

# Discussing the Future of Fernandina Beach

with the Comp Plan/LDC Working  
Group

July 18, 2021

Story & Song Bookstore Bistro

Working Group Panel: Beth Foster, Lauree Hemke, Betsie Huben,  
Margaret Kirkland, Alexandra Lajoux



# Today:

- Intro
- Coastal Management
- Public Trust

## Next Sunday:

- Economic development
- Housing
- Mobility (transportation)

# The Comp Plan/LDC Working Group

- ▶ Citizens working together to provide input on:
  - 1) the Fernandina Beach Comprehensive Plan & Land Development Code, and then
  - 2) the Nassau County Comprehensive Plan & Land Development Code

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- ▶ Motivated by:
  - 1) the fact that these documents are critical for the future of Amelia Island
  - 2) the extensive input of our citizens during the City Evaluation & Appraisal Review (EAR) public input sessions in April of 2019

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- ▶ Formed by Amelia Tree Conservancy, but represents a far broader scope of interests and concerns.

# Critical Documents for Our Future:

## ➤ City charter:

- The broad governing document for cities, towns & villages
- Focus: structures, powers, functions
- Adopted & amended by referendum

## ➤ Comprehensive plan:

- Required for state, counties and municipalities
- Includes plans for development, land use, transportation and other factors
- Purpose: help plan for a 20-year cycle and to manage growth.
- Adopted & amended by the Commission

## ➤ Land Development Code (LDC):

- Specifies all land use policies needed to implement the Comp Plan
- Usually submitted 1 year after comp plan submission
- Adopted & amended by the Commission



# The City Process Thus far:

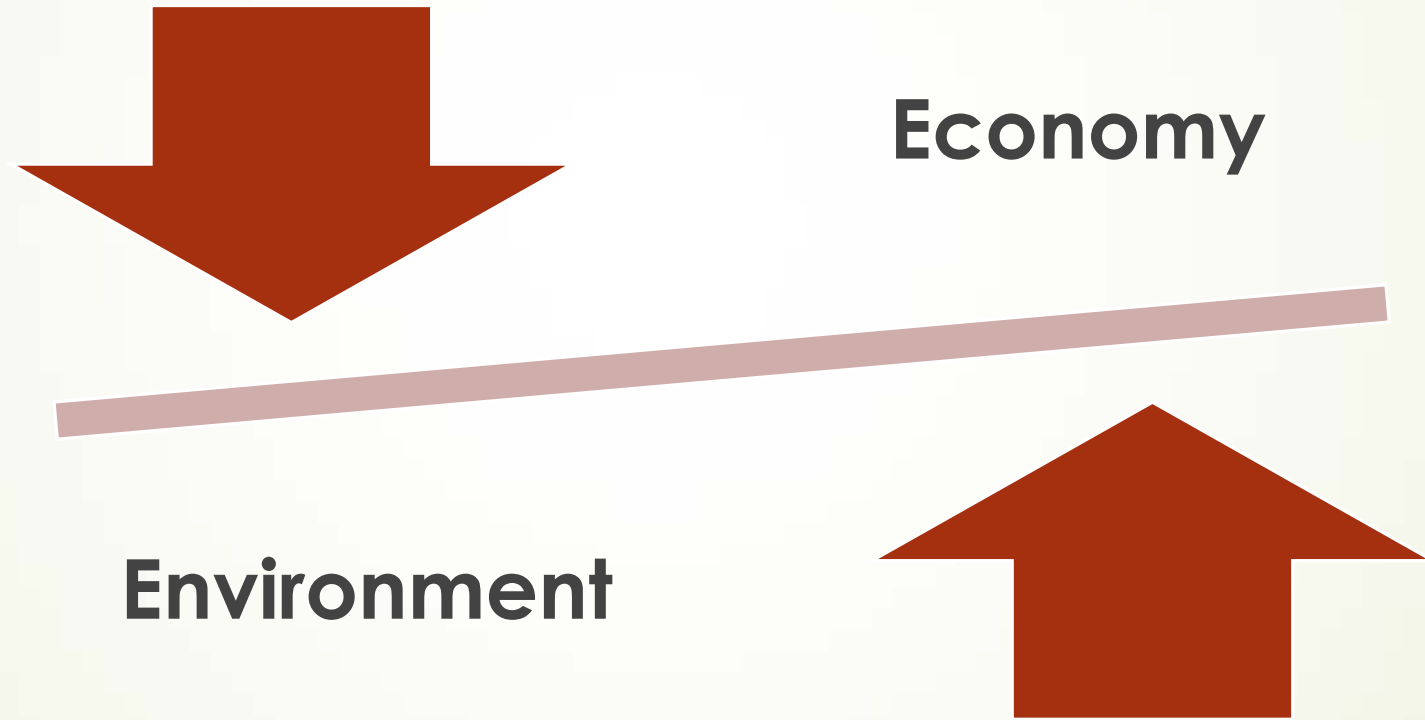
- Commission assigned to Planning Advisory Board (PAB)
- Input of citizens during City Evaluation & Appraisal Review (EAR) public input sessions April of 2019; run by Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC).
- RFQ 2020-02 for expert consultants & review process
- 3 legislative mandates completed by NEFRC & submitted end of 2020 (we provided input July 2020):
  - Seasonal populations
  - Peril of flood
  - Water Supply Facilities Work Plan
- City hired consultants
  - Collected public & stakeholder group input for Vision 2045 Plan
  - Will return with draft in August



