



Staff Analysis of Tuscawilla Road County Scenic Road Nomination

Prepared for:
Alachua County Board of County Commissioners

Prepared by:
Alachua County Growth Management

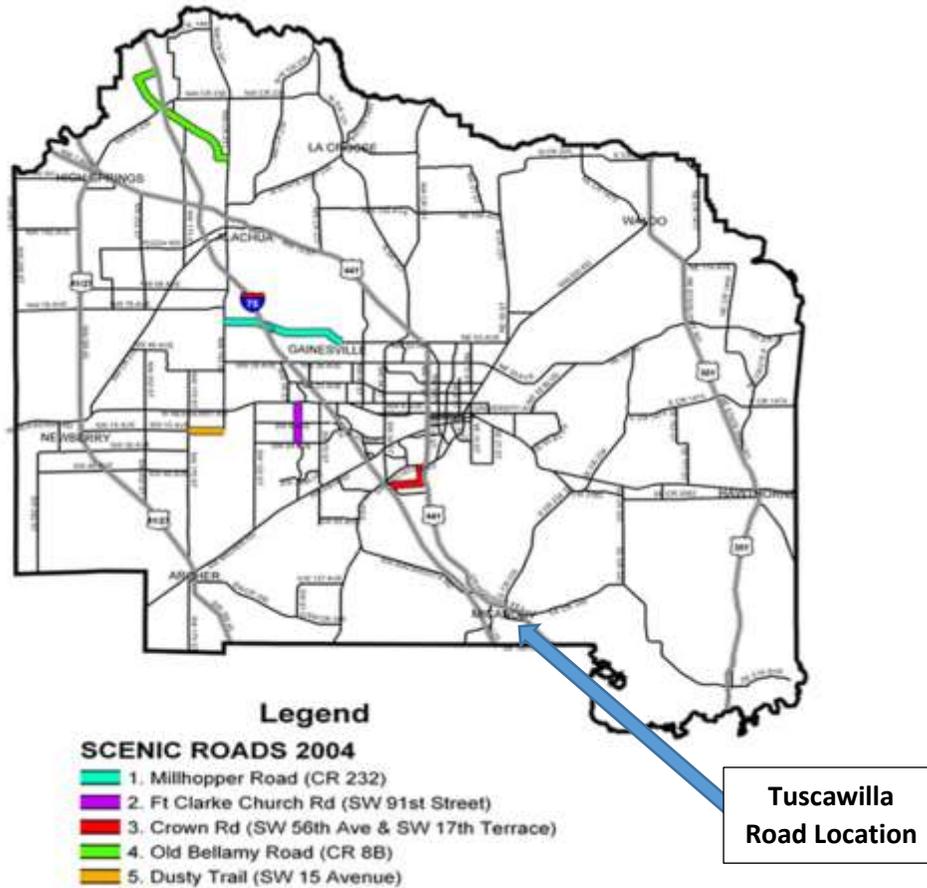
Presented on:
February 9, 2021

Executive Summary

The County recently received a request from a citizen to designate Tuscawilla Road as a County Scenic Road. The criteria and process for such a designation are included in ULDC ARTICLE IX. - SCENIC ROAD CORRIDORS OVERLAY. This Staff Report and associated presentation for the BOCC provides information to address Sec. 405.41. (Procedure for designation); Sec. 405.35. (Guidelines for designation); and Sec. 405.36. (Specific criteria for designation).

There are five (5) roads within the County with local Scenic Road designation, all of which were approved prior to 2004. The Scenic Road Ordinance was updated in 2005. There has not yet been a road designated under the updated guidelines, criteria and process.

This map shows the location of the existing County Scenic Roads, with the blue arrow showing Tuscawilla Rd. location.



Tuscawilla Road is a two lane facility between Cholokka Boulevard in the Micanopy Town limits connecting to the US 441 intersection within the County jurisdiction. The land uses along the corridor with the Town limits include large lot residential, institutional and the Town Native American Preserve. There are only a few parcels within the County jurisdiction along the corridor. There is approximately ¼ mile of linear distance on the north side of the roadway within the unincorporated area and ½ mile on the south side. Approximately ¼ mile of the linear distance on the south side is the frontage of the 44.4 acre Tuscawilla Preserve owned by the Alachua Conservation Trust. The other uses along the road in the County on the south side are Agricultural (grazing) property and an Institutional parcel. On the north side is a vacant residential parcel and the rural ag commercial parcel that has a proposed development that was granted Preliminary Development Plan approval by the County Development Review Committee on December 17, 2020.

This report provides the basis for the following **Staff Recommendation: Direct staff to advertise a public hearing to consider designating Tuscawilla Road as a Scenic Road Corridor.**

Staff Analysis of Tuscawilla Road per the Required Guidelines and Criteria

Sec. 405.35. - Guidelines for Designation

To measure the significance of the scenic, historical, and cultural value of scenic road corridors, the following guidelines shall apply:

(a) The quality of its scenic, historic, or cultural resources is unique and/or of sufficient magnitude to merit regional or county recognition;

Tuscawilla Road crosses through a wooded upland area at the edge of a prairie and enters the Town of Micanopy, the oldest inland town in Florida and rich in scenic, historic and cultural resources, of which the Town website provides a good description-- <https://micanopytown.com/>

(b) A variety and diversity of visual experience created by land form, changes in terrain, natural vegetation, type of landscape and/or land use activity is provided;

Micanopy is an area with little artificial lighting so the night sky is visible, and a Town resident photographed the darkness with a drone. The landforms in aerial views display diversity and uniqueness. A walk at the Tuscawilla Preserve allows experience of these areas.

