

Executive Summary

Viera Development of Regional Impact - West Viera Expansion Area (Substantial Deviation #2)

The History of Viera

In the early 1980s, residential neighborhoods began edging toward the center of Brevard County. The Duda family realized their beloved Cocoa Ranch was next in line to accommodate the county's coming growth. Determined to preserve the beauty and environmental integrity of the property, which encompassed 38,000 acres and had served the family's business and recreational interests for over 60 years, the family made the decision to master plan a town on the Ranch, rather than sell individual tracts of property.

To guide the vision for a brand new community, an extensive nationwide study of successful new town communities was commissioned and published by the Urban Land Institute. The planning team used the findings of the study to create the concept and master plan for a new town. The new town would have a balanced mix of land uses including a broad range of housing types, offices, medical and industrial parks, shopping centers and an array of recreational uses. The community would also be distinguished by aesthetic design guidelines, wildlife and wetland preservation efforts, community recreational centers and privately funded infrastructure programs. The community was named Viera, which means "faith" in the Duda family's ancestral Slovak language.

In 1990 the first Viera Development of Regional Impact (DRI) was approved for about 3,000 acres, making up Viera East. Construction began on the first residential neighborhoods within the DRI in 1992. In 1995, a 6,000-acre expansion was approved by Brevard County as a Substantial Deviation to the original DRI. In 1999, The St. Johns River Water Management District purchased over 14,000 acres bordering existing district lands, parallel to the St. Johns River in 1999 and now manages the property as part of the +44,000-acre River Lakes Conservation Area.

The Progress of Development

Development has proceeded gradually over the years, so that today Viera is a community with an estimated population of over 15,000 residents. Viera is home to 29 single-family residential neighborhoods and four multi-family complexes. Viera is also home to over 169 businesses as well as the County Government offices, which generate over 5,000 jobs for the community. The opening of the Viera Health Park, currently proposed by Health First, Inc. is expected to generate at buildout an additional 2,000 job opportunities for this growing community.

More than 2,200 acres have been set aside in the first two phases of development for lakes, parks, open space conservation and recreational trails. Wildlife Management Plans have been established which include habitat for gopher tortoise, scrub jays and burrowing owls, as well as protection zones for other threatened species. Conservation areas and community parks are accessed by the recreational trail system. In 1994, Viera earned the ENVY Award from the Florida Association of Realtors for balancing residential development with the area's existing natural environment.

Viera has donated over 471 acres for community facilities including Brevard County Educational Services Facility, Ralph Williams Elementary, Brevard County Government Operations Center, Brevard Zoo, Space Coast Stadium & Spring Training Complex, Harry T. and Harriet V. Moore Justice Center, Veterans Administration Clinic, Devereux Hospital, Brevard County Regional Park.

Over 2,000 acres within the Existing Viera DRI remain undeveloped at this time, most of which are still in agricultural use.

Planning for the Future

The Viera Company has commenced planning for the balance of the lands in this area owned by its parent company, A. Duda & Sons, Inc., in order to address the needs of this dynamic and ever changing community. The Viera Company seeks to add approximately 11,567 acres of land to the existing 9,078 acres within the DRI.

An integral part of the initial due diligence was to determine the County and State approved long-term growth projections for this 11,567-acre tract adjacent to the existing DRI. As enumerated in the Brevard County Comprehensive Plan, the FLU designations in this area include a mixture of R-4, R-2, and A-1, which project the potential for over 17,289 residential units over the entire 11,567 acres.

The Viera Company chose to undertake a voluntary community outreach program to provide the public, especially current residents of Viera, with the opportunity to learn about the proposal and offer their ideas and input. The community outreach program began in April, 2005 with a special workshop with County staff. The project team invited input into the planning process through community meetings, a web site, and a 25-member community advisory panel. Over the course of three months, the community advisory panel met three times, and two “open house” community meetings were held.

Proposed Plan

Through this plan, The Viera Company seeks to balance the integration of sustainable community development within Viera, continued agricultural operations, and the enhancement of the River Lakes Conservation Area through the preservation of adjacent lands, which will create a permanent edge to development. Utilizing input from community members during extensive public participation process, project team members produced a master plan featuring four main components Community, Village, Rural and Conservation, as shown in **Exhibit 13-2**.

The Community area allows conventional development forms consistent with existing Viera development. Infill development will continue in this area through buildout.

The Village area is composed of four (4) mixed-use villages, which offer a diverse mix of housing types and centralized commercial/civic nodes in the form of village centers. Residential densities transition from high within and around the village center to lower densities on the edges of each village. The proposed village form maximizes transportation efficiency by centralizing daily commercial needs and encouraging alternative modes of transportation, such as walking and bicycling, and incorporating a fine grained street network that provides a plethora of route alternatives.

The Rural area offers several benefits by providing opportunities for continued agricultural operations, a low density housing option, open space that will be enhanced and maintained as listed species habitat, and

a transitional buffer between urban development and conservation areas. The proposed project area is currently being utilized for agricultural uses. Because many of the existing agricultural activities such as sod farming and cattle-grazing are conducive to species habitat, it is envisioned that this Rural area will perpetuate this mutualistic relationship. These Rural lands also provide an opportunity for low density and/or rural hamlet housing options. The housing component will be limited to a certain acreage thereby ensuring compatibility with agriculture and wildlife.

The Conservation area along the western boundary of the project provides wetland and upland preservation for species habitat and allows for specified passive recreational activities. The designated conservation area also connects to the 44,000 acre River Lakes Conservation area.

The Viera Wilderness Park consists of the Conservation and Rural Areas (approximately 5,612 acres) and will serve as a focal point for wetland mitigation and provide habitat for listed species. The Viera Wilderness Park will be managed according to a comprehensive Habitat Management Plan to be included as part of the Development Order.

Continued Stewardship

As part of this proposed plan The Viera Company is working with the local legislative delegation to establish the Viera Stewardship District, an independent special district to provide community infrastructure and ensure the long-term management of environmental and conservation resources. If enacted, this district will provide the community with the legal authority to fund and finance basic capital infrastructure, facilities, and services necessary for the additional development proposed herein for future phases of Viera growth.

The impact assessments included herein provide a valuable tool in projecting the future needs of this growing community. The Viera Company understands the financial commitment inherent to responsible community development and has a proven track record in this area. The relationships with Brevard County and other public service providers will greatly benefit the community as this next phase of development is proposed.

Conclusion

Of the 11,567 acres in the West Viera Expansion Area, approximately 40% will remain undeveloped and environmentally connected to the 44,000-acre River Lakes Conservation Area, a regionally significant Conservation corridor along the St. Johns River.

Elements of community infrastructure required for implementation of this plan would be financed through the creation of the Viera Stewardship District. The village-style development proposed herein is based on community-input and sound planning principles.

This application proposes a financially feasible community plan that balances conservation with a community-inspired, sustainable development form that provides walkability, a balanced mixture of land uses, and an interconnected transportation network. It is the sincere hope of The Viera Company and its project team that this is the type of community plan that Brevard County and the State of Florida will not only approve, but champion.