

Rural Concerns Advisory Committee
Annual Workplan and Accomplishments Report: FY2024-2025

Chair: Dr. Rodney Clouser

Board Liaison: Ken McMurry, Senior Planner, Growth Management

Staff Support: Ben Chumley, Regina Williams, and other departments as requested for presentations

Brief History of Committee

The Committee was established by Resolution 03-34 on April 8, 2003 to provide guidance and advice to the Board regarding rural concerns and issues within Alachua County. The Committee has been extended by the BoCC five times, the most recent of which occurred on June 25, 2019, where Resolution 19-66 granted the Committee a six-year extension to December 31, 2025.

Mission Statement

The responsibilities of the Advisory Committee shall be to:

- A. Establish the importance of our rural, unincorporated agricultural and historic settlements;
- B. Assist in the development and evaluation of policies and programs affecting the rural areas of the County;
- C. Represent the rural areas in the County's various community planning processes and hearings; and
- D. Assist in the recognition and determination of the needs of the County's rural residents and advising the Board accordingly.

Prior Year Accomplishments

Held 9 meetings/workshops through September 17, 2024

• **Received presentations and provided input on:**

10/17/23 Review and discussion of proposed amendments to the Alachua County Unified Land Development Code – Angeline Jacobs, Planner, Growth Management Dept.

01/16/24 Final Review of RCAC Suggestions and Questions on proposed amendments to the Alachua County Unified Land Development Code – Angeline Jacobs, Planner, Growth Management Dept.

Reducing Pollution from Septic Systems in Alachua County – Stacie Greco, Water Resources Program Manager, Environmental Protection Dept.

- 02/20/24 Alachua County's Land Conservation Program: Protection of Water Resources, Wildlife Habitat, and Developing Agricultural Land Protection Strategy – Andi Christman, Environmental Program Manager, Environmental Protection Dept.
- 03/19/24 Update on Pavement Management Program, Transportation Capital Improvement Program (TCIP) FY 2023 FY 2032, and use of infrastructure surtax funds – Brian Kauffman, Asst. Director, Public Works
- 04/16/24 Impact of Climate on Alachua County's Agriculture and Rural Lands – Shane Williams, Storm Water Engineer, Environmental Protection
- 05/21/24 Update on Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy – Andi Christman, Environmental Program Manager, Alachua County Environmental Protection Department
- 07/16/24 Update and discussion of Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy
- 08/20/24 Update and discussion Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy: Update and RCAC Input & Concerns – Andi Christman
Discussion of potential future agenda item on Agricultural Tax Classification Assessment issues

- **Discussed and took action on Committee Items:**

- 10/17/23 Final review and approval of Annual Workplan and Accomplishments Report: FY2023-2024
Nominations and elections of officers
- 03/19/24 Discussion of RCAC 2024 Meeting Schedule
- 09/17/24 Review and update of RCAC Annual Workplan and Accomplishments Report: FY2024-2025

- **Made recommendation to BoCC:**

- 09/17/24 Approved letter of support for proposed Agricultural Land Protection Strategy

Goals & Objectives for Upcoming Year

The Rural Concerns Advisory Committee goals and objectives will be focused around three “pillars” of issues/concerns:

- I. Rural Health and Service Delivery,**
- II. Rural Economic Development, and**
- III. Rural Policy Concerns**

The focus of the goals and objectives for FY2024-25 is to educate the advisory committee on potential topics of concern in rural areas of Alachua County in order to be prepared for emerging issues of importance if input is needed and to offer suggestions when appropriate.

I. Rural Health and Other County Service Delivery

- A. Review and monitor health and social services and delivery of those services in Alachua County rural communities/cities/towns.
- B. Continue to partner with Alachua County government on broadband opportunities/partnerships and limitations in rural Alachua County, related to expansion of telemedicine to rural and underserved communities and opportunities for alternative financing including grants and guaranteed loans.
- C. Continue discussion of litter issues/concerns in Alachua County and right-of-way maintenance.
- D. Review of County solid waste program collection and providers.
- E. Review of issues concerning Alachua County Animal Services.

II. Rural Economic Development

- A. Increase public awareness of the scope, size and importance of agriculture and ag related industry in Alachua County – land, labor, taxes, prevention of economic leakages and exports of County-related agricultural products, including procure or recommend completion of economic impact study.
- B. Advise BoCC on importance of additional funding on scope, size and importance of the County rural roads and bridge system for agriculture-related prosperity.
- C. Review and monitor local food systems and value-added food service infrastructure.
- D. Continue conversation about small business grants and/or support in rural areas including those bringing services listed in ‘Rural Health & Service Delivery’ topic, and including the County’s Small-Producer Agriculture Capital Support (SMAACA) Grant program.

III. Rural Policy Concerns

- A. Continue education efforts for the BoCC and citizens of Alachua County on agricultural issues and other issues affecting the rural area including support of local markets, local farmers and local food production including limited resource producers.
- B. Provide input where appropriate on the following, including but not limited to:
 - Feral hog management
 - Invasive species control programs conducted by the County
 - Effective means of enforcing rules and rights relating to private roads and easements in the rural area
- C. Continue to promote and coordinate education of Best Management Practices for agriculture producers, governmental organizations and citizens of Alachua County, including State guidelines.
- D. Stay abreast of law enforcement and EMS services relating and critical to the rural area.
- E. Request update from Alachua County Property Appraiser's office on Florida State Use Value Assessment Law and application in Alachua County.
- F. Investigate farmland preservation programs/areas in surrounding counties.
- G. Stay abreast, informed, and provide feedback on the Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy adopted in 2024.
- H. Discuss a potential information gathering methodology to integrate rural concerns as included in the Committee Mission Statement, to "Assist in the recognition and determination of the needs of the County's rural residents and advising the Board accordingly."
- I. Make recommendations to BOCC on any Agricultural Issues and other issues affecting the rural area and emerging issues in the rural area and at the rural-urban fringe including review of options and funding sources for improving rural to urban transportation systems.
- J. Monitor the Comprehensive Plan as well as implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and Unified Land Development Code on rural lands and relating to agriculture and local food production.
- K. Continue discussion of energy conservation and generation methods that may impact the agriculture community and/or quality of life in the rural area
- L. Provide input where appropriate on septic systems (update on new septic system regulations in rural area).
- M. Review and monitor Alachua County Climate Action Plan.
- N. Encourage intergovernmental coordination between Alachua County and municipalities to identify opportunities to conserve natural and agricultural resources.

Other Potential Concerns include:

- Continue to review and comment on management of Alachua County Forever properties, including development and implementation of business plans for timber harvesting, cattle grazing and hunting leases.
- Provide input where appropriate on the following, including but not limited to:
 - County water supply issues
 - Stormwater issues
 - Fire services issues
 - Integration of emergency response systems for the rural area
 - Forest management related to tree and development conflicts
- Affordable housing in the rural area.