(c) Access between or to recreation areas or points of scenic, cultural, historical, or scientific interest occur as part of the system;

The road provides access to Tuscawilla Preserve (scenic), Micanopy's Native American Preserve (cultural), and terminates at the Town Historic District.

(d) The immediate roadside or corridor is relatively free of commercial or other development restrictive of scenic quality;

A retail commercial use is proposed at the intersection of Tuscawilla Rd. and US 441, otherwise currently there are no commercial uses and the scenery is natural.

(e) The scenic road corridor's natural, scenic, and cultural resources are not damaged beyond their recognition and it is relatively easy to restore their initial resource value.

There is one institutional use near US 441, and other in the Town jurisdiction. These are community gathering places with public parking areas. There is limited public parking at the Native American Preserve that also allows access to the Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT) Tuscawilla Preserve. The Town will maintain the cultural integrity of the burial mound. The non-profit ACT will maintain the ecological values since it serves our community by protecting and preserving natural spaces, creating opportunities to interact with the environment, and teaching the next generation through environmental education programs.

The following photos of the Micanopy Native American Heritage Preserve show the landscape on the north side of the road. The park was acquired by the Town with State funding, and protects an Indian mound.



Photo: Interpretive Kiosk at the Micanopy Native American Preserve



Photos: Tree with plaque at Micanopy Native American Preserve



Photos: Landscape, Bat House, and Parking Area at Micanopy Native American Preserve

Sec. 405.36. - Specific criteria for designation

To receive the designation of scenic road corridor, one or more of the following criteria must apply:

(a) Scenic resource significance

Scenic Resource Significance. The road borders Lake Tuscahill which is an area with limited residential development (with minimal impact on scenic quality) and also an Alachua Conservation Trust preserve (600 acres) accessible from the road. On the opposite side of the road is residential as well as the Native American Preserve (a burial ground with interpretive historic panels). A vicinity map and details are shown on this ACT website -

<https://www.alachuaconservationtrust.org/tuscahill-preserve-guide>

The Tuscahill Road is part of the Old Florida Heritage Highway, a State designated scenic corridor (since summer 2001). Alachua County Comprehensive Plan, Conservation and Open Space Policy 5.3.5. (2005 update) states "Alachua County shall participate in the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources of the Scenic 441 Old Florida Heritage Highway by supporting the concepts described in the Scenic 441 Vision Statement, and by providing appropriate resources and support to the Corridor Management Council for implementation of the Corridor Management Plan."

(1) Interesting geomorphic formations.

Paynes Prairie is about 5 miles to north. There are interesting geographical features on Tuscahill Rd, the location of the Village of Cuscowilla and William Bartram's visit in 1774. The highest geographical point on the North Side of Lake Tuscahill is located within the Micanopy Native Heritage Preserve and across the street is located the lowest point beyond Thrasher Park in Lake Tuscahill Preserve. (Note Map Genius Topo)

(2) Type of natural vegetation.

As described at the ACT webpage, Tuscahill Preserve includes a prairie and adjacent uplands with small creeks and mesic forests. Lake Tuscahill contains open water during periods of high to moderate water levels and can be almost completely dry during prolonged droughts. This hydrologic variation is the limiting factor for much of the vegetation and defines the extent of the forest rim. The hardwood hammocks that surround the prairie are dominated by live oak, southern magnolia, hickories, and cabbage palms.

The natural area allows visitors to understand the cycles of nature. This is as described "There's a hardiness about the plants in a wild setting. When you look at a prairie, you don't see complete losses from anything---you don't see net soil erosion or devastating pest epidemics. You don't see the need for fertilizers or pesticides. You see a system that runs on sun and rain, year after year, with no one to cultivate the soil or plant the seeds. It drinks in no excess inputs and excretes no damaging wastes. It recycles all its nutrients, it conserves water, it produces abundantly, and because it's chock-full of genetic information and local know-how, it adapts."¹

(3) Presence or nearness of water bodies (by type).

Lake Tuscahill, a wet prairie, is located south of the road, within view.

(4) Overall landscape composition.

The landscape along the Tuscahill Road is best described in the description of the ACT preserve along the road described under the natural vegetation criteria. The intersection at US 441 introduces an area described in the Old Florida Heritage Highway Master Plan as "Greater Micanopy." This Plan states 'Along the fringes of Micanopy, the landscape character changes significantly. The area along US 441 has an eclectic mix of architectural styles and uses that are different than any other area in the (48 mile state scenic road) corridor.' The designation of Tuscahill as a County Scenic Road is important to ensure that the natural landscape is not encroached by the highway uses.

