

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

WASHINGTON COUNTY, CARYVILLE, EBRO VERNON, AND WAUSAU

This data and analysis is support data and is not adopted with the Goals, Objectives and Policies.

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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Washington County, Florida

APPENDIX:

PAGE NUMBER

CHAPTER 9J-5.018 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

WASHINGTON COUNTY, CARYVILLE, EBRO VERNON, AND WAUSAU COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Section M

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Economic Development Element is to describe current and desired economic conditions in Washington County and its municipalities of Caryville, Chipley, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau. The updated Comprehensive Plan Elements present forecasts for the county's population growth with the impacts in the various Plan Elements, and each element must be considered in conjunction with economic development goals and related development implications. The ability to achieve the goals and objectives of the full Comprehensive Plan and this element are significantly dependent upon state, national, and global economic events and policies. Thus, this element will focus primarily on how the county and its municipalities can support and grow their local economies, work to protect themselves from economic downturns, and attract new and diverse economic development throughout the County. The Economic Development Element is a supplemental element; the minimum criteria for its contents are established in Chapter 9J-5, F.A.C. This Plan element was formulated to be consistent with those criteria, as well as relevant sections of Chapter 163, F.S., and the Strategic Regional Policy Plan. The goal has seven components with 9 objectives.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Economic Development Element is an optional element in both the Washington County and City of Chipley Comprehensive Plans. Economic Development Elements are to act as a guide for achieving desirable economic development, which in turn fosters improved commerce and quality of life for all residents throughout the county. For that reason, this is a joint effort of Washington County and its municipalities of Caryville, Chipley, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau in the creation of their Economic Development Elements. The County administers the Comprehensive Plans for the municipalities, except Chipley, as well as the unincorporated portions of the County. Although the county and the City of Chipley have separate Comprehensive Plans and apply separately for grants to aid in the development of their Comprehensive Plans, it is imperative that the City of Chipley and the County economic development initiatives be coordinated.

A. As determined during the Evaluation & Appraisal Report (EAR) process being completed with adoption of the EAR-based amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, Washington County is uniquely positioned to participate in the regional growth in Bay and surrounding counties.

B. As the result of economic development regionally, such as: (1) the nearly completed new Panama City-Bay County International Airport, expansion of the Port of Panama City for more containerized cargo and the start of operations to ship wood pellets to Europe; (2) the widening and improvements of the Panama Canal in Central America to provide access for Asian trade to the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic ports; (3) regional improvements to road and rail capabilities; (4) the West Bay Sector Plan; (5) the announced new bio-fuel plant in Jackson County near the border with Washington County; (6) the continuing emergence of the Emerald Coast as a desirable location for housing and economic development; (7) other economic drivers that are external to the County, Washington County has the location advantage of being positioned to provide the associated middle-range housing, as well as locations for related industries.

C. Within Washington County, there are several pending and anticipated applications presenting potential opportunities for new economic development such as: (1) the 47,000 acres of the 55,000 acre Knight Family Property in the southwest corner of the County pending either a Sector Plan approach or multiple large-scale land use amendments; (2) a pending Development of Regional Impact on 1,883 acres in the southeast area of the County near the border with Bay, Jackson and Washington counties; (3) construction about to start on the rail spur into the Washington County Industrial Park (Chipley) that will support a new concrete products plant with over 150 new above count-average paying jobs; (4) infrastructure construction about to start on the new Spring Ridge development within the existing Sunny Hills platted subdivision; (6) and continued opening of new businesses to support the growing population.

D. Washington County is poised for a period with economic development opportunities driven by activities external to the County, and has significant opportunities already underway within the County. By intent, this Economic Development Element includes residential development as an economic driver due to the significant up-front investment required for new dwelling construction, new job creation that lasts over a period of years with above county-average wages, and the increases to ad valorem, sales, and gas taxes that make county-provided services more affordable. Washington County land costs are below surrounding counties but the County is well position by the desirable community character, the terrain, natural features as well as reasonable commute times and road networks to provide housing for people employed outside the County. In its history, Washington County has not been faced with greater opportunities for growth and to build a solid economic foundation for the County in decades to come.

