

## **Summary of Community Workshop on Draft Comprehensive Plan Amendments for Equity and Environmental Justice Definitions and Policies**

**July 31, 2023 at 6:00 p.m., Grace Knight Conference Room and on Zoom**

Alachua County staff hosted a community workshop to review and discuss the draft text amendments to the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan on equity and environmental justice definitions and policies. There were 13 members of the public in attendance either in-person or on Zoom. The following is a summary of the public comments and questions from the workshop. After the workshop, County staff reviewed and considered each comment and has included brief notes in response to the comments or questions below.

### **Environmental Justice Definition**

The following new draft definition was presented:

*Environmental Justice means that no group of people, including those from marginalized racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should disproportionately bear the negative social or environmental consequences resulting from land use decisions. Principles of environmental justice recognize historically that the largest proportion of environmental burdens come from industrial development, energy production facilities, disposal of waste, and transportation systems, and that these burdens often fall on the communities that are least able to withstand the impacts of them; poorer and marginalized communities. Environmental justice is a principle and practice that emerged historically from people of color organizing to protect their environments, community rights, lands, and health.*

### **Public Comments on Environmental Justice Definition**

1. Add “Identity” before group in first sentence.

Staff Notes: The focus of the definition is intentionally and specifically on *marginalized racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups* and the environmental burdens they face. Use of the term “identity group” may unintentionally broaden the definition in a way such that it would potentially apply to any number and type of “identity” groups that exist, many of which do not historically suffer from environmental burdens. This could potentially make the definition less meaningful when implementing it in the land use context.

2. Second Sentence – There are differential development outcomes for different areas. Example of tree cover in different neighborhoods.

Staff Notes: One of the purposes of these definition and policy changes is to recognize and begin to address differential development outcomes in parts of the community.

3. Second sentence - Missing intentionality of systems causing harm.

Staff Notes: Intentionality of systems causing harm is implied in the definition reference to “land use decisions” (emphasis added). A more explicit description of past intentionality would require a greater level of detail than would commonly be included in a Comprehensive Plan definition.

4. Question: Why are communities least able to withstand impacts? Reasons were suggested including lack of agency and lack of political capital.

Staff Notes: Staff agrees with the reasons suggested. In addition, lack of awareness or understanding of local government processes may also be a contributing factor. The County has sought to make improvements in its community outreach efforts on planning and zoning matters and across the organization recently in order to increase awareness of local government decision-making processes.

5. Good definitions overall. One thing that is not adequately addressed, specifically, “persons with disabilities.” Read ADA definition about equal treatment.

Staff Notes: Language on persons with disabilities has been added to the definition.

### **Equity Definition**

The following new draft definition was presented:

***Equity** means redressing injustices that were previously incurred, fully incorporating all segments of the community in the decision-making and planning processes and establishing measures to prevent future inequities from occurring. Such efforts include expanding opportunity and promoting equal access to public services, providing equal service quality, ensuring procedural fairness, and striving for equal opportunity in such areas as education, health, employment.*

*In the context of sustainability, equity refers to how burdens and benefits of different policy actions are distributed in a community. The more evenly they are distributed, the more equitable the community is, and this is reflected in economic, ecological, and social outcomes. Equity in sustainability includes putting forth efforts toward rectifying previous environmental injustices, avoiding environmental injustices going forward, and providing equal access to participate in sustainability activities and shape their development.*

### **Public Comments on Equity Definition**

1. First sentence: How would the County establish measures?

Staff Notes: The County is beginning the process of developing quantifiable measures by which progress on equity could be measured, tracked, and analyzed. The Equity and Community Outreach Office is heading up this effort with input from all other County Departments.

2. Second Sentence: “equal access” does not truly get at equity for disabled communities.

Staff Notes: Staff recognizes that inequities exist for persons with disabilities. The draft equity definition attempts to define equity more generally and be inclusive of all groups (see “all segments of the community”) rather than calling out specific groups that may experience inequities. Persons with disabilities are addressed to an extent in the Comprehensive Plan within land use, transportation, housing, and community health policies. Such policies may warrant further examination for adequacy, and that could be addressed as part of a separate process.

3. In some communities, access to participation is limited.

Staff Notes: Staff agrees that public access to participation in the decision-making process is limited for some persons and groups, and that this can be a key component of community inequity. Improving access to participation in local government is something that has and will continue to be addressed in practice through enhancements to community outreach efforts and methods as well as public notice methods.

