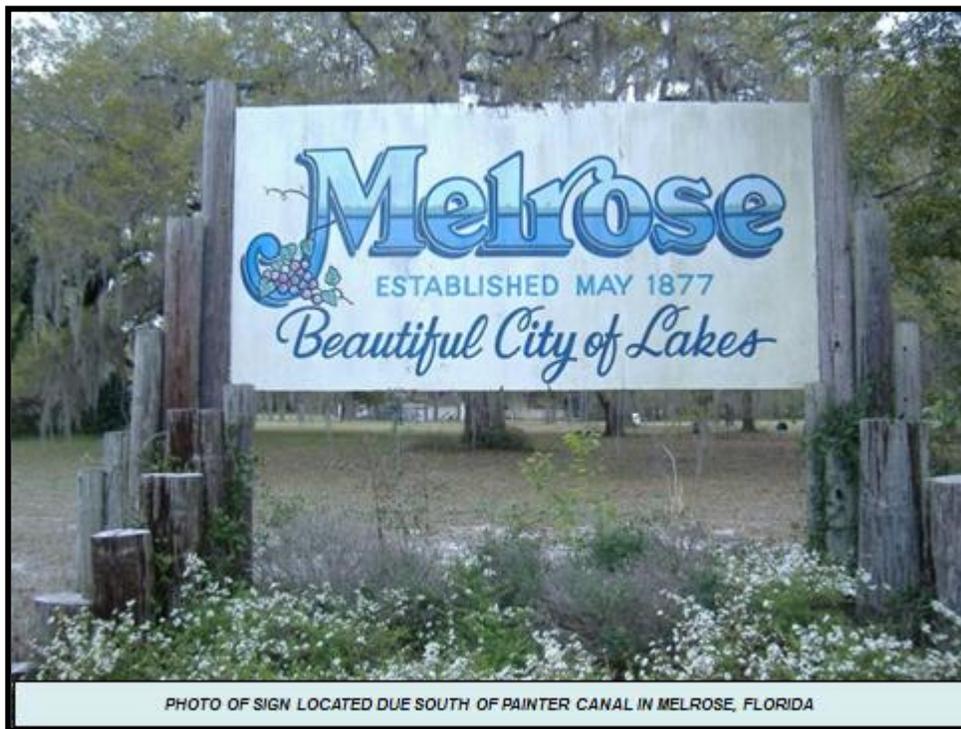




ENG, DENMAN & ASSOCIATES, INC.

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Melrose Rural Cluster Sub Area Plan Preliminary Report



Project Request: A Preliminary Sub Area Plan Report to request that the County Commission approve a planning process to amend the official limits of the Melrose Rural Cluster.

Submittal Date: June 4, 2012

Prepared By: Clay Sweger, AICP, LEED AP
Eng, Denman & Associates, Inc.

Background

Community History

Melrose is an unincorporated community situated in the corners of Alachua, Bradford, Clay, and Putnam counties and is located approximately 18 miles northeast of downtown Gainesville. The portion of Melrose that lies within Alachua County is described in the Comprehensive Plan as a ‘Rural Cluster,’ which according to Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Element (FLUE) Policy 6.4 is defined as a ‘settlement outside of an urban cluster...(and) serves as a focus for an existing rural community.’ Founded in the late 1800’s, Melrose has existed ever since as a vibrant rural community that has thrived based on its proximity to Lake Santa Fe originally as a shipping route and more recently as a regional recreation and eco-tourism destination. In addition, many homes line the shoreline of Lake Santa Fe, providing its residents access to one of the greatest natural treasures in North Central Florida. Much of the rich heritage of the community still remains as 72 structures within Melrose are on the National Register, according to the Melrose Business and Community Association.

Characteristics of the Melrose Rural Cluster

The Alachua County Comprehensive Plan includes policies written to guide development activity within the various rural clusters in the County. Melrose is one of 12 individual rural clusters spread throughout the Alachua County. The entire list of Rural Clusters is listed below:

Policy 6.4.4 *The following communities are the rural clusters:*

- a. *Cross Creek*
- b. *Evinston*
- c. *Campville*
- d. *Grove Park*
- e. *Rochelle*
- f. *Windsor*
- g. *Lochloosa*
- h. *Orange Heights*
- i. *Melrose***
- j. *Earlton*
- k. *Hague*
- l. *Santa Fe*

While these communities share the same general label of ‘Rural Cluster,’ each have unique characteristics, including location, geographic area, local population, natural resources and infrastructure. Melrose stands out from the other identified Rural Clusters for a number of reasons, including the following:

Population: According to the latest available census data, the Melrose population is approximately 3,500, which far exceeds the population of any other designated Rural

Cluster. It is interesting to note that Melrose has a larger population base than several of the incorporated municipalities within Alachua County, with the City of Newberry having a similar population of 3,600. In addition, Melrose is larger than the following incorporated areas in Alachua County:

Municipality	Population (approx.)
Hawthorne	1,400
Archer	1,300
Waldo	800
Micanopy	650
LaCrosse	140

Geographic Area: The entire Melrose community is larger than any Rural Cluster within Alachua County when measured by geographic area, including approximately 750 acres on 685 tax parcels. In comparison, the next largest Rural Cluster in Alachua County is Windsor, which includes approximately 669 acres on 253 tax parcels. When comparing Melrose to some of the incorporated municipalities within Alachua County, Melrose is approximately 13% larger than Micanopy (750 vs. 662 acres) and approximately 56% of the size of Waldo (750 vs. 1,340).

Public Facilities: Melrose has several established public facilities in place, many more than any other Rural Cluster, including but not limited to the following:

Public School: Melrose Elementary School.

Infrastructure: Melrose is the only Rural Cluster that has its own centralized potable water system, a private cooperative titled Melrose Water Association, Inc.

Fire Rescue: Melrose Volunteer Fire Department.

Library: Melrose Public Library.

Parks: Melrose residents enjoy the use of three parks; Heritage Park located in 'downtown' Melrose, the Melrose Bay Park abutting Melrose Bay and the Santa Fe Lake County Park located between State Road 26 and Lake Santa Fe. Cumulatively, these parks have many of the characteristics typically found in urbanized areas with examples including active and passive recreation, lake access, pavilions, trails, playgrounds, restrooms, paved roads and parking and a public boat ramp at the Santa Fe Lake Park.

Churches: Melrose is served by several places of religious assembly, including the Melrose Church of God, Melrose United Methodist Church, Eliam Baptist Church, Trinity Episcopal Church, Believers Worship Center Church, St. Johns Baptist Church, St. William Catholic Church and Melrose Church of Christ.

Community Center: The Melrose Senior Community Center was constructed in recent years and provides various public services and an excellent meeting space for the community.

