

This article from the Daytona Beach News Journal highlights the continued commitment of leaders from across Central Florida to implement the Central Florida Regional Growth Vision.

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Putting the growth plan to work

By JOHN BOZZO
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DAYTONA BEACH -- Drawing up a vision for the future of green areas, with growth centered in cities connected by a variety of transportation options, was easy for the How Shall We Grow? effort.

Now comes the difficult part for seven Central Florida counties participating in the planning: Reach those goals through the everyday decisions by local governments.

"We've got the visioning all down," Volusia County Chairman Frank Bruno said. "Now we need to start going into implementation."

Representatives from Volusia, Brevard, Seminole, Orange, Lake, Osceola and Polk plan to vote Dec. 14 in Orlando to establish a new committee to make the vision come true, the How Shall We Grow? Congress of Regional Leaders.

How Shall We Grow? is the evolution of *myregion.org*, which began with a summit of Central Florida regional leaders in 1999. The group issued a report in October 2006 warning local governments that continued unbridled growth threatened to take over most of the untouched green areas in the region. Another report in August outlined goals developed from thousands of interviews with residents to conserve land and focus growth in urban areas linked by transportation options.

Leaders would preserve the ongoing effort led by local governments, rejecting an alternative proposal to become a business entity, local leaders say.

"The commitment's going to be there," Bruno said.

The commitment is important, because the population is expected to double from 3.6 million to 7.2 million by 2050. In Volusia, the population is expected to grow to 874,000 from 380,000. Without a commitment to greener growth principles, developed land in the seven counties will double to 5,200 square miles in 43 years.

"A lot of smart growth principles are outlined -- infill, redevelopment, saving green space, going up in cities," Bruno said. "But when it comes down to the community, the community needs to buy into it.

"If the community doesn't buy into it, it's going to be the same old scenario: Not in my back yard."

Bruno ran into such opposition recently. He suggested a so-called "smart growth" strategy for a site in rural Seville, clustering 30 homes on one part of a 150-acre site, preserving the balance of the parcel for conservation and agriculture. Residents in the area didn't want any part of the plan.

"A lot of people are here and don't want any additional folks," Bruno said. "It's inevitable more people will come in. Whatever we come up with as a plan for smart growth, we're going to have to have buy-in from the community to enable it to happen."

Volusia County pays a \$35,000 annual assessment for professional assistance from myregion.org to the How Shall We Grow? effort. The same professional staff will continue to be involved, although the future assessment is unresolved.

"Our main thing is to promote understanding and support of the vision plan," said Holly Hill Mayor Roland Via, who represents Volusia's mayors at How Shall We Grow? meetings. "A lot of green space already has development rights. We want to come up with reasonable solutions on how to preserve green space."

Via expects the proposed Congress of Regional Leaders to serve as a watchdog, monitoring progress toward a greener vision of the future and making sure newly elected leaders in local communities become familiar with the plan.

"Nobody wants this to go away," said Pat Northey, a Volusia County councilwoman who has been involved in How Shall We Grow?

Officials in the counties must look at their communities with "eyes that are bigger than your own" to see how each county fits in the region, she said.

"At least if we were talking to each other regionally, we're talking, which is more than we were doing 10 years ago, when this process began," Northey said. "When you're talking, you can usually find a way."

Keys to success will be agreeing on how to protect green areas and planning transportation on a regional basis, instead of countywide, she said. Some regional transportation planning is under way with Volusia, Seminole, Orange and Osceola, developing commuter rail service from DeLand to Poinciana, southwest of Orlando. A key to the rail effort will be fostering development around the train stations, she said.

How Shall We Grow? is working toward making Central Florida an important super-region on par with places such as Atlanta or Miami, but with a better quality of life, Northey said.

"I think they're (the Congress of Regional Leaders) going to be looking at Daytona," she said. "I think they're going to be looking at places in Kissimmee. Their role won't be a traditional chamber role. The intention would be to develop this regional area as a real powerhouse."

Northey said there's much the seven Central Florida counties can agree on, but one potential source of controversy might be water. An attempt to form a countywide water authority in Volusia recently fell apart. But she remains optimistic.

"I think we can take the values of myregion and apply them across the region," Northey said. "The bigger group has the financial ability and political skill to make us a super-region, which is a good thing, if we embrace the values."

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Growth Themes – The 4 Cs

- Conservation: Establish a green areas conservation footprint.
- Countryside: Preserve countryside outside of population centers.
- Centers: Promote growth in current city, town or village centers and encourage development of additional population centers to counter the trend of urban sprawl.
- Corridors: Connect centers with a balance of roads, light rail, streetcars and buses planned regionally.

Growth Principles

- Preserve open space, recreational areas, farmland, water resources and regionally significant areas.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Foster distinct, attractive and safe places to live.
- Encourage a diverse, globally competitive economy.
- Create a range of obtainable housing opportunities and choices.
- Build communities with educational, health care and cultural amenities.

How Shall We Grow?

New Name: How Shall We Grow? Congress of Regional Leaders.

Structure: Committee will include 16 members, including the county chairman or mayor from each county, a city mayor from each county and two representatives from the Central Florida Public School Boards Coalition.

Purpose: Develop appropriate regional growth policies, promote understanding and support of the vision for growth; monitor progress and develop a process to update the vision to respond to evolving trends.