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Destin City Council Workshop Summary Report

Prepared by the West Florida Regional Planning Council

On June 9, 2016 at 6:00 PM the Destin City Council held a Special Workshop facilitated by the West Florida Regional Planning Council (WFRPC). The Special Workshop, requested by the City Council at their regularly scheduled meeting on May 2, 2016, was called to discuss the 2020 Comprehensive Plan as it relates to key issues affecting growth and development in the City.

The purpose of the workshop was to provide a forum for the City Council to discuss key topics in the recently amended 2020 Comprehensive Plan, to build a consensus from City Council, and provide City Staff with specific policy direction. The three topics for discussion were 1) Total Floor Area Ratio 2) Multi-Modal Transportation District 3) Parking Standards.

The workshop began with an overview from WFRPC on Comprehensive Planning in Florida. Staff explained Comprehensive Plan requirements set forth in Florida Statute Chapter 163 and how the City must comply in their Future Land Use and Transportation Elements. Staff emphasized the Future Land Use Element's role to control population density and structure intensity for each future land use designation. The Transportation Element must contain plans for traffic circulation, level of service standards, and system needs. Legislative changes in 2011 now require Transportation Elements to plan for multi-modal transportation as well.

Following the broad overview of Comprehensive Planning in Florida, staff summarized Comprehensive Planning in Destin over the past thirty (30) years. The presentation focused on the criteria by which proposed development was reviewed, and how it evolved initially from a compatibility review to a 3-tiered system offering incentives of higher density and intensity in exchange for innovative, pedestrian friendly development. Most recently, the Comprehensive Plan amendment approval in March of 2016 removed the tier system and implemented Total Floor Area Ratio for determination of maximum density and intensity.

Following the overview of Comprehensive Planning in Florida and the City of Destin, staff presented the three main discussion topics for the workshop and explained how these planning tools are carried out in the Comprehensive Plan. Staff provided a definition of Total Floor Area Ratio, how it is calculated, and information detailing how the most recently approved Comprehensive Plan uses Total Floor Area Ratio as a planning tool in conjunction with height limitations to control intensity, bulk, and mass of buildings for a majority of the Future Land Use designations.

The second topic discussed was the City's Multi-Modal Transportation District (MMTD), which was approved in 2005 and was designed to provide a safe and comfortable environment for bicyclists and



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pedestrians, increase public transit, and reduce vehicle miles traveled. The WFRPC provided examples of other MMTDs and mobility plans across Florida to show different ways multi-modalism has been achieved.

The third topic discussed was parking standards and how they are calculated. The Land Development Code (LDC) requires a of minimum number of parking spaces based on the use of the building, while also requiring parking maximums if the proposed development is within the the Old Destin Multi-Modal Transportation District sub-area. This requirement is an outcome of policy direction set forth in the City’s Transportation Element. To further support the Multi-Transportation’s District’s policy of reducing automobile mobility, tools such as joint use parking and bicycle parking in lieu of automobile parking are also utilized.

After the WFRPC presentation, the City Council discussed the three topics. The table below summarizes the key points identified by City Council members as they relate to the current Comprehensive Plan.

Key Topics	Council Member Discussion
Total Floor Area Ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Comp. Plan policy 1-2.1.7 Density and Intensity</u> dictates floor area ratio which appears to have gone up from the 3-tier system and is not accounting for residential units per acre. This will impact infrastructure and parking if all cars from the residential units are not accounted for. • Original goal of recent Comprehensive Plan amendment was to eliminate the tier system while balancing the rights of individuals to utilize their property. The Comprehensive plan can only be modified so much without taking away a significant portion of someone’s property rights. • Council requests more involvement in the review process. There is concern with administrative rezonings. There is an understanding that there are inconsistencies between approved development plans and what is constructed. There are also incremental changes to development that are not being accounted for. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Related to T-FAR and review of projects, the Council is not currently part of the review process and does not have approval authority. ○ Council can be part of review process via quasi-judicial hearings, but there needs to be specific, objective criteria during review.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Council members are volunteers with full-time jobs. Council review of applications will require increased number of public hearings. ● The Comprehensive Plan is updated every couple of years and should be taken into consideration when considering frequent, incremental changes. ● The new density and intensity regulations do not reflect the public’s input. The public wanted less intensity and density, however this plan will result in increased Floor Area Ratio. ● Some of the recent amendments in the Future Land Use Elements have thresholds that are not defined. There are changes in wording that open loopholes by replacing “shall” with “may”. Other requirements of developers are qualified with “when feasible” language. More objective terms are requested. ● <u>Section 1-1.2.1 Protecting Residential Areas</u> does not cover all residential areas. The Comprehensive Plan should protect residents in all areas. ● There are issues with both combining parcels for redevelopment and issues of compatibility are arising subdividing property and it is changing the original residential nature of the area. These do not preserve the heritage of the area.
Multi-Modal Transportation District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seasonal population leads to high influx of tourists, which has to be balanced with the needs of the permanent population. ● There are critical elements of MMTD that should be reviewed if there is no infrastructure to support them. Credits and parking reductions should be removed. ● Pedestrian-oriented development is good, but developers should not be able to provide less parking onsite by paying a fee in lieu of necessary infrastructure.
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parking is currently a major issue and a solution is needed. ● Destin is almost completely built out so there should be parking solutions that work with redevelopment. ● The parking garage development the City promised a few years ago should be pursued, but the priority should be to correct how parking is currently calculated. There needs to be regulations in place to account for employees and outdoor seating.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives that decrease parking requirements should be removed for now. • Large home are being built that are used as short term rentals with large groups of people staying there. The infrastructure needed to support the parking is beyond what is currently required. Large homes used as short-term rentals should be reclassified into something like a Microtel with different review standards for parking.
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Discussion Outcomes

