

Staff Report

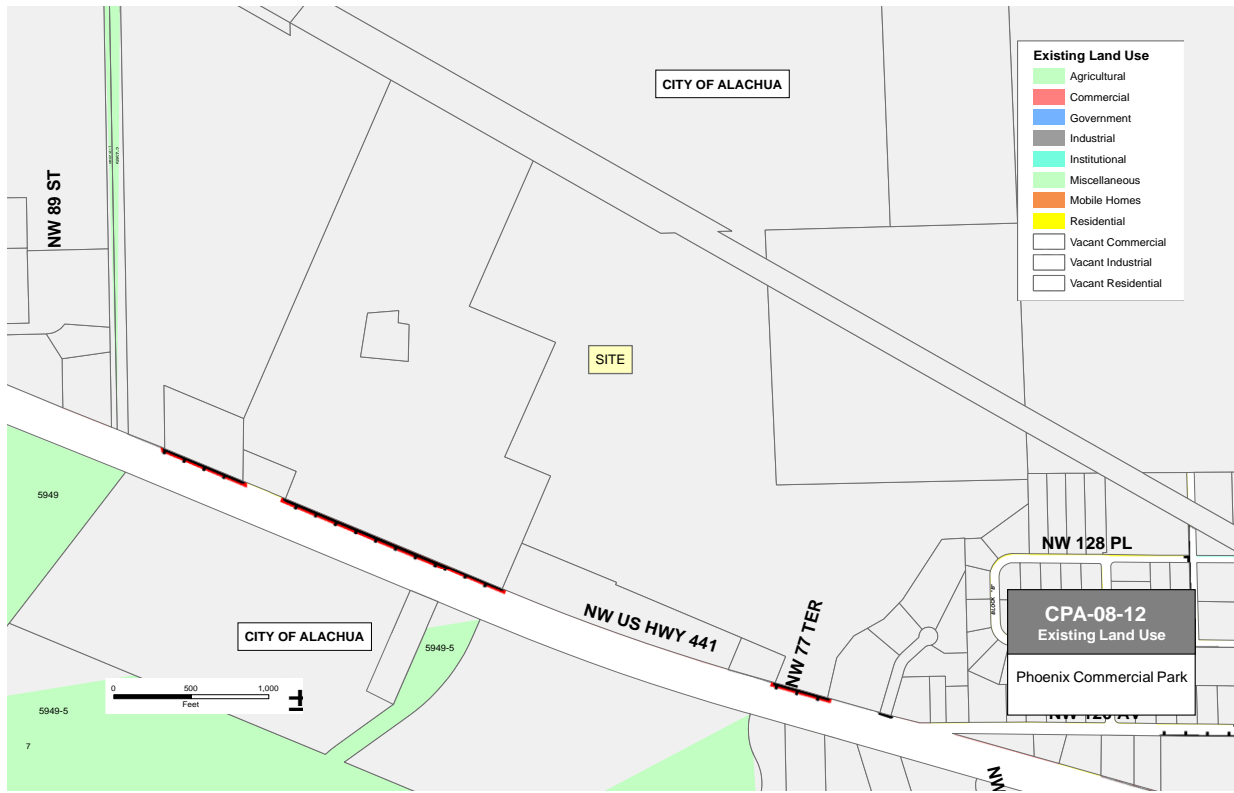
Amending Current Rural Employment Center Policies Alachua County Comprehensive Plan

Background

The Alachua County Comprehensive Plan (Plan) Future Land Use Element adopted in 1984 recognized Rural Employment Centers (“RECs”) containing a major employer outside of the urban cluster and provided for supporting commercial or industrial and residential uses at a limited density (generally at a maximum of one acre lots.) There were six Rural Employment Centers identified in the Plan in 1984, which were subsequently reduced to two centers: McGinley Industrial Park and the General Electric at Hague Rural Employment Center, which were recognized in the 1991 update of the Comprehensive Plan. The Hague Rural Employment Center remains in unincorporated Alachua County, but as detailed below, there have been significant changes in the use of the property including the closure of the “General Electric at Hague” industrial facility and economic and other factors including designation of the site as a “Brownfield” that warrant modification of the policies to tailor them to the circumstances in this area.