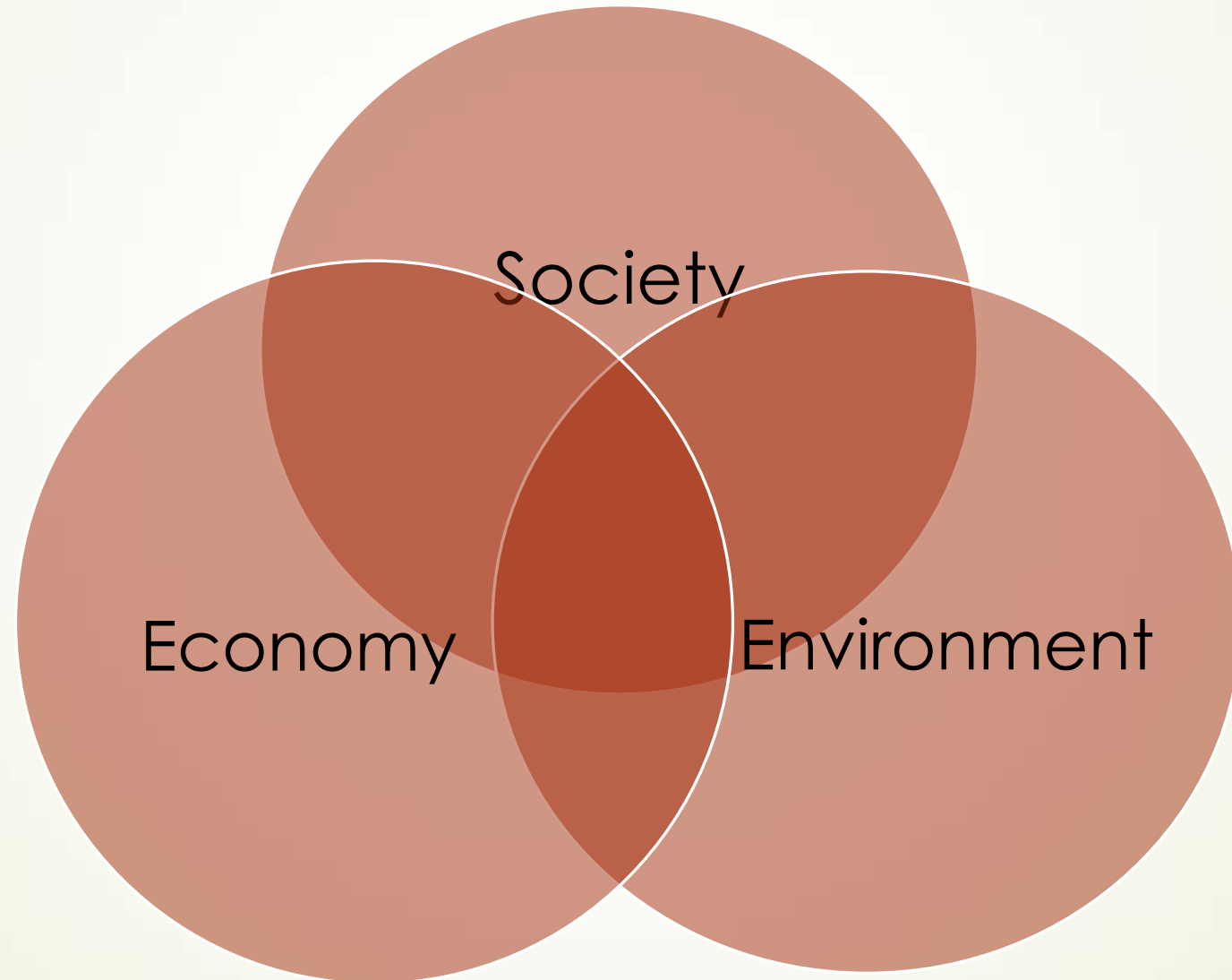
# Worldview of Comp Plan/LDC Working Group