III. GOAL:

Section 125.05, F.S., specifically empowers the Board of County Commissioners (the “Board”) with the authority to attract and retain business enterprises. The goal for the Board pertaining to economic development has seven components:

A. Improve the general welfare and competitive position of Washington County while building the financial foundation for future years;

B. Enhance and expand the economic diversity and activity in Washington County by retaining the existing business base and attracting new businesses that create new employment opportunities in order to provide a stronger, balanced, and stable economy in the County that will be less susceptible to economic cycles;

C. Create a positive business environment in the County by actively participating in the state-level programs operated by the Governor’s Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development, with special attention to processes, support, and funding available to the County through the designation as a Rural County of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC);

D. Develop a “team effort” throughout the County by involving government entities, civic organizations, business and community leadership, and citizens who represent all segments of the population in all aspects of promoting economic development in a coordinated manner;

E. Recognize and use all aspects of economic development that would include commercial and industrial development, infrastructure availability, residential development, development of the tourism base through the Tourist Development Council the “TDC”), and establish an active liaison with the Chamber of Commerce and an Economic Development Council.

F. Establish a method to provide consistent funding to economic development initiatives.

IV. GENERAL STRATEGY

A. The Board will focus upon those programs and activities that are under the Board’s jurisdiction and control.

1. Provide an adequate supply of land for commercial, industrial, and residential uses through the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and the Land Development Code.

2. Develop an infrastructure plan that will support economic development in designated areas of the County, subject to available funding.

3. Protect existing industrial or commerce parks from potentially incompatible adjacent land uses.

4. Actively seek additional large acreage tracts throughout the County that possess the appropriate criteria for diverse economic development opportunities.

5. Establish more formal relationships with public/private partnerships for economic development using as models those concepts and entities proven successful in other economically emerging counties. While the economic development programs may at a future date be coordinated through the County planning department, initially, the workload must be carried by the Tourist Development Council the “TDC”), the Chamber of Commerce and an Economic Development Council.

6. Commit at the earliest opportunity to a sustainable funding program that provides for annual budget allocations in support of all economic development initiatives approved by the Board.

7. Recognize that economic development must be coordinated with general tourist development, and emerging markets such as, but not limited to, eco-tourism, agri-tourism, and heritage tourism, as well as use of the recreational resources of the County, and that all of these activities promote new residential and commercial development because Washington County is a good place to live.

B. OBJECTIVES & POLICIES

Objective 1: Maintain an adequate supply of land designated for commercial, industrial, and residential uses by periodic review and updates to the FLUM in conjunction with emerging land use definitions and changes to the Land Development Code that promote modern growth patterns and innovative land use designations across the County.

Public Purpose (PP): Making lands available for the retention, attraction, and expansion of business, industry and residential uses in conjunction with population growth (s. 125.045, F.S.).

Performance Measure (PM): Designation of areas on the FLUM specifically for industrial, commercial, or residential development coordinated with and consistent with the infrastructure development and Capital Investment Element for the County.

Policy 1-1: The County will designate additional land on the FLUM through periodic review and updates to support emerging growth patterns.

Policy 1-2: Establish criteria in the Land Development Code for land to be designated on the FLUM for industrial, commercial, or residential uses in new designations that may emerge in future years as the planning process adopts new land use concepts. Considering the County's location advantages, special attention should be directed to accommodating Active Adult and Retirement community development, to include age restricted concepts, that are of particular interest to a large market segment of "baby boomers" desiring to live near but not at the Gulf coastal areas.

Policy 1-3: Designations for land use shall be made in conjunction with environmental and conservation elements to minimize impacts on designated environmentally sensitive areas, conservation areas, protected springs, or other significant environment resources.

Policy 1-4: Commercial land use shall be consistent with the concept of concentrated development of commercial districts surrounded by other compatible land uses in commercial nodes or corridors.

Policy 1-5: Industrial and commerce parks may be located in urban, suburban, or areas when level of service standards are met, and such use will not cause urban sprawl development patterns.

Policy 1-6: Residential uses shall be prohibited on all lands designated for commercial or industrial uses on the FLUM, but residential uses of varying densities may be adjacent to commercial or industrial uses as a separate land use, or as part of a planned unit development, mixed use development, or other future land use concept that may emerge for multiple uses within a defined development area.

Objective 2: Develop a plan to provide for development of infrastructure in areas of the County designated on the FLUM for commercial, industrial, or residential uses.

Public Purpose (PP): To focus future development into areas already planned for infrastructure development as funding becomes available from public or private resources.

Performance Measure (PM): Complete a concept plan at the earliest opportunity that funding is available that is coordinated and consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan, this Element, and the Capital Investment Element.