Aerial View of the Hague Rural Employment Center



Existing Land Use Map

Existing Land Uses within the Hague Rural Employment Center

As shown on the existing land use map, a variety of existing land uses are present within and around the Hague REC. These range from single family residential to the east of the REC, agricultural property located to the north and south as well as designated commercial to the west. The Hague REC is surrounded by the City of Alachua and all properties outside the REC are under their jurisdiction.

The REC is within the Reserve Area designated under the Boundary Adjustment Act for potential annexation by the City of Alachua and is an enclave. There have been proposals in the last few years for voluntary annexation of additional unincorporated properties to reduce or even eliminate the enclave but the annexation process has not been completed.

History of Rural Employment Center Policies within the Plan

The 1984 Plan established Rural Employment Centers as areas outside the urban cluster where there is a single employer of 100 or more persons. The Plan originally envisioned the potential for REC's. However, the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) for the Comprehensive Plan 2001 Plan update as adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) on September 28, 1998 recommended that Rural Employment Center policies be evaluated and amended to better define permitted/prohibited uses and businesses. (Evaluation and Appraisal Report on

the Alachua County Comprehensive Plan: 1991-2011 adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, Sept. 28, 1998 by Ord. 98-36, p. I-107 Table 29, Recommendation #43.) The Plan update for the 2001-2011 Comprehensive Plan to implement the 1998 EAR amended the Rural Employment Center policies to clarify allowable uses, and deleted policies suggesting the potential for designation of new RECs and stated that the two Rural Employment Centers (Hague and McGinley Industrial Park) were depicted on the Future Land Use Map. The REC policies remained unchanged in the most recent update of the Plan (2011-2030).

The policies for Rural Employment Centers are currently implemented through standard zoning categories corresponding to the various uses identified as allowable within the Rural Employment Center Objective and Policies. Given the unique mix of uses and circumstances present in the Hague Rural Employment Center as detailed below, staff recommends that Planned Development zoning be used as the mechanism for implementation of this Rural Employment Center

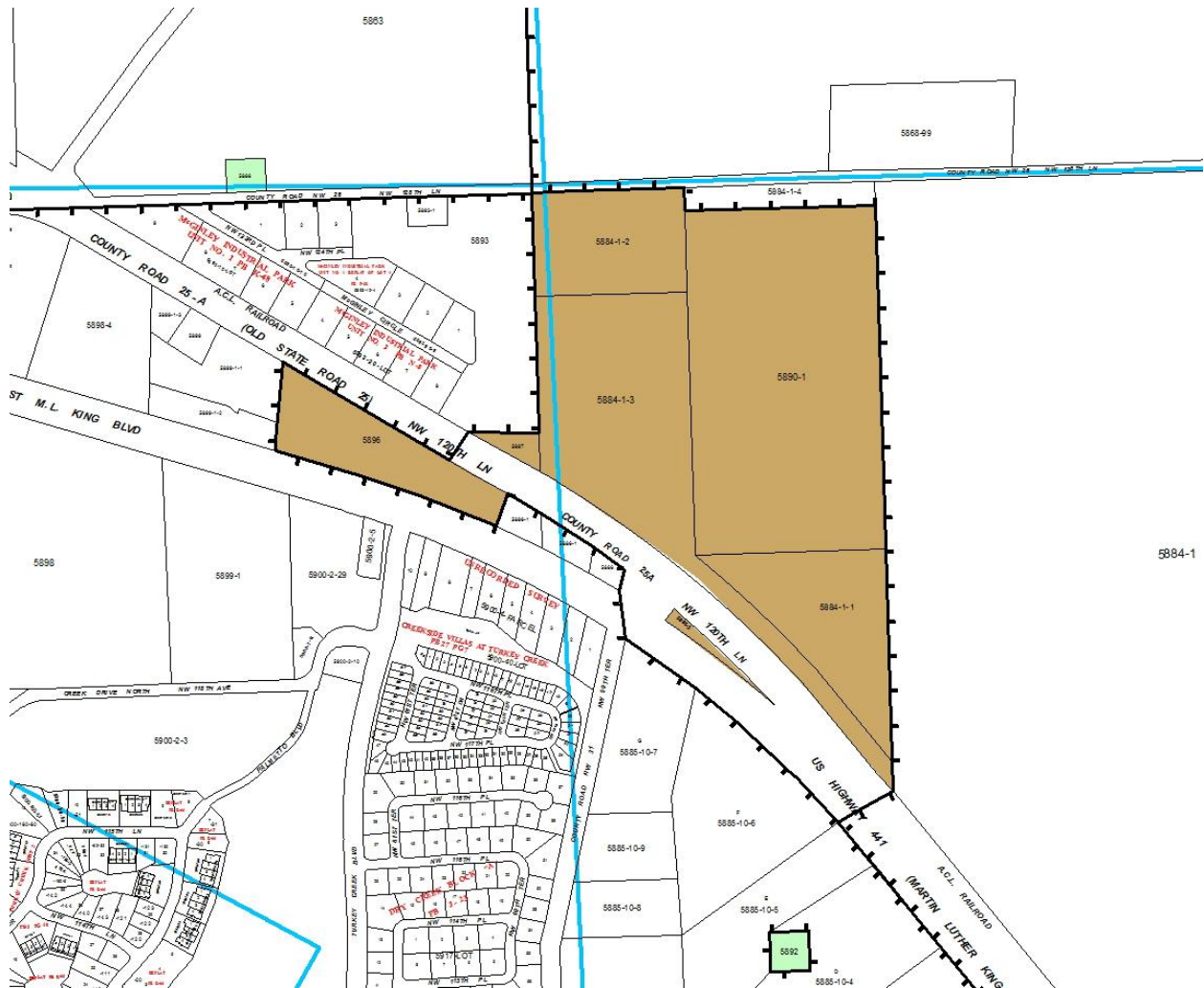
History of Hague Rural Employment Center