- ▶ Importance of sustainability & resilience in preparation for changing weather patterns, storm surge & sea level rise
  - ▶ Critical for economy, environment & social stability
- ▶ Importance of the character/“sense of place” in the social and economic sustainability of the city

# Traditional View of the Relationship Between the Economy and the Environment:



# Current View: Systems Integration— an Interdependent Synergy







# Our Fernandina Beach Context: SWOT Analysis

- Strengths (internal strengths of the community)
- Weaknesses (internal weaknesses of the community)
- Opportunities (now or for the future that need to be considered in the plan)
- Threats (external threats to the well-being of the community)




# Participant SWOT: Strengths

- Sense of community, identity & vibrancy
- Diversity: human, ecologic, socio-economic
- Not overdeveloped “yet”
- Natural resources/ecological foundation
- History
- Diversity of businesses in historic downtown
- Industrial base
- Arts community
- Community activities
- Strong balance (full-time residents, short-term & visitors)



# Participant SWOT: Weaknesses

- We are an island
  - One environment, 2 jurisdictions
  - Lack of ethnic/racial diversity in government
  - Apathy/frustration/feeling that we can't make a difference
  - Processes cumbersome & lengthy
  - Lack of accountability
  - Development as the priority; not balanced
  - No plan for the community is followed; lack of implementation/enforcement of community priorities
  - Disconnect between different social groups
- 



# Participant SWOT: Opportunities

- Change P&Z process
- Comp Plan as agent of change
- Codify the Comp Plan & Implement it
- Enforce what is planned
- Waterfront
- Efficiency going forward: Analyze & expedite process
- Redevelop what we have
- Work collaboratively (County/City/etc.)
- Require broad representation in key decisions. (If insufficient input, City should not move further but simply say they had insufficient input.)
- Music/arts education in schools (Chamber Music Festival, Jazz Festival, Arts Alive, Amelia Island Opera, Island Chamber Singers)



# Participant SWOT: Threats

- Overdeveloping this barrier island
- Developers "leading us by the nose"
- Erosion of home rule in self-government
- Too big = homogenized character
- Overemphasis on tourism
- Different "ethos"—county versus city
- Lack of awareness/engagement of more residents
- Apathy
- "Wrong form of city government: There is no way five low-paid, non-professional elected officials can lead the decision making across all topics."



# Working Group SWOT: Strengths

Goal numbers below refer to our 2045 Comp Plan working draft:  
<https://www.aiwg.org/goals>.

- Our environment that supports our well-being and is the foundation of our economy (Intro; Goal 2; Goal 9)
- Attractive/ vibrant sense of place/character (Intro)
- Diversity (Intro)
- Strong volunteer culture

# Working Group SWOT: Weaknesses-1

Goal numbers below refer to our 2045 Comp Plan working draft: <https://www.aiwg.org/goals>.

- Lack of public trust (Goal 1)
- Limited long-term planning (Goal 2; Goal 9; Goal 11)
- Delayed recognition of the need to plan for sustainability & resilience (Goal 2)
- Dominance of traditional view of environment versus economy (Intro; Goal 10)
- Nature of FL property rights laws
- Insufficient collaboration between City & County (all goals)
- Need for staff training & credentials (all goals)
- Need for Chief Financial Officer (Goal 1, Goal 9; Goal 11) & Chief Resilience Officer (Goal 2)

# Working Group SWOT: Weaknesses-2

Goal numbers below refer to our 2045 Comp Plan working draft: <https://www.aiwg.org/goals>.

- **Need for sufficient data for planning:**
  - **Carrying capacity--environmental features & population/vehicles (safe evacuation) (Intro; Goal 2; Goal 6; Goal 12)**
  - **The current nature of the economy & revenues that remain local (Intro; Goal 9; Goal 12)**
  - **City and island real estate market for permanent residents, seasonal residents and businesses. (Goal 12)**
  - **Wildlife & bird habitat and corridors (Goal 2)**
  - **Periodic housing studies (Goal 5)**
- **Lack of affordable housing & increasing homelessness (Goal 5)**
- **Limited public transportation as well as beach access & parking (Goal 6)**





# Working Group SWOT: Opportunities

Goal numbers below refer to our 2045 Comp Plan working draft:  
<https://www.aiwg.org/goals>.

