and work.”

Mr. Renne says home prices in New Urban and TOD developments remain high in large part because not enough of them have been built yet, a matter of supply and demand. Coconut Point is also an example of how many trendy developments built on New Urban principles have also failed to offer one of its key elements: alternative transportation options. Surrounded by a huge parking lot, Coconut Point is still built mainly to be visited by car.

Mr. Renne adds that if developments offer truly multi-modal options, people could end up saving money even if they pay more for housing.

“The average American spends around 20 percent of their income on transportation cost,” he said. “But if you don’t have to have a car you can cut that down to like

SEE GETTING, 19 ►

Transportation options.

Cities hope
Brightline transforms
rail service along
east coast

BY JAN NORRIS

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THOUGH THE DATE FOR THE LAUNCH OF THE \$3 billion Brightline, the high-speed passenger rail system connecting Miami to Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and ultimately Orlando, is still unknown, anticipation is growing.

Representatives from Brightline's parent group, All Aboard Florida, are reluctant to project a start date for Phase I of the passenger train service — the West Palm Beach to Miami route. The launch has been delayed from late July, to September, and now, to the end of 2017.

Stations and tracks are still under construction, though all five of the trains that will make up the Phase I service in South Florida have been delivered to the Workshop — the railroad operations center in West Palm Beach.

The three-story stations are brightly lit, with meeting space, WiFi and work areas. Miami's station will have retail shops and restaurants in its larger terminal.

Ticket prices have not been announced, either, though officials say there will be a promotional fare to start, and later, monthly, weekly and weekend passes will be available, as will other incentives, possibly through area businesses or city promotions.

A spokesperson for the train said the ticket price would be comparable to operating a car for the trip.

Up to 32 trains daily will deliver passengers from downtown West Palm Beach to Fort Lauderdale in 30 minutes, and to Miami in about an hour. Trains are scheduled to run hourly from early morning to late night.

West Palm Beach Mayor Jeri Muoio is anxiously awaiting the first ride. She sees Brightline as a huge addition to the growth of the city, and the region, with the trains bringing businesses, workers, and tourists to the area. The city has been working with Brightline since it was planned in 2012.

"I'm very optimistic about the effects of Brightline on West Palm Beach. I think it's really going to add so much to our city. It's good for businesses, and offices and their workers," she said.

Business owners she's talked to expressed interest in opening offices here or moving here, while maintaining offices or extending their business to Broward or Miami-Dade.

"I spoke with some young people with an engineering firm in Lauderdale looking to open an office here," she said. It's the kind of movement Brightline planners and the cities it reaches are hoping to achieve.

The exposure for the area will be sig-

nificant, she said. West Palm is ready for additional visitors coming for culture to the Kravis Center, the Norton Museum of Art or the many playhouses. She also sees the potential for event visitors — SunFest, the Palm Beach International Boat Show, and more baseball fans coming for spring training.

The city is getting ready for lodgers with more accommodations adding to those already in and near downtown. "We have a lot of hotels in the proposal stage, and some already under construction."

Brightline is building a parking garage and a 290-unit apartment complex at the station, as well — another boon to the growing downtown that has dozens of cranes visible on its skyline.

Rick Rose, co-owner of the Grandview Heights Bed & Breakfast in West Palm Beach, is optimistic about the train, as well. He's active in the tourism and hospitality areas of the city's plans.

He sees a significant boost in visitors coming for short stays during Phase I of the train line.

"There's going to be two different groups of people. The Europeans, who might not rent a car — they are used to trains. They fly in and go to Miami Beach by taxi. And a lot of New Yorkers take a shuttle to Miami Beach and never see a car while here.

"They're going to say, 'Let's go to Palm Beach for a couple of days.' Maybe they'll catch an act at the Kravis, or go to a museum, or an exhibit at the Norton."

Those visitors have been to Key West or Fort Lauderdale maybe to party and want a bit more culture or more mature crowds offered here, he said.

"They will do an overnight or two days here," he said. Already many of his guests come up from Miami; the train will make it that much simpler; they can be here in half an hour, and then, "We can pick them up, or they can even walk over."

But the real potential, he says, the second group of riders. They'll come when the Orlando route opens and families come north to go to Disney World, or south to fly out of Miami after going to the theme parks.

