

ALACHUA COUNTY UNIFIED LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE (ULDC)
CHAPTER 402, ARTICLE 16, SPECIAL AREA PLANS

Article 16 Special Area Plans

402.96 Purpose

Special Area Plans are established as one mechanism to protect unique environmental, historic, or cultural resources within strategic ecosystems, significant habitat areas, listed species habitat areas, or to address specific needs and circumstances in other areas designated by the Board of County Commissioners in order to enhance livability, protect the character of a neighborhood, provide amenities, plan for traffic management, and facilitate joint planning with municipalities. Where a Special Area Plan is required, the process is designed to facilitate the collaborative planning of these areas in order to provide integrated protection of resources and to provide for shared infrastructure and common open space.

402.97 Applicability

The adoption of a Special Area Plan is required for:

- (a) Strategic ecosystems, as identified within the KBN/Golder Associates report, “Alachua County Ecological Inventory Project” (1996), and mapped generally on the KBN/Golder Ecological Inventory Map adopted in the Future Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan; except as provided in Article 5, Strategic Ecosystems, of Chapter 406.
- (b) Other areas specifically designated by the Board of County Commissioners as part of a community and neighborhood planning program effort to address specific needs and circumstances.
- (c) Properties containing significant habitat areas or listed species habitat areas if required by Chapter 406, Article 3.

402.98 Special Area Planning Process

The process required for the development or expansion of a Special Area Plan may be initiated by the County, a property owner, or group of property owners within an individual strategic ecosystem, adjacent strategic ecosystems, or other areas designated for Special Area Planning. The Special Area Planning process consists of the following basic components:

- (a) A scope of work that defines the geographic extent of the study and the level of detail of the planning effort;
- (b) A Special Area Study that includes a public participation process, a scientific assessment of resources, analysis of infrastructure, and a land use analysis;

- (c) A Special Area Plan that provides a specific land use and resource protection plan, including development guidelines, to direct the type, manner, and location of future activities, and to plan for infrastructure needs.

402.99 Pre-Application Conference

Prior to the initiation of the Special Area Planning process, an applicant shall request and participate in a pre-application conference with the Department. At this conference, the Department will identify specific issues that must be addressed during the process.

402.100 Scope of Work

Determining the scope of work is the first step in the special area planning process, and should be a collaborative effort between the County, property owners, and the public. The scope of work will be determined at a public hearing of the Board of County Commissioners.

(a) Notice to Stakeholders

All property owners within the strategic ecosystem(s) or other area for which a Special Area Plan is being developed, shall be notified in writing of the intent to develop a plan for the area at least 30 days prior to the public hearing and shall be encouraged to participate in the planning process.

(b) Specific Elements

The scope of work shall specify the following:

1. The geographic extent to be covered by the Special Area Plan. A Special Area Plan may be conducted for all or for portions of one or multiple adjacent strategic ecosystems, or for other areas of natural, cultural, community, or historic significance as specifically designated by the Board of County Commissioners. The defined area for study shall be sufficient to understand the nature of system values and function and relevant historic resources and infrastructure.
2. Basic information concerning all properties within and immediately abutting the strategic ecosystem(s) or other planning area, including the acreage, current uses and owners for each parcel.
3. The important ecological functions for the strategic ecosystem(s) or other planning area, based on available historical and digital map data, and other information sources.
4. The type, extent, and schedule for ground-truthing to be conducted, identifying opportunities for verification of results by the County and affected owners within the strategic ecosystem(s) or other planning area.
5. Description of relevant infrastructure, including transportation facilities.
6. Detailed description of the planning process, meeting the requirements of Article 3 of this Chapter, Preliminary Procedures for All Applications, that will be used to develop the Special Area Plan. This shall

include the means of public participation, an outline for the Special Area Plan, and the format of the outcome to be provided in the Special Area Plan.

7. The specific planning issues that will be addressed through the Special Area Planning process and their relationship to county-wide comprehensive planning goals and/or the vision of the community or neighborhood.

8. The minimum qualifications of the environmental professionals that will be participating in the study.

(c) Review Process

The proposed scope for a Special Area Study and Plan shall be submitted to County staff for recommendation for resolution by the Board of County Commissioners. Upon receiving recommendations from County staff, the Board of County Commissioners shall take one of the following actions:

1. Approval;
2. Approval with modifications; or
3. Denial.

402.101 Special Area Study

After the scope of work is approved, the Special Area Study shall be conducted in accordance with the approved scope of work to create a ground-truthed resource assessment and an infrastructure and land use analysis that will provide the supporting data and analysis for the Special Area Plan. This process shall be a collaborative effort between the County, property owners, and the public, and shall involve the following steps.

