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SHOULD THE DRI PROCESS BE ABOLISHED?

THOMAS G. WRIGHT, JR.†

I have the privilege of being the last speaker. I will keep it short, but I hope to give you something to think about. My topic today is: Should the DRI process be abolished? But the real question must be not *should*, but *when* and *how* will the DRI process be replaced.

There are three parts of my talk:

First, I have to say some bad things about the DRI process.

Second, I will go over some basic planning concepts, many of which were discussed by speakers earlier today, and I hope that we can agree on most of them.

Third, I will describe one particular governmental structure to implement comprehensive planning in Florida that would function well without the DRI process.

The DRI process is responsible for misdirecting vital resources, thinking, and energy away from a real effort to plan long range for Florida's future. In those areas of the state that have adopted and implemented comprehensive plans, it has proven to be an unnecessary encumbrance to sound economic growth. The DRI process fosters short-term thinking and short-term solutions. What purpose it served in the past has clearly become an obstacle to what we must accomplish in the future.

The DRI process is, and always has been, a large-scale site plan permitting process that forces all participants to use a narrow, short-sighted vision with attention to microscopic detail — creating a rigid result and providing no real grasp on overall long-range needs of the state or the community.

The ELMS II Committee and Speaker's Water Task Force Reports point out that only five percent of the housing in the state falls under the DRI process. The DRI process was created when there was no real planning at any level of government to focus attention on and force a review of large scale developments. However, the vast majority of development in Florida has occurred at a scale far below the DRI threshold level. The original need for the DRI process is gone and its continued existence does not contribute to achieving the long-term goals of the state.

It has been said that the DRI process "has strong thumbs but weak fingers," and we all know of examples that prove it to be so.

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The nightmares of the DRI process have been told before. The de Cordis project in Dade County recently brought out under a harsh light the economic growth that Florida's future must have.

Studying the DRI process and attempting to expand it, to reform it, to make it an incentive, or to make it less of a waste of valuable time, money, and resources, have for years drained the creative energy of some of the best minds in this state away from what this state so badly needs: true *long-range* comprehensive planning at the state level *and* at the local government level.

There are some fundamental concepts of comprehensive planning we should consider:

†A comprehensive planning process must give all growth and development in this state equal consideration and attention.

†Development and its effects — good or bad — should be considered, evaluated, and provided for in light of the state's needs and capabilities, and in light of the needs and capabilities of the local governments in the area where development will take place.

†Each state agency needs to have a plan which is consistent with state goals, local requirements, and the functional plans of other state agencies.

†All of these plans need to be aimed towards government fulfilling its obligations to existing and future residents.

†It is the responsibility of the state and the local governments to allow people to live where they choose and to be prepared to provide for their needs. If, however, the development of certain geographical areas would destroy a public right or damage the health, safety, or welfare of the state's citizens, then those areas must be specified and put off-limits before development intrudes.

In simpler terms, the comprehensive planning process can do what the DRI process has failed to do — plan, long-range, to accommodate the growth which everyone says is inevitable.

State and local comprehensive plans should focus on positive ways to provide for the inevitable growth; they should authorize and encourage creation of new urban centers and new communities, as well as the expansion of existing communities, whenever the funding and management of basic infrastructure facilities will be available as market and economic forces dictate.

Local governments have and should continue to have primary responsibility for growth management in Florida; therefore, local comprehensive plans are the key element in planning for Florida's growth. The state must establish its long-range comprehensive planning goals and implement agency plans that are consistent

with those goals. There must be consistency in statewide comprehensive planning.

Each local comprehensive plan must be consistent with the state comprehensive plan. It will be necessary to provide the state with an effective mechanism to assure that all development decisions of local government are consistent with the adopted plans.

There is a lot for everyone to gain from comprehensive planning. It is always true that in order to achieve something worthwhile, a price must be paid; we must all pay our share of that price. For example:

†The state must accept that real comprehensive planning, as with any sound political process, starts and ends at the grass roots with each local government.

†Cities and counties must accept the necessity of adopting plans that are consistent with the goals of the state comprehensive plan.

†Regional Planning Councils must accept a narrowly focused and helpful role, and when that role is fulfilled, get out of the way so that the city, county, and state agencies with the authority and responsibility to implement plans for their constituencies can do their job.

†Developers small and large must accept that long-range comprehensive planning is the only way to acquire the certainty that comes from advance knowledge of how they can use their land, a reliable warning if there are dangers to proceeding with development, and the flexibility of an efficient process to change the plan when they can prove they have a better idea.

The challenge for Florida is to develop a governmental structure for a comprehensive planning and implementation system — one which encourages good planning and provides proper controls for all development within the state. A governmental system which does not rely on the DRI process could be structured as follows:

1. At the state level

The state would continue with the development and implementation of its state plan and the requisite agency plans.

2. At the regional level

Regional Planning Councils would not adopt their own separate comprehensive plans; instead each RPC would be responsible for making recommendations regarding the formulation of regional subelements of the state plan. The RPCs would become the regional planning arm of the state. The staffs of the RPCs would be employees of the State of Florida and the State Planning Agency. The Regional Planning Councils could have the power, under cer-

tain circumstances, to issue an order staying any development order granted by a local government which is proven to be inconsistent with either the local or state plan. Any citizen within the region could file an objection with the RPC questioning the consistency of a development order issued by local government. Finally, the Regional Planning Council could be given the power to site locally unpopular facilities that involve overriding state interests. This could be done despite conflicts with the local government's comprehensive plan and local land use regulations.

3. At the local level

Local plans would have to be consistent with the state plan. Local governments would have to adopt and implement long-range capital improvement programs. The local plan and capital improvement program would be submitted to the State Planning Agency for a substantive review. Those local governments which adopt and implement comprehensive plans would be responsible for *all* development review within the jurisdiction of the local government. The DRI process would not be applicable in those jurisdictions. If the RPC determined that a local government did not have adequate plans and regulations to manage a particular development issue, then the RPC could ask the State Planning Agency to revoke the local government's right to review and regulate that particular development issue. Any local government could request the assistance of the RPC during the development review process. Local plans could be changed when and as desired by local government so long as the changes were not inconsistent with the state plan.

In conclusion, allow me to point out that the DRI process does not work as it was intended and there must be a legislative commitment in 1985 that it be replaced.

Primary planning responsibilities must remain with local governments. The DRI process can be phased out when and where the local government has an adequate comprehensive plan and development regulations in place.

We will never be able to think and plan long range about the future development and growth of Florida so long as the DRI process is described as the cornerstone of Florida's growth management program and is portrayed as the symbol of Florida's commitment to manage growth. That symbol has become a facade that must be dismantled so that a sound structure can be erected.