- Plan for sustainability & resilience before this possibility is precluded by too much destruction of our environment, prohibitive costs and/or advance of the climate change process (Intro; Goal 2)
- Maintain & grow a healthy economy that improves quality rather than size (Intro; Goal 9)
- Effective long-term planning for fiscal and environmental sustainability (Intro; Goal 2; Goal 9; Goal 11; Goal 12)
- Improve & eventually resolve public trust issues that currently impact most major decisions & processes (Goal 1)
- Prepare for the future effectively through City/County/Region/State collaboration (all goals)



# Working Group SWOT: Threats

Goal numbers below refer to our 2045 Comp Plan working draft:  
<https://www.aiwg.org/goals>.

- Hazards of climate change, storm surge & sea level rise (Intro; Goal 2)
- Overpopulation (Intro)
- Gentrification & negative impacts on significantly large sectors of our community (Intro; Goal 5)
- Traffic & mobility challenges (Goal 6)



# Draft Vision Statement Key Elements:

*The City of Fernandina Beach will maintain environmental, social and economic sustainability and resilience.*

- *Fernandina Beach encourages development of the quality of life and success of our community without increasing size or density.*
- *The City will utilize innovative, strategic leadership to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*
- *The City will also engage and incorporate diverse input from city and island residents, community and business leaders and seasonal visitors in such a way that honors the historic, environmental and cultural features of the City.*



# Questions & Discussion



# Coastal Management

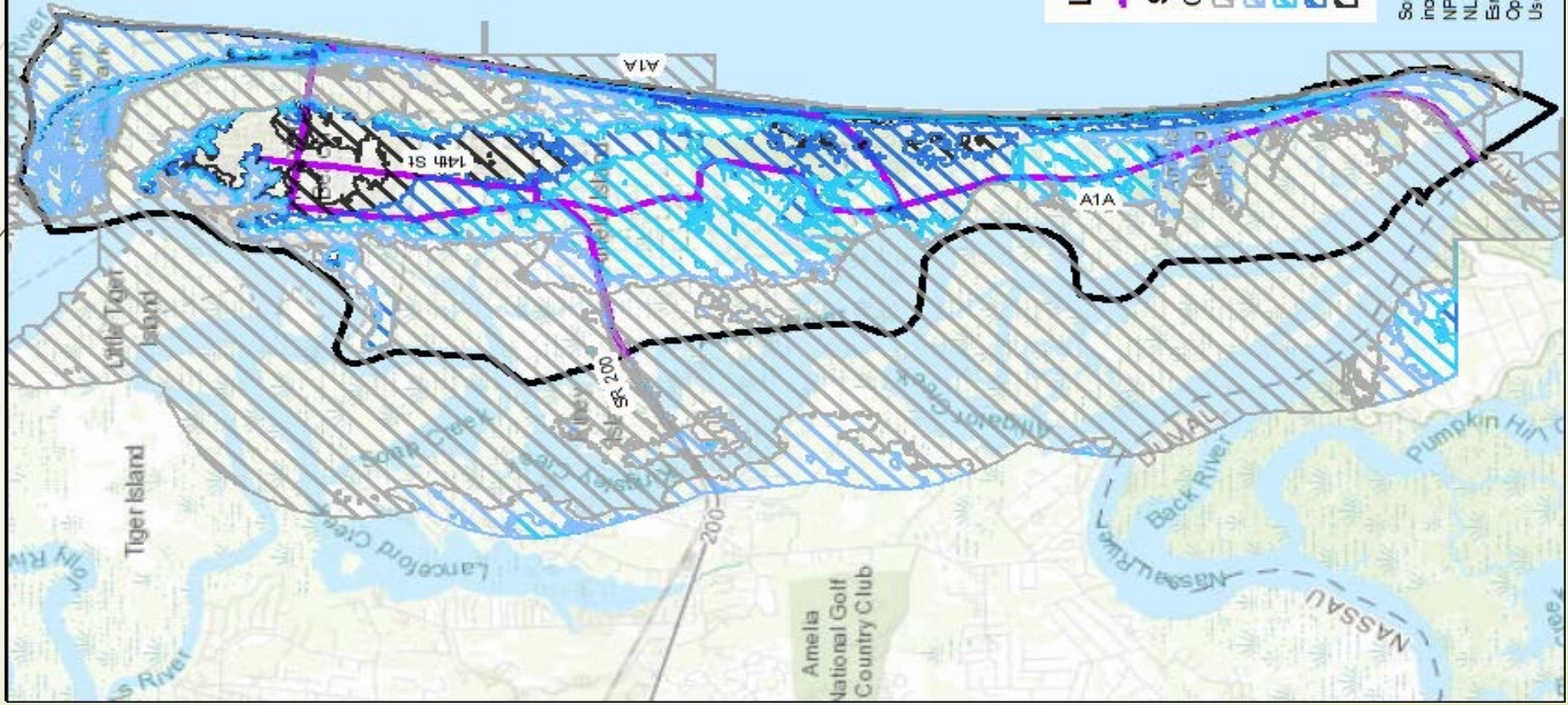
(part of Goal 2. Coastal Management and Conservation in our working draft, Goal 5 in current 2030 plan)

