



Palm Beach County 2070: What's Next?

Report for the November 27, 2018
Palm Beach County Citizens' Workshop



*Organized by 1000 Friends of Florida
in Partnership with the North County Neighborhood Coalition*

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 Palm Beach County 2070 please visit:

[www.1000friendsofflorida.org/saving-special-places/martin-and-palm-beach-counties/
palm-beach-county-2070/](http://www.1000friendsofflorida.org/saving-special-places/martin-and-palm-beach-counties/palm-beach-county-2070/)

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Palm Beach County 2070

How can Palm Beach County absorb a substantial 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 in West Palm Beach in October, and a follow-up evening workshop in Palm Beach Gardens in November of 2018.

At that evening workshop, **Palm Beach County residents took charge** of the program. 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 Palm Beach County**.

1000 Friends Fights for Palm Beach 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 Palm Beach County**. We established the Palm Beach/Martin County Green Initiative to promote sound community planning and effective advocacy in both counties. We have worked to maintain Palm Beach County's Tier system for managing growth. We have challenged and helped stop proposals for developments that were inconsistent with the county's growth plan. 1000 Friends provided input into the creation of the Ag Reserve Master Plan and over the years have fought inappropriate development proposed for that sensitive area.

We also have fought against threats to the county's water supply, including the impacts of the proposed State Road 7 extension on the Grassy Waters Preserve.

We have filed other legal challenges to uphold planning in Palm Beach County. And we have represented the county's interests on growth and development policies in the state capital. During the 2018 legislative session, 1000 Friends engaged on important issues for Palm Beach County, including Everglades restoration, funding to carry out Amendment 1, home rule for local governments and septic-tank remediation.

How Shall Palm Beach County Grow?

In the *Florida 2070* and *Water 2070* reports published in 2016 by 1000 Friends, the University of Florida's GeoPlan Center projected **Palm Beach County would add more than 850,000 residents over the next half century**, from about 1.3 million people in 2010 to nearly 2.2 million in 2070. Absorbing that much population growth without any increase in urban density would nearly double the amount of developed land in the county, from 17 percent to 30 percent, according to a subsequent analysis from the GeoPlan Center. It would increase development-related water demand by an unsustainable 131 percent.

Against this backdrop, **1000 Friends** conducted its daylong workshop on Oct. 5 in West Palm Beach, with government officials, planners, developers and conservation advocates in panel discussions that explored a more sustainable approach to growth in Palm Beach County. (Details can be found at www.1000friendsofflorida.org/saving-special-places/martin-and-palm-beach-counties/palm-beach-county-2070/)

On Nov. 27, 1000 Friends followed up with an evening workshop in Palm Beach Gardens for county residents to lay out the future they want for their communities, and how best to get there.

Palm Beach 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 Palm Beach 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:

- **The environmental land preserved in Palm Beach County**
- **Publicly accessible outdoor recreation assets**
- **A broad belief among residents in environmental stewardship and an engaged citizenry**
- The county's Comprehensive Plan and its Managed Growth Tier System to control development
- Natural lands and open spaces
- The groups in the county that fight to fund land preservation
- The Agricultural Reserve and other agricultural lands
- Beaches and the public access to them
- The economic benefit realized from natural resources
- The county's history of policies aimed at environmental restoration, remediation and access
- Palm Beach County's Environmental Resource Management agency
- The county's strong and strengthening urban centers
- The county's diversifying economy

Palm Beach County's Challenges

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

- **Sea-level rise and coastal erosion**
- **Problems with water quality and water quantity**
- **Sprawling development and its negative impacts**
- Limits on beach access
- Population growth
- Light pollution
- Limited choices for transportation

- A lack of opportunities for youth education and involvement in natural areas
- The gap between rich and poor and a lack of economic diversity
- Dangerous conditions for pedestrians
- A lack of consistency in regulations amid too many local governments
- No state support for local planning, and a divergence in outlook between state and local leaders
- Destruction of wildlife habitat
- Invasive species
- A need for more Florida native landscaping
- Problems created by Lake Okeechobee for water storage and treatment
- No successor to the sugar industry for the county's economy

Citizens' Strategies for Sustainability

Finally, Kim and Tom asked the audience to offer **strategies for sustainability in the 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:

- Vote
- Educate political candidates and elected official about citizens' interests and concerns
- Add enforcement authority - "teeth" - to state environmental regulations, including:
 - i) Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) designed to reduce pollution in watersheds
 - ii) Best Management Practices (BMPs) aimed at reducing agricultural pollution
 - iii) Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), intended to limit pollution in waterways
- Connect more young people to the environment through education
- Promote greater density and mixed uses in urban development
- Strengthen growth management requirements
- Improve intersections, add more traffic calming devices, enhance pedestrian safety
- Use smart irrigation systems that don't irrigate saturated soil
- Reduce the use of sod and irrigation
- Convert more septic tanks to sewer systems
- Stop coastal development
- Expand the use of alternative energy
- Restore state oversight and coordination to development
- Toughen water-quality standards
- Transfer development rights from coastal to inland urban areas
- Reduce plastic use
- Expand green spaces in urban cores
- Utilize littoral plants, native plants and bioswales in stormwater retention areas
- Use more pervious pavement that allows water to drain to replenish underground supplies

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 three 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, echoing an earlier suggestion from the audience, he urged them to **vote**.

Looking Ahead

1000 Friends of Florida was impressed with the level of engagement from audience members. We learned a lot about what’s important to Palm Beach County citizens - valuable information that will inform **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 the 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 Palm Beach 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