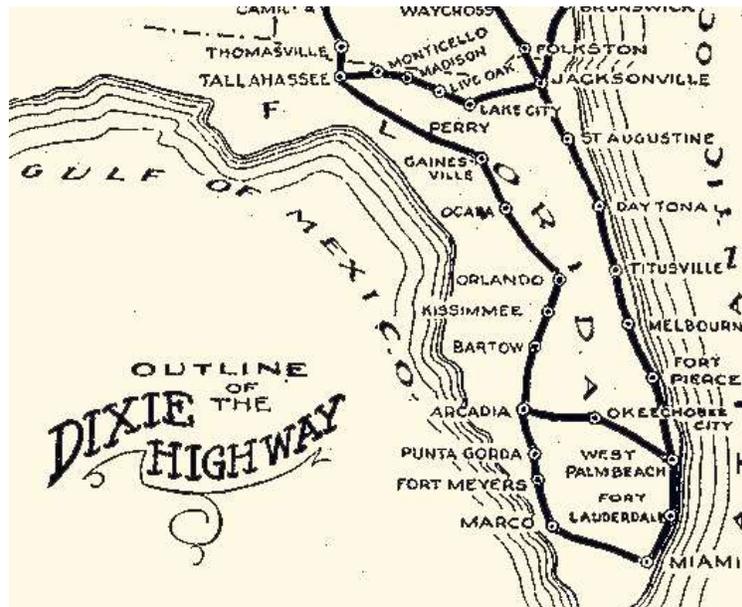
(b) Archaeological resource significance.

Area of archaeological importance. Native American Preserve is located on this road within Town limits and is a protected area, purchased by the Town of Micanopy with State funding. Other research on the Battle of Micanopy documents significant sites on private land in the vicinity and this provides tourism attraction for the Town.

(c) Historical resource significance.

(1) Road developed prior to era of interstate development.

Road developed prior to era of interstate development- Tuscawilla Road was part of the “Old Dixie Highway” that was a major system for tourists travelling to Florida from the north and Midwest US.ⁱⁱ



The Dixie Highway system in 1923. Source: <http://www.tampapix.com/tincantourists.htm>

ACHC appointee Ashley Wood has noted that at the time the Dixie Highway was built, it was not necessarily a ‘straight line’ road corridor. (March 2016 Minutes of ACHC). Staff was told by another Town resident that Micanopy local historian and long-time resident John Thrasher has stated that the current configuration of Tuscawilla Road dates to the 1950s when paving was done and part of the roadway was moved slightly.

(2) Sites of historical importance.

Native American Preserve along road, and the Micanopy National Historic District at the terminus in Town.

(d) Cultural resource significance.

(1) Unspoiled character of resource (no adverse land uses and structures).

The Native burial mound is protected.

(2) Amenability for multiple recreational uses for pedestrian, equestrian, or bicycle paths, and passive recreation.

There is no bike lane and current posted speed is 30mph. Experienced cyclists do travel the corridor and there are off road hiking trails for passive recreation and bird watching, as well as wildlife and night sky viewing.

(e) Priority of criteria.

(1) Scenic quality.

The following Comprehensive Plan (*italized*) policies apply:

Policy 5.3.5 The County shall recognize and participate in voluntary programs for the beautification of public roadways, such as:

....

(b) FDOT Florida Scenic highways, such as the citizen-initiated designation of a portion of SR 441 and spur road system.

(c) The Transportation map series shall depict the FDOT designation of a portion of SR 441 in Alachua County and related county roads as the Scenic 441 Old Florida Heritage Highway.

(d) Alachua County shall participate in the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources of the Scenic 441 Old Florida Heritage Highway by supporting the concepts described in the Scenic 441 Vision Statement, and by providing appropriate resources and support to the Corridor Management Council for implementation of the Corridor Management Plan.

(e) Gateway streets in conjunction with the City of Gainesville and other participating municipalities.



Map: “Old Florida Heritage Highway;” (Orange depicts roads designated as a State Scenic Byway in June 2001)

(2) Variety of recreation experience.

Micanopy is recognized as one of America’s Top 10 Historic Small Towns! (Source: VisitGainesville Dec. 2020 article in Alachua County Employee Newsletter). Specialty shops are an important feature of the Town economy, and the annual “Fall Harvest Festival” attracts thousands of visitors over the weekend. The Tusawilla Road is within walking distance of the downtown business district, part of the National Historic District. There is public parking at the Native American Preserve to access the Alachua Conservation Trust preserves on the other side of the proposed County scenic road. VisitGainesville included the hike at Tusawilla Preserve in a list of top 5 hikes in the County in August 2020 (attachment). A 1986 publication with a car/bicyclist self-guided tour of the Bartram Trail includes Tusawilla Road (attachment). Following is a screenshot of an article “The 12 Cutest Small Towns in America” showing Micanopy historic district shop.

34.7K

SHARES



MICANOPY, FLORIDA

Ahh, Florida: the home of Disney World, Casey Anthony and Miami. But this sleepy town (population: 600) is as quaint as they come. Tom Petty sang of it in "A Mind with a Heart of Its Own," and the Michael J. Fox film *Doc Hollywood* was filmed there. It also boasts some of the most beautiful Spanish moss-covered roads in the Southeast.