The Hague Rural Employment Center originally housed the Gates Battery Facility and, later, the (General Electric) Energizer Battery Plant. The entire site is approximately 40 acres in size. At the time that the Rural Employment Center Designation was established, it was known as 'General Electric at Hague' and the development type was 'industrial' (manufacturing, recycling and general). All development in the REC was of an industrial nature until the facility closed approximately 10 years ago. Subsequent attempts to find uses for the plant have met with limited success. A portion of the facility (including a large 180,000 square foot warehouse) was subsequently purchased by Phoenix Commercial Park LLP with the intent of developing the site as a light industrial park catering to users who will find benefit with large, flexible warehouse spaces. The portion of the site purchased includes both existing structures on the western portion of the site as well as undeveloped property between US 441 and a railroad line located along the north property line.

The parcel is within the City of Alachua Urban Reserve Area and is surrounded by the incorporated city limits. However, the property owner and the City have been unable to come to an agreement regarding annexation and the property remains unincorporated.

McGinley Industrial Park

The McGinley Industrial Park was annexed by the City of Alachua as part of the Urban Reserve Agreement between that City and Alachua County. However, parcels outside of the Industrial Park itself retain the REC designation.



These parcels contain County facilities (Department of Public Works – Parcels 5884-1-1 and 5890-1) as well as Gainesville Regional Utilities facilities (5884-1-2 and 5884-1-3). A parcel along US 441 contains a mobile home park (5896). It is the recommendation of staff that these parcels be the subject of a land use change at a future date with the County and GRU parcels receiving an 'Institutional' designation and the property with the mobile home park receiving a 'Rural/Agriculture' land use designation.

Request for a Large Scale Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Phoenix has undertaken numerous site improvements as part of their effort to market the property. However, existing policies for rural employment centers limit the types of uses that can occur there. Specifically, Policy 6.3.3 of the Future Land Use Element states that:

The following supporting activities may be permitted within a rural employment center provided the appropriate policies and standards within the Comprehensive Plan are met.

- a) Commercial uses consistent with Policy 3.11.1*
- b) Office uses consistent with 3.9.1 and industrial uses consistent with Policy 4.5.1*

In the case of commercial uses (Policy 3.11.1(a)), the uses are identified as grocery, pharmacy, medical offices and personal services not to exceed 30,000 square feet. Office uses are those general office uses as permitted in office parks while light industrial uses include research, development and experimental laboratories as well as warehousing transportation and distribution if performance standards can be achieved.

