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# TERRA FIRMA

## YOUR GUIDE FOR SOLID LAND USE PLANNING

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## COMMUNITY/URBAN GARDENS



Lately, with the rising cost of fuel and produce in our grocery store we have seen an increase in the number of roadside fruit and vegetable stands, farmer's markets and community gardens.

Most zoning codes prohibit or don't even consider the placement of urban gardens in many of their districts. Because **Land Planning Solutions** believes in promoting sustainability, we wanted to provide you with reasons why urban gardens should be encouraged in local zoning code and neighborhoods.

- Buying fresh produce is less expensive than prepackaged or processed food
- Produce can be grown without the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers
- Gardening, either at your own home or in a community garden setting provides a low-cost, healthy family activity
- Gardening provides an education in ecology, botany and the overall cycle of life
- Community gardens create a venue to develop positive relationships with neighbors through communication as well as the sharing of produce
- A diverse variety of produce can be planted that provide habitat for beneficial insects and wildlife
- All gardens, whether big or small, provide a place to practice being good stewards of the earth on a small piece of land

Local ordinances need to be amended to allow for this type of land use. Community and urban gardens do not need to be a nuisance. They should be embraced as a way to promote community, local food production and a reduction in vehicle miles traveled necessary to get food to our

grocery stores. Now is the time for innovation to find its way into our codes.

**Land Planning Solutions** has partnered with **Produce 911**, a local hydroponic and produce expert. **Produce 911** has staff with over 30 years of experience in south Florida garden creation, operation and maintenance. Together, we can provide you with zoning advice, technical operational and implementation advice and can also educate and assist you in the creation of an urban garden in your community, a hydroponic vegetable garden or your own backyard garden. Should you be interested in talking with us about this unique area of expertise, please call us at 2405-7983.



## **JOBS TO HOUSING BALANCE**

Did you know that there are currently over 300,000 homes in Florida sitting vacant? This is known as an "overhang." This doesn't account for the number of homes being added to the market daily due to foreclosures. With this amount of overhang on the books, homebuilders will not begin building new homes in Florida any time in the near future. As a result, the entire construction industry in our great state suffers - from the contractors down to the landscapers. Likewise, banks are reluctant to loan money to any homebuilders that might even be considering building right now, as the banks feel that the homes will not sell and they will therefore lose money.



What this state needs right now are not more homes. What this state needs are jobs. We need to find ways to promote commercial and industrial development. A critical element to sustaining the future of Florida is our ability to

find an appropriate balance between jobs and housing.

Simply the jobs to housing balance or ratio is a measure of the relationship between the number of dwelling units and the amount of employment. To do the calculation you simply divide the number of jobs by the number of dwelling units and you get the jobs to housing ratio. In an area that is an employment center, you will typically see a high jobs to housing ratio, however a low ratio is usually indicative of a

suburban/bedroom type community that has many homes, and not many job opportunities.

What we should strive for is a balanced community - one in which people could work close to home. This would have the added sustainability effect of reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on our roadways, thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Balancing jobs to housing will allow for a social and economic diversification in our communities, as well.



How do we get there? There are number of factors and choices that affect the jobs to housing balance. There are market forces which are beyond our control such as employment opportunities, housing prices and policies at the state level. However, what we need to do now is take action. We need to work with employers and our economic development councils to help find creative ways to not only stay in business and to also attract new business. We need to continue the regional visioning efforts that have been started around the state that look to secure employers that are in need of skilled workers and offer high wage jobs. This is what will sustain the quality of life in Florida.

I would encourage every municipality, if they haven't already done so, to calculate their jobs to housing ratio and see just exactly where they need to go from here.

## 2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION - HOT TOPICS

We all know to expect to see a lot of discussion surrounding economic stimulus bills in this upcoming Legislative Session. A few of the hot topics that we are tracking are following:

1. **Extension of State and local development approvals** - including the possible extension of phase deadlines, addition of no new fees/penalties, no additional reviews - much like the State of New Jersey currently does.
2. **Extension of Comprehensive Plan deadlines for local governments** - including the completion of the required Capital Improvements Element and school

- concurrency.
3. **Relaxation of Development of Regional Impact (DRI) requirements** - including the elimination of the DRI process altogether for certain uses - such as commercial uses and the increase in threshold requirements for other uses - such as industrial parks. Consideration is also being given to the elimination of parking requirements.
  4. **Streamlining of development approval processes.** It is being considered that all Comprehensive Plan Amendments would follow the Small Scale Comprehensive Plan Amendment process or an expedited State level review.

Without a doubt, this year's Session will bring about change for planning and development. Land Planning Solutions intends to remain tuned in order to continue to serve our clients well.

While there are several other bills being considered, these seemed most important to our clients. For more information about these and other bills being considered for this Session, please visit our website in early March at [www.landplanningsolutions.us](http://www.landplanningsolutions.us) and click on the In The News page. There you'll see "**LPS Consideration of Upcoming 2009 Legislative Session.**"

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