Volusia 2070: River-Friendly Planning

Prepared By
St. Johns Riverkeeper &
1000 Friends of Florida
In 2016, 1000 Friends of Florida partnered with the University of Florida GeoPlan Center and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to undertake two GIS-based studies to determine the impacts of population growth on Florida’s lands and waters. Each study includes three scenarios: the 2010 Baseline based on actual figures, the 2070 Trend if current development patterns continue, and the 2070 Alternative reflecting the impacts of greater sustainability.

The Florida 2070 project reveals that if Florida does not change the way it develops, by 2070 more than a third of Florida's lands will be developed and development-related water demand will more than double. On the other hand, if we promote more compact development patterns and increase protected natural lands, we will save 1.8 million acres of natural and agricultural land.

On November 3, 2021, Volusia County became the seventh county in which 1000 Friends of Florida worked with our partners to extrapolate the Florida 2070 / Water 2070 data to the county level. For Volusia 2070: River Friendly Planning, 1000 Friends joined forces with St. Johns Riverkeeper and Stetson University’s Institute of Water and Environmental Resilience (IWER) to host an interactive workshop at the Sandra Stetson Aquatic Center in Deland.

Volusia County’s distinct urban-rural character, access to pristine springs, riverfront and beaches, and charming communities make this region a desirable place to live, work and play. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the county’s population grew by more than 50,000 between 2010 and 2020, bumping it to the twelfth most populated county in Florida. Thanks in part to its outdoor recreational amenities - including its beaches and natural springs - its higher education institutions, and its proximity to employment hubs in Orlando and the Space Coast, Volusia is almost certain to keep growing and experiencing development pressure. It is critical Volusia County’s leaders and citizens make sound planning decisions today to prepare for this growth.
**Volusia County**

**At a Glance**

- 10th largest in the state by land mass at 1,432 square miles
- 23% of the county is water (331 square miles)
- 16 municipalities: Daytona Beach, Daytona Beach Shores, DeBary, DeLand, Deltona, Edgewater, Holly Hill, Lake Helen, New Smyrna Beach, Oak Hill, Orange City, Ormond Beach, Pierson, Ponce Inlet, Port Orange, South Daytona

**Demographics**

- Below-average **household income**: $49,000
- 23.7% of the county population holds a **bachelor’s degree or higher**
- 70% of **homes are owner-occupied**
  - Average **listing price of a home** is $285,000, an 18.5% increase from 2020
- **Diversity**:
  - 68% white (compared to 53.2% statewide)
  - 14.9% Hispanic (compared to 26.4% statewide)
  - 10% African American (compared to 16.9% statewide)
- **Median age**: 47.3 (compared to 42 years as the state median)

**Leading Economic Sectors**

- 25% Education & Health Services
- 23% Trade, Transportation & Utilities
- 17% Leisure & Hospitality
- 14% Government
- 13% Professional & Business Services
- 8% Construction

**Agriculture Economic Contributions**

- Volusia County has 1,575 farms, worth $196 million dollars in product value. Over the last ten years, the agriculture sector experienced positive market growth.
- The largest share of agricultural products are nursery, floriculture and sod products, and cattle farming makes up the biggest share of livestock production.
Volusia County Growth & Projections

The following maps and charts are based on extrapolated approximate land development and water demand for Volusia County based on the statewide Florida 2070 / Water 2070 figures. They offer sobering insights into the future of the county if effective planning is not undertaken.

It is important to note that this study does not incorporate current planning measures in place to prevent inappropriate development on rural lands as planning and zoning provisions are not in effect in perpetuity and can be changed by subsequent County Councils, for better or worse. For example, Volusia County’s Environmental Core Overlay that was adopted in 2008 as part of the Future Land Use Map, with the goal of ensuring that Volusia County retains an interconnected network of environmentally important lands to preserve the county’s ecosystem into the future.

“Limits on development are only as strong as the commitment of current leaders to maintain them.”
- Paul Owens, President, 1000 Friends of Florida

Data in these maps are based on the Florida 2070 dataset, which is intended for statewide and regional use only. Discrepancies are inherent when used at smaller geographic scales. Original Florida 2070 data is available from www.fgdl.org.
Volusia County Population Growth

2020: 554,000
2070: 696,000

Growth Projections

- Volusia 2070 forecasts the county’s population will grow from 500,000 in 2010 to nearly 700,000 by 2070.
- Volusia County’s population grew by more than 50,000 between 2010 and 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- The current pattern of development could lead to an increase of total developed land from 29% to 46% of the county.
- The 2070 Alternative projection would spare more than 66,000 acres from pavement and rooftops through a 20% increase in development density.
- Development-related water demand is on track for a 122% increase, whereas the 2070 Alternative would yield a 46% increase in water demand.

