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Non-residential progress tops growth chart

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While Palm Coast's recent past was focused on residential development, its present and future are following a different path.

According to the city's 2008 annual report on Growth and Development Trends in the City of Palm Coast, non-residential development outpaced housing growth.

In fact, the only area on the residential side that saw any growth at all was in multifamily development, with 418 units permitted in 2008.

Not surprisingly, residential development in 2008 was down significantly from previous years. From a high of 3,877 total dwelling units completed in 2005, the city reported a total of 287 units completed in 2008.

But on the non-residential side of the equation, the picture was much sunnier.

In 2008 more than 1 million square feet of non-residential construction was completed and building permits were issued for nearly 340,000 square feet of commercial and institutional space in the city.

The emergence of non-residential construction to the top comes as no surprise to city officials, especially after years of strong residential growth.

"I think this is the logical consequence of that," said Mayor Jon Netts, referring to the city's rapid population growth in the first half of the decade. "It is axiomatic that retail follows growth."

Netts said when retailers and national chains saw the growth in Palm Coast and Flagler County, they began to take notice.

"What you are seeing today is the consequence of what they saw in '04, '05 and '06," he said.

And while it doesn't make up for the shortfall in building permit fees and other impact fee revenue, it does help.

"For us, it takes some of the edge off," Netts said.

But that doesn't mean an uptick in residential growth won't return.

Netts said the city is participating in a visioning program called Reality Check First Coast, which just kicked off a planning program for northeast Florida earlier this month.

"They are projecting a doubling of population in the region by 2060," he said. "It is logical to suggest that some of that growth might happen here."

The difference this time, Netts said, is the city and county should be more prepared for a growing population.

He also said he hopes the next period of growth doesn't wash over the city like a wave, but is instead a more steady and sustainable.

"One we're capable of dealing with," he said.

For Ira Corliss, economic development coordinator for the city, the report highlights a positive development.

"It's an excellent trend at this point, and long overdue," he said of the non-residential in 2008. "We still continue to be underserved based on the population and what's not here."

A copy of the report is available on the city's Web site at www.ci.palm-coast.fl.us .

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