(3)Compatibility with other corridor users.

Scenic Road designation is compatible with existing uses (residential and institutional).

(4)Harmony with other land use.

Existing preservation uses and large lot residential are harmonious land uses in area.

(5)Access to parks and other recreation.

In the jurisdiction of the Town of Micanopy along the Tusawilla Road there are two public parks, one the Native American Preserve and on the opposite side of the road is the Alachua Conservation Trust Tusawilla Preserve. (Attachments include Bartram Trail and Top 5 Hiking Trails in Alachua County)

(6)Popular demand.

Many citizens in Micanopy, including corridor residents and community leaders, are supportive of this nomination.

(7)Degree of urgency if the corridor is to be protected.

The road has been designated as one segment of a State Scenic Highway since June 2001. However this has no regulatory impact and there is concern in the community that more protection is important.

(8)Protection of ecology.

The designation as a County Scenic Road will benefit the natural ecology of the area. The road frontage has a dense tree canopy and this will be protected. Tusawilla Preserve is recognized as a protected bird sanctuary by the Audubon Society

(9)Suitability for use by other transportation modes (bus, pedestrian, equestrian, bicycles).

Tusawilla Road lacks instreet bicycle lanes or paved shoulders but is used by recreational cyclists.

County Public Works Staff provided the following comments regarding the potential scenic designation:

“1. The road is currently posted at 30 MPH and the latest speed data we have indicates an 85th percentile speed of 48 MPH. There has been no reason to evaluate or change the speed limit on this road and there has only been one crash in recent history and it was animal related. If for some reason there were in an increase in accidents that could be related to the speed being posted too low we would want to evaluate the appropriate posted speed limit.

2. After this facility becomes scenic, we will become limited on what improvements could be made on the roadway in the future. To our knowledge, there are currently no plans for improvements at this time.

An item of note is that there are currently no weight restrictions on this roadway.”

(10)Type of developmental possibilities.

The zoning of the Rural Commercial Agriculture parcel allows various use categories as permitted or limited uses, some more typical in scenic areas (resource based rec, cemeteries) however retail is possible and a proposed development was reviewed by the County Development Review Committee already.

The County Comprehensive Plan Goal states-

Encourage the Orderly, Harmonious, and Judicious Use of Land, Consistent with the Following Guiding Principles.

Principle 1- Promote sustainable land development that provides for a balance of economic opportunity, social equity including environmental justice, and protection of the natural environment.

(11)Resource vulnerability to incompatible land use.

As current biological research has revealed that trees are connected via root systems, any development has some potential for impacting the canopy that makes Micanopy unique.



Photo above shared by corridor resident requesting designation (from a local history presentation included as an attachment).

(All other photos by Staff)

Impact of Proposed Scenic Road Designation on the Corridor

The County Scenic Road designation if approved will only impact parcels within the County jurisdiction of the road. These have future land uses of Rural Agriculture and Rural Commercial Agriculture (see Future Land Use map attachment in separate file). However a parcel at the intersection of US 441 and Tuscawilla Road that was granted Preliminary Development Plan approval by the County Development Review Committee on December 17, 2020, will not be impacted by the possible designation.

Some impacts from ARTICLE IX. - SCENIC ROAD CORRIDORS OVERLAY are paraphrased here, see attachment for details:

Protected area along the scenic road corridor is within 100 feet of the right-of-way lines or the limits of the county's prescriptive use. A 100 foot buffer is required on parcels, unless a variance is granted by the Board of County Commissioners.

Outdoor advertising signs are prohibited within the protected area except small (7½-square-foot maximum) signs advertising residential development, homes for sale signs or subdivision signs.

Any commercial activity is prohibited within the protected area.

Prohibiting overhead utilities within the protected area, except for designated types. (*Note some overhead utilities existing in the corridor currently)

As noted in the email from County Public Works staff, some guidelines for scenic road corridor maintenance take effect:

(a) Conserve and restore the high quality of natural resources and unique features such as tree canopy, ground cover, animals and geological features in their natural state.

(b) Preserve cultural and historical character.

(c) Clear cutting of vegetation in the scenic road corridor right-of-way shall not be permitted, except under such circumstances where the sight lines are obstructed and contributing to traffic hazards after fulfilling specific procedures); provided, however, that one annual clear cutting shall be permitted, if necessary, to restore scenic vistas along a corridor.

(d) Selective vegetation cutting may be permitted to open up and enhance views and vistas within the scenic road corridor right-of-way upon recommendation of the staff and approval of the county commission.

(e) Where proper permits have been obtained controlled burning may be practiced where necessary to encourage vegetation growth and control insect and pest occurrence.

(f) Mowing shall be permitted in drainage ditches to prevent clogging and overflow.