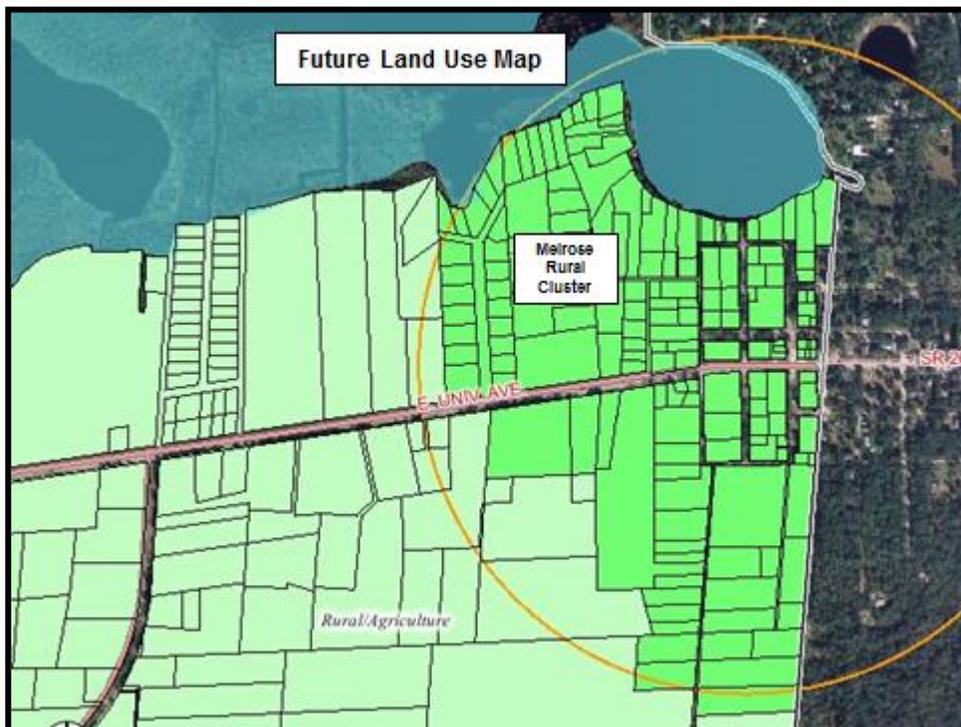
Commercial Activities: Melrose is home to many existing commercial activities that serve the community, including but not limited to at least six restaurants, a grocery store, bank, funeral home, antique shops, optician, pest control service, service stations, physical therapy clinic, photography studio, physicians, realtors, art studios, barber shops, architects, attorneys and an animal hospital. The amount of existing commercial shops and services within Melrose exceeds some of the incorporated areas within Alachua County.

Regional Tourism / Recreation: Melrose is unique in that it is a regional eco-tourism destination that attracts a large number of County residents who recreate on Lake Santa Fe, a 5,800 acre spring-fed lake.

As described above, the community of Melrose is a much more developed area with more community assets when compared to the other Rural Clusters, thus making it unique to its counterparts. In addition, Melrose also exceeds the size and scope of several incorporated municipalities within Alachua County.

Location/Geographic Limits of the Melrose Rural Cluster

Based on the existing Alachua County Future Land Use Map, the Melrose Rural Cluster currently has the boundaries shown below in dark green (the remaining portions of Melrose are located in other counties):



The limits of the Rural Cluster as illustrated above were previously established by Alachua County based primarily on an evaluation and interpretation of Comprehensive Plan Policy 6.4.2. This policy provides the general guidelines for evaluating the boundaries of a Rural Cluster, as stated below (emphasis placed on sections in **bold**):

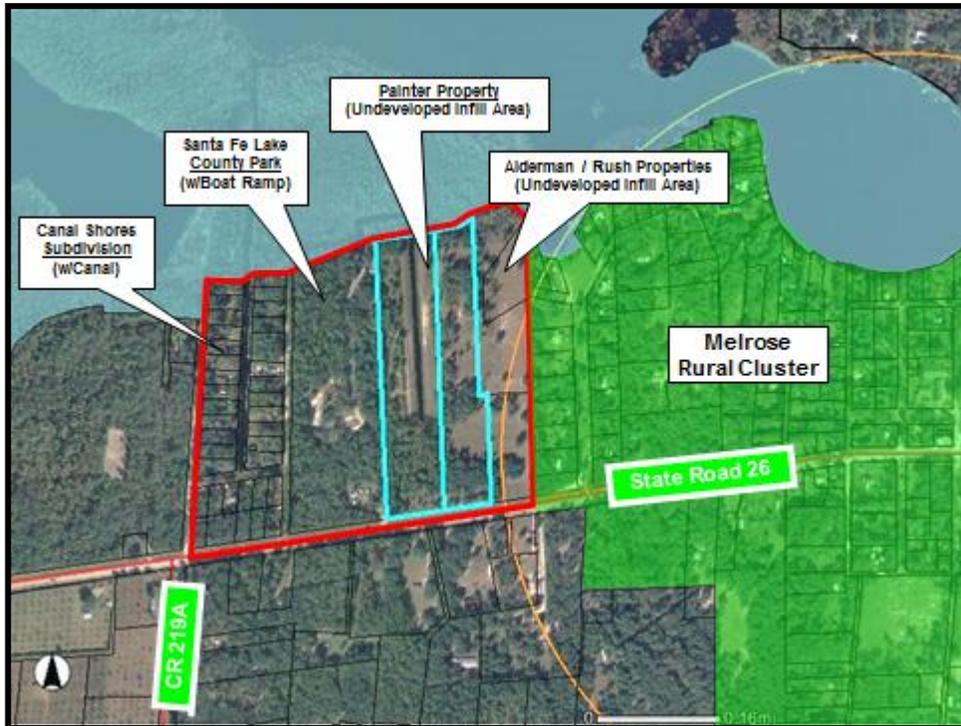
Policy 6.4.2 *The Rural Clusters identified in Policy 6.4.4 are **generally depicted on the Future Land Use Map**. The **boundaries of the Rural Cluster shall be updated** as part of an evaluation of the designated Rural Clusters based on the **sub-area planning process identified in policy 6.4.5**. **The following guidelines shall be used in evaluating the boundaries of a rural cluster:***

- a. *Rural Clusters shall **generally include developed area approximately 1/2 mile from the easily discernible focal point of the cluster**. The focal point is usually the intersection of two rural roads or some other prominent feature around which the community seems to be centered.*
- b. *The cluster shall be construed as **containing all of the developed areas and undeveloped infill areas**, but not undeveloped land beyond the extent of developed areas.*
- c. *For the purposes of these guidelines, **developed areas include** areas with commercial uses, non-farm **residential areas where lot sizes are generally below five acres**, and usually below one acre, and other specialized uses not normally found in a rural setting. **Platted, undeveloped subdivisions or other pre-existing developments where densities are higher than on unit per acre should be included**, even if not developed, provided that the various lots or parcels are largely in different ownerships. **The extent of non-conformity of these lots or parcels from County setback, access, and other regulations shall be considered in determining Rural Cluster boundaries**.*
- d. *The cluster may contain open space or conservation areas if these areas can be logically included given the other standards listed above. Such areas in the cluster shall be consistent with policies in the Conservation and Open Space Element.*
- e. ***Consideration may be given to natural features** (including otherwise defined open space or conservation areas) or man-made features (such as jurisdictional boundaries, **highways**, railroads, or **distinctive land use areas**) that help form a logical boundary.*

As indicated in the policy above, the Comprehensive Plan clearly states that the boundaries of the Rural Cluster are general in nature and are intended to be updated on an occasional and scheduled basis. Upon examination of the criteria outlined in Policy 6.4.2, the currently mapped boundaries of the Melrose Rural Cluster do not include all the areas which should be included, including *all developed areas and undeveloped infill areas...open space areas* (i.e. parks), *platted, undeveloped subdivisions or other pre-existing developments where densities are higher than one unit per acre*.