Policy 2-1: Actively pursue grant funding and other alternatives to supplement General Fund allocations for long-term planning.

Policy 2-2: Encourage private development that includes infrastructure construction (roads, central water/ sewer, and storm water systems) in support of proposed land uses, the FLUM and other related Elements.

Policy 2-3: Participate in regional planning for infrastructure that may assist in obtaining funding for construction of infrastructure consistent with the long-term plan.

Objective 3: Protect industrial, commercial, and residential areas from incompatible adjacent land uses.

Public Purpose (PP): To provide for transitions in density and intensity of land uses from one land use category to another to protect substantial public or private investment from potential incompatible land uses.

Performance Measure (PM): Incorporate guidelines into the LDC to protect new and existing industrial, commercial and residential areas from incompatible land uses.

Policy 3-1: Modify the LDC to incorporate setbacks and buffer yard standards for industrial or commercial land uses to provide a transition between land use areas.

Policy 3-2: Encourage and support the use of planned mixed use development that may include a functional and self-sustaining mix of public facilities, commercial, industrial, and institutional uses.

Objective 4: Seek large tracts for development of industrial or commercial land uses that incorporate development standards and criteria needed for successful development. of industrial or commercial land uses, and adjust the FLUM appropriately to support such plans.

Public Purpose (PP): To provide for concentration of commercial and industrial development in areas where infrastructure is or will be available on land areas sufficient for future growth.

Performance Measure (PM): Seek and or promote large tracts that can be brought under control of the County through acquisition, approved land use for private development, or the creation of special land use areas for Enterprise Zones, Foreign Trade Zones, or other special programs provided by the state or federal governments.

Policy 4-1: Establish long-term funding mechanisms to provide funds for acquisition of lands suitable for designation on the FLUM for industrial uses. Such mechanism might include, for illustration purposes, the use of special purpose bonds, a cash reserve account, short or long term debt, grants and/or matching funds for grants, allocation of a portion of land sales revenues or other revenue source for future land acquisitions.

Policy 4-2: Seek early coordination with land developers at the conceptual land use planning phase to encourage allocation of land to support economic development goals.

Policy 4-3: Encourage commercial and industrial development adjacent to existing industrial and commerce parks or commercial areas to further concentrate these land uses within the County.

Objective 5: Establish relationships with existing third-party entities such as the Chamber of Commerce, or Economic Development Council, that provide clear statements of each party's responsibilities for economic development.

Public Purpose (PP): Use the most skilled entities available for the tasks to be performed, recognizing that the County has limited capabilities for economic development initiatives due to lack of staff available at this time.

Performance Measure (PM): The establishment of written arrangements through memorandums of understanding, contracts for services, or in certain cases interlocal agreements, on a long-term basis that establish accountability for performance and the allocation of resources.

Policy 5-1: The Board of County Commissioners to form a small planning group (Economic Development Group, or EDG) to determine the roles and responsibilities of available or needed entities to support economic development. Initially, this conceptual planning group shall consist of a representative of the Chamber of Commerce, its Economic Development Council, the Tourist Development Council, designated representatives of the Board of County Commissioners, municipalities with Enterprise Zones, a Planning Commission Member and three (3) members of the general public. The committee shall be appointed by the Board and given a specific mission and time schedule for the initial report and a final report, and shall select a chair, vice chair, and secretary from among the members.

Policy 5-2: Actively seek relationships with economic development entities in other economically emerging counties as well as adjacent counties to determine what types of third-party entity structures may best support County development needs for the next decade, or beyond.

Policy 5-3: Establish a target date of not later than the end of the next fiscal year on September 30, 2010, to establish a detailed written plan that identifies the entities that will perform the primary missions in support of County economic development, and the proposed documents necessary to implement such a plan commencing October 1, 2010.

Objective 6: Create financial mechanisms to fund economic development on a sustained basis through the use of General Fund allocations, creation of new revenue streams, use of grants as appropriate, allocation of a portion of County land sales to support acquisitions long-term of tracts of land.

Public Purpose (PP): To provide the resources necessary long-term for the Board to perform its responsibilities under Florida Statutes pertaining to economic development and related planning steps.

Performance Measure (PM): Identify the extent to which the Board has identified and dedicated funding sources to economic development and the related or implied tasks to enhance the economic viability of the county in future years.