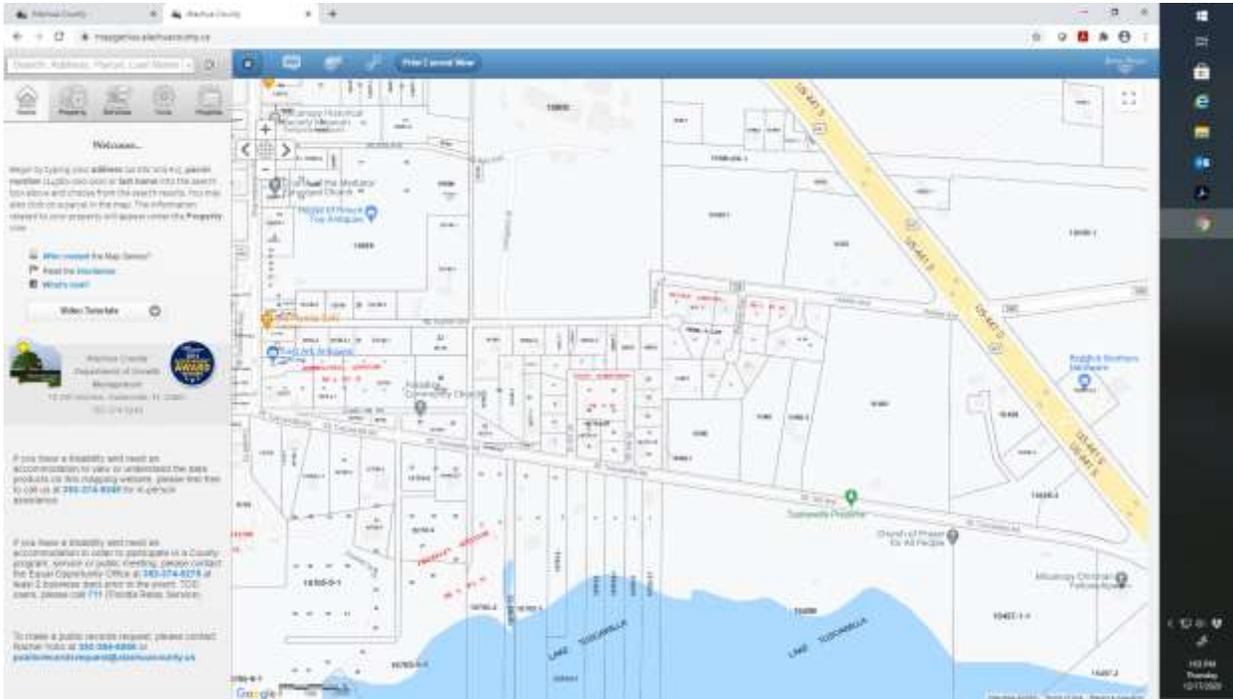
(g) Trees and other vegetation damaged beyond the restoration stage, either by natural causes or accidents, should be removed. Attempts should be made to replant such areas to bring them to their original state.

(h) In cases where recreation access and/or facilities (scenic overlook, picnic areas, multi-purpose trails, unpaved parking) are provided, they shall be maintained on a regular basis.

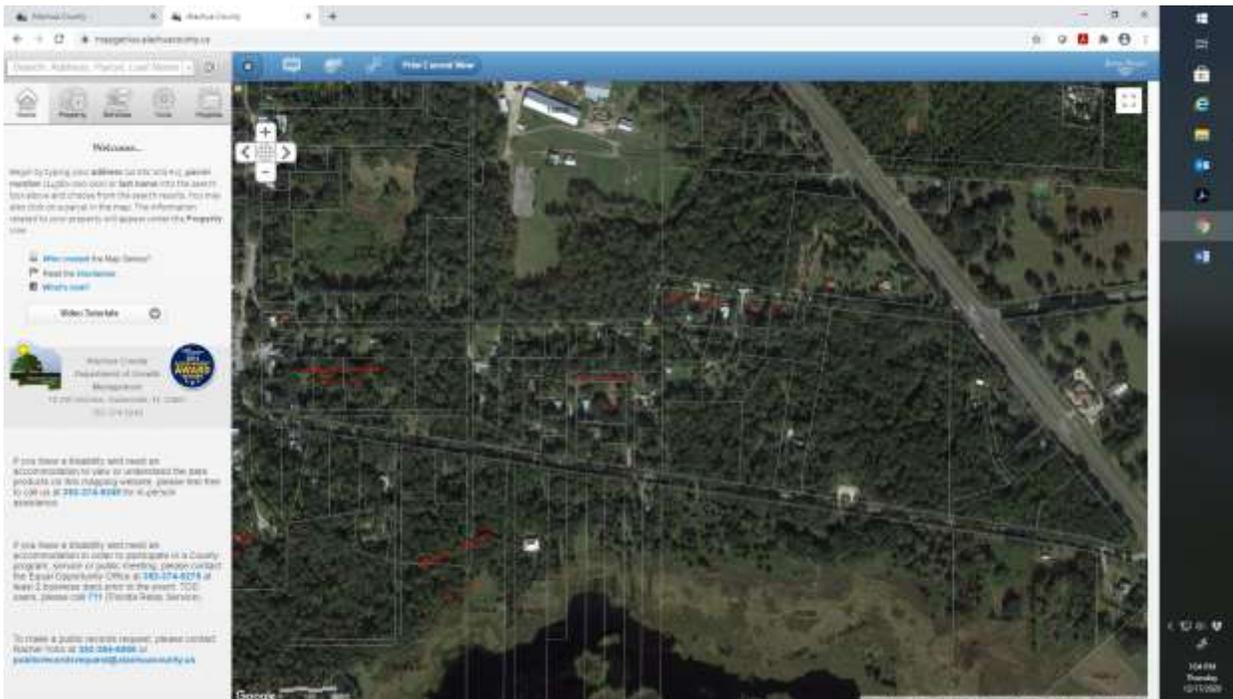
[As noted above, see FLU Map and ARTICLE IX. - SCENIC ROAD CORRIDORS OVERLAY attachments]