Upon examining the existing land uses in the immediate area, specific inconsistencies can be found between the existing Rural Cluster mapped boundary and the written criteria listed in Policy 6.4.2. Examples of areas that meet these criteria that are presently located outside of the mapped Rural Cluster include the Canal Shores Subdivision (with lots of approximately ¼ acre that are non-conforming in density, lot size and building setbacks

based on the Rural Agriculture Future Land Use Designation and Agriculture zoning designation), Alachua County Santa Fe Lake Park/Boat Ramp (designated active recreation / open space area) and the undeveloped infill properties (Painter, Alderman & Rush) between the County Park and the present Rural Cluster boundary. The following map illustrates the specific location of these areas in relation to the existing Rural Cluster boundary:



In addition to the Rural Cluster boundary criteria outlined above, Melrose’s centralized potable water service is currently available to serve the properties shown in the exhibit above. Specifically, a 6-inch water main is located along the northern right-of-way of State Road 26 from central Melrose westward to the intersection of State Road 26 and County Road 219A. Therefore, all properties that are outlined in red can presently be served by this centralized utility.

Description of Request

Preliminary Sub Area Plan

This Preliminary Sub Area Plan includes a rationale and justification for the County Commission to consider amending the official mapped limits of the Melrose Rural Cluster. The potential expansion area is known as the “Study Area” and is illustrated on the following exhibit:



This study area, consisting of approximately 85 acres and 41 tax parcels, encompasses uses that by Comprehensive Plan definition should be included in the Rural Cluster. A process is defined in the Comprehensive Plan to amend the boundaries of the Rural Cluster. Specifically, Policy 6.4.5 provides direction as stated below:

Policy 6.4.5 *As part of the evaluation and update of the designated Rural Clusters the county shall prepare sub-area plans to explore the carrying capacities for appropriate levels of nature and heritage tourism in rural clusters, including those with historic or natural resources which give them special attractiveness. Such sub-area plans shall incorporate the local neighborhood and community vision and goals, and shall include provisions to ensure consistency of the Rural Cluster with policies for the surrounding Rural/Agricultural area, and:*

- a. Enhances the community's livability.*
- b. Protects rural character.*
- c. Provides amenities for residents.*
- d. Protects natural resources.*
- e. Special consideration shall be given to linking these communities through the use of heritage or nature trails, bikeways, etc.*

Based on discussions with Alachua County Growth Management staff, no staff-initiated sub-area plan has ever been prepared to update the Rural Clusters and no future plan is in place for such an update. Therefore, the Painter Family (i.e. PM Land, Inc.), owners of tax parcels 18762-000-000 & 18762-001-001, are taking the initiative to prepare and submit a privately initiated Sub Area Plan, which in simple terms is a Comprehensive

Plan map amendment request to include the Study Area in the mapped limits of the Rural Cluster. Privately initiated Sub Area Plans are permitted per Policy 6.4.6 as stated below:

Policy 6.4.6 Any new residential subdivision proposed in a Rural Cluster shall be allowed only after update of Rural Cluster boundaries based upon a sub-area plan prepared pursuant to Policy 6.4.5. A phased schedule for preparation of sub-area plans for each Rural Cluster and the minimum requirements for sub-area plans shall be established by the Board of County Commissioners. ***Privately initiated sub-area plans may be prepared in advance of the phased schedule if authorized by the Board of County Commissioners; the applicant shall bear the cost of preparing the sub-area plan.***

As indicated above, this policy provides the ability for a privately initiated sub-area plan to be prepared and considered based upon its merits by the Board of County Commissioners. All costs for such a request shall be borne by the private applicant. This approach seems most appropriate given that the County staff does not have a phased schedule to prepare a Sub Area Plan update in the future.

Planning Process / Work Plan

The planning process to analyze the Study Area will include multiple steps, including the following work plan (in sequential order):

1. Preliminary Sub Area Plan

A privately initiated Sub Area Plan is permitted per Policy 6.4.6 of the Future Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan, provided that the County Commission approves the initiation of this planning process. This Preliminary Sub Area Plan provides the rationale and justification for the County Commission to initiate the planning process and ultimately approve the request to include the Study Area into the limits of the Rural Cluster.

This document was submitted to county staff on June 4, 2012 and is scheduled to appear before the County Commission on July 10, 2012.

2. Neighborhood Workshop

Upon approval of the County Commission to initiate the Sub Area Plan process, the applicant will facilitate a neighborhood workshop with the property owners within the Study Area and nearby areas. The workshop will describe the findings of the Sub Area Plan and discuss the impacts to the Rural Cluster. Input from citizens will be welcomed and any new relevant topics will be included in the Final Sub Area Plan Report.

This workshop will occur in July, 2012 and the results provided to county staff.

3. Comprehensive Plan Amendment

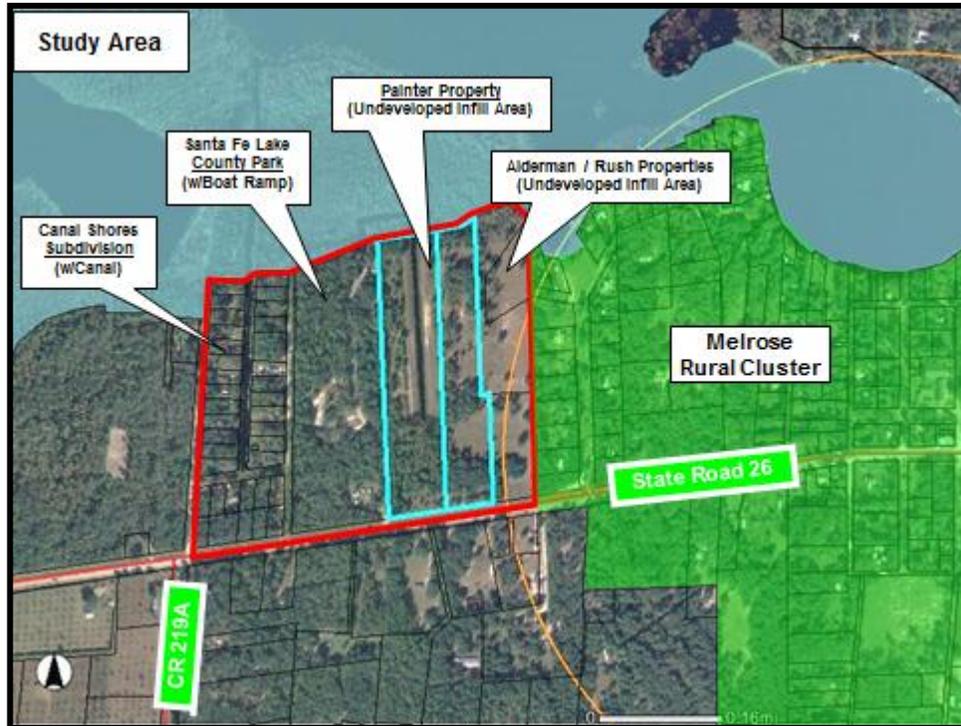
The formal request to amend the Rural Cluster boundary will come in the form of an official Comprehensive Plan Amendment that will include a Final Sub Area Plan Report and Future Land Use Map amendment from 'Rural Agriculture' to 'Rural Cluster.' In addition, Comprehensive Plan text amendments may be proposed to include new policies for the Melrose Rural Cluster (to be determined when preparing the Final Sub Area Plan) to incorporate specific development / environmental protection recommendations made in the Sub Area Plan.