Policy 6-1: Assign a program code and appropriate initial budget lines at the time the EDG in Policy 5.1, above, is appointed that are appropriate to provide accounting information and financial management reports as funds become available.

Policy 6-2: Allocate a nominal amount, (goal of \$1,000.00 to be matched by the Washington County Chamber of Commerce Foundation), to pay incidental costs that may be incurred by the EDG (and can be approved by the County Manager) in accordance with County expense policy and procedures.

Policy 6-3: Establish as part of implementing the final recommendations of the EDG the committed revenue streams, no matter how small initially, to provide reliable funding for economic development activities.

Policy 6-4: Establish a minimum for each fiscal year as a percentage of total revenues in the account that shall be transferred from general land sales to support economic development, and establish a policy that 50% of the net to the County sale proceeds realized from the sale of land in County-owned industrial or commerce parks shall be returned to a trust account dedicated to future economic development projects.

Policy 6-5: Funding created by this Objective for economic development shall be independent of and not deemed a part of General Fund allocations to the Washington County Chamber of Commerce to support their general operations to promote the County to a wide spectrum of people and businesses that have a need to know about Washington County, in addition to the economic development initiatives.

Objective 7: Using the EDG initially, and later the entities designated for a primary role in economic development for Washington County, develop a coordinated approach for all aspects of economic development that also involve county staff and departments as appropriate and other agencies such as the Board of Education, the Sheriff's Department, the Health Department, regional transportation planners, and economic drivers such as the Port of Panama City Port Authority, the Bay County/Panama City International Airport Authority, Opportunity Florida, Florida's Great Northwest, and elected officials at all levels, so that regionally Washington County becomes known as progressive, welcoming to responsible development, and a great place to invest and live.

Public Purpose (PP): To bring to bear all possible resources within and external to the County to enhance opportunities for economic development within a regional context.

Performance Measure (PM): Encourage the Board and entities with primary economic development responsibilities to become aware at the earliest opportunity of activities that may have application to County economic development goals and objectives.

Policy 7-1: Establish a working relationship with planning departments in adjacent counties and the West Florida Regional Planning Council through the County Planning Department.

Policy 7-2: During the existence of the EDG, develop a list and points of contact for agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals with whom Washington County entities with economic development responsibilities should establish and maintain working relationships.

Policy 7-3: The Board shall conduct periodic workshops with staff and entities with economic development responsibilities to assess progress on existing projects, determine general priorities for new potential projects, and to be generally informed about development activities within the region. As a minimum, one workshop should occur in 3rd quarter of the fiscal year to assess budget priorities related to economic development.

Objective 8: The County and municipalities will carry out a program of activities to facilitate the efficient and effective review of land development proposals for economically beneficial land uses.

Policy 8-1: The County and municipalities will continue to review and monitor the Plan, the Land Development code, and the development review process to identify specific regulations and/or specific regulatory procedures that are detrimental to rapid review and approval of commercial and industrial development proposals, and will revise the regulations and procedures as indicated.

Policy 8-2: The County and municipalities will identify differences in development practices and requirements between residential and non-residential projects and will apply the procedures most appropriate to the type of development proposed.

Policy 8-3: Areas adjacent to industrial or commercial land uses will not be changed to any incompatible residential use.

Policy 8-4: The County and municipalities will consider methods for allowing expedited procedures for review of new development or modifications to existing development in established non-residential areas when appropriate to encourage new economic development.

Policy 8-5: The County and municipalities will facilitate off-site mitigation required for environmental permitting for development of appropriate employment uses through pre-permitting of development, through participation in mitigation parks, and through coordination with permitting agencies.

Policy 8-6: The County will encourage mixed used development that discourages urban sprawl, encourages the development of self-contained residential communities (i.e., residential, recreation, commercial, and associated public facilities provided within the development), and promotes a

clustered, innovative design that is sensitive to preserving the rural and environmental character of Washington County.

Policy 8-7. Promote state programs, investments, and development and redevelopment activities which encourage efficient development and occur in areas which will have the capacity to service new population and commerce.

Policy 8-7. Develop a system of incentives and disincentives which encourages a separation of urban and rural land uses while protecting water supplies, resource development, and fish and wildlife habitats.

Policy 8-9. Enhance the livability and character of urban areas through the encouragement of an attractive and functional mix of living, working, shopping, and recreational activities.