# Hazards We Face on Our Barrier Island

- **Changing weather patterns**
- **Flooding from heavy rain events**
- **Sea level rise (documented in Fernandina Beach since 1897): Between 8" and 6.1' by 2100 (Andre Desilet, Downtown Waterfront Sea Level Rise Study, January 9, 2019)**
- **Storm surge: "Most of Amelia Island would be impacted by a Category 1 storm surge," not accounting for sea level rise (Nassau County Vulnerability Assessment, Balmoral group, reported April 3, 2020)**



# Nassau County Vulnerability Assessment: Phase II. Balmoral Group. Apr. 3, 2020



### Legend

Evacuation Routes

### Storm Surge

Cat

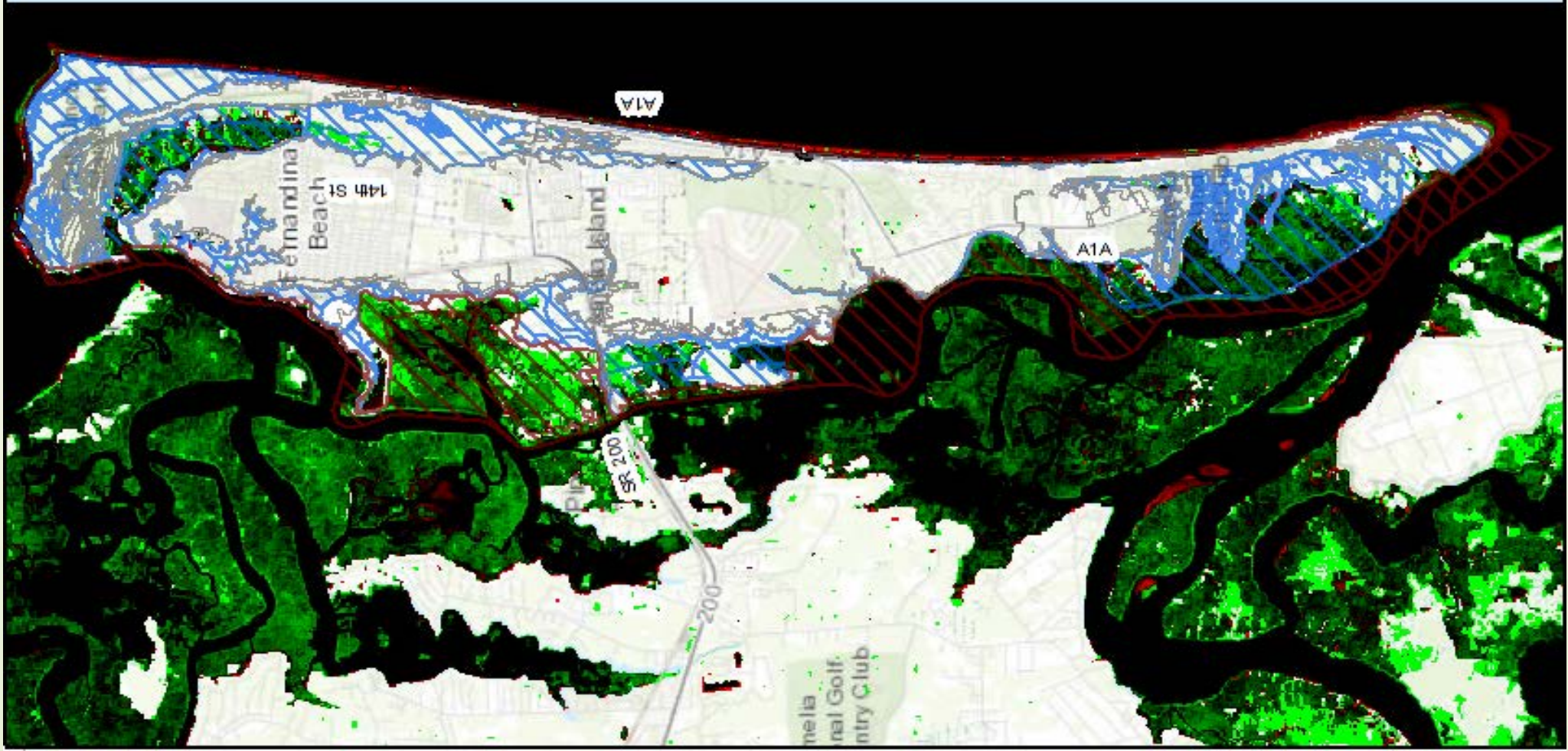
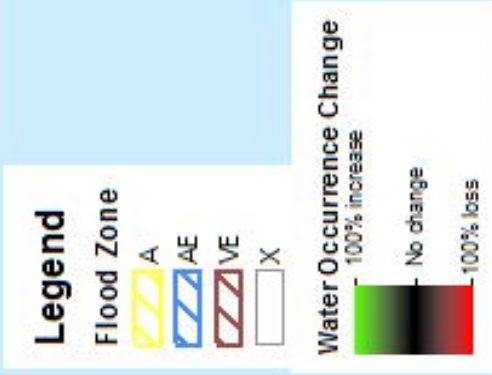
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Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeBCo, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community