It should also be noted that the proposed Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map Amendment for the Study Area will be optional and the decision whether or not to be included shall be up to each individual property owner. Those who chose to 'opt-in' shall be included in the privately initiated application at no expense to the owner. Those who 'opt-out' will keep their existing Rural Agriculture Future Land Use Map Designation.

The Comprehensive Plan Amendment will be file with Alachua County staff in July, 2012 and will be scheduled to appear before the September Planning Commission and October Board of County Commissioners.

Overview of Study Area

As previously mentioned, the study area consists of approximately 85 acres and 41 tax parcels, which have been identified as meeting the criteria for inclusion in the Rural Cluster. The following exhibit and data table provides a detailed account of the property uses and characteristics:



Property Name	Existing Characteristics	Size / Number of Lots
Canal Shores Subdivision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing developed subdivision, circa 1960's Average Lot Size: ¼ Ac. 30 of 35 lots developed (85%) Centralized potable water system service Previously zoned 'R-1a' (Single Family Residential) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16.3 Acres (+/-) 35 Tax Parcels/Lots
Santa Fe Lake Park (Alachua County)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed County Park providing primary boat access to Lake Santa Fe Park developed in 1970's Centralized potable water system service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 Acres (+/-) 1 Tax Parcel
Painter Family Property (PM Land, Inc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undeveloped Infill Area Canal Access to Lake Santa Fe Canal dates back to 1964 Family has owned canal parcel since 1964 Centralized potable water system service Portion previously zoned 'R-1a' (Single Family Residential) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27.7 Acres (+/-) 2 Tax Parcels
Alderman & Rush Properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undeveloped Infill Area Frontage on Lake Santa Fe Centralized potable water system service Portion previously zoned 'R-1a' (Single Family Residential) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16 Acres (+/-) 3 Tax Parcels

As indicated in the exhibit and table above, the study area has been an established part of the Melrose community for decades. The existing Canal Shores subdivision and the County Santa Fe Lake Park have been developed for over 35 years. The Painter property has had various uses in the past (residential and commercial agriculture) and includes a canal that has been in existence for approximately 50 years. The Alderman/Rush properties are immediately abutting the existing Rural Cluster boundary and have direct and/or legal access onto State Road 26.

Historical Alachua County Rural Cluster Boundary / Zoning Map

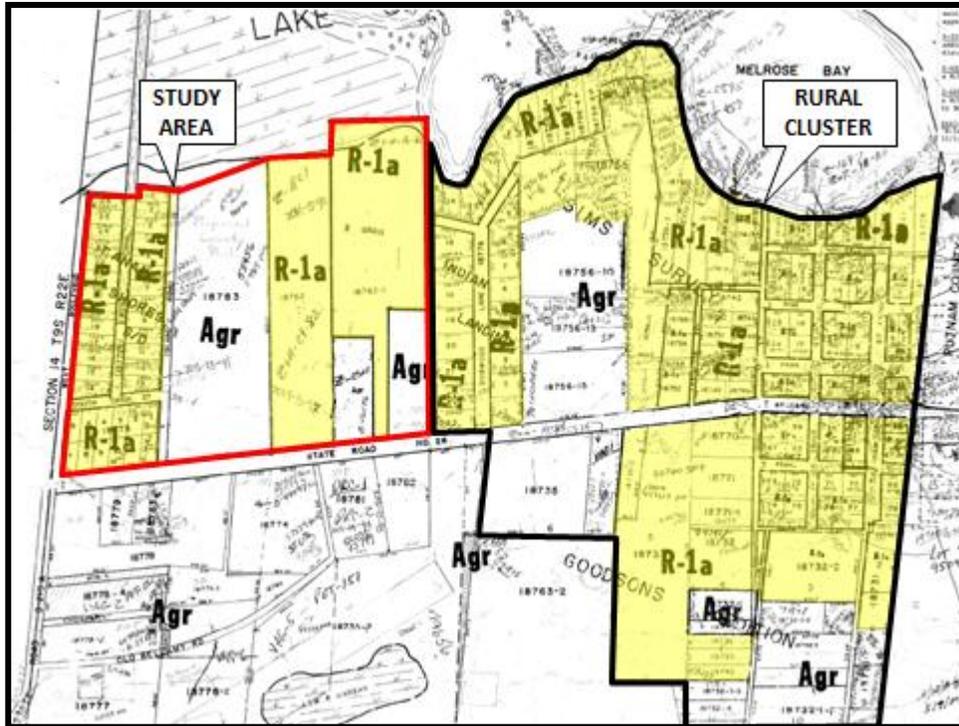
In 1990, the Comprehensive Plan was updated as required by state planning mandates. It is understood that the 1990 update included the creation of Rural Cluster policies (and map) and subsequent inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan. It can be assumed that at this time, the County examined the existing development within Melrose and chose to create the limits of the Rural Cluster based on the same (or similar) criteria that are still outlined in Policy 6.4.2. If this assumption is correct, all development in the Melrose area that predates the 1990 policies should have met the standard for inclusion, including the Canal Shores subdivision and the Santa Fe Lake County Park as they were developed prior to the creation of the Rural Cluster policies.

The existing County Zoning Map (pre-1990) indicated that the Canal Shores subdivision and a majority of the Painter, Alderman and the entire Rush property had an 'R-1a' (Single Family Residential) zoning designation, which was identified at that time as allowing lots with a minimum lot size of at least ½ acre. Specific notations made on the County historic zoning map reference specific petition numbers and approval dates, including the following:

ZOM-16-82: Rezoning from 'AGR' to 'R-1a' approved by B.C.C. 5/18/82

*ZOM-29-82: Rezoning from 'AGR' to 'R-1a' approved for ½ acre minimum lots B.C.C
7/20/82*

The following exhibit is the historic County zoning map that specifies which properties historically had the 'R-1a' (Single Family Residential) designation within the Melrose area, which includes ZOM-16-82 (a portion of the Painter property), ZOM-29-82 (a portion of Painter and Alderman properties and all of Rush property) and the entire Canal Shores subdivision (also labeled as 'R-1a'). The properties with the R-1a zoning designation are shown below in yellow:



Again, the properties highlighted in yellow above all have an ‘R-1a’ (Single Family Residential) zoning designation that was approved by the County Commission, which allows the development of residential lots at an urban density level. Note that a vast majority of the properties within the existing Rural Cluster area also had an ‘R-1a’ zoning designation, particularly when excluding the 25 acre Santa Fe Lake County Park, which is a non-residential use.

This historic Zoning Map provides the best and most accurate information of how these properties were originally intended for development which predated the Rural Cluster policies included in the Comprehensive Plan. It appears that the Rural Cluster policies and related map were prepared ‘after the fact’ and only certain properties with the same R-1a zoning designation were subjectively selected for inclusion within the Rural Cluster. Assuming that the intent of the Melrose Rural Cluster was to honor the original development rights issued to the parcels by the Board of County Commissioners, then the properties within the Study Area should have also been included in the limits of the Rural Cluster from the beginning. Approval of the requested map amendment within this Sub Area Plan will correct this discrepancy.

Melrose Identification within Study Area

The following image indicates that several signs that are immediately identified with Melrose are located along State Road 26 within the Study Area. These identification signs bolster the case that the Study Area is clearly identified as part of Melrose. Specifically, all three signs immediately about the Painter property with the County Park sign to the west and the two remaining signs to the south along State Road 26.



