

myregion.org recently had the opportunity to participate with elected officials and staff from Osceola County in a work session dealing with growth issues in the county. Information *myregion.org* has accumulated through the PennDesign Central Florida, Central Florida Regional Indicators Report and Naturally Central Florida: Fitting the Pieces Together helped provide background information for the session.

Osceola News-Gazette – August 26, 2005

County Looks For Ways To Deal With 525,000 Population

By Conswella C. Bennett News-Gazette Staff Writer

Osceola County commissioners are looking to the future and trying to find ways for the county to accommodate growth.

In a retreat held at Gaylord Palms Tuesday commissioners and county staff discussed ways to prepare for a projected population of 525,000 residents in the county by the year 2025.

Randy Lyon Jr., president of the Xentury City Development Co. and chairman of *myregion.org*, hosted the meeting to inform local officials on how Osceola County fits into the region and how its seven counties (Brevard, Lake, Orange, Osceola, Polk, Seminole and Volusia) and 85 cities working together can become stronger competitors in the global market.

Mike Kloehn, growth management administrator for the county, told commissioners that there is a need to create urban growth boundaries, which designate areas where municipal government can reasonably provide services. The boundaries have been used in some areas to halt urban sprawl by encouraging infill development.

"That's where the vast majority of people will be moving to, and we need to be preparing to provide services there," Kloehn said.

Commissioner Ken Smith asked if commissioners could do anything that has not already been done to stop growth.

"I'm not willing to let it get to 525,000 people if we can stop it," Smith said.

Commissioner Atlee Mercer, referring to people who owned land that could be sold to developers, asked, "How do we want that development to occur?"

County Attorney Jo Thacker said commissioners must have a valid reason before they could legally slow or stop growth.

"I need to have a 'why,' and then I can give you a how to," she said.

Chairman Paul Owen said his fellow commissioners were expressing the concerns from citizens who want development slowed because the growth clogs roads and crowds schools.

As the population increases, the county will have to expand services, including those related to police and fire, roads, water and sewer.

On the growing need for new and upgraded roads, Smith said commissioners must take the blame for not having a plan. He said it was time to begin long overdue work.

"Neptune Road should have been paved the first day I walked into office nine years ago," Smith said.

A transportation meeting will be held Monday to discuss upcoming roadwork.