# Flood Zones & Water Occurrence Change

Nassau County Vulnerability Assessment:  
Phase II. Balmoral Group. Apr. 3, 2020







# Addressing Sustainability & Resiliency

- **The State and many Florida cities are now focusing seriously on sustainability & resiliency. Jacksonville has recently issued a report and hired a Chief Resiliency Officer.**
- **The City has been increasing its efforts in this area & the County has done research on vulnerability.**
- **We need to elevate that level of preparation and develop an in-depth long-term plan.**
- **This Comp Plan update is our first opportunity to address this in a holistic manner.**



# Establish full-time Floodplain Manager & Chief Resilience Officer

- ▶ Why?
  - ▶ Leadership & coordination
  - ▶ While we have time to plan, implement & plan financing over long term
- ▶ Why combine these positions?
  - ▶ Considerable overlap in areas of expertise
  - ▶ Coordination of efforts:
    - ▶ across City departments & among public
    - ▶ with County, State & Federal agencies
- ▶ Where?
  - ▶ Asst. City Manager
  - ▶ Reconfiguration of current positions or new position



# Recommendations of the Jacksonville City Council Special Committee on Resiliency:

- Natural systems have been proven to be far more effective than manmade approaches.
- Our trees are critically important for stormwater management and our protection.
- It is critically important that we start our preparations now because the longer we wait, the more prohibitively expensive preparation will be.



**Serious long-term  
planning**



**Incremental steps to  
sustainability &  
resilience**

- Study island capacities (“carrying capacity”)
- Develop long-term plans for:
  - Dune management,
  - Floodplain management,
  - Land conservation,
  - wetland protection,
  - “green infrastructure” protection,
  - wildlife habitat & corridor protection
- Plan a sequence of Adaptation Action Areas



# Understanding Capacity




# Sustainability & Resilience

- ▶ What are the tolerances of this finite environment, particularly in the face of the hazards of storm surge and sea level rise?
  - ▶ Dunes needed
  - ▶ Canopy & understory needed
  - ▶ Wetlands needed
  - ▶ Impervious surface
- ▶ What population can the island accommodate & still evacuate?
  - ▶ Full-time residents
  - ▶ Part-time residents
  - ▶ Visitors
  - ▶ Vehicles

