



Martin County 2070: What's Next?

Report for the November 28, 2018
Martin County Citizens' Workshop



*Organized by 1000 Friends of Florida
in Partnership with The Guardians of Martin County*

Facilitated by the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council

*Sponsored by the
Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties
and The Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation*

To find out more about Martin County 2070 please visit:

www.1000friendsofflorida.org/saving-special-places/martin-and-palm-beach-counties/martin-county-2070/

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Martin County 2070

How can Martin County absorb a significant increase in population over the next half century without degrading its environment, economy and quality of life? That critical challenge inspired 1000 Friends of Florida to conduct an all-day workshop at Indian River Community College in Stuart in October, and a follow-up evening workshop at the same location in November of 2018.

At that evening workshop, **we invited Martin County residents to take charge of the discussion.** They identified the strengths in their communities and the challenges to sustainable development. They proposed strategies to reinforce and enhance those strengths and overcome those challenges. Finally, they received tips on how to advance their strategies with public officials and promote **the future they want for Martin County.**

1000 Friends Stands with Martin County

1000 Friends of Florida is a statewide organization whose mission is to promote growth management and environmental stewardship in all of Florida's 67 counties. However, we continue to maintain **a special focus on protecting the environment and quality of life from incompatible development in Martin County, the home of our late co-founder, Nathaniel Reed.** We established the Palm Beach/Martin County Green Initiative to promote sound community planning and effective advocacy in both counties. We helped Martin County develop and maintain its award-winning comprehensive plan and Urban Services Boundary. 1000 Friends staff participates in regular meetings and calls with the leaders of Martin County's conservation organizations. 1000 Friends Policy and Planning Director Thomas Hawkins serves on the Advisory Board to the Guardians of Martin County.

Our efforts in Martin County, and our positive impact, continued in 2018. Earlier this year, the Martin County Commission considered Harmony Ranch, a proposed mega-development outside the county's urban services boundary on more than 2,600 acres designated agricultural. Thomas Hawkins testified against it on behalf of 1000 Friends, identifying 9 points where the proposal ran afoul of Florida "Sprawl Rule." Commissioners unanimously rejected the proposal.

Throughout our history, we have filed other legal challenges to uphold planning in Martin County. And we have represented the county's interests on growth and development policies in the state capital. In this year's legislative session, 1000 Friends engaged on important issues for Martin County, including Everglades restoration, Indian River Lagoon protection, funding to carry out Amendment 1, home rule for local governments and septic-tank remediation.

Also in this year's session, 1000 Friends took the lead on stopping a terrible bill that would have weakened the power of local governments to manage growth. We also fought legislation that would have taken away local governments' ability to regulate tree trimming and removal. These bills would have handcuffed the ability of Martin County and other counties throughout Florida to preserve undeveloped areas and protect their quality of life.

How Shall Martin County Grow?

In the *Florida 2070* and *Water 2070* reports published in 2016 by 1000 Friends, the University of Florida's GeoPlan Center projected **Martin County would add nearly 70,000 residents over the next half century, from about 146,000 people in 2010 to 216,000 in 2070.** The Center looked at the 2010 census and started running the data in 2014. Other assumptions might produce lower projections.

If significant growth does come to the county, one of the biggest challenges is to ensure there is enough land and water to meet the needs of people, agriculture and the environment. Under the Center's 2070 Trend scenario - which assumes the county would add 70,000 residents by 2070 with no increase in density - the amount of developed land in Martin County would almost quadruple, from 14% to 52%, with close to 130,000 additional acres of land developed. Development-related water demand would soar by an unsustainable 378% between 2010 and 2070.

