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TERRA FIRMA

YOUR GUIDE FOR SOLID LAND USE PLANNING

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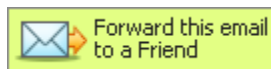
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RURAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

Although the current economic times have dramatically dampened development pressures in rural areas, this downturn is temporary and is already showing the early signs of recovery. This is particularly true in South Florida where historical growth in coastal areas has led to substantial developmental shifts to the central parts of the state, areas traditionally characterized by rural landscapes and agricultural economies.



As development pressures build once again in Florida's Heartland, it is imperative that planners and development professionals alike look to context sensitive designs for these rural areas in order to preserve their unique sense of

place and identity, while allowing for appropriate levels of development to accommodate the inevitable population growth coming our way.

While traditional urban design focuses on the creation of walkable environments and mixed-use, dense development patterns, rural design principles have an entirely different set of objectives. Rural design is focused on maintaining the appearance of rustic transportation corridors, preserving historical aesthetic through customized design regulations, and maintaining lower levels of density in a progressive, holistic manner. In the past low density development patterns were traditionally achieved through the platting of large lot subdivisions. However, as planning evolves in the 21st Century, the focus has shifted to development clustering, in order to preserve the expansive open spaces intrinsic to a rural environment, and at the same time achieving other conservation and infrastructure goals.

There are several core principles that are fundamental to developing comprehensive and functional rural design



guidelines. The first is the use of landscaping and buffering to preserve and promote the natural aesthetic. It is important to implement expansive buffers with clustered plantings for greater impact and significance. An excellent example of this principle is found in DeSoto County's Comprehensive Plan, which requires new villages to provide a 100-foot rural buffer, thereby creating appropriate urban/rural separation.

Codifying a unified signage and design theme based on community's historic heritage is also an integral rural design principal. The Mediterranean style does not work everywhere in Florida, therefore effort should be taken to identify the prevailing community character and build upon it in order to promote the existing identity, rather than attempt to change it. The goal of this principle is to create a meaningful visual impression that is both functional and reflective of enduring local tradition.

Lastly, development clustering is perhaps the most important concept to employ when planning for rural communities. Clustered or compact development means that growth is located in appropriate areas based on existing public infrastructure investments, natural features or existing population centers in order to preserve large, meaningful areas for continued agricultural uses and conservation. Clustering reduces the footprint of the developed area, thereby allowing for reduced infrastructure costs, better pedestrian circulation, and increased open space and preservation lands.



As a final note, when developing rural design guidelines for a specific project, it is imperative that the design is based on the community's heritage,

existing character and vision for the future. Involving stakeholders early in the process will allow for a meaningful, consensus-based design and improve overall acceptance by the community.

LPS HOSTS BOX CITY WORKSHOP

Mrs. Molly Arthur's 3rd grade class at [Naples Christian Academy](#) invited land use planners Allison Megrath and Alexis Crespo of **Land Planning Solutions** to host a **Box City Workshop**. The event was held on Tuesday, May 1 and lasted a half day.

Twenty-one students sat wide-eyed and anxious to participate in the event while the fundamentals of city planning, zoning and the interrelationships of buildings were explained to them.



Once each child had selected two types of building to "construct," they had to apply for a mock building permit for their particular use. Upon approval of their permit, the children were turned loose to decorate their buildings (boxes) in any way they felt represented the type of building they had selected.



The students then were allowed to place their building on the "grid" of *Arthurville* (a 9' x 12' sheet with streets, lake, railroad tracks and city "zoning districts" shown, representing the frame of the city they would build).

Upon completion of building placement, each building was "inspected" to ensure that all buildings following the game's regulations for each zoning district. If a building was found to meet the requirements, the children were issued an "Arthurville Certificate of Occupancy."



This event is a hand-on activity and a great way for children, and adults alike, to learn about the city planning process. "We were thrilled to be able to offer this to the class," Megrath said of the event. "Their enthusiasm was outstanding! They embraced the challenges and expressed

their creativity when designing their buildings. A great exercise to watch young minds work and for us to learn from them what they notice, as eight year olds, about the built environment." Megrath's last point was emphasized when before the project's completion a team of students their own initiative installed telephone poles and wires throughout *Arthurville*.

Land Planning Solutions is available to provide the same program to other schools and organizations (ideal for groups such as Boys and Girls Clubs, 4-H, YMCA activities or schools). Call us at 239-405-7983 regarding rates and additional information. [Visit Land Planning Solutions website.](#)



ALEXIS CRESPO RECEIVES HONORS!

Alexis V. Crespo, AICP, LEED AP, has been selected by Ryerson University as a recipient of their **2009 30 Under 30** award. This award is given to alumni of the University who are emerging young leaders.



Alexis is a Senior Planner with **Land Planning Solutions** and a rising star in her profession. Please join us in congratulating Alexis with this recognition!



MEGRATH PRESENTS ETHICS WORKSHOP FOR LOCAL PLANNERS



On May 7, 2009, **Allison Megrath, AICP**, President of **Land Planning Solutions**, presented a workshop on ethics for planners. The Calu Chapter of the Florida Planning & Zoning Association (FPZA) asked Ms. Megrath to join Wayne Dalry FAICP, in presenting a session on the Planner's Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. The course was designed to assist certified planners (AICP) in achieving their required certification maintenance continuing education credits. The event was held at the Estero Community Center.

For a PDF copy of Ms. Megrath's "**Practical Ethics**" presentation, please visit our website at www.landplanningsolutions.us/public_speaking.html.

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