# Long-Term Dune Management

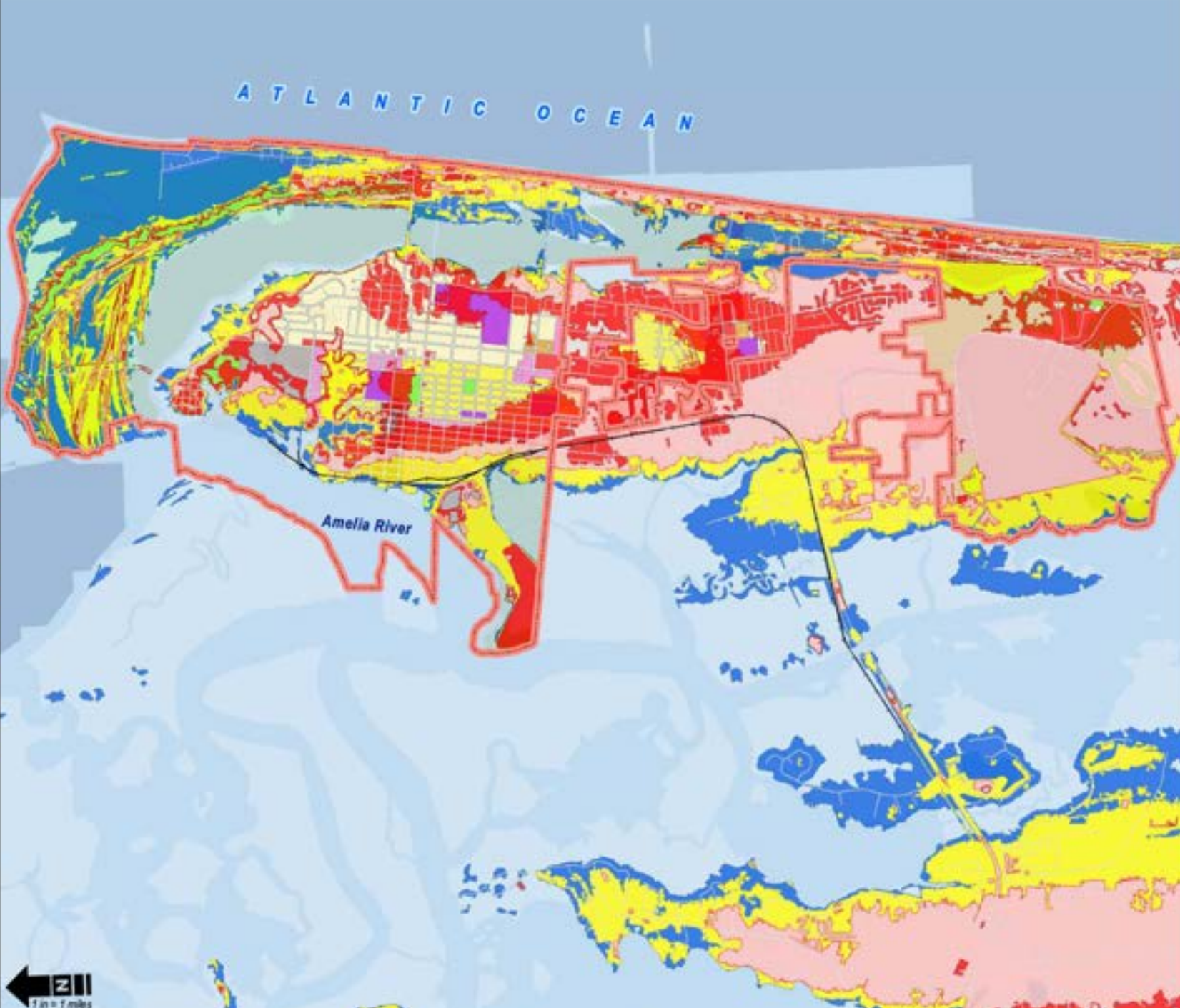
- ▶ Developing & implementing a dune management program to include the following:
  - ▶ Classifying beach and dune systems and prioritizing them based on level of need for restoration, rehabilitation or protection.
  - ▶ Identifying dunes that do not meet standards, developing detailed plans to achieve the restoration, rehabilitation, or protection and scheduling implementation.
  - ▶ Identifying natural strategies to achieve the following:
    - ▶ dune stabilization to meet current FEMA standards
    - ▶ dune rehabilitation and closing gaps in dunes
    - ▶ restoration of native vegetation
    - ▶ regularized schedule for upgrading walkovers and drive overs
    - ▶ regularized schedule for assessing, maintaining and growing dunes



# Long-Term Planning for the Coastal High Hazard Area (CHHA)

- The CHHA is the area below the elevation of the Category 1 storm surge line as established by a Sea, Lake, and Overland Surges from Hurricanes (SLOSH) computerized storm surge model.
- We need to conserve as much of this land and the upland wooded areas around the CHHA as possible.
- No new development, which means the city needs to be able to buy or trade lands (also exchanges, conservation easements and major tax deductions for conservation land donation)





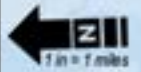
City of Fernandina Beach  
Community Development Department

### Future Land Use Map Sea, Lake + Overland Surges from Hurricanes (SLOSH)

**LEGEND**

- |               |                                   |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| City Limits   | <b>Future Land Use Categories</b> |
| Roads         | <b>LANDUSE</b>                    |
| Railroad      | CONSERVATION                      |
| Uncategorized | RECREATION                        |
| 1             | PUBLIC & INSTITUTIONAL            |
| 2             | LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL           |
| 3             | MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL        |
| 4             | HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL          |
| 5             | MIXED USE                         |
|               | WATERFRONT MIXED USE              |
|               | GENERAL COMMERCIAL                |
|               | CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT         |
|               | INDUSTRIAL                        |
|               | INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT             |

Map Reference #: FLUM-3  
Created: July 2011  
Data Source: Planning Dept. GIS + NOAA







# Candidates for Adaptation Action Areas

## Adaptation Action Area:

- Low-lying coastal areas subject to increased flood events from high tides, storm surge & sea level rise.
- Local government can:
  - enact greater regulatory scrutiny and/or
  - prioritize funding for capital improvement projects that mitigate flood vulnerabilities.