Against this backdrop, **1000 Friends conducted its daylong workshop on Oct. 12 in Stuart,** with government officials, planners, developers and conservation advocates in panel discussions that explored a more sustainable approach to growth in Martin County. (Details can be found at www.1000friendsofflorida.org/saving-special-places/martin-and-palm-beach-counties/martin-county-2070/) **On Nov. 28, 1000 Friends followed up with an evening workshop in Stuart for county residents to lay out the future they want for their communities, and how best to get there.**

Martin County's Strengths

Two leaders with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council served as facilitators for the discussion: incoming Executive Director Thomas Lanahan and Director of Strategic Development and Policy Kim DeLaney. First, they asked audience members to identify the **strengths in their Martin County communities.** Here's the list of ideas that came from the audience, beginning with the three overarching themes in county strengths that Kim and Tom gleaned from audience answers:

- **Martin County's engaged, informed citizens**
- **Protections against inappropriate development in the county's comprehensive plan**
- **The county's abundant environmental and civic resources**
- "Conservation consciousness" among county citizens
- A safe, low-crime environment in the county
- Open spaces
- Water
- Beaches
- The four-story height limit on buildings in the county
- An increasing number of families with children
- Local agriculture and food production
- Protected wetlands
- Good county commissioners
- A small-town feel
- Nearby accessible natural areas with native habitat
- Large nature preserves
- Parks

- Environmental studies
- Young people
- A good school system
- Policies that require growth to pay for itself
- Development rules that are enforced
- A commitment to maintenance
- A willingness among citizens to tax themselves to invest in themselves
- The county's urban services boundary
- A growing public park system
- A strong economy
- A strong tax base

Martin County's Challenges

Next, Kim and Tom asked audience members to name **challenges their Martin County communities face**. Here's that list, starting with the three common, overarching themes as identified by the facilitators:

- **Water quality problems**
- **The need to direct growth to developed areas**
- **"Dated" agriculture in the county disconnected from community needs**
- Toxic algae, including red tide
- Nutrient pollution in waterways
- Water supply problems
- Weak state regulations for runoff, nutrient pollution
- Low-wage jobs amid expensive housing in the county
- Limited economic opportunities for local youth
- Public health impacts of water quality problems
- Lack of diversity by age and race in the county's population
- The potential windfall for developers who break the rules
- Confusion over unclear jurisdiction on water quality responsibilities
- Commercialization of highway corridors, with negative aesthetic impacts
- Fear of density leading to sprawl
- Difficulty in finding common ground on issues amid polarization
- Lack of funding for water quality monitoring leading to a lack of data
- The need for more infill development
- Climate change and a failure to prepare for it
- Traffic congestion amid a lack of alternatives
- Very limited bus transportation
- The Brightline train
- Aging infrastructure
- Decreasing ecosystem sustainability
- Lack of local food sources
- Reduced tourism

Citizens' Strategies for Sustainability

Finally, Kim and Tom asked the audience to offer **strategies for sustainability in Martin County, to preserve and enhance the strengths they identified and confront the challenges**. Kim and Tom did not pick out three main themes in this group. Nor does the

following order reflect any priorities expressed by the group or 1000 Friends of Florida. Here is the list:

- Seek higher wage jobs, so that local youth can stay in the county
- Implement incentives and regulations to expand the supply of affordable housing
- Protect the county's strengths
- Do more to involve the county's agricultural community in addressing local issues
- Utilize vacant land within the urban services boundary for development
- Make greater use of farmland preservation trusts to protect agricultural land from development
- Cultivate high tech industries through incentives such as tax abatements, expedited permitting
- Evaluate regulations against goals for the county
- Establish a sustainability board; consider models in Cocoa Beach and Brevard County
- Return to a culture that values making things
- Expand vocational skills training in schools to create more career paths
- Increase teacher salaries and create more incentives to compete for them
- Better control Lake Okeechobee discharges
- Expand aquaculture
- Increase the supply of affordable workforce housing - "housing with dignity"
- Develop walkable, mixed-use inclusionary neighborhoods, open to all income levels
- Continue and enhance vocational programs with Indian River State College
- Expand paid internships
- Bring more money into the county through local events, tourism, organic farming, senior communities, solar communities, "toxic-free zones," family orientation programs, "holidays for health"
- Accommodate growth through infill development in existing urban areas
- Engage young people and ask what they want for their future; establish a youth advisory group
- Identify and study peer communities of similar size and strengths that have succeeded in meeting similar challenges
- Strengthen home rule, letting Martin County make its own decisions on education, other issues
- Enlist more partners in water regulations and research, including health-related impacts
- Impose a tax on commuters from outside the county to help cover their cost of services

