

August 23, 2014

The Honorable Priscilla Taylor, Mayor
and Commissioners
Palm Beach County Board of Commissioners
301 N. Olive Ave.
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

RE: Minto West Ag Enclave Project

Dear Mayor Taylor and Commissioners:

I am writing on behalf of 1000 Friends of Florida, a 501(c)(3) growth management advocacy nonprofit with many members in Palm Beach County. Given the legislative findings in Chapter 163.3162(2), F.S., under the Agricultural Lands and Practices Act, the County has no choice regarding the transmittal of the proposed project. However, there are important reasons discussed below for the County to **raise objections** regarding the Minto West project with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity as part of its review.

Within the constraints of the Agricultural Enclave process found in Chapter 163.3162, F.S., your staff has worked in good faith negotiations to amend into the comprehensive plan new urbanist planning principles for this 3,735 acre site. However, the **magnitude of the increase** being requested in dwelling units (**50%** from 2,996 to 4, 546) and non-residential square footage (**800%** from 235,000 to 2,200,000), plus a 150 room hotel and 3,000 student college campus, is **simply out of character with the surrounding areas**. This area of Palm Beach County **cannot reasonably maintain its rural character** while becoming a regional economic, employment or retail center. The traffic impacts alone are enough, even without completed traffic surveys, to **call into question the reasonableness of the proposed increase**.

Such critical information has only been provided publicly in the last week. Without a staff report assessing the adequacy of this information, can the Commission be expected to make an informed decision? And are we correct in understanding this was only required for zoning and not planning review? Being aware of other proposed new developments in this same area, including Avenir (Vavrus), G.L. Homes, and Highland Dunes, it is not surprising that **traffic objections have been voiced by the Indian Trails Improvement District, Loxahatchee Groves, Royal Palm Beach, and several neighborhood groups**. The staff report actually states that the "...traffic analysis is ongoing and a full determination of the traffic impacts and associated mitigation **will be available prior to the adoption public hearing of the FLUA amendment**" (p.23, E.1). What level of road impacts are anticipated? What will be the applicant's

Mayor Taylor and Commissioners

August 23, 2014

page 2

Appropriate proportionate share payment? Has staff agree with the applicant's final, revised, concurrency analysis? What would approval of this project mean for the other proposed developments in the area? How can an informed discussion and decision, both from a policy and fiscal standpoint on this project, be made without this critical information? Clearly, prior to any planning consideration, there needs to be a comprehensive review and assessment of the transportation network in western Palm Beach County regarding existing built, existing approved but unbuilt, and proposed residential development.

The magnitude of proportionate share costs to the applicant are indicative of the traffic impacts from the proposed project. Several roadway improvements have either been started or approved to address some, but not all, of the current roadway deficiencies. However, from the applicant's own revised traffic concurrency report of 8/14/14, the proportionate share cost is estimated to be \$55, 172, 497. Those dollars are meant to deal with many needed improvements involving increasing 2 lane roads to 4 lanes, 4 lane roads to 6 lanes, and even some increases from 6 to 8 lanes. Given that this is only the applicant's "fair share", it means that any identified problem will NOT be fixed until the county, state, and/or taxpayers come forward with their shares. Is this something County taxpayers are inclined to do? And regardless of the fiscal question, are these the types of road "improvements" one would expect to find in a rural, low density community?

You are also aware that your very own **Planning Commission denied this proposed project not once but twice**. In part, its judgment considered the **current allowed land uses of 2,996 residential units and 235,000 square feet of commercial and institutional space to be more in keeping with the surrounding rural area**. In fact, the County agreed in 2008 that this level of development was compatible with the surrounding area. At its 8/8/14 meeting, a 12-1 DENIAL recommendation was made even though it supported the overall design concept proposed. However, this recent, overwhelming denial vote was based on issues of compatibility with the existing Rural and Exurban Tiers, the proposed intensity of the nonresidential development, the lack of analysis on traffic, the need for quantifiable public benefits and commitments from the developer to addressing these issues. What has changed since that time?

Of course this **project could proceed without the need to increase density or intensity**, modify the existing conceptual plan and implementing principles, expand the acreage, or modify text language in the comprehensive plan. Five (5) previous planning studies in this general area **confirmed the citizens' preference for a low density, rural lifestyle** that did not include a regional employment center, and/or large retail and institutional uses. It is not reasonable to

Mayor Taylor and Commissioners

August 23, 2014

page 3

assume that something like the nearby Wellington Green Mall, with 1,300,000 square feet of retail space, can be compatible with a rural community lifestyle. However, the **amount of non-residential square footage being requested, 2.2 Million square feet, is more similar in scale to the Sawgrass Mills Mall in Broward County** - it has 2.4 Million square feet and boasts of drawing 26 Million visitors annually. Does that sound like a rural density or intensity amenity?

We believe it should be **seriously questioned how and why a five (5) mile radius to determine surrounding population density was selected**. It appears that this arbitrary figure was selected in order to meet the 1000 residents/square mile criterion of Chapter 163.3164(4), F.S. A larger radius may well have produced a different result, one that would subject the project to an urban sprawl analysis. Additional questions should be raised regarding the **appropriateness of using non-residential multipliers from the 2008 sector plan remedial amendment when such figures would have been derived from the time just before the housing bubble burst and Florida, like other states, experienced a recession**. Those figures, combined with the 50% increase in the proposed residential densities, also contributed to the justification of the significant increase in non-residential land uses (an 800% increase).

The most important environmental issue for this project is **drainage**. But as critical as this is, **no definitive resolution** has been reached regarding drainage to the **C-51 canal to benefit Lake Worth Lagoon, Loxahatchee Slough or the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River**. No agreement has been reached with West Palm Beach and its drinking water reservoir at **Grassy Waters Preserve**. And finally, **no comprehensive agreement(s) with the SFWMD has been reached concerning the project's role in the region with respect to flood control, water flows, and storage**. In fact, SFWMD indicated it would need to restart the federal planning process to comprehensively assess regional water needs in this area. As noted previously regarding transportation considerations, how can an informed decision be made without such critical information?

To conclude, **the Minto West project as proposed is out of scale with the rural character of the surrounding community**. The transportation impacts due to significant density increases (50%) for residential units and major institutional square footage space (800%), as well as unresolved drainage issues, simply show that the proposed **project is not compatible with existing development**. To the extent that this site is appropriate for some level of development, we **ask that the Commission to voice its objections** on this basis, and work with the applicant and surrounding communities to develop a project using the 2,996 residential units and 235,000 square feet of commercial uses already authorized.

Mayor Taylor and Commissioners

August 23, 2014

page 4

We respectfully request that this correspondence be made part of the public hearing record when this project is considered on August 27, 2014. Thanking you for your time and considerations, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles G. Pattison". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "C".

Charles G. Pattison

Policy Director