(a) Stakeholders Workshop

All property owners within the area defined by the scope of the Special Area Study, as well as other registered stakeholders, shall be notified in writing of the intent to develop a plan for the area, and shall be encouraged to participate in the planning process. Prior to the submittal of an application for a Special Area Plan, an applicant, including the County, shall hold a stakeholders workshop. The workshop shall be conducted and documented in accordance with Article 5, Neighborhood Workshops, of this Chapter.

(b) Ground-Truthing of Site

Site-specific ground-truthing of natural resources shall be conducted to evaluate critical system functions and values in accordance with the requirements of the natural and historic resources assessment (see Chapter 406, §406.04). For Special Area Studies within strategic ecosystems, site-specific ground-truthing shall be conducted using the KBN/Golder report, background mapping and historical data, and other specific factors identified in Article 5 of Chapter 406, as a guide to develop a current scientific assessment of the systems involved. The location and extent of specific natural

resources, as well as higher and lower valued portions of the strategic ecosystem(s), shall be delineated within the study area, and with respect to surrounding ecosystems. Those areas found not to contain strategic ecosystem resources shall be eligible for consideration for development as part of a development plan or Special Area Plan provided the ecological integrity of the strategic ecosystem as a whole will be sufficiently protected.

(c) Public Infrastructure and Services

The study shall identify potential access to public infrastructure and services, and issues and needs related to public infrastructure and services.

(d) Land Use Analysis

The study participants shall determine one or more scenarios for the future uses of land within the area of study and identify the most appropriate locations for various types of land use, including as applicable, agriculture or silviculture activities and conservation areas. Parcel ownership and management considerations shall be evaluated in order to develop a scenario that balances protection of the natural and historic resources with ownership interests and protection of private property rights.

402.102 Special Area Plan

Once completed, a Special Area Study shall form the basis for the submittal of a Special Area Plan. The Special Area Plan shall be in the form of text regulations, illustrations, and maps that are adopted into this Unified Land Development Code, and as necessary, adopted into the Comprehensive Plan. General development standards shall be consistent with the requirements of Chapters 406 and 407. The Special Area Plan shall, at a minimum, address the following considerations:

- (a)** Permitted land use types, including:
 - 1. A range of gross floor area and type of non-residential uses, and
 - 2. A range of the number and type of residential dwelling units.
- (b)** General arrangement and location of permitted land use types and their density or intensity.
- (c)** Infrastructure planning, including identification of needs, phasing, and opportunities for shared infrastructure.
- (d)** Landscaping and buffering standards.
- (e)** General location and type of stormwater facilities that will serve all land uses within the Special Area Plan.
- (f)** General location, dimensions, and type of open space areas that will serve all land uses within the Special Area Plan.

- (g) Transportation circulation plan including automobile, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation. The transportation circulation plan shall provide for proposed access points to the development from the surrounding road network.
- (h) Description of protection methods and management strategies for conservation management areas, including conservation easements or management plans. Specific discussion of how important ecosystem values are maintained long-term.
- (i) A set of specific resource standards shall be prepared consistent with the goals and policies of the Conservation and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive Plan. They shall be based upon information developed from the special area study and relate to all of a natural resources and processes of the strategic ecosystem or other relevant natural and community resources. These standards will ensure the continued functioning of natural processes by considering cumulative impact information generated from the study's impact assessments.

402.103 Adoption of Special Area Plans

A Special Area Plan shall be adopted through public hearings, as amendments to this ULDC, in accordance with Article 8, Unified Land Development Code Text Amendments, of this Chapter. The Comprehensive Plan may require map or text amendments in connection with the adoption of a Special Area Plan, in order to permit the land uses and development types. Such amendments shall be processed in accordance with Article 7, Comprehensive Plan Amendment, of this Chapter. Once adopted, the Special Area Plan will govern all subsequent development requests within its boundaries.

402.104 Implementation of Special Area Plans

Development plan applications within established Special Area Plans shall be submitted and processed in accordance with Article 10 of this Chapter, Development Plan Review. If a Special Area Plan has been adopted that applies to the parcels proposed for development, the applicant shall be required to demonstrate compliance with the adopted Special Area Plan.