

Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization
WHITE PAPER: A position piece on Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements
Approved by MPO Governing Board Sept. 23, 2009

Position

The Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization is an appropriate entity to endorse and to advocate in the two-county region the negotiation of, execution of and implementation of Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements (171.20-171.212, F.S.). An opportunity exists for the Lake~Sumter MPO to assist in the accomplishment of two primary organizational goals of the MPO Area: (1) the enhancement of planning activities and (2) the coordination of transportation issues among multiple jurisdictions. The proposed endorsement and advocacy of ISBAs would be in addition to existing support of Joint Planning Area Agreements. In the cases of JPAs and ISBAs, the proposal is to utilize these tools as a "best practices" approach to implementing local and regional plans.

However, the opportunities are well beyond transportation and planning in terms of the benefits to member local government of the Lake~Sumter MPO. Myriad governmental coordination issues could be resolved through a thoughtful and thorough inventory and analysis of collective governmental services. Boundaries could be established regarding urban growth areas, annexations, utility extensions, planning policies and public service responsibility. The coordinated approach could empower a predictable process that encourages responsible private investment.

The major public benefit is the savings to the taxpayer as agreements could address better efficiencies and the removal of redundant public services and facilities perhaps through an economy-of-scale approach. In light of the recent actions involving statewide voter-based property tax reform and the downward fluctuation of property values in the region, present economic realities demand a fresh approach to local government. A comprehensive, coordinated and continuous approach may be the Lake~Sumter Region's answer to the 21st-century challenges facing local government.

For the Lake~Sumter MPO, in terms of its transportation focus, Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements provide an avenue for local governments to address roadway jurisdictional issues. Some county-jurisdictional roadways may be more appropriately or more feasibly maintained by municipalities. Regionally-significant county roadways affecting multiple jurisdictions may be deemed to be best planned and maintained under county government. Roadway maintenance and roadway capacity can be addressed through agreements. Mass transit services and funding and regional trail planning and maintenance could also be included within Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements.

Apart from direct transportation issues are the issues that indirectly affect the mission of the Lake~Sumter MPO. The establishment of service and growth boundaries and the coordination of land use planning would yield benefits to the MPO planning process. Plans would be more integrated and cost-feasibility would be more realistic through a comprehensive, coordinated and continuing planning process that integrates the implementation of local comprehensive plans and MPO plans.

Background

In 2006, the Florida Legislature passed annexation law that created a new means through which local governments can address intergovernmental coordination issues. The legislation enabled local governments to create Interlocal Service Boundary Agreements (ISBAs), which provide an option for cities, counties and specific special districts to engage in a proactive process to address the common concerns.

At a minimum, an ISBA could address a common service issue between a municipality and a county or special district. For example, a city and county could utilize the ISBA process to address the roles and responsibilities of each party in the provision of a public service like parks and recreation or public safety. However, the law allows ISBAs to address far more. Under ISBA statute, local governments can agree to mutual boundaries that could address issues such as utilities and annexation. ISBAs could also be utilized to provide boundaries for the application of planning policies and could lead to the development of sincere urban growth boundaries. In addition, the state statute provides for some Special Districts to be included in the process, which could lead to agreements on Special District boundaries and services just as with other forms of local government.

One preferred outcome that sparked support for the legislation is the potential increase in efficiencies and the possible elimination of redundancies as a result of executed agreements. The legislature anticipated that local governments engaging in the ISBA process would find ways to improve the collective provision of public services. By coordinating public service provision among multiple local governments, the taxpayer would be the direct beneficiary of cost-savings provided through the agreements.

The Lake~Sumter Region is comprised of two counties and 19 municipalities, as well as several qualifying Special Districts. The region is populated with nearly 400,000 residents and growth has been significant during the last generation. The large number of local governments and the near doubling of regional population since 1990 are supporting points for the widespread execution of ISBAs.

The Lake~Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization is a governmental agency responsible for regional planning in the two-county area. Federal funding is provided to the Lake~Sumter MPO for the purposes of multi-modal transportation planning. However, the scope of MPOs across the nation is determined based upon individual needs of the region. Local governments within respective regions set MPO agendas.