Melrose Water Association

Melrose is the only Rural Cluster that has its own centralized potable water system, a private cooperative titled the Melrose Water Association, Inc. Melrose’s centralized potable water service is currently available to serve the properties located within the Study Area. Specifically, a 6-inch water main is located along the northern right-of-way from central Melrose westward through the Study Area to the intersection of State Road 26 and County Road 219A. The provision of this existing urbanized service within the Study Area supports the development of property at a higher density than what is provided in the existing Agriculture zoning district and therefore, supports the inclusion of these properties within the Rural Cluster.

Comprehensive Plan Consistency

Essential to any proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment is a justification that the amendment is consistent with the applicable sections of the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, this amendment must demonstrate that the request is consistent with the policies that govern Rural Clusters. A review of the Rural Cluster policies is listed below:

Future Land Use Element

6.4 Rural Clusters

Policy 6.4 *Rural clusters are small settlements outside of an urban cluster. These clusters serve as a focus for an existing rural community. They generally lack public services and facilities identified as necessary for more intense urban development.*

Consistency: As examined in this report, the Melrose Rural Cluster is unique as it is by far the largest designated Rural Cluster in several aspects, including size, population, public facilities, infrastructure, public services, businesses, parks, etc. However, it still fits the general description of a settlement outside of an urban cluster and a focus for an existing rural community.

The expansion of the Rural Cluster to include the Study Area is justified for multiple reasons but specific to this policy, the Study Area includes existing public infrastructure, most notably a centralized water system with a 6 inch water main that is in place that currently serves several parcels in the Study Area and is currently capable of serving the parcels identified as undeveloped infill parcels within the Study Area. The availability of this public infrastructure by itself makes the Study Area more ‘urbanized’ than other existing Rural Clusters.

Policy 6.4.1 *Development in the rural clusters 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 for development on a central water system, consistent with Potable Water/Sanitary Sewer Element Policy 2.3.1 and Conservation and Open Space Element Policy 4.5.6. Limited support commercial and support institutional land uses appropriately designed, located and scaled to serve the cluster market may also be considered.*

Consistency: The historic development pattern within the Study Area includes an existing subdivision (Canal Shores) with lots of less than 1/2 acre in size and an urban style regional park (Santa Fe Lake Park) that have been part of the Melrose community for decades. In addition, a centralized water system is in place in the Study Area to serve the existing development and the undeveloped infill parcels, thus allowing for the potential to develop lots within the density range allowed in this policy. This type of urban public infrastructure is by all accounts always located within the urban cluster or at a minimum, more appropriately located within a Rural Cluster (not in an area designated as Rural Agriculture). This existing development pattern supports the argument that the Study Area should be included in the official limits of the Rural Cluster, especially because the reduction of private wells is encouraged in appropriate areas.

Policy 6.4.2 *The Rural Clusters identified in Policy 6.4.4 are generally depicted on the Future Land Use Map. The boundaries of the Rural Cluster shall be updated as part of an evaluation of the designated Rural Clusters based on the sub-area planning process identified in policy 6.4.5. The following guidelines shall be used in evaluating the boundaries of a rural cluster:*

Consistency: As stated above, the boundaries of the Rural Cluster shall be updated as part of a sub-area planning process (defined in Policy 6.4.5). As the County does not have a timeline to initiate such a plan, this report serves as a privately initiated sub area plan to be considered by the Board of County Commissioners.

- a. *Rural Clusters shall generally include developed area approximately 1/2 mile from the easily discernible focal point of the cluster. The focal point is usually the intersection of two rural roads or some other prominent feature around which the community seems to be centered.*

Consistency: This policy states that a ½ mile radius should **generally** be applied to define the limits of the Rural Cluster. The focal point was previously chosen to be the Melrose historical marker located in front of the M&S Bank branch located along State Road 26. While a majority of the Study Area is located outside of the ½ mile radius, the fact that the policy uses the term **generally** provides the ability to consider areas outside of the radius area, especially if it is clear and logical that these areas include features that are clearly part of the fabric of the existing community. Specifically, the Study Area includes an existing large residential subdivision and an established urban style regional park. Additionally, the Study Area includes urbanized infrastructure (central water system) that support development at a higher density than allowed in the Rural Agriculture area.

In addition to the loose language regarding a general ½ mile radius area, there has been a precedent set to expand the limits of the Rural Cluster outside the ½ mile radius where deemed appropriate. Several examples exist within other existing mapped Rural Cluster areas that show parcels with the Rural Cluster Future Land Use Map designation lying outside of the general ½ mile radius, as indicated below (the yellow circle represents the 1/2 mile radius):



As indicated above, almost half of the other Rural Clusters have existing mapped limits that exceed the 1/2 mile radius boundary. This expansion is allowed for two reasons; 1) the 1/2 mile radius is only a general guideline, and 2) the limits of the Rural Cluster should be determined more by its consistency with the criteria listed in Policy 6.4.2 (b-e), as discussed below.

- b. The cluster shall be construed as containing all of the developed areas and undeveloped infill areas, but not undeveloped land beyond the extent of developed areas.*

Consistency: The Study Area includes both developed areas and undeveloped infill areas, as stated in this policy. This policy appears clear that *all* of these areas should be included within the Rural Cluster and specifically uses the term ‘shall’ when referencing the inclusion of all developed areas and undeveloped infill areas. Further supporting this argument is the historic zoning map which indicates that a majority of the parcels within the Study Area previously had a ‘R-1a’ zoning designation (permitting at least ½ acre lots), which was approved by the Board of County Commissioners. The ‘R-1a’ zoning designation is an urban zoning designation that supports the development of residential lots that are smaller than what is permitted in the Rural Agriculture area.

- c. For the purposes of these guidelines, developed areas include areas with commercial uses, non-farm residential areas where lot sizes are generally below five acres, and usually below one acre, and other specialized uses not normally found in a rural setting. Platted, undeveloped subdivisions or other pre-existing developments where densities are higher than one unit per acre should be included, even if not developed, provided that the various lots or parcels are largely in different ownerships. The extent of non-conformity of these lots or parcels from County setback, access, and other regulations shall be considered in determining Rural Cluster boundaries.*

Consistency: This policy defines ‘developed areas’ as including ‘non-farm residential areas where lot sizes are generally below five acres, and usually below one acre.’ The Study Area includes 41 parcels, 36 of which are below 1 acre in size. In addition, the average size of the parcels within the Study Area is 2.07 acres per lot.

The policy also states that ‘pre-existing developments where densities are higher than one unit per acre should be included.’ The Canal Shores subdivision, which includes 35 lots (85% developed), meets this standard of having a density of higher than one unit per acre.

The Study Area also includes another existing feature that meets the definition of ‘other specialized uses not normally found in a rural setting.’ The existing 25 acre Santa Fe Lake County Park provides amenities not normally found in an undeveloped, rural setting. This park includes urbanized features such as paved roads and parking lots, pavilions, children’s play equipment and a boat ramp which is a regional attraction. The provision of this scale of active and passive recreation is not normally found in remote rural areas.

- d. The cluster may contain open space or conservation areas if these areas can be logically included given the other standards listed above. Such areas in the cluster shall be consistent with policies in the Conservation and Open Space Element.*

Consistency: As described in the response to Policy 6.4.2(c), the Study Area includes a large County Park that provides active and passive recreation in an open space area that is centered between the existing Rural Cluster and an existing residential subdivision with urban densities. This park has existed for decades and is interwoven into the fabric of the Melrose community and the region as a whole as the primary entry point for boaters onto Lake Santa Fe.