The initial City Council discussion revealed several recurring themes. Council members expressed that the intent of the recent Comprehensive Plan amendment was to capture the community's vision for future development and modify the plan accordingly, however there was general agreement among the Council that the 2020 Comprehensive Plan does not accurately reflect the community's vision. While there was some hesitancy as to how much the City should change density and intensity allowances from the old Comprehensive Plan, it was clear the approved height and total floor area ratio need to be reevaluated. The conversation on intensity and density led to the broader discussion of City Council review of projects. The Council expressed that with changes in policies they have had less input over time and would like to reinsert themselves into the approval process in some capacity. Council believes this additional level of review of proposed developments would help keep track of their cumulative impact over time.

It was the opinion of the majority of the Council that the Multi-Modal Transportation District is not operating as effectively as it should. Certain multi-modal infrastructure was never constructed so there is the belief the City cannot continue to provide parking reductions. While one Council member suggested removing the Multi-Modal Transportation District (MMTD) completely, there was general agreement that the intent and purpose of the MMTD is desired and achieved over time. The final consensus from the Council is that Destin is not currently at the point where it can accommodate any parking incentives or alternatives to developer-provided spaces.

Council discussion on parking incentives and infrastructure focused primarily on the South Harbor Mixed Use area. This area contains a dense mix of short-term rentals, hotels, restaurants, and retail that attract tourists driving from U.S. 98 and parking. There was Council consensus that there is not enough parking infrastructure available due to the Land Development Code's inability to capture outdoor seating, employee parking, and boat slip spaces. There was acknowledgment that other areas like Crystal Beach are more bike friendly and conducive to the MMTD.

The Council also felt that due to the nature of U.S. 98 and the lack of infrastructure supporting it, the MMTD should not be allowing more capacity than what the Florida Department of Transportation provided. If the MMTD is not being utilized appropriately, then the credits given to developers that

allow additional capacity on U.S. 98 should not be allowed. Before MMTD allowances are given, more infrastructure needs to put in place on U.S. 98 to solve congestion issues.

Related to all three topics was the emerging issue of redevelopment. Council members acknowledged that their regulations need to capture the unique redevelopment constraints and opportunities of Destin. Redevelopment issues come to light when land owners wants to subdivide, combine property, or rebuild with a different use than what was originally approved.

Next Steps and Policy Direction for City Staff

To get clear policy direction from City Council, the WFRPC asked Council members to answer the following three questions:

Q: What Total Floor Area Ratio best aligns with the community's vision for Destin?

A: The Council directed City staff to provide an analysis of the T-FAR in each future land use designation to determine if the currently approved numbers are appropriate. They requested visualizations of the different T-FARs to understand what it would mean if a property achieved the maximum T-FAR. The Council requested further clarification on how the approved T-FARs compare to Tier 2 and Tier 3 maximum development standards. Newly adopted language in Policy 1-2.1.7 of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan will need to be reviewed as part of the density and intensity reevaluation. The Council also requested more information on how height is measured and if parking structures are taken into consideration.

In addition to the T-FAR evaluation, the Council requested City Staff to report on how density and intensity is tracked for cumulative impact when redevelopment such as subdivisions, combining property, and modifying existing building footprints occur. The Council requested a mechanism that triggers their review of proposed projects. The Council emphasized the need for a development threshold, which will result in Council review of residential and non-residential developments.

Q: How would you describe a preferred Multi-Modal Transportation District based upon the community's vision for the City of Destin?

A: The Council directed City staff to provide a comprehensive review of the Multi-Modal Transportation District and identify credits and incentives that allow developers to exceed capacity on U.S 98. Council requested a reevaluation of these credits and how they are calculated. The Council also requested a review of potential new policies that do not allow credits, unless there is a functioning multi-modal system in place.

Q: How would you describe effective parking standards for the City of Destin, specifically considering: minimum and maximum parking requirements; outdoor seating capacity; design standards; and aesthetics?

A: The Council directed City staff to review maximum parking standards and incorporate outdoor seating into the calculation determining parking space requirements. The Council also directed staff to review parking requirements to ensure adequate capacity for employees. All parking reductions and incentives



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related to the MMTD should be reconsidered and amended accordingly. This includes bicycle credits, fees in lieu of parking spaces, and waivers. Council also requested staff research strategies to plan long-term and finance parking garages.