“Map Genius” data

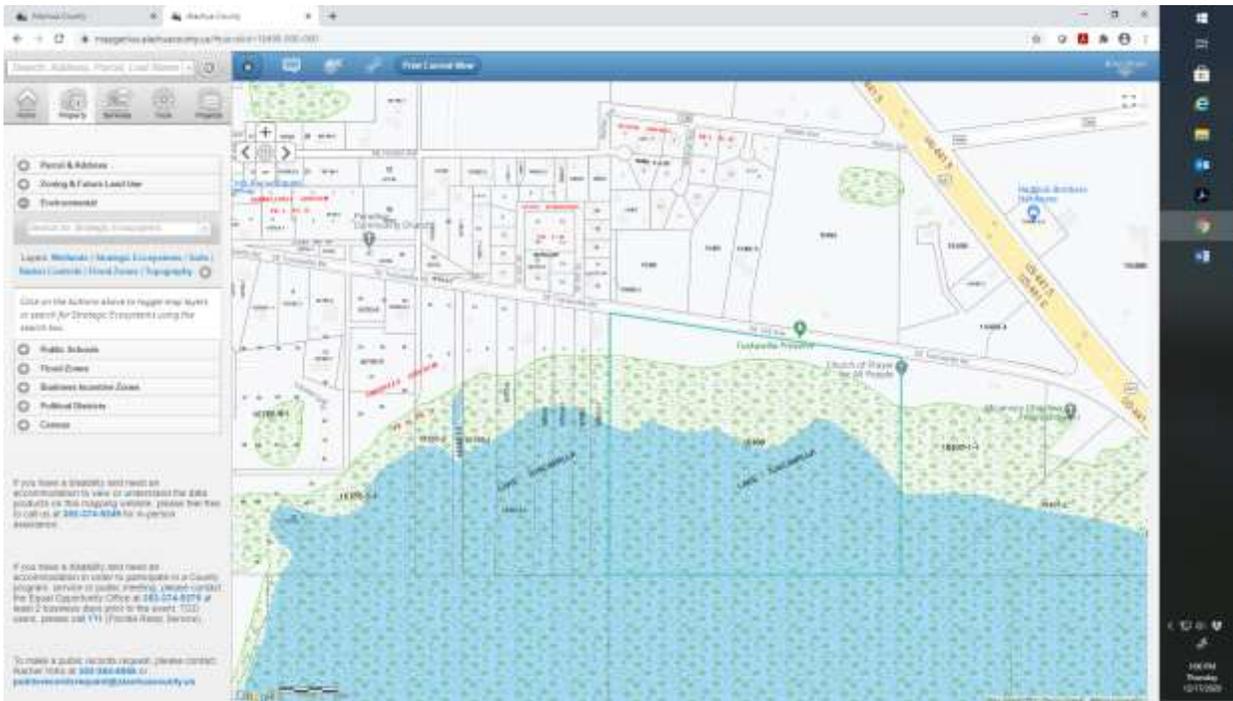
Parcel Layer (Source: <https://mapgenius.alachuacounty.us/> for all maps in this series)