As Volusia County grows in population, one of the biggest challenges is to ensure sufficient land and water to meet the needs of people, agriculture, and the environment.
The cumulative impact of multiple, small land-use changes will, over time, shape the future landscape of Florida.

**Principles of smart growth:**

- Utilize a mix of land uses to cluster businesses and services near homes and jobs
- Provide a wide range of housing options for people of various incomes and ages
- Design distinctive, attractive communities that foster a strong sense of place
- Preserve open spaces, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Provide a variety of transportation choices and make communities walkable
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions
- Follow compact neighborhood design

**Benefits of more compact development include:**

- Lighter environmental impact
- Lower costs for taxpayers for public services
- More transportation options
- Less time stuck in traffic
- More housing choices
Community Feedback

During the November 2021 workshop, attendees were asked to participate in a “dot exercise” to gather feedback about various quality of life related issues in the county. Participants placed colored sticky notes on different subjects to indicate whether they felt Volusia County was doing a good job or whether the county could improve.

Results of the “Dot Exercise”

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<th>Subject</th>
<th>Good job</th>
<th>Needs work</th>
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<tr>
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<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government transparency</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Where is Volusia County excelling?

- Economic development
- Government transparency
- Conservation lands and green space

Where does Volusia County need to improve?

- Water quality
- Transportation and traffic
- Growth management
- Affordable housing
How do we build better communities in Volusia County?

Promoting development that is more compact in design is essential to accommodate Volusia County’s projected growth in a sustainable manner. Compact development not only saves land but also makes communities more livable and walkable. Strategies include supporting infill and redevelopment in a manner that is sensitive to existing communities. When new areas are developed, they should be near existing communities and infrastructure. New development and the retrofit of existing development should promote a mixture of homes, shops, schools, and offices within proximity and include a range of housing choices to ensure affordability. It is essential to design for multiple transportation options, including walking, biking and public transportation. It is important not to destroy the very qualities that make Volusia County unique. Care should be taken to protect significant historic and natural resources as development occurs.

What can Volusia County Do?

- Formalize the Environmental Corridor Overlay by adding it to the County Charter
- Adopt Map B to establish receiving zones for Transfer of Development Rights
- Establish Urban Service Boundaries around the existing municipalities
- Partner with developers on conservation goals before approving development

“This is a fantastic policy with some very good elements, but we need to make sure we stick to them and make sure that applicants seeking development approval utilize these good ideas that are written into your comprehensive plan.” – Jane West, Policy & Planning Director, 1000 Friends of Florida
**How can we save special places in Volusia County?**

To protect the region’s fragile water supply, prevent pollution from entering the St. Johns watershed, support springs restoration, and enhance the quality of life in Volusia County, it is important to protect vital conservation, agricultural and other working lands like those on the Florida Forever and Florida Greenways List. Strategies include supporting funding for greenways and corridors that protect wildlife habitat and provide recreational opportunities, establishing incentives and increasing funding to help landowners conserve important agricultural lands and other working landscapes, and working to significantly lessen the impact of new development on Florida’s lands and waters.

- Approximately 30% of the land area of Volusia County has been placed in permanent protection. Our 2070 model shows that 48% of Volusia County land needs to be protected to maintain the ecological services provided by natural lands. This will protect wildlife habitat, water quality and water quantity.

- On November 2020, Volusia County voters re-authorized the Volusia Forever and Volusia ECHO programs to support land conservation efforts and environmental, cultural, historic, and outdoor recreational facilities. This is an important step towards land conservation goals.

- To protect the county’s four freshwater springs and the greater St. Johns watershed, we must focus on preventing pollution at the source, especially from septic tanks and urban and agricultural fertilizer runoff.

- With a rising population comes increased water demand. *Water 2070* makes it clear that the single most effective strategy to reduce water demand is for individuals to significantly reduce the amount of water used for irrigation.

“There are more than 100 freshwater springs that provide over 30% of the freshwater critical to the St. Johns River, so it’s very important that we protect our springs.” – Lisa Rinaman, St. Johns Riverkeeper
For more information and to view the presentation slides from the November 2021 Volusia 2070: River Friendly Planning workshop visit:
1000fof.org/COUNTY/VOLUSIA

To learn more about Florida 2070 / Water 2070 visit:
1000fof.org/2070project/