



Florida Needs an Urban Policy

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All across Florida cities and counties are battling over annexation. On Monday the City of Orlando discussed annexing approximately 6,300 acres running from I-4 to Orange Blossom Trail and from Sand Lake Road to the Bee Line Expressway. The area includes most of I-drive and the county's convention center.

The city argues that the county had already agreed that the city could annex this area in a joint planning agreement or JPA signed years ago. The county claims that the JPA is void and that the annexation is nothing more than an attempt by the city to capture a very lucrative tax base that would cost county tax payers about \$10 million per year.

Furthermore, the county complains that it has invested over \$3 billion in infrastructure to serve this area and cannot recoup this investment if the land is annexed into the city. Passions are high and a court challenge is all but assured. Unfortunately, this type of controversy is occurring all across Florida as cities and counties compete for tax revenues and to provide profitable services to constituents. And often it is also (surprise, surprise) about power – the power to control land uses.

Landowners are increasingly exploiting this city/county competition to obtain development rights and to alter comprehensive plans that are designed to manage growth. The fundamental problem is that the State of Florida has never established an urban growth policy that would guide cities and counties. The state has never determined which unit of local government should be in the urban services business, what services counties should provide, and when should cities take the lead? This is very unfortunate and completely avoidable.

However, today cities and counties fight over territory and they rarely consolidate costly public services, such a police and fire protection that could exploit

economies of scale thereby reducing costs. In Orange County alone the county is battling with the Orlando and Apopka over these issues. You can only imagine what is happening in a place like Palm Beach County with over 30 municipalities. The governor has made growth management one of his priorities in this upcoming legislative session. It would be great if the Department of Community Affairs would put forth an urban policy for our state that would guide cities and counties in the provision of urban services and would stop the divisive battles between these crucial providers of expensive public services.

This is Hank Fishkind for 90.7 FM, WMFE News.

<http://www.fishkind.com>