- e. Consideration may be given to natural features (including otherwise defined open space or conservation areas) or man-made features (such as jurisdictional boundaries, highways, railroads, or distinctive land use areas) that help form a logical boundary.*

Consistency: The Study Area is bounded to the north, west and south by features described in this Policy. Specifically, the Study Area is bounded to the north by Lake Santa Fe, a large fresh water lake (natural feature) that is one of Alachua County's largest conservation areas. To the west of the Study Area is a large parcel that has the Strategic Ecosystem designation which limits development activity to a level below what is appropriate within a Rural Cluster. To the south lies State Road 26, a man-made feature that provides the arterial highway access westward to Gainesville and eastward into Melrose and beyond to Putnam County.

Considering the characteristics of the properties within the Study Area (described above), these natural and man-made features located on three sides of the Study Area help provide a logical extension of the existing Melrose Rural Cluster limits from the east.

Policy 6.4.3 *Commercial or institutional development may be permitted within a rural cluster, subject to the following standards:*

- a. Commercial uses shall be limited to rural support services, retail sales, or personal services intended to serve the immediate population (such as farm implement sales, grocery stores, veterinarian services or clinics to serve the rural and farming community, pharmacies or medical or dental offices, or co-operative or farmers markets to promote the sale of locally grown products. There shall be a maximum of 30,000 square feet of total commercial floor area for such uses.*
- b. Performance standards shall be established to require integration of non-residential development within the rural area, including site and building design measures such as provision of open space, landscaping and buffering, parking lot design, building massing and scale, and limitations on signage and lighting, to produce development that is compatible with surrounding rural land uses.*
- c. The non-residential land uses shall be located at the focus or center of the rural cluster.*

Consistency: Because the Study Area would constitute the western limits of the Rural Cluster (not central), non-residential land uses would not be appropriate in this area. Further, a large portion of the Study Area (41 of 85 acres and 36 of 41 lots) is already developed as a residential subdivision (Canal Shores) and a County Park. Therefore Policies 6.4.3(a-c) are not applicable to the Study Area.

- d. *There shall be an interconnected, paved and internal traffic circulation system on dedicated local roads, and minimal development impacts on rural collector and arterial roads.*

Consistency: The Study Area and the existing Melrose Rural Cluster is served by State Road 26 as it provides a major east/west vehicular corridor for access to Gainesville (west) and Putnam County (east).

- e. *Industrial development shall not be allowed.*

Consistency: Agreed. Industrial development shall not be allowed in the Study Area based on the Policy above.

Policy 6.4.4 *The following communities are the rural clusters:*

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| a. <i>Cross Creek</i> | g. <i>Lochloosa</i> |
| b. <i>Evinston</i> | h. <i>Orange Heights</i> |
| c. <i>Campville</i> | i. <i>Melrose</i> |
| d. <i>Grove Park</i> | j. <i>Earlton</i> |
| e. <i>Rochelle</i> | k. <i>Hague</i> |
| f. <i>Windsor</i> | l. <i>Santa Fe</i> |

Consistency: Portions of Melrose are currently located within the area presently identified by Alachua County Growth Management as a Rural Cluster. However, the Study Area is not included on the existing Rural Cluster map. The applicant believes that this map should be updated to include the Study Area within the Melrose Rural Cluster for the reasons outlined in this report.

Policy 6.4.5 *As part of the evaluation and update of the designated Rural Clusters the county shall prepare sub-area plans to explore the carrying capacities for appropriate levels of nature and heritage tourism in rural clusters, including those with historic or natural resources which give them special attractiveness. Such sub-area plans shall incorporate the local neighborhood and community vision and goals, and shall include provisions to ensure consistency of the Rural Cluster with policies for the surrounding Rural/Agricultural area, and:*

Consistency: As stated in the Policy above, the following community characteristics are to be observed and protected regardless of whether or not the Study Area is include in the actual limits of the Rural Cluster. However, including the Study Area in the Rural Cluster will help better incorporate the community vision and goals, as described below:

- a. *Enhances the community's livability.*

Consistency: It is logical to include the existing developed residential subdivision and County Park, as they have been part of the community fabric for decades. In addition, the inclusion of the undeveloped infill parcels will allow for the future development of these parcels in a manner that is consistent with the existing development pattern within the Rural Cluster. In addition, the development of these parcels with a moderate density

range as allowed in the Rural Cluster will allow for appropriately located infill development that will increase the population of Melrose and thus will provide more support for the existing businesses that serve the area. The support of commercial services in Melrose will support and enhance the livability of the community for years to come.

b. Protects rural character.

Consistency: As stated, approximately 50% of the Study Area has been developed for decades and therefore is already interwoven into the existing fabric of the community. The potential future development of the undeveloped infill parcels at densities consistent with what is currently found in the Rural Cluster will be compatible with the rural character of the community.

c. Provides amenities for residents.

Consistency: Without question, the greatest amenity available to the residents of Melrose access to Lake Santa Fe. The primary boat ramp for recreation on the lake is within the Study Area in the Santa Fe Lake County Park. This regional park has served the community for over 35 years and will continue to be an integral amenity to the Rural Cluster. It is for these reasons that the inclusion of the park within the Rural Cluster is logical and appropriate.

d. Protects natural resources.

Consistency: As indicated in the Environmental Review and Considerations section of this study, few environmentally sensitive resources lie directly within the Study Area. However, the protection of Lake Santa Fe remains a high priority for the area. Lake Santa Fe, a designated Outstanding Florida Water (OFW), is afforded the following protections within the Comprehensive Plan, which is twice the required buffer protection for a delineated wetland:

Conservation and Open Space Element – Policy 3.6.8

<i>Protected Resource</i>	<i>Buffer Distance</i>
<i>Outstanding Florida Waters (OFWs)</i>	<i>150 Foot Average / 100 Foot Minimum</i>

Any development within the Study Area would, at a minimum be required to meet the OFW protection standards as referenced above. It should be noted that this standard provides far greater buffering than what has been required in the past. Many existing lakeshore homes in Melrose encroach much closer to the lake than what is currently allowed.

In addition to the lake protection standards outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, any future development shall comply with the standards provided for location of septic tanks as regulated by Alachua County Health Department. Specific minimum setback

requirements are included in the regulations including a minimum 75 foot separation from surface waters (lake and canal), potable water wells and other septic tanks. These separation requirements will moderate the potential intensity of development in the Study Area to an appropriate level. In addition, specific development policies through a Planned Development zoning can provide further regulations and specifically, include a requirement that septic tanks be located as far from surface waters as practical and provide a minimum separation requirement. Strategies include placing septic tanks on the opposite side of a house from the surface water.

An additional benefit to include the Study Area within the Rural Cluster is the potential to encourage and/or require future development to connect to the centralized water system which is available to serve the properties located within the Study Area. Existing infrastructure is in place, including a 6 inch water main along the north side of State Road 26 with capacity to serve the entire Study Area.

- e. Special consideration shall be given to linking these communities through the use of heritage or nature trails, bikeways, etc.*

Consistency: The Santa Fe Lake County Park includes 25 acres of recreation area, including paved and unpaved corridors to walk through the natural surroundings. ‘Nature Study’ is an activity that is referenced on the Alachua County website for this park. These nature trails allow for nature study activities and are utilized by the Melrose community who reside in the Rural Cluster and other surrounding areas.

