

The comprehensive plan and the land development regulations

Ty Harris, Community Development Director

Please let me introduce myself, my name is Ty Harris and I became the new director for the Charlotte County community development department this past January. Before taking this position, I worked for the Charlotte County Attorney's Office as the county's land use attorney. My background prior to working with Charlotte County was as a land use attorney in the private sector on the east coast of Florida. Although my current department handles many different aspects of land development, today I would like to discuss the county's comprehensive plan.

I am often questioned about the relationship between the county's comprehensive plan and the land development regulations (LDRs). The comprehensive plan provides the high level, long-term vision and goals for future development and redevelopment within the county, and the LDRs provide the mechanism to implement that vision and goals through detailed land use and development standards. The two documents should work together, but should not be a replica of each other. Both documents need to be in line with any state or federal regulations but do not need to duplicate those regulations, just simply reference them.

The Smart Charlotte 2050 Comprehensive Plan (Plan) was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (Board) on July 20, 2010, and became effective on June 15, 2011. During the implementation of the Plan, via development of the LDRs, it became apparent that some policies needed to be revised in order to fulfill the vision that was established in Smart Charlotte 2050 and better guide redevelopment and future development within the county. Per the Board's direction, staff has been working on the revisions.

Whenever there are changes to a document such as the comprehensive plan, there are always questions. Some of these are specific, others are general concerns. I would like to address some of the more common questions I am hearing.

One of these concerns relates to changes relating to urban sprawl. The proposed changes do not lessen the policies relating to urban sprawl, they are simply being revised to incorporate Florida Statutes 163.3177 which specifically addresses preventing urban sprawl. This is being done to bring the Plan in line with the Florida Statutes.

I have also heard concerns about TDU (Transfer of Density Units) related issues. These changes are being made to eliminate duplication between the Plan and the Charlotte County laws and ordinances. The regulations themselves are not changing.

As we are a county with large and diverse ecosystems, maintaining our environmental diversity and protecting those ecosystems is of great importance—please rest assured that the goals to protect wetlands and other ecological requirements remain in the Plan. However, language in the Plan establishes wetland categories which are not consistent with the state and federal categorization processes. I am recommending removing these policies and referencing the applicable state and federal regulations to ensure consistency. This does not reduce any of the protection for wetlands that is in the LDRs.

Charlotte County is a coastal county with regulations to protect aspects of development within the Coastal High Hazard Areas (CHHA). These protections and limitations are not going away. There has been no recommendation to amend the policies in the comprehensive plan relating to development in the CHHA.

My aim in making any changes is to ensure we are consistent with all applicable state and federal regulations, and to ensure that regulations relating to development of a specific parcel are all located in one area—the LDRs—without any duplication or redundancy in the comprehensive plan.

To ensure we have public input at all stages, we are holding a series of roundtable discussions relating to the proposed changes to the LDRs (the LDRs will be named the Unified Land Development Code when updated). These roundtables are being held every Friday afternoon from 2 till 4:30 p.m. through June in the Murdock Administration Center, 18500 Murdock Circle, Room B-106, Port Charlotte. My staff or I would be happy to meet with any concerned citizens to address issues on a case by case basis.

I made the decision to move to Charlotte County and continue my career here because Charlotte County is simply a great place to live, work and play. My goal as community development director is to ensure that policies agreed upon by your representatives—the Board of County Commissioners—are clear, transparent, include input from all sectors, and are enforced in a fair and consistent manner. I believe by doing this, Charlotte County will continue to develop in such a way that it remains a great place to live, work and play.

For more information or to discuss any specific concerns you may have, please do not hesitate to contact me at 941.764.4909 or via email at Ty.Harris@charlottefl.com.