In the Lake~Sumter Region, two county governments, 19 municipal governments, several qualifying special districts and two school districts present a unique challenge for the prospect of intergovernmental coordination. Fortunately, the creation of the Lake~Sumter MPO has provided a positive precedent for the ability of the two-county region to work in harmony to achieve regional goals. Meanwhile, local and regional visioning efforts within the Lake~Sumter Region are already bearing fruit. The endorsement of and advocacy of ISBAs may be the best means to implement the plans of Lake~Sumter communities.

Around the Lake~Sumter Region

The following are brief overviews of what benefits the ISBA process could bring to the Lake~Sumter Region.

Sumter County

The Sumter County Board of County Commissioners has already executed the first ISBA in the two-county region in partnership with the City of Wildwood. The city-county agreement addresses service provision, land planning, annexation boundaries and funding responsibility. The agreement is comprehensive and it has established a blueprint which is now being followed as Sumter County engages in negotiations with the city of Bushnell.

Wildwood

The City of Wildwood has annexed a large number of acres in northern Sumter County through the last four years. As annexations occurred, questions arose as to the future of public services in these newly-annexed territories. The City of Wildwood, which is a regional utility provider, has effectively planned for its future through the execution with Sumter County of the first ISBA in the two-county area. The city is now implementing the provisions of the agreement and has found the ISBA process to have enhanced city-county communications.

Bushnell

The City of Bushnell is currently in negotiations with Sumter County on the creation of an ISBA. The pending boundary would also establish annexation and service boundaries with neighboring municipalities. Like Wildwood's ISBA, Bushnell's proposed ISBA includes significant areas of central Sumter County under the city's regional utility system.

Center Hill, Coleman and Webster

Sumter County continues to work with the three small municipalities to address planning issues. As the ISBA process continues with Bushnell, Sumter County and the three municipalities will explore the best options in terms of intergovernmental coordination. It may be determined that ISBAs are in fact the best means to address cross-jurisdictional concerns.

Lake County

The new draft of the Lake County Comprehensive Plan is nearing transmittal. In the draft plan, policies call for the utilization of ISBAs to implement many of the goals of the comprehensive plan, including the allocation of new growth predominately into municipalities rather than into unincorporated rural areas. With 14 municipalities established within Lake County, earnest implementation of the new plan is more likely through the intergovernmental coordination supported by the ISBA process.

Montverde

The Town of Montverde is the first Lake County municipality to adopt the required resolution to begin the ISBA negotiation process with Lake County. The town seeks to utilize the process to establish additional mechanisms to protect the character of the rural municipality. Opportunities exist for additional coordination with Minneola and Clermont and meaningful growth boundaries may be an outcome of this pending first ISBA in Lake County.

Clermont

The City of Clermont and Lake County have a Joint Planning Area Agreement between city and county. The agreement currently in place is oriented toward land development regulation issues. A missing component in the intergovernmental coordination process may be the comprehensive plan level of planning afforded through the ISBA process. Several gaps occur outside the corporate limits of Clermont in which the county government must address planning and service issues. Efficiencies could be achieved through the city and county engaging in the ISBA process.

Mount Dora

The City of Mount Dora is one of three municipalities with a Joint Planning Area Agreement with Lake County. With the pending Wekiva Parkway project and with concerns of the Wekiva Springs Protection Area just to the east of Mount Dora, the city could bolster its planning efforts by creating an ISBA with Lake County. Such an initiative would lend itself to the needed coordination of the planned employment center at SR 46 and Round Lake Road and would lead to enhanced planning efforts with the Mount Plymouth-Sorrento community. A Mount Dora ISBA could also lead to agreements with Eustis and Tavares.

Lady Lake

The Town of Lady Lake is the third municipality to execute a Joint Planning Effort with Lake County. The town has spent much effort in establishing a plan for responsible growth. The community is planning to intensify development into a center planned in the CR 466 and Rolling Acres Road area. Opportunities exist for the town and county to coordinate planning efforts by focusing development pressures to the town's designated area for growth while preserving appropriate areas. Of critical importance in preservation efforts is the Ocklawaha Basin. An ISBA could be utilized to address planning and preservation issues for the basin and could possibly lead to a discussion of development rights transfers.

