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County Commission to vote on development rules

Regulations will govern development and design in mixed-use communities.

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In January, county commissioners approved a long-term plan for future growth through a Comprehensive Plan policy that envisioned mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods linked by a future bus rapid transit system.

On Tuesday, commissioners are scheduled to take one of the last steps to enact this new and, at least in Florida, fairly unique policy. The commission will take a final vote on the rules that will govern the development and design in two types of mixed-use communities that the county, with few exceptions, will require in urban areas - transit-oriented developments and traditional neighborhood developments.

Jeff Hays, the county's senior transportation planner, said the long-term goal is a "downtown" or "new urbanist" type of development that cuts down the number of automobile trips on the external road network with a pedestrian-friendly community that mixes retail, office and residential components.

Along designated public transit corridors, such as the area near Interstate 75, any development of at least 150 residences must be built as a transit-oriented development, said Jonathan Paul, the county's Transportation Planning and Impact Fees manager. In urban areas of the unincorporated county that are not along transit corridors, any development of 300 homes or more will be required to be built as a traditional neighborhood development.

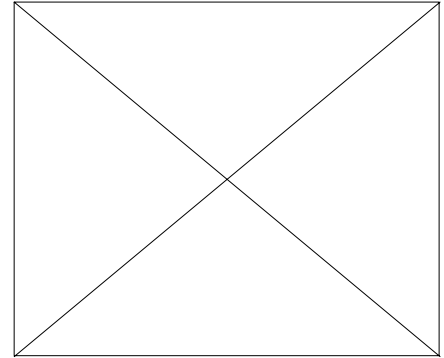
For both types of developments, the county will require a mix of residential and retail development, with the retail and more dense residential development - such as apartments or townhouses - focused toward a "village center" at the heart of the community.

In that area, development will follow a layout of traditional city blocks, with buildings facing the street and parking typically in the rear.

Sidewalks and multi-use paths will be required throughout the communities and at least 20 percent of the development's footprint will be designated open space.

For transit-oriented developments, the developer will be required to put funding for at least 15 years toward the operations of the planned bus rapid transit system. These communities are intended to be linked by that system.

Four sizable developments now going through county land use change hearings - SpringHills, SantaFe Village, Oakmont and Newberry Village - are proposed as transit-oriented developments.



"None of these projects are popping up out of the ground next week if the county approves this," Paul said of the vote on the land development regulations. "The biggest unknown for everybody is when will economic conditions pick up again."

Paul said that the first of the developments is realistically four to five years from becoming a reality.

Then, there's the matter of funding the ambitious plan for a bus rapid transit system, which would have dedicated bus lanes, sometimes built down the median, on existing roadways.

Besides required developer contributions, local officials plan to go after state and federal funding.

In the fall, staff is expected to be back before the county commission with a proposed mobility fee. Like the current transportation impact fee, the mobility fee would be a one-time charge levied on new development to fund infrastructure improvements made to accommodate growth.

While the transportation impact fee only funds road construction, the mobility fee also would go toward the transit system and multi-use pedestrian and bike paths.

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