Policy 8-10. Develop a system of intergovernmental negotiation for siting locally unpopular public and private land uses which considers the area of population served, the impact on land development patterns or important natural resources, and the cost-effectiveness of service delivery.

Policy 8-11. Consider, in land use planning and regulation, the impact of land use on water quality and quantity; the availability of land, water, and other natural resources to meet demands; and the potential for flooding.

Policy 8-12. Provide educational programs and research to meet state, regional, and local planning and growth-management needs.

OBJECTIVE 9: Develop strategies for the conservation of energy resources in the construction of new homes as well as during redevelopment activities

Policy 9-1: Establish educational programs and incentives to promote agricultural cultivation and livestock best management practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Local, state and federal standards and regulations should be reformed to support agricultural practices that reduce emissions and curtail practices that increase GHG emissions.

Policy 9-2: Include the local production of food and energy among the uses addressed in comprehensive plans and local regulations. Reform state agricultural policy to shift resources and funding priorities toward support of locally produced food distribution and access. Remove regulatory barriers to the distribution, consumption and purchase of locally produced food.

Policy 9-3: Encourage and prioritize in policy, regulation and investment decisions the use of energy sources that contribute less greenhouse gas through their production, distribution and consumption, and discourage less efficient energy sources. Provide tax incentives for the development, distribution and implementation of renewable energy sources and use.

Policy 9-4: Support initiatives that generate energy from local renewable sources as a part of economic development efforts.

Policy 9-5: When siting energy generation facilities, planners should encourage the power generation plant to become an anchor of an eco-industrial park. By cascading energy resources through the combined production of electricity, heat and steam, energy generation facilities can be made more efficient and collocating industries which benefit from the use of these resources, more competitive in the world marketplace.

V. COORDINATION ACTIONS

A. Data and data analysis applicable to the Economic Development Element are provided in detail within, or as appendices to, the following Comprehensive Plan Elements:

- Future Land Use
- Transportation
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Conservation
- Recreation & Open Space
- Intergovernmental Coordination
- Capital Improvements
- Concurrency Management
- Public School Facilities

B. Supplemental data and analysis unique to economic development are attached as appendices for this element, and are to be used in conjunction with data and data analysis contained in other elements.

C. The County is in the process of submitting the EAR-based amendments for approval to the Department of Community Affairs, and reference to other elements of the Comprehensive Plan are made within the context of the proposed EAR-based amendments.

D. The Board recognizes and specifically states by adoption of this Element that economic development requires coordination with multiple agencies and programs, and that there are implied tasks that must be accomplished to establish the working relationships with other entities to achieve successful economic development. County staffs are directed to actively seek and reach-out to agencies and others encountered in the normal course of business that may be able to support County economic development goals and objectives. For illustration purposes, some of those initiatives would include:

1. Coordination with the Board of Education and state workforce programs to provide education and training opportunities for increasing the capabilities of the local labor resources as a way to attract new jobs.

2. Coordination with municipal governments so that they adopt ordinances and regulations to implement the tax incentive programs that are or may become available to attract new businesses to invest in Washington County facilities with new above average job opportunities.

3. Coordination with industrial, commercial, and residential developers to encourage new construction and job creation throughout the County, to include the use of innovative land use categories and modern planning methods that will provide a better life-style for County residents.

4. Coordination with the Bay County Economic Development Alliance, the Jackson County Development Council, Inc., and equivalent entities regionally to maximize the economic opportunities for Washington County from major projects in the region. Special emphasis should be accorded to the Port of Panama City Port Authority and the Bay County/Panama City International Airport Authority marketing arms to enhance the opportunities for Enterprise Zones, the County-wide Federal Hub Zone, and the pending Foreign Trade Zone located in Washington County.

VI. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS

Strengths:

A. Washington County's commitment to maintaining a high quality of life, has served to protect its environmental resources, limit congestion, and has helped maintain the low cost of living. This has made the area attractive for people to relocate to the County; in fact over 94% of the growth in population is due to in-migration. Further evidence of the attractiveness and appeal of the area is that almost three quarters (74.3%) of the total in-migration is from other areas within the State of Florida.

B. The County has successfully blended a rural quality of life with the expanding population growth and the emerging industrial, commercial, and residential development patterns. County and municipal governments have embraced one-stop permitting, property tax abatements, partial waiver of occupational licenses where applicable (Chipley), Enterprise Zone and Hub Zone designations. Quality businesses and industries are welcome and desirable. The Economic Development Council for Washington County has been successful in attracting new employment opportunities to the County, with the most recent success being the concrete products company and new railroad spur.