"Right now, people fly into Miami and to get to Orlando, rent a car and take the Turnpike or I-95. They see West Palm Beach on a highway sign — that's it.

"When Brightline's Phase II opens, it's going to be a different ball game. West Palm Beach will be their first tropical stop (southbound). We're right in the middle of the route," he said. "People

have read about it, maybe, and now they'll see it and want to stop over."

The potential for longer "stay-put" vacations, especially for families, is huge, he said. "Palm Beach County is the No. 1 family destination on the Gold Coast. Miami and Fort Lauderdale are more for singles and couples. We're family-friendly."

The ability to walk and get around near the station is a part of that appeal for riders, he said, so he expects some hotels and some bed and breakfast rooms to fill those needs.

Because they're more rapid-transit savvy, "The international folks and families will definitely use this service," he predicts.

Raphael Clemente, executive director of West Palm Beach's Downtown Development Authority, agrees. He's a big supporter of the train system for dozens of reasons.

"First of all, I think it's a huge amenity for West Palm Beach and for the region — not just where it ends in the north in Phase I.

"Having the South Florida region and major population centers connected with a major rail system is a tremendous step forward" in smart growth plans, he said.

"It's incredibly well designed, and from the user perspective, it's going to be a great success."

The modern trains, with level boarding, are equipped with wide seats, touchless restrooms, high-speed WiFi and a "select" (reservation) option for prime seats and food and beverage service. Luggage storage and bike racks are on-board.

Mr. Clemente, an urban planner, sees the privately funded train as a long needed answer to some of South Florida's unique traffic and congestion problems stemming from its booming growth.

He explained the area's layout. "Unlike most metropolitan areas, we are a linear metropolis. Chicago, other major metropolises are more circular with different patterns.

"Our connectivity as a region is limited to the Turnpike and I-95 and Tri-Rail."

Rebuilding, expanding, and maintaining roads is an expenditure, while building mass transit is an investment, he says. "Do we spend, or do we invest in our future?"

He believes the era of single-occupancy vehicles is ending, making the question moot. "Increasingly people are making that decision not to drive," he said. Generational or because of cost or time in traffic, the reasons are many. He acknowledges there will always be those who want to drive their personal vehicle,



CLEMENTE



MUOIO





COURTESY PHOTO

Brightline President Michael Reininger addresses a crowd with BrightBlue in the background.

and some have a need.

But the clogged roads are inadequate in moving people efficiently, he said, and they're only going to get worse with South Florida's growth.

"I talked to a businessman from Fort Lauderdale just today who was at a meeting in downtown West Palm. It took him an hour and 40 minutes in his car from Fort Lauderdale to get to downtown West Palm Beach. That's a lot of wasted productivity," he said.

Add to that the parking costs and tolls, it makes little sense for one person to drive their car in between the cities, he said,

when there's an opportunity to have the system like Brightline in place.

The North-South traffic corridor cries for a rail system, he said. And while there will be drawbacks and growing pains — backups on roadways at the rail crossings that are undesirable chief among them, "They are more desirable than building more and bigger roads and having more congestion.

"We have to create opportunities for multi-modal transportation. We are giving people mobility options. It's not a luxury — it's a necessity."

Another component Brightline adds is

socio-economic and it's long overdue as well, he says. It's a chance at affordable housing and economic equality, especially once feeder systems are in place to connect with Brightline's hubs, he said.

"If we're going to have true urban neighborhoods, where people live and work, transportation is critical. When we start talking about housing affordability, it can't be separated from transportation. If you're forced to live 10 or 15 miles from where you work, you're spending so much to live outside on transportation, it's not economically feasible."

He points to service sector jobs — a core in South Florida's hospitality industry. Most of those jobs are in the urban centers, in or near downtowns. "They have to get to work somehow.

"I'm standing in front of Rocco's Tacos (on Clematis Street in downtown West Palm Beach). They employ 70-plus people. Lots and lots of those don't have a car, or don't drive. Or some do and wish they had another option."

Now, he says, they have a shot at possibly even a better job, as long as the cities step up with connective transportation options to the trains.

Key will be connecting the western communities and the airport. "We have to look at our regional systems," he said. "Hopefully there will be great support."