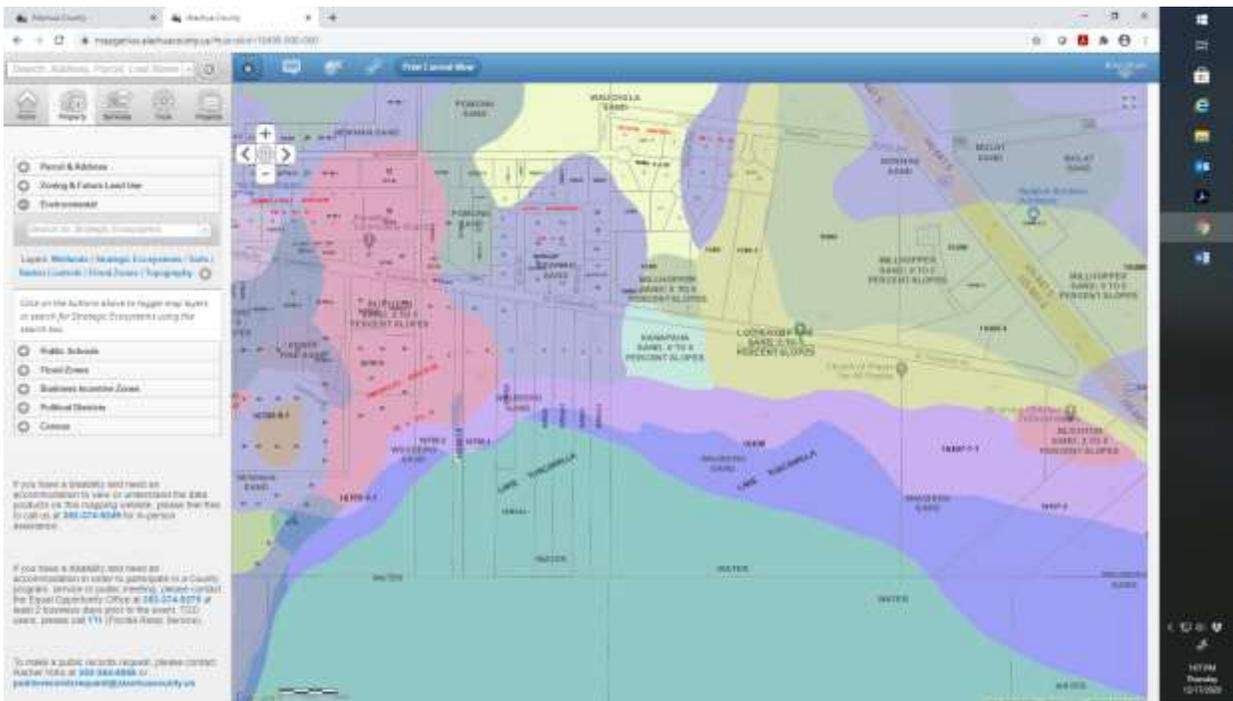
Google Satellite



Wetlands



Soils



REFERENCES

Hawken, Lovins and Lovins. 1999. (Natural Capitalism, Creating the Next Industrial Revolution. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.)

Ingram, Tammy. 2014. *Dixie Highway, Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930*. Chapel Hill, UNC Press.

Old Dixie Highway Map thru Alachua County- "Other National Road"- <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/11544/view/1/1/>

ⁱ Hawken, Lovins and Lovins. 1999. P. (12-13)

ⁱⁱ Ingram, Tammy. 2014. Page 43- "In November 1914 Carl Fisher's proposal to build the first modern automobile highway linking the North and the South provoked a jubilant response. Southern newspapers rushed to endorse the so-called Cotton Belt Route, declaring it "a splendid investment" that would encourage the construction of more roads.....The New York Times dubbed it "The Dixie Peaceway" and declared the route "a memorial....symbolic of the accord between brethren which shall never be broken." (Ralston quoted in "Governors Meeting Called to Make Plans for Great Highway from Chicago to Dixie," Atlanta Constitution, December 13, 1914, 4A. "The Dixie Peaceway," NYT, April 4, 1915, C2. Page 109- "The DHA estimated that 27,000 motorists in nearly 7,000 cars spent \$2,760,000 along the Dixie Highway during the winter season of 2016-2017 alone, though most were bound for Florida." ("Dixie Highway Travel Heavy during Winter," Chicago Daily Tribune, February 18, 1917, D9)





First map published by the Dixie Highway Association, *Dixie Highway*, January 1917, 9.



Red-and-white Dixie Highway markers were usually painted onto telegraph and telephone poles to guide motorists along the route. (Image from Wikipedia Commons, author Parsa)

APPENDIX

Conservation and Open Space Element

OBJECTIVE 5.3 - SCENIC QUALITY

Protect the natural resources and scenic quality of the community to preserve and cultivate a unique sense of place while maintaining economic well-being.

Policy 5.3.1 Alachua County shall develop standards and incentives to protect, maintain, enhance, and improve the landscape and built environment.

Policy 5.3.2 Infrastructure and utility structures, such as communication towers, personal wireless service facilities, radio and television antennas, water and sewer, and energy generation and distribution facilities shall be designed and located to minimize adverse visual impacts on the landscape and avian mortality. Public utilities shall be located underground to the maximum extent possible. The County shall coordinate with local municipalities and public utilities to implement this policy.

Policy 5.3.3 All forms of outdoor advertising shall be designed and located to minimize adverse impacts on the visual quality of the built and natural environments.

Policy 5.3.4 Landscaping of highways and community gateways shall incorporate native vegetation and reflect themes of local history and culture. Tree preservation and planting of low-maintenance native vegetation should be pursued along public rights-of-way throughout the County, with special focus on entranceway corridors.

(a) The County shall promote and protect the visual characteristics of canopy roads through tree planting programs and tree maintenance practices, in cooperation with other agencies and private landowners.

(b) The County shall promote and protect the visual characteristics of wildflower areas through planting programs and maintenance practices, in cooperation with other agencies and private landowners.

Policy 5.3.5 The County shall recognize and participate in voluntary programs for the beautification of public roadways, such as:

(a) I-75, through participation on the I-75 Corridor Council.

(b) FDOT Florida Scenic highways, such as the citizen-initiated designation of a portion of SR 441 and spur road system.