C. The major strength of the County is its geographic location surrounded by regional economic drivers.

D. The second major strength is a wide-spread belief that action is needed now to increase economic development throughout the County. A poll conducted May 27-29, 2009, as a general attitude survey by a nationally recognized polling organization based in Tallahassee revealed that 82.7% of those surveyed reported that it “is very important for county leaders to take steps to improve Washington County’s economy and create new jobs.” A further 8.97% reported that it was “important”, so 91.67% of the population believe actions must be taken to grow and stimulate the economic development for the County. In the same poll, only 4.65% reported that they were “very satisfied” with the County’s efforts to improve the local economy (Cherry Communications Co., 301 registered voters surveyed by telephone, 95% confidence level with +/- 1% sampling error).

E. The third major strength of the County is that the EAR-based amendments are being completed and the Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Code, and FLUM, have identified weaknesses that will be addressed in the immediate future. With the Sector Plan in Bay County and the possibility of a Sector Plan, or some very large scale innovative land use amendments, in the southwest area of the county, there is an opportunity to expand land use definitions to include modern land use concepts at this time.

F. The fourth major strength at the present time is the designation as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) that provides the County with access to certain state programs, waivers on certain state requirements, and ways to “fast track” new development permitting. Successful economic development will remove the County from this designate group of counties.

G. The fifth major strength is that two major projects will be starting construction before yearend; (1) the new concrete products plant and rail spur in the County Industrial Park, and, (2) the building of Phase 1 of the roads, water system, and storm water drainage that will ultimately be a 6,000 lot platted community within Sunny Hills named Spring Ridge. The industrial park project is on the north end of the county and the Spring Ridge Subdivision is in the southeast part of the County, so there will be the appearance of real work in two geographic areas. Also, activity continues in the southwest part of the community to move planning for the 55,000 acre Knight Property forward. The County is not dormant waiting for new projects to come along.

H. The sixth major strength is that Washington County has endorsed, and is working with Bay County, Jackson County and the Fl Landings developer to implement and construct the Elkcam Blvd Extension to serve the needs of Sunny Hills and the residents of the County by creating a major east / west arterial highway connecting US 231 with SR 77 as a key transportation link in the southeast portion of the county.

Weaknesses:

The following issues and concerns affect Washington County’s economic development in a negative manner from the County perspective.

A. Lack of sufficient centralized water and sewer services throughout the County, which increases the threat of groundwater pollution thru the use of septic tanks, and currently the absence of a plan that identifies and prioritizes the needs;

B. Insufficient mix of skills in the local labor pool that makes it difficult for new or existing employers to rapidly fill vacancies. A significant portion of the skilled labor forces is already established with employers outside the County;

C. Lack of a well developed secondary local road system that results in road travel not being by the most direct route due to road conditions;

D. Limited provision of urban services (water, sewer, Fire / EMS services and stormwater management) through county-wide planning, central management or budgets, and historically the municipalities have been left to solve their own problems;

E. Limited local market for goods and services that requires travel outside the County for major items, to include any shopping that cannot be accomplished at the Wal-Mart in Chipley;

F. Historically, the elected officials throughout the County have shown little inclination to explore economies of scale by pooling certain resources for central management, i.e., fire services, recreation programs, a county-wide sewer and water authority, animal control, code enforcement, or enactment of standard legislation to encourage economic development programs on a County basis. Also, the County has shown a lack of a central theme or common leadership for economic development.

G. To continue to concentrate on a majority of future residential development to occur within old platted subdivisions with vested positions that require a greater demand for facilities and services funded by the existing county wide tax base.

H. Washington County has suffered from a lack of financial resources to provide critical support infrastructure in support of and to promote economic development.

Opportunities:

A. The primary opportunity is to establish a “county-wide” economic development program by adoption of this Element and putting to work the Economic Development Group (see Objective 5, Section IV. B) with encouragement to be innovative but meet the deadline to set the structure and responsibilities for Washington County Economic Development in the next decade.

B. By being prepared for the next economic upturn, the County can take steps to maximize the ad valorem, sales tax, and gas tax revenue base by encouraging a diversity of desirable economic development, which will increase the revenue available to improve services to the tax payers. Also, the opportunity includes reorganization of services for greater efficiencies and perhaps creating special revenue streams linked to specific services.