Astatula

The rural Town of Astatula currently provides no utility services. The municipality provides police protection to its residents. But its modest tax base is limiting to the types of services that are likely to be provided. An ISBA between the town and county could address planning issues. Utility service issues may be best addressed through an ISBA with the City of Tavares.

Eustis

The City of Eustis has undergone an extensive community visioning process through which the community has committed to focus more toward the city's center and away from a sprawling development pattern. Eustis has several areas to the periphery of the city that are of concern to the community due to jurisdictional issues. An ISBA could address those concerns and could lead to agreements with Tavares, Mount Dora and Umatilla.

Fruitland Park

The City of Fruitland Park is wedged between several jurisdictions and could benefit greatly from an ISBA that provides a predicable future for the community. With Lady Lake to the north, Leesburg to the south, Sumter County to the west and Lake Griffin to the east, the city sees itself as an infill community that already has a traditional center. The city wants to address what will occur around its edges and the ISBA process may be the best means for Fruitland Park to reach that goal.

Groveland

The City of Groveland's footprint has changed much over the last decade. The city's corporate boundaries have been expanded to touch several neighbors including Clermont, Minneola, Howey-in-the-Hills, Mascotte and Leesburg. For Groveland, the ISBA process is likely to involve much more than city-county negotiations. An ISBA for Groveland would likely lead to negotiations with the city's many neighbors on long-term boundaries and service provision. The process would also provide an opportunity for the city and county to strengthen their partnership approach to protecting the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern.

Howey-in-the-Hills

The Town of Howey-in-the-Hills has only a couple of neighboring municipalities. An ISBA with Lake County would likely reinforce the small-scale growth plan that the town is currently implementing. The town-county issue most likely to be resolved through the ISBA process is roadway jurisdiction, although greater efficiencies for town and county are also likely to be gained through the process.

Leesburg

The City of Leesburg has a regional utility service area much greater than the area within the corporate limits of the city. Leesburg has annexed large land holdings southwest to Sumter County and centering around the Turnpike interchange at CR 470. To address what occurs regarding city and county service provision as those vacant but annexed square miles are developed, an ISBA may prove to be the most effective vehicle for addressing the effects of urbanization in that area. Meanwhile the city and county continue to address enclaves and unincorporated areas and gaps around the city's periphery. The ISBA process could help in solidifying service plans for those areas.

Mascotte

With the Green Swamp to the south, Leesburg to the north and Groveland to the east, Mascotte views its growth boundaries as well determined. The city has annexed along the CR 33 corridor and now opportunity exists for greater city-county coordination to address the fact that vacant annexed properties sit alongside vacant unincorporated properties, leaving one with the sense of being in a rural area. The ISBA process may afford the City of Mascotte an opportunity to enhance planning efforts in conjunction with the county and in partnership with its neighbors.

Minneola

The City of Minneola is focused on growing the local economy through maximizing use and development of existing properties and annexations. The centerpiece of the future growth will be the within the Hills of Minneola DRI, primarily around the new Florida Turnpike Interchange at mile marker 279. Effective coordination with surrounding municipalities in the areas of transportation and utility delivery continues as the ISBA process is embraced in the South Lake region.

Tavares

The City of Tavares has adopted a community vision that focuses on redeveloping the downtown and minimizing peripheral development that does not enhance the local economy. An ISBA between the city and county could establish growth boundaries for the unincorporated Lake Jem area and could address the unincorporated area in the center of the "Golden Triangle." Opportunities may exist for the county seat and the county government to partner on facilities or service provision and for Tavares, Eustis and Mount Dora to address common issues.

Umatilla

As the gateway to the Ocala National Forest, the ISBA process may provide a means to address appropriate growth controls in an area of Lake County rich with lands appropriate for conservation. Meanwhile the city has growth plans that include the extension of utilities and the expansion of tax base. An ISBA may lead to an orderly growth plan that is supported by the county government. Also, the ISBA process could lead to an agreement with Eustis on jurisdictional issues.

Qualifying Special Districts

The ISBA legislation affords qualified special districts the opportunity to engage in the ISBA process. Special Districts can work with municipal or county governments to address provisions of services and the ownership and operations of facilities.