The downtown trolley is a perfect example of a go-between in the area. The city is changing the route to stop at Brightline.

"Here's a stat for you: 500,000 people rode the trolley last year. They use it to access Tri-Rail, hotels, shopping areas. Now we're adding in the Bikeshare program, and

there will be a rack there (at Brightline)."

He's looking forward to riding for both business and pleasure. "I frequently go to Miami for work, and take Tri-Rail. I take my laptop and work on the train, or just chill out with music or watch a video."

On Brightline, though, "I'll take my family to Miami just for fun," he said. "And eventually to Orlando to see the grandparents."

He acknowledges it may take a while for people who are skeptical about how efficient it can be versus the cost of the ticket. But that will change once they get aboard, he says.

"From a user perspective, I think it's going to be a great success. Once they ride it, it will be a big 'Aha!' moment." ■

"Having the South Florida region and major population centers connected with a major rail system is a tremendous step forward... It's incredibly well designed, and from the user perspective, it's going to be a great success."

— Raphael Clemente

GETTING

From page 17

5 percent."

Although there are numerous New Urban-style developments in Florida, there are few genuine examples of TODs, Mr. Renne said.

A West Palm Beach developer named Michael Masanoff hopes to change that. For the last two decades he has been working on creating Transit Village on the western edge of downtown, a half-billion dollar planned community on seven acres. It would, he says, connect commuters to the Tri-Rail line, buses and the downtown trolley, as well as offer affordable workforce housing that a city employee or teacher could afford, with units located in the same downtown apartments with "market rate" homes.

The project was nearly green lit this year, but Mr. Masanoff and city officials have not come to an agreement on how much public financing should go toward the Village.

"The municipalities and counties which get a tremendous amount of tax dollars for the TOD have to participate in creating a better system for their people," Mr. Masanoff said. "Having people understand that's tough."

How to pay for transit

Even if governments don't have the money or political will to fund expensive new transit projects that could take decades before they begin to pay off and potentially cost hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars, in some cases the private sector does.

In an article this year for the journal Housing Policy Debate, FAU's Mr. Renne suggests that partnerships with the business world could be transit's future, taking some of the risk of a major investment off the public's shoulders.

All Aboard Florida's Brightline project



COURTESY IMAGE

A rendering of the Brightline station in Miami.

on the east coast and the Denver RTD's new \$2.2 billion Eagle P3 line, he pointed out, are two modern rail projects innovate for their private sector funding.

Brightline, which is scheduled to open with stations in Miami, West Palm Beach, and Fort Lauderdale this year, and eventually connect to Orlando, is entirely privately funded with public sector support through low-interest bonds. A key part of its profit margin, Mr. Renne notes, are apartments and other real-estate the company is building around its stations in Miami and West Palm Beach, areas that used to be "forgotten places."

"The problems have shifted from blight to fears of overpriced housing and gentrification," he wrote.

All Aboard Florida declined to make executives available for an interview because they were traveling.

"Brightline is setting a new national standard for the introduction of privately funded express intercity passenger rail service and the development of mixed-use real estate around the transportation hubs," the company said in a statement, and will "serve millions of business and leisure travelers."

Denver RTD's Eagle P3 project will cover 36 miles of new commuter rail lines. It's funded with a combination of a federal grant, sales tax, fares, and Denver Transit Partners, a consortium of private investment firms and other companies that will be responsible for building, maintaining and operating the Eagle line for close to 30 years.

"Everybody's looking at us right now to see if it's going to work or not," Mr. Currey said. "And I believe that it will. It's a good model. It's going to enable cities to look at different ways of funding infrastructure."

In Charlotte County, help from private businesses could be a route to developing public bus service, Commissioner Bill Truex said. (The county currently operates a Dial-A-Ride system that offers curbside pickup service but must be reserved days in advance.)

He envisions a bus line possibly connecting Punta Gorda to areas such as Englewood, Deep Creek, and Murdock Village.

"Near the main road off (U.S.) 41 and offshoots, you could probably get some pretty good usage out of it," he said, "but still the ridership is going to be too weak and it would definitely be a taxpayer subsidy to

keep it operational without a public-private partnership...

"It would be important to try to make sure we had a private investor on board, because they make sure that they pay their own way. So in the past, transportation in some areas of New York for example were done via this method and advertising and things like that on the busses helped to pay for (it)."