## Areas of particular concern:

- Dunes, particularly north of Atlantic
- Coastal High Hazard Area
- Coastal Upland Protection Zone--Maritime hammock



# Possible sequencing

- 1. Continuation of current work on waterfront, stormwater management, sea wall, living shoreline**
- 2. Research on carrying capacity, while beginning to undertake the following.**
- 3. Identification of initial areas to identify for Adaptation Action Areas, research grants available and apply:**
  - a. Waterfront area**
  - b. Dunes north of Atlantic**
  - c. Coastal High Hazard Area: land conservation, etc.**



# Questions & Discussion



# **Fernandina Beach 2045 Comprehensive Plan Public Trust**



**A NEW PROPOSED ELEMENT**



# Background, Data and Analysis

National surveys in 2020 captured national flavor of mistrust:

- ▶ May 2020, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research
- ▶ July 2020, survey by ICF International tracked declining confidence in local response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- ▶ September 2020 Gallup reported a trust level of 71 percent for local governments, down from a previous high of 77 percent



# Background, Data, and Analysis

## Trust Status in Fernandina Beach

1. National Research Center, Inc. in 2017 and 2019 indicated a significant decline in ratings of City government related to
  - effectiveness
  - direction
  - acting in the best interest of the City
  - integrity
  - equitable treatment of citizens
2. Significant sectors of local population no longer sufficiently involved in most aspects of city governance
3. Lack of diversity in city leadership, including elected officials
4. City and business employees living outside of city limits, but contribute to economy, with no voice/vote



# Rebuilding Public Trust for a Sustainable and Resilient Community

## **PUBLIC TRUST AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**


**The City must reestablish and improve public trust in city government by maintaining high standards for government accountability, performance, transparency and communication, while strengthening participation and representation of citizens, and basing decisions on their interests.**

## **KEY OBJECTIVES**

1. Public trust and citizen participation
2. Integrity and performance
3. Transparency and communication
4. Standards for citizen participation and representation
5. Citizen interests
6. Chief Financial Officer



# Some key policies...

- ▶ City departments review current processes and develop practices to involve citizens
  - ▶ Decisions based on current best practices, innovative techniques, data analysis
  - ▶ Performance evaluations based on implementation of comprehensive plan with integrity
  - ▶ Any issue that impacts residents, both county and city, and disproportionately represented are advertised and discussed
- 





# Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

Restore public trust in the comprehensive nature of financial information as communicated to the citizens:

THINK BIG PICTURE: THINK WHO WILL DO THIS

Long term planning, projections and leadership in how annual and longer term (i.e. 1 year, 5 year, and 10 year) are being reviewed and reconciled

1. Expert leadership and fiduciary oversight of all City accounting, financial, budgeting activities.
2. Transparency and accessibility to all department source data, processes and procedures, reporting, and budgeting. Translate and transfer interpretation to public and city staff
3. Analysis, recommendations, and proposals in alignment with the best interest of the majority of residential taxpayers, the comprehensive plan, the City and community vision.
4. A return on tax dollars invested, either financially or commensurate benefits, in all activities
5. Analysis of financial information and projection of potential outcomes of City financial decisions and investments and consulting contracts to evaluate and improve financial outcomes for the City.



# Vision Plan Purpose and where are we today?

- Understand the process and next steps
- Long range plans to develop and implement projects, funding partners
- Align with city plans and projects
- Measurable goals and outcomes
- Drives funding and prioritization of projects
- Determines updates to Comp Plan and Land Development Code
- Addresses citizens concerns



# What is in the Vision Plan (taken from the City's Website)

- Review of commercial and residential development, transportation, infrastructure, recreation, and open space elements
- Big ideas and themes developed by the community.
- Guide for city programs, future planning studies, funding priorities, and community partners.
- Measurable goals and benchmarks.



# Next steps:

Stay engaged:

- ▶ Emails, phone calls, attend meetings
- ▶ Talk with neighbors, groups
- ▶ Share information
  
- ▶ Questions about issues:
- ▶ Look for data, long range planning, including maintenance
- ▶ How does the change impact stability in neighborhoods
- ▶ How does support the Comp Plan/LDC



# Questions and Discussion