Currently, there is no linkage of trails and/or bikeways between the Study Area and the existing Rural Cluster boundary. In addition, no sidewalks or bike lanes exist along State Road 26. However, opportunities exist to provide this linkage between the existing / future uses within the Study Area and the existing Rural Cluster. Strategies to provide pedestrian / bicycle linkage include the creation of an east/west corridor that runs through the entire Study Area. This corridor can be accomplished by utilizing existing right-of-way within Canal Shores that is directly abutting the County Park. Moving eastward, the County Park can provide a modified trail network to cross through to the Painter property. If the County Commission agrees to include the Study Area within the Rural Cluster, the adjacent Painter property will propose a rezoning to Planned Development, which will include a Zoning Master Plan that will illustrate interconnectivity between the County Park and the undeveloped properties to the east. The final link would occur if/when the Alderman/Rush properties were developed. Alternate plans could include the placement of sidewalks adjacent to State Road 26 in the right-of-way.

This pedestrian/bicycle linkage would be a great benefit to the residents of Melrose as it would provide a safe route to access the County Park without driving a vehicle.

Policy 6.4.6 Any new residential subdivision proposed in a Rural Cluster shall be allowed only after update of Rural Cluster boundaries based upon a sub-area plan prepared pursuant to Policy 6.4.5. A phased schedule for preparation of sub-area plans for each Rural Cluster and the minimum requirements for sub-area plans shall be established by the Board of County Commissioners. Privately initiated sub-area plans

may be prepared in advance of the phased schedule if authorized by the Board of County Commissioners; the applicant shall bear the cost of preparing the sub-area plan.

Consistency: Based on discussions with county staff, this Preliminary Sub Area Plan serves as justification for the Board of County Commissioners to authorize the planning process to include the Study Area in the Rural Cluster. As indicated by county staff, no phased schedule exists in which a county-initiated sub area plan would occur. Therefore, the applicant has no other option but to submit the privately-initiated application and bear the subsequent cost for doing so. This privately initiated sub area plan provides a professionally prepared land use analysis found in this report that provides the bases for approval by the Board of County Commissioners.

Environmental Review & Considerations



Overall: An overall review of the environmental conditions found within in the Study Area reveals the following information. First, virtually the entire Study Area has been disturbed by some level of previous or current development and/or agricultural pursuit. This statement applies to the areas that are not immediately surrounding the lakeshore and are now protected by lake buffer requirements.

Wetlands: Limited wetland areas (shown in blue) are scattered within the Study Area. With the exception of the County Park, the wetland areas are minimal and are primarily located within the northernmost portion of the parcels, protected within the 150 foot lake buffer area and also by required wetland setback regulations (50' minimum and 75'

average). Therefore, minimal, if any wetlands impacts will occur as a result of future permitted development activity.

Floodplain Areas: Portions of the Study Area are within the 100 year floodplain, which is indicated in pink above. A majority of the 100 year floodplain lies with existing developed residential lots (Canal Shores) and most of the remaining area is within the existing Painter Canal. Therefore, 100 year floodplain areas will have little if any impact on developable areas within the Study Area.

Lake Santa Fe: Lake Santa Fe is located at the northern limits of a majority of parcels within the Study Area. Lake protections are outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, which includes minimum required setbacks from the lake (150 feet).

Strategic Ecosystem: The Study Area is not located within the mapped Strategic Ecosystem and therefore, these regulations do not affect the Study Area.

Compatibility with Adjacent Uses

The Comprehensive Plan requires that Comprehensive Plan amendment applications should demonstrate compatibility with the adjacent properties. The following Comprehensive Plan policy stresses compatibility with adjacent uses when considering any proposed zoning or land use action:

- Policy 7.1.2 Proposed changes in the zoning map shall consider:*
- c. the relationship of the proposed development to existing development in the vicinity...*

The following land uses currently exist on the properties adjacent to the Study Area:

North: To the north of the Study Area is Lake Santa Fe. Compatibility with this natural feature shall be demonstrated through compliance with the lake protections outlined in the Comprehensive Plan, including setbacks from the lake (150 feet), buffers from wetland area (50 foot minimum, 75 foot average), etc. Future residential development should come in the form of a Planned Development, which provides specific lake and canal protection standards, including limited canal access, Conservation Management Areas (CMA's), Low Impact Development (LID) criteria and limited residential density below the maximum permitted amount.

East: To the east of the Study Area is the Indian Shores residential subdivision, containing lots of approximately ½ acre in size. The inclusion of the Study Area in the Rural Cluster will not result in a level of residential development that will exceed the amount found within this existing subdivision.

West: To the west of the Study Area is a large privately owned tract of land with several environmentally sensitive features, including wetlands and flood plain areas. In addition, the property is located within the mapped Strategic Ecosystem. These

limitations make the property not conducive for inclusion in the Rural Cluster. This property makes a natural stopping point for the western end of the Rural Cluster.

South: State Road 26 is located immediately south of the Study Area and contains several large parcels with a Rural Agriculture future land use designation. Typical uses found on these lots include homesteaded agricultural lands. In addition, a church is located on one parcel within this area. These properties also form an appropriate transitional zone between the limits of the Rural Cluster and the Rural Agriculture area.

Benefits for Inclusion of Study Area in Rural Cluster

Numerous potential benefits are possible as a result of including the Study Area properties within the Rural cluster, including:

Consistent & Fair Land Development Rights: As discussed throughout this report, the properties included in the Study Area meet the criteria for inclusion in the Rural Cluster and thus should be included as requested in this application. They have unofficially been a part of the Melrose Community for decades. Because of the appropriateness to include these properties ‘officially’ on the Future Land Use Map, it is only fair that they enjoy the same development rights as other properties within the Rural Cluster.

Restores Historic Development Rights: A majority of the properties within the Study Area had an ‘R-1a’ residential zoning designation that was approved by the Board of County Commissioners prior to the creation of the Rural Cluster policies and map. This ‘R-1a’ zoning designation was also shown on a majority of the properties within the Rural Cluster during the same time period which seems to reveal that the Study Area should have also been initially included. The approval of this amendment by the Board of County Commissioners would restore the same development rights previously afforded to these properties and would create a more logical and fair boundary.

Increased Property Values: The inclusion of the Study Area into the Rural Cluster will increase the development potential of the undeveloped properties – the same development rights that are presently enjoyed by the property owners within the Rural Cluster. Specific development rights would be determined by Alachua County with subsequent approvals of property rezonings and development plans for specific projects. However, the inclusion of the Study Area properties within the Rural Cluster would create a theoretical increase in development potential and would provide an inherent increase in property value based on this new potential for growth – particularly for the undeveloped infill properties.

Property Taxes will not Increase: Increased property values will not come at the expense of increased taxes. The Property Appraiser assesses property taxes based on the present use of the land. If a property is used for agricultural purposes, the tax rate is evaluated based on those agriculture activities, not the theoretical development potential of the

property. In other words, inclusion in the Rural Cluster will not result in an increase in property taxes.