4. What could rectify previous environmental injustices?

Staff Notes: There are several examples of potential ways that the County could rectify previous environmental injustices. The primary way would be through County decisions and budgeting on capital improvement projects such as stormwater/drainage improvements, water quality programs, land acquisition, flood mitigation projects, and extension of municipal utilities to unserved urban areas. In a planning and land use context, conditions for approval of Special Use Permits or Special Exceptions could potentially be modified in some instances to better address environmental concerns if or when such applications are proposed for renewal or modification.

5. Consider adding “housing” at the end of the equity definition.

Staff Notes: Housing has been added to the equity definition.

### **Industrial Land Use Policy**

The following draft policy language amendment was presented:

***Policy 4.2.1. Industrial land uses shall not be located adjacent to residential or agricultural areas without adequate buffering or integrating design and business practices to eliminate or minimize adverse impacts. Land use decisions concerning location of industrial uses shall take into consideration environmental justice, equity, and community, historical, and neighborhood***

character; this shall include consideration of the residents of the community, their relationship to the land, and the characteristics of the land itself. In considering community, historical, and neighborhood character, particular consideration shall be given to recognizing, protecting and preserving the resilience, collective desires, and resources of historically burdened communities. Historically burdened communities are those where the residents, often from racially or ethnically marginalized communities, face inequities and have disproportionate burdens associated with land use.

## **Public Comments on Industrial Land Use Policy**

1. Include descriptions or examples of historical burdens.

Staff Notes: There are numerous examples of environmental burdens that might be associated with industrial land uses including ground or air pollution, water quality degradation, noise, and odor. In some instances, these burdens may lead to a long-term deterioration of quality of life in nearby neighborhoods, reduction of land values, and lack of private investment in particular areas. The last sentence of the draft policy describes what constitutes a historically burdened community.

2. Add definition of “historical burdens”.

Staff Notes: Staff agrees it is important to define historical burdens so that the policy can be functional. As noted above, the last sentence of the draft policy describes what constitutes a historically burdened community. Staff believes this language in the policy in combination with the new definitions of equity and environmental justice (which will all be part of one Comprehensive Plan amendment package) adequately describe historical burdens.

3. Add recognition of persons with disabilities.

Staff Notes: Persons with disabilities are recognized in the definition of environmental justice. This ensures that persons with disabilities are taken into account as part of all policies which mention environmental justice.

4. Can we use the term “disenfranchised” instead of “marginalized”.

Staff Notes: Disenfranchised implies being deprived of a legal right or privilege, and that is not the subject of this policy which is focused on land use impacts on a community. Staff believes marginalized is the appropriate term in this instance.

5. Examples should include the specifics of the industries mentioned in the Environmental Justice definition.

Staff Notes: The County’s Unified Land Development Code (ULDC) contains detailed standards which regulate specific impacts associated with industrial uses ([Sec. 407.61](#)) and non-residential uses in general

([Sec. 407.60](#)). These standards address impacts such as waste discharge, smoke, dust, dirt, vibration, noise, odor, glare, fire hazards, radioactive materials, and electromagnetic interference. Comprehensive Plan policies such as the Industrial policy above are typically more general in nature with more specific details addressed in the ULDC.

### **Institutional Land Use Policy**

The following draft policy language amendment was presented:

***Policy 5.2.2*** *Institutional facilities shall be designed and located for integration into the surrounding community. Land use decisions concerning location of institutional uses shall take into consideration environmental justice, equity, and community, historical, and neighborhood character; this shall include consideration of the residents of the community, their relationship to the land, and the characteristics of the land itself. In considering community, historical, and neighborhood character, particular consideration shall be given to recognizing, protecting and preserving the resilience, collective desires, and resources of historically burdened communities. Historically burdened communities are those where the residents, often from racially or ethnically marginalized communities, face inequities and have disproportionate burdens associated with land use.*

### **Public Comments on Institutional Land Use Policy**

1. Same comment from above regarding need to address disabled persons.

Staff Notes: As noted above, persons with disabilities are recognized in the definition of environmental justice. This ensures that persons with disabilities are taken into account as part of all policies which mention that term.

### **Other Comments**

1. Question about Charter amendment regarding equity.

Staff Notes: This question is in reference to the Charter language that was approved by voters in 2020 providing that the County shall annually examine policies and endeavor to eliminate all elements of racial and gender bias in both the design and delivery of County programs and services. The proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments are part of the County's overall equity work throughout the organization and the implementation of the Charter language.