



Alachua County Environmental Protection Advisory Committee

Jay Rosenbek, Chair
David Vaina, Vice Chair
Ian Kress, Secretary

Alachua County Advisory Boards Annual Workplan/Accomplishments Report FY 2026

Brief History of Committee:

The Alachua County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) initially established the Environmental Protection Advisory Committee (EPAC) in 1984 to advise and assist the BoCC on environmental issues. EPAC is comprised of 9 Board-appointed citizens, plus 1 alternate, interested in developing effective environmental programs and policies and in promoting greater community involvement in local environmental issues and local governmental programs dealing with these issues. EPAC gathers information, makes recommendations to the BoCC, and endorses selected environmental policy initiatives.

Mission Statement:

EPAC provides an opportunity for citizen involvement on environmental issues and concerns affecting residents of Alachua County. It advises the BoCC on appropriate measures to safeguard air, land, and water resources and on responsible management of public lands and resources.

Major Accomplishments in FY25

1. EPAC received an update on gopher tortoises and their preservation from Chase Pirtle, Director of Ashton Biological Preserve. Committee members recognized the threat to the species from development and the increasing challenge of relocation.
2. EPAC unanimously passed a motion to support and expand Alachua County tree Policy. The approved motion is as follows:

EPAC supports Amendments to Trees and Natural Vegetation (Art II, Chapter 406) and Open Space (Art V, Ch 407) of the Unified Land Development Code) based on data and best practices. Specifically, EPAC supports the following:

- Establishing a long-term goal for tree and canopy preservation through the Urban/Community Forest Management Inventory & Plan
- Reducing DBH for landmark Live Oaks
- Creating enhanced best practices to complement mitigation strategies
- Quantifying the public health and environmental benefits of retaining a healthy tree canopy in order to establish an economic justification for tree preservation
- Mandating and enforcing state-of-the-art care standards for retained and planted trees
- Establishing an industry, community, government partnership to create a long-term strategy to foster development and protection of Alachua County's canopy, critical trees and open spaces

3. After hearing the details of the Tara developments planned within the City of Alachua, EPAC passed the following motion:

EPAC expresses the strongest possible support for the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department and Board of County Commissioners' efforts to eliminate or minimize the environmental damage to water resources and karst features that may result if the City of Alachua Commission approves the Tara Forest West development. EPAC considers the potential consequences of degradation of these resources by this development unacceptable, therefore we endorse the use of all possible data-based, legal, and political tools and arguments to protect these invaluable resources.

4. As part of its on-going effort to be responsive to the environmental issues of greatest concern to Alachua County's citizens, EPAC's spring, 2025 Intern completed a second citizen survey, which was distributed online and had 46 responses.
5. EPAC voted unanimously to redefine Community Outreach. The approved motion is as follows:

EPAC indefinitely suspends Community Conversations as means of public outreach in favor of other modes of outreach including but not limited to public forums around comprehensive plan updates, existing community events, and televised events, to be determined with the assistance of an intern.

6. After a presentation to EPAC by a representative of the citizen's group supporting Scenic Road status for Shoreline Drive on the western border of Payne's Prairie, EPAC unanimously approved the following motion:

EPAC supports the petition to grant official Scenic Road status to Lakeshore Drive which runs along the western shore of Newnan's Lake. Lakeshore Drive, at a minimum, meets four of the five criteria for designation of Scenic Road status as outlined in Chapter 405, Special Districts and Activities Centers; Article IX. Scenic Road Corridors Overlay; Section 405.36, Specific criteria for designation, as outlined in the Alachua County, Florida Code of Ordinances. These criteria include scenic, historical and cultural significance. EPAC also supports maximum restrictions along the scenic road's corridor including dark skies lighting, underground utilities, and restoration to original state of all trees and vegetation damaged by natural causes or accidents. Finally, EPAC supports maximum governmental efforts to preserve Lakeshore Drive and its environs now and in the future from degradation that could result in the modification or revocation of its Scenic Road Status.