C. Generally, the County enjoys a lower cost of living and has preserved its natural beauty and amenities in a responsible manner. By using modern planning methodology combined with a coordinated and enforced FLUM, Comprehensive Plan, and Land Development Code, the County and municipality leadership can require growth to occur in a responsible manner in areas of the County best suited to support the development. By promoting a diverse program of economic growth, combined with supporting infrastructure investment and returns on investment, whether public or private, can be maximized, and natural areas are preserved. Due to the location advantage for the County within the region, and with modern planning and directed growth patterns the county can implement development with little negative impact on the desirability of the County for new development, but it will insure that the natural beauty and rural character are preserved along-side and between modern development clusters.

D. The County shall work in conjunction with the School Board and municipalities to develop a standard and coordinated approach to impact fees so that the cost to support new development is not placed solely onto the ad valorem income base. Reasonable impact fees that result in improved services have not been proven to hinder responsible growth and development.

E. In addition to using modern growth and planning methodologies and promoting new growth and development contribute to the expanded services base, the County and municipalities need to address proportionate fair share by enacting appropriate ordinances coordinated with state requirements that requires new developments, thru contributions and public / private partnerships to implement capital infrastructure improvements requirements early in the project phasing, to reduce the capital cost to the existing county tax base, yet incorporating appropriate credits towards in-kind offsets and or impact fees or fair share contributions.

Threats:

A. Economic conditions locally, regionally, and at the state, federal, and international level that the County cannot control or influence positively.

B. Legislative actions at the state or federal level that have a negative impact on an emerging County's ability to fund programs to move beyond minimum essential services or emergency repairs to infrastructure that can restrict economic development of all types.

C. Failure of elected and community leadership throughout the County to recognize that economies of scale can be realized by working together to improve the life-styles and benefits for all residents and/or tax payers. There are some municipal services that can be better managed on a County-wide basis and free the elected leadership to focus on the unique needs of their

constituents.

D. Failure to actively implement the EAR-based amendments and this Element, and continue to improve the Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Code, and FLUM, to encourage and promote diverse economic development as an offensive plan, rather than having a passive defensive posture that results in undesirable growth and an increased financial burden on the existing taxpayers.

VII. CONSIDERATION & REVIEW OF COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ELEMENTS

A. Background and Overview.

State rules require that all elements of the Comprehensive Plan be consistent. Therefore, the goals, objectives, and policies adopted in the Economic Element should be consistent with plan elements that address related issues. The Future Land Use Element, the Public Facilities Element, and the Capital Improvements Element and the Public School Facilities element will all be impacted by, and must be consistent with the Economic Development Element.

B. Comprehensive Plan Elements Normally Impacted by the Economic Element.

1. Land Use Element.

a. Adequate amounts of land designated for future uses consistent with modern planning methodologies.

b. The Local Planning Authority should develop a strategic plan to review the current FLUM considering the evolved current uses and the concept of highest and best use for future uses to insure that new development and growth will occur in proper locations with appropriate natural features / environmental protections as well as adequate transportation infrastructure, central services and facilities as appropriate, and proper buffering and/or transition land use between other land uses.

c. In conjunction with implementing the EAR-based amendments, the Land Development Code shall be updated to coordinated with County, state, and federal agency requirements.

2. Capital Improvements Element.

a. Identified and planned improvements must be included in the CIE whether funded publically or privately through developer agreements. This is an on-going annual process that requires coordinated input from both County staff and the municipalities and should be regarded as part of the Board-level strategic planning process, rather than a boring administrative process to meet calendar deadlines.

b. Feasible revenue and funding sources need to be identified for each project, although this may be somewhat speculative for some projects. The County needs an extensive grant finding effort combining state, federal, private funding sources and public-private partnerships.

3. Infrastructure Element.

a. Identify improvements to establish central water/ sewer, stormwater management and solid waste by obtaining a study that defines the needs and implementing steps for progress towards a combination of public and private assets that may at a future time become a central system.

b. The County has significant land area that is subject to development restrictions due to watershed protection and aquifer recharge issues. Infrastructure construction must be controlled to protect the County and regional water supply.