In general, commercial development in Alachua County is limited to those areas designated as 'activity centers' on the Future Land Use Map. In doing so, the intent of the Plan is to promote 'efficient use of land within the urban cluster' that provide nodes of higher density and intensity mixed uses that are inter connected with other commercial, employment, light industrial and institutional centers through a system of multi-modal corridors and public transit system'. However, the Plan acknowledges that commercial activities exist within the urban cluster but outside activity centers, in part through the designation of commercial enclaves. There are, in addition, those non-conforming commercial sites scattered throughout the cluster.

Outside the urban cluster, commercial development up to 30,000 square feet is allowed within designated rural clusters (of which there are 13 in unincorporated Alachua County), on those parcels with an A-RB (Agriculture rural business) zoning district or on those parcels designated 'Rural Commercial – Agriculture'. These clusters as well as the rural commercial sites acknowledge that limited commercial activities are necessary to support a rural population, who require services (e.g. medical, limited retail, agricultural products) that are not normally associated with rural land uses.

The unique character of the Hague Employment Center (and Phoenix Park in particular) revolves around the fact that the property formerly functioned as an industrial site. The site includes existing structures not normally associated with agricultural uses. Centralized sewer facilities exist on the site that are not usually found within the rural agricultural land use. The owner of the Phoenix Park is requesting additional permitted uses at the site for potential new clients and employers who may wish to take advantage of the unique set of opportunities

offered by this site (large warehouse space and ready access to a major arterial road as well as I-75). The owner, their agent and County staff have been meeting to develop a scenario that would provide added flexibility within the Plan. This primarily involves expanding the range of permitted uses allowed within the rural employment center in order to provide flexibility in marketing the site as well as acknowledging the changing character of the center away from industrial uses and toward a greater mix of uses including, but not limited to, commercial, technology-based businesses and recreational uses.

At its meeting of June 12, 2012, the Board directed staff, through approval of a request to advertise, to amend the rural employment center policies to reflect these changes and to also incorporate the site's brownfield designation into the policies as a means of economic development for the entire property.

It is the intent of the property owner, once the large scale amendment has been approved, to submit a planned development (PD) application for all property under their control. This application would codify all permitted uses consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. It would also provide a master plan for their portion of the REC site, including existing and proposed structures. The master plan would also identify resources to be protected as well as providing for open space and other requirements found in the ULDC.

Proposed Policy Changes

The following is the language presently found in the Plan:

OBJECTIVE 6.3 - RURAL EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

Recognize existing industrial uses in conjunction with related residential and supporting uses outside the urban area. Rural employment centers are characterized by at least one employer of 100 or more persons outside of an urban cluster.

Policy 6.3.1 *The Future Land Use Map shall depict existing Rural Employment Center boundaries.*

Policy 6.3.2 *Development in a rural employment center may be permitted with lot sizes of one acre or greater for development on private wells and septic tanks (or on lots as small as one-half acre with both a central water and sewer system), consistent with the Potable Water/Sanitary Sewer Element and Conservation and Open Space Element Policy 4.5.5(f).*

Policy 6.3.3 *The following supporting activities may be permitted within a rural employment center provided that the appropriate policies and standards within the Comprehensive Plan are met.*

(a) *Commercial uses consistent with Policy 3.11.1.*

- (b) Office uses consistent with 3.9.1 and light industrial uses consistent with Policy 4.5.1.

Policy 6.3.4 *The following existing rural employment centers are depicted on the Future Land Use map series:*

- (a) McGinley Industrial Park, and
- (b) Hague Rural Employment Center.

Policy 6.3.5 *Joint ventures in pursuing employment activities between the County and smaller municipalities shall be encouraged within those cities.*

Policy 6.3.5.1 deals specifically with the Hawthorne Rural Community Employment Center. This language is intended to remain 'as-is' and is not subject to change. Staff is proposing the following amended language. New policies also take into account the brownfields designation of the property and the opportunities for economic development based on that designation. Deletions are noted by ~~strike throughs~~ while new language is underlined.