(c) The Transportation map series shall depict the FDOT designation of a portion of SR 441 in Alachua County and related county roads as the Scenic 441 Old Florida Heritage Highway.

(d) Alachua County shall participate in the preservation and protection of the natural and cultural resources of the Scenic 441 Old Florida Heritage Highway by supporting the concepts described in the Scenic 441 Vision Statement, and by providing appropriate resources and support to the Corridor Management Council for implementation of the Corridor Management Plan.

(e) Gateway streets in conjunction with the City of Gainesville and other participating municipalities.

Policy 5.3.6 The County shall enhance the value and beauty of bicycle and pedestrian routes by locating them to take advantage of scenic resources while maintaining the ecological integrity of other conservation and preservation areas.

Policy 5.3.7 The County shall require that adverse impacts of outdoor lighting be minimized in order to preserve the ambiance and quality of the nighttime sky and reduce energy consumption while allowing for public safety and security.

(a) The following conservation principles shall be required:

(1) Minimize offsite lighting impacts, including glare, light trespass, and light pollution.

(2) Use lighting at the appropriate intensity, direction, and times, to ensure light is not overused or impacting areas where it is not intended.

(3) Maximize energy and cost efficiency.

(b) The County shall adopt land development regulations for a comprehensive set of outdoor lighting design standards based on conservation principles.

(c) Land development regulations shall address the outdoor lighting of roadways, parking lots, advertisements, commercial, industrial, residential, municipal and recreational activities.

(d) Current and planned municipal outdoor street lighting shall be evaluated and, where practicable, revised for consistency with conservation principles.

(e) The County shall seek the involvement of all of the local municipalities.

Policy 5.3.8 Development shall avoid and minimize adverse environmental and visual impacts through innovative planning, design, and management practices in the context of the natural features of the landscape, such as topography, vegetative edges, and soil types. Built and natural features shall be harmonized to the greatest extent practicable.

Policy 5.3.9 Alachua County shall identify and protect the scenic quality of the community through special area plans and a Community and Neighborhood Planning Program. Such plans shall include:

(a) Identification of scenic resources, such as viewsheds and scenic corridors, which exhibit unique scenic, historic, architectural, and/or cultural qualities due to tree canopy, substantial wooded fringes, lakes, ponds, streams, wetlands, rocky outcrops, scenic vistas, wildlife populations, wildflowers and/or other appropriate features.

(b) Identification of measures to preserve and enhance the visual, cultural and environmental quality of scenic resources, including development standards and incentives that may include:

-
- (1) Requirements that site plans and planning efforts address preservation and enhancement of the scenic beauty and visual heritage of the community through measures such as:
- a. Locating development in consideration of significant public viewsheds, e.g. off of hilltops and visually sensitive horizon lines.
 - b. The siting, form, scale, and profile of multi-family and non-residential buildings to blend with and preserve the character of the community and natural landscape.
 - c. Use of materials and methods of construction that are specific to the region, exhibiting a continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate to encourage the development of local character and community identity.

(2) Standards for scenic corridors, including:

- a. Setbacks, limitations on removal of existing vegetation, additional restrictions on erection of signs for development adjacent to adopted scenic corridors, and modifications to scenic corridors, so as not to disrupt the canopy vegetation or the historical or natural character of the corridor.
- b. Development and implementation of management plans to maintain each scenic corridor according to its unique attributes.
- c. Minimizing traffic impacts and the limiting driveway access to the scenic corridor.
- d. Prohibiting land use and zoning changes which change the character of designated scenic corridors.
- e. Scenic easements as a means of protecting scenic corridors in collaboration with landowners.

(c) Provisions for adoption in land development regulations of specific, objective design standards for development on lands within the scope of each special area plan.

APPENDIX 2

Sec. 405.41. - Procedure for designation.

(a)

Method of designation.

(1)

Once a request has been received to designate a particular road as a scenic road corridor, staff will review the proposal and prepare a report and recommendation to be presented to the county commission.

(2)

Should staff's report be favorable, the county commission shall give public notice of a hearing to consider designation as a scenic road corridor, in accordance with the requirements of Article 4, Chapter 402 of this ULDC. The notice shall include the following:

a.

Description and location of the corridor and popular name;

b.

Maximum weight limit to be set, if any;

c.

Speed limit to be set, if any;*

d.

Description of the protected area; and

e.

Any other special limitation, restriction or use not covered above which may be imposed along the scenic road corridor.

https://library.municode.com/fl/alachua_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIIIUNLADECO_TIT4OLADERE_CH405SPDIACC_E_ARTIXSCROCOOV

Entire ULDC ARTICLE IX. - SCENIC ROAD CORRIDORS OVERLAY in attachments.

*Comprehensive Plan TME Policy 1.8.5 It shall be the Policy of the Board of County Commissioners that speeds on County roads shall be the minimum necessary to ensure safe and efficient travel. Roads and streets shall be designed with context sensitivity using the techniques in Transportation Mobility Element Policy 1.6.5 to encourage reduced speeds. The County's general policy shall be that proposed posted speed increases shall be brought to the Board for approval along with suggested alternatives.