Correct Non-Conforming Status within Canal Shores: Presently, the Canal Shores subdivision has a Future Land Use Designation of Rural Agriculture and a zoning designation of Agriculture, both of which permit residential lots at a maximum density of 1 unit per 5 acres. Therefore, the existing lots, which are approximately ¼ acre each in size, are defined as legal, non-conforming lots with the land use and zoning designations.

This non-conforming status can be problematic for property owners when they must provide a zoning compliance letter from the County in order to finance or re-finance a house. Typically, this letter may state that the lot does not conform with the current Agriculture zoning standards and is a legal, non-conforming lot, which may affect the bank's willingness to offer financing. In addition, legal non-conforming lots may face problems at such a time that the existing structure needs to be replaced (fire, demolition, etc.). The County building department may impose building setbacks that reduce the development potential that was enjoyed by the previous structure.

The inclusion of the subdivision in the Rural Cluster and subsequent rezoning to a low density residential zoning category would resolve their non-conforming status as the new designations would allow the existing ¼ acre lots 'by-right.'

Potential for Highest and Best Use of Property: Inclusion within the limits of the Rural Cluster does allow the opportunity for a property owner to change their future land use and zoning designation to other designations that are consistent with the Rural Cluster policies. However, each property owner within the Study Area may keep their existing Rural Agriculture Future Land Use Designation and Agriculture designation. While the privately initiated Comprehensive Plan Amendment application offers to include all properties within the land use change request at no cost, the decision to change the future land use and zoning designations lie entirely with each individual property owner.

It should be noted that the Painter Family will apply concurrently for a Planned Development zoning application to permit a residential subdivision that will incorporate the latest Low Impact Development (LID) design principals to protect the lake from unnecessary impacts.

Environmental Improvements: The Study Area will focus on evaluating and protecting the natural resources that are so highly valued by the Melrose community. The Alachua County Future Land Use Element's Conservation and Open Space Element has a clearly stated goal to "*conserve, manage and restore or enhance the natural and human related resources of Alachua County to ensure long- term environmental quality for the future*" (introduction to the element). Lake Santa Fe, along with the adjacent Santa Fe Lake Park, will be the primary focus. This element requires an extensive information system for the natural resources as well as developing solutions for any areas of concern (Objectives 2.1 and 3.0).

Areas of study will include:

- **Water Quality Protection:** The Comprehensive Plan provides for protection and conservation of the groundwater resources. Santa Fe Lake is an Outstanding Florida Water, and hence additional buffers are required (150 foot average; 100 foot minimum) along with any standard wetland buffers (75 foot average; 50 foot minimum) that will be incorporated into the study. In addition, potential slope erosion from sheet runoff will be addressed, as will flood plain zones and wetlands. A significant contribution to water quality is the existence of a centralized potable water system. Potential deed restrictions against the overuse of fertilizations will be incorporated into the study.
- The impact of septic tank location and septic tank type will be discussed.
- Conservation areas of special concern will be identified and an appropriate management plan developed.
- Threatened and Endangered Species of the local flora and fauna will be studied. Although gopher tortoises are not threatened or endangered, they are a specie of special concern. A small colony of gopher tortoises has been identified on the Painter property. Each gopher site will be marked on the ground, classified as active or abandoned, and mapped using GPS coordinates. Should any gopher turtles be located in an area to be disturbed, a relocation plan and permit shall be prepared.
- Exotic species will be inventoried, and if found, an eradication plan will be developed.
- Incorporating a Low Impact Development (LID) plan.
- Significant geological features will be identified.
- Biodiversity and its spatial distribution will be identified and enhanced as deemed appropriate.
- The approach to Melrose and its associated scenic corridor can be enhanced to cultivate a unique sense of place while maintaining the uniqueness of the community. This element can be incorporated into the scenic quality of the approach.

Recommended Development Standards within Study Area

This Sub Area Plan can benefit the Study Area and the Rural Cluster as a whole by proposing guiding principles in order to ensure that future development occur in a way that provides increased lake protection measures. These principals should include the following:

- Recommend future residential development within the Study Area occur under a Planned Development zoning designation, thus allowing the Board of County Commissioners to approve only plans that include necessary measures to adequately protect Lake Santa Fe. This can be accomplished through the placement of conditions as part of the Planned Development zoning approval.

- Requiring Low Impact Development (LID) practices for all future development within the Study Area.
- Require future east/west pedestrian and bicycle interconnectivity within future development in the Study Area, as encouraged in Policy 6.4.5(e).
- Require connection to the available centralized water system for all future residential development.
- Create a policy to strongly encourage connection of existing development to connect to the centralized water system within the Study Area. Pursuit of grants or other funding sources to pay for such connections should also be encouraged.
- Summarize that the Study Area does not appear appropriate for future commercial activities and therefore, any future rezoning applications to a commercial designation should be discouraged.

Conclusion

As indicated in this Preliminary Sub Area Plan, Melrose is a unique rural based community, both in its size and amount of public facilities. A review of the existing boundaries is appropriate for several reasons, including the central fact that the Comprehensive Plan requires periodic updates. As a result of this review, it has demonstrated that the identified Study Area is a historic part of the fabric of Melrose and logically fits within its limits and meets the criteria for inclusion as outlined in the Rural Cluster Policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

Additionally, future development within the Study Area can occur in a more uniform and consistent manner within the Rural Cluster through the implementation of recommended development standards, including required connections to centralized water system (currently voluntary), required Planned Development zoning (and conditions) for future residential development and the application of Low Impact Development criteria.

Therefore, the approval of this planning process and ultimately the Sub Area Plan an Comprehensive Plan Amendment(s) by the Board of County Commissioners will benefit the owners of the properties within the Study Area without creating negative impacts to the community and the natural resources in the area.

Appendix

Chronology of Santa Fe Lake County Canal & Painter Canal

An existing canal is located on the Painter property at the 24600 block of NE State Road 26. This canal is commonly known as ‘Painter Canal’ or ‘Santa Fe Lake Canal.’ The canal was originally dug in 1964. Alachua County first issued a Special Use Permit for dredging the Painter canal in 1976, the same year that Alachua County dredged an adjacent canal to provide access to the Santa Fe Lake County Park. While the original bottom depth of the canal is not recorded, the 1976 permit provided for a bottom cross-section at an elevation of 134.5 feet (msl). No documentation exists as to why this depth was established. In 2000, the property owner, unaware of this Special Use Permit Condition and after asking County staff for permission (staff was also unaware of the 1976 Special Use Permit), dredged the canal to a bottom elevation of approximately 130 feet (msl). Subsequent to the dredging and upon becoming aware of the 1976 Special Use Permit, Alachua County found that the property owner violated the 1976 permit and adopted Resolution Z-01-34.

Resolution Z-01-34 required the property owner to restore the canal to an elevation of 134.5 feet (msl) by placing “coarse-grained quartz sands, pea gravel, or other similar inert fill material” in the bottom of the canal. Before complying with Resolution Z-01-34, the property owner and Alachua County noted that the banks of the canal had become well established with a diverse association of native wetland vegetation. Further, Alachua County questioned whether placing fill within the canal would cause turbidity in Lake Santa Fe. To protect the lake vegetation and the natural restoration process and at the request of County staff, the property owner did not place fill within the subject canal and subsequently, the County Commission approved Special Use Permit ZOS-07-08 in February, 2009 to allow the property owner to regrade and stabilize the eroding banks (without placing materials back in the bottom of the canal) with a County staff approved plan. This plan has been implemented, inspected and approved by the County Environmental Protection Department.