OBJECTIVE 6.3 - RURAL EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

~~Recognize existing industrial uses in conjunction with related residential and supporting uses outside the urban area. Rural Employment centers are characterized by at least one employer of 100 or more persons outside of an urban cluster.~~ Rural Employment Centers are recognized as areas outside the urban cluster that can support light industrial and limited commercial uses not otherwise associated with surrounding rural/agricultural land uses.

Policy 6.3.1 The Future Land Use Map shall depict existing Rural Employment Center boundaries. The Planned Development (PD) zoning mechanism shall be used for the Employment Center to ensure that proposed development is consistent with the goal, objectives and policies of the Plan. The PD zoning process shall ensure that level of service standards identified in the Plan are met; that proposed development does not adversely impact surrounding properties and that environmental resources are adequately protected.

Policy 6.3.2 Development in a rural employment center may be permitted with lot sizes of one acre or greater for development on private wells and septic tanks (or on lots as small as one-half acre with both a central water and sewer system), consistent with the Potable Water/Sanitary Sewer Element and Conservation and Open Space Element Policy 4.5.5(f). As part of a designated brownfield site, Alachua County may assist with redevelopment efforts in the Hague Employment Center taking place under the Brownfield Redevelopment Act (F.S. 376.77) including expedited review of development applications.

Policy 6.3.3 The following ~~supporting activities~~ uses may be permitted within a rural employment center provided that the appropriate policies and standards within the Comprehensive Plan are met.

- (a) ~~Commercial uses consistent with Policy 3.11.1~~ Within the Hague Rural Employment Center Only: Business and professional services, retail sales and services, food service, personal services, entertainment and recreation activities and the processing, packaging, warehousing and distribution of agricultural products. Retail sales and services uses shall not exceed 10% of the existing gross square footage within the rural employment center.
- (b) Office uses consistent with 3.9.1 and light industrial uses consistent with Policy 4.53.1.
- (c) Conference and training facilities

Policy 6.3.4 The following existing rural employment centers are depicted on the Future Land Use map series:

- (a) McGinley Industrial Park, and
- (b) Hague Rural Employment Center.

Policy 6.3.5 Joint ventures in pursuing employment activities between the County and smaller municipalities shall be encouraged within those cities.

Comprehensive Plan Consistency

The proposed revisions to the policy language are consistent with the Plan as a whole as well as the specific policies listed below:

Policy 3.3.1 New commercial development shall meet all of the requirements for adequate facilities based on the level of service standards adopted in this plan for roads, potable water and sanitary sewer, solid waste and stormwater facilities and the concurrency provisions of this plan.

Policy 3.3.2 In addition to the facilities for which level of service standards are adopted as part of the concurrency management system of this plan, other facilities that shall be adequate to serve new commercial development include:

- a. fire, police and emergency medical protection*
- b. local streets*
- c. pedestrian facilities and bikeways*

Consistency: The proposed comprehensive plan amendment to allow additional permitted uses within the Hague Employment Center is consistent with the required level of service standards at the land use review level. The existing developed properties are currently developed and centralized services with an adequate capacity to accommodate future development are available.

Levels of Service – The Alachua County Comprehensive Plan Capital Improvements Element requires that public facilities and services needed to support development be available concurrent with the impacts of development and that issuance of a Certificate of Level of Service Compliance (CLSC) be a condition of all final development orders.

Traffic: The properties are located along a segment of US Highway 441 that has adequate capacity to serve any potential uses on the subject property, as indicated in the following table:

LEVEL OF SERVICE SUMMARY

Highway Segment:	US Highway 441 (FDOT Segment #17)
Maximum Service Volume (MSV):	33,800 ADT
Existing Traffic (Including Reserved Trips):	22,421 ADT
Available Capacity:	11,379 ADT
Percent of Capacity Available:	34%

As indicated in the level of service summary above, adequate capacity exists on US 441 to accommodate any realistic development scenario that might occur as a result of this comprehensive plan amendment within the Employment Center. Specific traffic impacts based on future potential uses will be determined when a specific business occupies the facility. This determination will be based on the type and size of the use. As required by Alachua County, the any increased impacts will be required to meet the concurrency requirements of the Comprehensive Plan and ULDC.

Potable Water: A private centralized potable water system is in place in the Hague REC and all existing development that is within the existing industrial complex is currently served by this centralized service. Capacity is also available to serve future development activity in the Hague Rural Employment Center.