4. Housing Element.

a. Identifies an inventory of existing platted subdivision lots. Over 71% of these lots are concentrated within the Sunny Hills development and vested for development on septic tanks on substandard lots thereby threatening the community and regional water resources. Although the number of lots would be adequate based upon BEBR growth projections, it is recognized that development of these lots will result in a greater burden for support infrastructure cost to the current county tax base. The county also recognizes that growth demands in recent years demonstrate that consumers do not gravitate to existing platted areas not offering modern amenities. It is the desire of the county to promote alternative development that ties master planned community development with modernized development criteria and standards, protects and preserves natural features and open spaces, provides central water / sewer services and provides mitigation / fair share contribution for planned community road network improvements and community services.

b. Due to regional influences by economic drivers outside the County, it's anticipated there will be a need for innovative master planned community development in areas not already platted. There is a need in the County at historic growth levels for new dwelling units each year.

c. The largest platted subdivision in the County, and perhaps the Panhandle, is Sunny Hills with 24,612 lots dating from the early 1970's as a planning concept. About 14,000 lots are in private ownership but fewer than 650 homes have been built to date. Approximately 25% of Sunny Hills is being developed as Spring Ridge with a modern concept that provides for a home owners association, modern amenities such as a large club house with a pool, tennis, and exercise facilities as well as accommodations for group meetings. However, development of

these lots will still be served by septic tanks as no central sewer service is available.

c. While the County has areas suitable for upper income dwelling development, it's anticipated that the largest housing demand will be for middle-income, workforce and Active Adult / Retirement housing convenient to transportation corridors for the actively working new residents and new in migration.

d. Due to the convenient location of the County to the Gulf of Mexico, and population centers in Bay County, Jackson County, and south Alabama that offer more metropolitan shopping, entertainment, and services, it appears that the area will attract some of the "baby boomer" population shift who wish to live near coastlines but not within tropical storm zones. This population tends to be affluent, wants access to metropolitan areas, but prefers living in a semi-rural environment with recreational amenities nearby. Washington County can benefit from innovative land use planning to accommodate age restricted community development for active adults.

e. In addition to new dwelling developments, there is a need throughout the county for redevelopment of existing housing to improve the quality of housing for lower income residents. A portion of the population lives on owned land in below modern standard housing and mobile homes. There is a need to find ways to redevelop existing substandard housing as part of the economic development of the county.

5. Transportation.

a. Implement the Washington County Five-Year Paving and Road Improvement Plan as provided in the Transportation Element.

b. Actual construction of roads, paving of dirt roads, and repaving is dependent upon external funding, but the priority of work needs to be coordinated with the FLUM whenever possible as part of locating new development according to a plan, rather than random spot development or urban sprawl.

c. Continue to work with Bay and Jackson counties along with the FI Landings developer to implement the Elkcam Blvd Extension providing a arterial connection between US 231 and SR 77.

6. Population Growth.

a. Population growth often precedes certain economic development, but as the County develops further, the success of ~~from~~ sound planning and controlled growth can stimulate more population growth.

b. At this time, it is difficult to make detailed population projections based upon historic data, but after the 2010 census data becomes available, more accurate projections will be

possible. Based upon the 2010 census data, the FLUM may need to be revisited in conjunction with the housing element. It is recognized that historic growth trends have not adequately reflected the emergence of growth in the Emerald Coast / Panhandle of Florida and therefore, strict dependence on BEBR to anticipate future demand is an inadequate projection of the future.

7. Conservation and Recreation & Open Space Elements.

a. Implement the EAR-based amendments as appropriate through the Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Code, and the future update of the FLUM.

b. Coordinate the Conservation requirements with state/federal requirements so the County does not create added but understaffed workload for itself.

c. Seek grant funding to assist the county in developing a comprehensive open space preservation plan for the County addressing key natural features, wetlands, springs protection, Karst / ground water protection, the provision of community open space and recreation / park facilities with design standards and criteria incorporated into the LDC. .

8. Public School Facilities Element.

a. Successful economic development results in population growth as people are drawn to new job opportunities.

b. Population growth demands additional support facilities and government services and the School Board is a taxing authority to provide additional facilities and services related to education for all age groups from pre-K through adult education for additional career skills or personal development.

c. Expansion of the County education resources, especially the physical facilities, can take years and often trails actual needs; therefore, it is imperative that economic development initiatives be coordinated with planning for the educational system. Likewise, both the County and the Board of Education must operate in a coordinated manner to insure that economic development opportunities do not result in unanticipated problems for either party.

d. Promote the creation of age restricted Active Adult / Retirement community development to respond to development demand without placing demands on the need for schools yet generate taxes in support of the county school system.