



CITY OF PORT ST. LUCIE

Planning & Zoning Department

September 8, 2023

Benjamin Balcer, AICP, Director
Planning & Development Services
St. Lucie County
2300 Virginia Ave. Fort Pierce, FL 34982

Re: Proposed Oak Ridge Ranches Projects

Dear Mr. Balcer:

I am writing to express my concerns over the coordination between our governments on the Oak Ridge Ranches project (the "Project"). While we have met about the Project as summarized below, the approval process is not proceeding in the manner that the representatives of St. Lucie County (the "County") previously advised it would. We are receiving new information quite late in the process, making it difficult to fully analyze and assess the implications for City of Port St. Lucie ("City") officials. And the promised solution to the City's traffic concerns is a new comprehensive plan policy that is not yet available for our review, even though the comprehensive plan amendment was already reviewed by the reviewing agencies and the Project is scheduled for final approval on September 19. I respectfully request that you assist the City by providing all of the relevant information as soon as possible so that our input into the County adoption process can be well-informed and meaningful. Moreover, the Project is only one of a number of pending development proposals in this area of the County west of the City, collectively affecting thousands of acres, making it even more important that our intergovernmental coordination is both timely and effective so that the interests of County and City current and future residents are protected.

At a meeting that was held on July 26, 2023 with County staff, City staff, representatives from Kolter Homes ("Applicant") and the Applicant's traffic consultants, City staff asked how the proposed improvements that were identified in the May 2023 Oak Ridge Ranches traffic report would be memorialized. The Applicant stated that a developer's agreement or some similar contractual agreement would be prepared for the City and County to review. We were advised that the developer's agreement would be included as part of the approval of the rezoning application. When City staff inquired about impacts to City roads since the Applicant intended to utilize the County's proportionate share program to fund required road improvements, County staff stated that there would need to be an interlocal agreement between the City and the County to address impacts to City roadways.

On August 31, 2023, County staff forwarded a revised traffic report and comment response letter from MacKenzie Engineering for Oak Ridge Ranches (ORR Traffic Report revised August 30, 2023). Later that day, a meeting was held with County staff, City staff, St. Lucie County TPO staff, and the City's 3rd Party

Traffic Consultant (“Staff Meeting”) to discuss the proposed Oak Ridge Ranches Comprehensive Plan amendment and traffic impacts. There, City staff was notified that the County had scheduled the adoption hearing for the proposed Oak Ridge Ranches Comprehensive Plan amendment (22-05 DRI) for the September 19, 2023 Board of County Commissioners meeting. In addition, City staff was notified for the first time that two additional applications associated with Oak Ridge Ranches would also be on the September 19, 2023 agenda for final action by the Board of County Commissioners: the adoption hearing for the rezoning of the property and the approval of a site plan for the Project.

It now appears that the County is moving forward with the adoption of the Project without the benefit of a developer’s agreement and/or an interlocal agreement with the City. Based on the County’s schedule, it appears that comprehensive plan amendment, rezoning, and site plan will receive final approval from the County Commission before the City is assured that extra-jurisdictional impacts to City services and infrastructure are fully addressed. The City’s 3rd Party Traffic Consultant’s review of the August 30, 2023 Revised Traffic Report identified that substantial areas of concern remain unresolved.

As the City has expressed to the County in various meetings and letters over the last four months, the City is very concerned about the number and scale of proposed developments on the west side of Range Line Road that are currently under review in St. Lucie County. Each of these massive applications represents the transition of agricultural land to more intense uses. We continue to assert that no further approvals should occur until a Regional Traffic Analysis has been conducted which looks at proposed development and the infrastructure needed to support a sustainable transportation network in this region of the county. The cumulative impact of these projects west of Range Line Road will have significant impacts on City roadways and on roadways such as the Turnpike and I-95 located to the east in the City; reviewing projects individually, without consideration of the other large pending projects does not ensure a complete infrastructure needs analysis.

As noted in the traffic studies for these applications, the roadway network that is in place to serve these proposed developments is primarily within the City. The City-owned rights-of-way and roadways in the area west of Interstate 95 and east of Range Line Road are developer-funded improvements that were constructed or are scheduled to be constructed in association with approved Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs). If additional capacity is needed on any of these roadways beyond what is required by the DRIs or prior to the DRI commitments being triggered, the City would be the entity responsible for funding and constructing any additional improvements, including the associated drainage improvements or further right-of-way acquisitions. For these reasons, it is essential that impacts to the City’s roadways are properly quantified, and mitigation guaranteed in a manner acceptable to the City.


At the August 31, 2023 meeting, County staff mentioned that the County was working on an addition to the sub-area policies that are currently proposed for adoption into the County’s comprehensive plan for Oak Ridge Ranches to address transportation impacts. We do not understand why such a policy would not have been included in the transmittal of the amendment package, so that all of the review agencies would have the opportunity to comment on it. Such a policy, in theory, might well be an effective means of addressing the City’s concerns. However, the City and the County have not yet agreed on what infrastructure improvements may be needed in the City and, as such, we are not clear on how a new sub-area policy would be able to guarantee that the substantial impacts to the City would be mitigated. City staff would appreciate it if you could forward the proposed County initiated sub-area policies, staff reports, ordinances, and other relevant information concerning the various applications related to the Project as soon as possible.

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Given that the September 19, 2023, Board of County Commissioners meeting is less than two weeks away and the City, County, and the applicant have not negotiated transportation mitigation requirements within the City, have you considered requesting a further extension of time from the Florida Department of Commerce? This would give the parties adequate time to finalize the traffic report, negotiate traffic conditions, and prepare a developers agreement that is acceptable to the County and the City.

Thank you in advance for providing any draft materials or documents as soon as possible.

Sincerely,


Mary F. Savage-Dunham, AICP, CFM
Director-Planning & Zoning

- cc: Jesus Merejo, City Manager
Teresa Lamar-Sarno, Assistant City Manager
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