Sanitary Sewer: A private sewer system is in place and all existing development that is within the existing Hague industrial complex is currently served by this centralized service. Capacity is also available to serve future development activity in the Hague Rural Employment Center.

Fire and Emergency Services: This site is served by Alachua County Fire Rescue.

Solid Waste: Adequate capacity is available to serve the proposed development. The New River Solid Waste Facility has capacity for an estimated 50 years.

Mass Transit: The area is not currently served by RTS bus service.

Schools: The Employment Center land use is mainly non-residential in nature and the proposed text changes will not have an impact on public school enrollment in Alachua County. The proposed text changes are intended to allow additional commercial uses within the REC.

Recreation: The Employment Center land use is primarily non-residential in nature and the proposed text changes will not have an impact on recreation levels of service in Alachua County.

Policy 3.9.1 of the Future land Use Element states that *office uses shall only be located in areas designated for commercial development; low medium or high activity centers, village centers, planned developments, transit oriented developments, traditional neighborhood developments, rural employment centers or rural clusters.* Business and Professional services, both of which are being proposed as permitted uses for this employment center, allow a wide range of office uses. Amending the language in Policy 6.3.3 to allow such uses is thus consistent with this policy.

Policy 4.1.1(b) of the Future Land Use Element states that *Industrial uses, other than those limited uses provided for in Policy 4.1.1(a), located outside of the urban cluster shall locate in existing rural employment centers, and shall be designated on the [Future Land Use Map](#) with the appropriate land use classification. Standards for rural employment centers are contained in Section 6.0.* The Hague Employment Center is designated on the Future Land Use Map. All industrial uses permitted within the employment center are to be consistent with Policy 4.3.1 (Light Industrial Uses) found in the Future Land Use Element. **Policy 4.3.1** states that *certain office and light industrial uses, such as research, development, and experimental laboratories and similar uses, or the manufacturing or fabrication of products that have minimal off-site impacts and that do not require specialized sites may also be appropriate within Transit Oriented Developments (TODs) or Activity Centers. Stringent performance standards shall be incorporated into the land development regulations to provide buffering, signage, landscaping, and architectural standards, and other methods to limit any adverse impacts and ensure compatibility with adjacent areas. Certain warehousing, transportation and distribution uses may be appropriate if all performance standards can be achieved.* No changes to the permitted

industrial uses are being contemplated by these amendments. All permitted industrial uses must be consistent with Policy 4.3.1.

Analysis with Other Policies in the Plan

Policy 1.1.1 of the Economic Element states, in part, that *Alachua County shall promote the recruitment and expansion of targeted industries that are either growing, high-skill, high wage areas of desired growth or contribute to regional economic diversification.* The expansion of permitted uses within the employment center promotes the goals of Policy 1.1.1 by providing the flexibility to permit a variety of permitted uses. These can include high-wage industries but can also include retail or recreational uses that serve the population of the immediate area as well as greater Alachua County and surrounding municipalities.

Policy 1.1.2 of the Economic Element states that *Alachua County shall promote economic development efforts that build on and complement existing commercial, industrial and agricultural assets in the local economic system.* The Hague Employment Center (HEC) is an existing industrial complex in the County. The proposed changes are meant to facilitate continued growth and new economic opportunities within the HEC, an existing asset within unincorporated Alachua County.

Policy 1.5.2 of the Economic Element states that *the County shall make information available to the community on potential incentives such as reduced impact and/or mobility fees, streamlined permitting requirements for redevelopment within the Urban Cluster, and financial incentives available at the state and federal level for redevelopment of brownfield sites.* The revised policies for employment centers and specifically new **Policy 6.3.2** encourage the use of incentives in brownfields redevelopment within employment centers.

Policy 4.5.20 of the Conservation and Open Space Element states that *the County shall encourage the redevelopment of brownfields consistent with the protection of human health and natural resources.* The Hague Employment Center will be required to provide required buffers, open space and natural resources protection consistent with the provisions of the ULDC and the Policies of the COSE found in the Plan.

Impact of Amendment on Affordable Housing

This proposed amendment will not have a negative effect on the provision of affordable housing within Alachua County.