



## Agenda Item Summary

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**File #: 23-00718**

**Agenda Date: 11/7/2023**

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**Agenda Item Name:**

**Special Area Study for Hickory Sink Strategic Ecosystem/Lee Property**

**Presenter:**

Stephen Hofstetter, Environmental Protection Department, Director (352) 264-6811  
Ben Chumley, Growth Management Department, Principal Planner (352) 374-5249

**Description:**

Consideration of an application for a Special Area Study for the Hickory Sink Strategic Ecosystem/Lee Property in accordance with Chapter 402, Article 16 of the Alachua County Unified Land Development Code (ULDC). Section 402.101(f) of the ULDC provides that a draft Special Area Study shall be presented to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC), and the BoCC shall consider whether to accept the Study and whether to authorize any specific follow-up recommendations or strategies that have been identified as part of the Study.

The attached staff report provides a review of the applicant's Special Area Study in relation to the County's Comprehensive Plan and ULDC requirements, and recommended conditions for potential acceptance of the Special Area Study.

If the Special Area Study is accepted by the BoCC, the applicant/landowner may then submit application(s) for one or more Special Area Plans for the subject property. Such application(s) will involve proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and possible amendments to the Unified Land Development Code and zoning map.

**Recommended Action:**

Approve Resolution to accept the Special Area Study and authorize the process for a Special Area Plan(s) based on the recommendations contained in the applicant's Special Area Study Second Supplement report and with the conditions recommended by County staff.

**Prior Board Motions:**

June 9, 2020: The BoCC approved the Scope of Work for the Special Area Study.

September 20, 2022: The BoCC held a stakeholder workshop on the Special Area Study. No formal motion was made by the Board at that meeting.

**Fiscal Note:**

There is no anticipated fiscal impact associated with considering whether to accept the Special Area Study.

**Strategic Guide:**  
Environment

**Background:**

In May of 2020, FCL Timber, Land & Cattle, LLLP (“FCL”), through its agent, requested that the County initiate a special area planning process for approximately 4,068 acres of land in southwestern Alachua County, and submitted a Scope of Work for a Special Area Study that would be conducted by the applicant in accordance with the Section 402, Article 16 of the Unified Land Development Code (ULDC).

The Board of County Commissioners, on June 9, 2020, approved the Scope of Work for the Special Area Study (attached).

In April 2022, the applicant submitted a draft Special Area Study report with attachments for the County’s review. After receiving comments from County staff on the initial Study, the applicant then submitted a first supplement to the Special Area Study in July of 2022. The BoCC conducted a Stakeholder Workshop on the Special Area Study on September 20, 2022 but did not take any formal action at that meeting.

On September 19, 2023, the applicant (now represented by England-Thims & Miller) submitted a second supplement to the Special Area Study with significant revisions to the recommended land use scenarios. One recommended scenario includes placing approximately 85% of the property into a local or state conservation easement with the remaining portion of the property (south of Oakmont and west of Haile Plantation) being used for a University of Florida golf course and ancillary institutional facilities. Under both scenarios, the UF golf course/institutional area would be Phase 1 of the Special Area Plan. The other potential land use scenario includes possible future residential development as Phase 2 of the Special Area Plan on portions of the property that are not designated as Conservation Management Areas.

The general purpose of Special Area Planning in the County’s Comprehensive Plan and Unified Land Development Code is to provide a process wherein specific circumstances for a sub-area of the County are analyzed, and planning considerations are addressed at a detailed level as part of a collaborative effort between the County, the landowner, and the public.

The Alachua County Comprehensive Plan provides that a Special Area Planning process is necessary prior to the approval of a land use change, zoning change, or development plan within areas designated as Strategic Ecosystems. A Special Area Planning process is also required for subdivisions of greater than 100 lots in the “Rural/Agriculture” areas of the County. The subject property contains the majority of the “Hickory Sink” Strategic Ecosystem as designated and mapped generally in the County’s Comprehensive Plan. Given the Strategic Ecosystem designation and the size of the property (~4,068 acres), a special area planning process is required for this property as a prerequisite to any proposed land use or zoning change, or development plan approval.

Chapter 402 Article 16 of the Alachua County Unified Land Development Code (ULDC) spells out the

process for special area planning (see attached ULDC Section). The process includes three steps, and the Special Area Study is step two of that process:

1. Scope of Work
2. Special Area Study (current step)
3. Special Area Plan

Each step in the process must be completed before proceeding to the next step. Each step of the Special Area Planning process is summarized below.

**Step 1. The Scope of Work** is required to identify the geographic areas included in the Special Area Study/Plan and the issues and process to be used for the Study. The Scope of Work must be presented to the Board of County Commissioners, and the Board may approve, deny, or approve with modifications.

As noted above, on May 1, 2020, FCL Timber, Land & Cattle, LLLP (“FCL”) submitted a letter to the County and a proposed Scope of Work for a special area planning process for its ~4,000 acre property in southwestern Alachua County. The Scope of Work was presented to the Board of County Commissioners and approved on June 9, 2020.

**Step 2. The Special Area Study (current step)** is required to provide an analysis of existing conditions, infrastructure, and natural resources relevant to the issues or circumstances identified in the Scope of Work, and provide recommendations for potential strategies or actions to be pursued as part of the Special Area Plan in the next step of the process. The detailed requirements for the Special Area Study are provided in Section 402.101(a) through (f) of the ULDC (see ULDC special area planning section, attached). For Strategic Ecosystem Special Area Studies such as this, the primary purpose of the Study is to ground-truth the natural resources on the site for purposes of delineating those areas that are required to be permanently protected in accordance with Comprehensive Plan policies and land development regulations. The Strategic Ecosystem resources must be delineated through the Special Area Study regardless of what land use scenario is ultimately proposed for the property.

Pursuant to Section 402.101(f) of the ULDC, a draft special area study shall be presented to the Board of County Commissioners. The Board shall consider whether to accept the study and whether to authorize any specific follow-up recommendations or strategies that have been identified as part of the study.

**Step 3. Special Area Plan.** If the Special Area Study is accepted by the Board of County Commissioners, then the next step in the process is the Special Area Plan. The Special Area Plan is the stage where the recommendations identified as part of Special Area Study are implemented through proposed Comprehensive Plan policies, zoning, and land development regulations for the property.

The Special Area Plan may include proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments to establish new or revised goals, objectives, and policies in the Plan and/or revisions to the Future Land Use Map for the

property. The Special Area Plan may also include proposed zoning changes for the property to implement any amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. Both the Comprehensive Plan amendment process and the rezoning process require additional Neighborhood Workshops, public hearings of the Local Planning Agency/Planning Commission, and BoCC public hearings.