He added that shared public bicycle programs that have been instituted in Punta Gorda as well as larger cities around the United States could have potential as a form of daily public transportation in growing areas of Charlotte.

"(P)ark-and-ride bicycle programs could become a potential for areas like Murdoch Village and maybe even Parkside in the future," he said. "I've brought that up as a potential for Englewood Beach. I think we just have to start looking at avenues to bring in alternatives that are not break-the-bank type things."

FDOT is also looking at ways to ease traffic while saving money on expensive road-widening projects.

Suggesting just how overfed our road system is, the state is this fall planning to put a congested, dangerous stretch of U.S. 41 near downtown Fort Myers on a temporary "road diet." They'll use construction barrels to take it from six lanes down to four lanes for a couple of months to see how drivers and pedestrians react.

"Could it function with four lanes and if so then what can we look at doing?" asks FDOT's Mr. Burch. "Can we look at adding on-street parking? Can we look at adding bike lanes? Medians with landscaping to make it more attractive looking?"

Roughly north of Hansen Street to downtown, one lane in each direction will be blocked. Sound fun? Not to worry, Mr. Burch said: "If after a week it's total gridlock and it's horrible we can just go pull the barrels," he said. "Or do people adapt? Do they look at different ways to get where they're going?" ■



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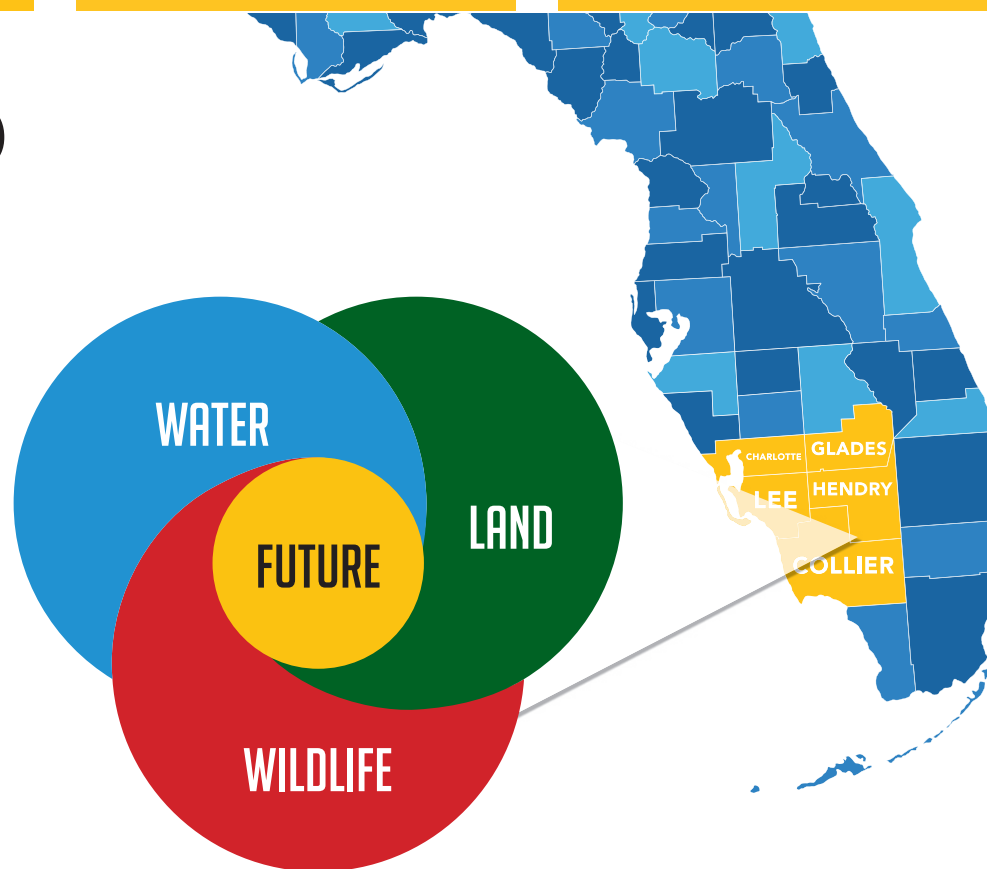
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