Effective Citizen Engagement with Government

The workshop concluded with 1000 Friends Policy and Planning Director Thomas Hawkins offering **practical advice for citizens to advance their strategies for sustainability.**

Thomas, a former Gainesville City Commissioner, acknowledged the frustration that citizens often feel during public meetings, when they are typically limited to speaking no more than 3 minutes. He advised citizens to keep going to meetings, but consider attendance the "exclamation point" on their involvement in public policy making.

Thomas portrayed a **pyramid of engagement for citizens** with building coalitions at the base, ascending to doing their homework on issues, and peaking with speaking directly to public

officials. He advised that in-person meetings are more impactful than telephone calls, which in turn carry more weight than emails. Online petitions have the least influence with public officials in Thomas' experience. **He stressed that the optimal level of citizen influence is achieved by building relationships with officials before and after an election.**

For citizens seeking input or changes to land-use decisions, Thomas pointed out that **local comprehensive plans are "where it all starts."** They contain binding rules for land use, but local elected officials also enjoy broad discretion to make policies in plans for community good *as they see it*. When considering land development regulations or development approvals, officials also are bound by rules, but don't have much discretion. Any actions they take must be consistent with comprehensive plans.

Finally, Thomas recommended that citizens' groups - neighborhood associations, community organizations and civic groups - hold forums for candidates, take positions and **speak with one voice**. He encouraged them to promote their positions through social media platforms and letters to the editor. He advised them to **focus on the long term** in those positions. And finally, he urged them to **vote**.

Looking Ahead

1000 Friends of Florida was impressed with the level of engagement from audience members. We added to our understanding about what's important to Martin County citizens - valuable information that will fortify **our ongoing efforts with citizens and their leaders to protect the county's environment, economy and quality of life from the pressures of growth and development.**

As we have for more than three decades, we will continue to partner with citizens to monitor changes to growth plans and development proposals to evaluate whether they are appropriate for Martin County. We will keep educating and empowering citizens to exercise their right to have a say in the future of their communities and their state. We encourage citizens to continue to reach out to us by telephone at 850-222-6277, through email at friends@fof.org, and on our Facebook page.

Working together, we will keep Martin County special.

About 1000 Friends of Florida

Our Mission:

The state's leading not-for-profit smart growth advocacy organization, 1000 Friends of Florida is building better communities and saving special places in one of the fastest growing states in the nation. We promote vibrant, sustainable, walkable, livable communities which provide residents with affordable housing choices and transportation alternatives. We work to protect natural lands that cleanse and store fresh water needed for residents, agriculture and the environment, provide refuge for wildlife, and support abundant recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Above all, we strive to give citizens a meaningful role in shaping the futures of their communities and state. Founded in 1986, 1000 Friends of Florida is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization.

Our Vision:

Picture a Florida with vibrant cities and towns, thriving and livable neighborhoods, and an outstanding quality of life.

Imagine communities where kids can ride their bikes to school or the park, and parents can walk to the store or take a bus to work if they wish.

Envision our state with abundant natural lands, a verdant network of wildlife corridors and greenways, productive farms, and pristine springs and rivers.

Think about a Florida with a vital economy, well-paying jobs, and affordable housing choices.

This is the future toward which 1000 Friends of Florida is working.

To find out more about 1000 Friends of Florida please visit:

www.1000friendsofflorida.org



Saving Special Places • Building Better Communities