7. EPAC received a review of the progress toward a county Climate Action Plan from Jennison Kipp, Resiliency Specialist with Alachua County EPD. Committee members made suggestions including an emphasis on a public-facing dashboard so the public can monitor progress, and members committed to offering other suggestions at the August public forum.
8. The EPAC sunset was extended to 2030, and the number of members was changed from 12 to 10.
9. Five vacancies were filled resulting in 3 new members.

Goals and Objectives for FY 2026

1. **Water Quality and Water Resources:** EPAC's objective is to support policies and practices that ensure Alachua County visitors, residents, farmers, and ecosystems are supported by clean, adequate water.
 - a. Support policies and practices to protect surface water and groundwater quality and quantity including protecting, restoring, and celebrating the springs.
 - b. Support efforts to reduce water usage while promoting water resource recovery through recharge and re-use.
 - c. Support BOCC efforts to improve collaboration of county, state, and municipal officials and developers on issues related to natural resources.

- d. Support citizen initiative to expand protection of water bodies in Alachua County by designating new Outstanding Florida Waters.
- e. Ensure the application of innovative stormwater management principles, including low-impact development.

2. Land Use and Conservation: EPAC's objective is to advocate for policies and practices that preserve Alachua County's environmentally, historically and culturally significant sites while simultaneously supporting affordable development necessary to a burgeoning population.

- a. Encourage policy makers to implement International Dark Sky Association recommended regulations that promote responsible outdoor lighting practices for new developments as well as existing businesses and residences.
- b. Review proposals to designate springs in Alachua County as part of a National Park or National Heritage Area, maintain active monitoring of proposal progress.
- c. Support and expand county-wide programs to promote preservation of large connected natural areas, both public and private, and seek opportunities to incorporate natural areas in Alachua County into large scale efforts such as the Florida Wildlife Corridor and Great Florida Riverway.
- d. Evaluate the impacts of developments such as UF golf course, Tioga South, and Gainesville Preserve on Strategic Ecosystems, East Side Greenway, and preservation areas and make recommendations to the BoCC accordingly.
- e. Contribute to the Alachua County Comprehensive plan updates under the Evaluation and Appraisal Review process.
- f. Evaluate progress of the Alachua County agricultural land protection strategy.

3. Health and Safety: EPAC's objective is to advise and support policies that improve and protect the health of all current and future Alachua County residents, its communities, and our ecosystems.

- a. Collaborate with county leadership and CCAC to contribute to policies, procedures, and programs that address heat impacts on residents and wildlife
- b. Work to strengthen policies and procedures that mitigate the impacts of flooding, including Flood Map updates.

- c. Assess the potential health impacts of environmental pollution of soil, air , and water in Alachua County and provide recommendations for identifying and mitigating risks.
 - d. Promote Environmental and health benefits of open space and tree canopy.
- 4. Community Outreach:** EPAC's objective is to foster trust and engagement among Alachua County citizens by providing opportunities to identify potential environmental threats, voice concerns, and participate in decision-making that impacts our local environment.
- a. Connect with environmental, citizen groups, and youth organizations to inform them of EPAC's mission and offer collaborative opportunities.
 - b. Develop revised outreach strategy incorporating intern recommendations and engage new intern to assist with implementing the new strategy.
 - c. Re-engage with Alachua County volunteer website and assess potential value and promotion opportunity.
 - d. Contribute to related efforts through volunteerism.
- 5. Recycling and Waste Management:** EPAC's objective is to suggest and support policies and procedures that reduce, eliminate, and divert landfill waste in Alachua County through safe and responsible practices.
- a. Expand EPACs understanding of current waste management challenges in Alachua County and determine how best to contribute to finding solutions.
 - b. Encourage recycling building materials.
 - c. Identify opportunities to implement LEED certified commercial and residential buildings.
 - d. Determine the fate of construction materials from land clearing operations and develop composting and sustainable reuse strategies.

Conclusion

EPAC appreciates the opportunity to serve our county and appreciates this commission's commitment to environmental protection, sustainable economic development, and the health and welfare of all the county's citizens. We look forward to continuing to assist the commission in this mission.

Signed,


Jay Rosenbek, EPAC Chair

10-22-25

Date

On behalf of the Environmental Protection Advisory Committee