



Cooperative Growth Management Is Key to Supporting Community and Preserving Environment

PANAMA CITY, FL - A lot of people would have you believe that conservation and development are mutually exclusive. While the history of much of Florida would appear to support that belief, many groups here in Bay County have joined forces to ensure that the special character and beauty of this area will prevail as the community continues to grow and prosper.

Take a good look around the West Bay area, and you'll be rewarded with some of the most beautiful views of land and water in the world. But what you don't see makes for a much more interesting story. Because the West Bay area is the center point of one of the largest land planning efforts ever to be initiated in the Southeast. The West Bay Sector Plan pro-actively plans for long-term growth and the management of that growth to create a more sustainable and livable community. It encompasses conservation, land planning and land uses well into the future.

How does it all fit with a growing local economy in an area that's increasingly attractive to new businesses and new residents? Amazingly well, when you have a vision, build consensus among the many groups affected, and stick to your plan. "The West Bay Area Vision is a strong example of how careful, long-range planning can blend a future of growth with good stewardship of the land, conservation of biodiversity and protection of the natural beauty of a place" says Billy Buzzett, Director of Strategic Planning for The St. Joe Company. "Not many communities take the kind of comprehensive approach to the future that is going into place right here in Bay County."

The West Bay Area Vision is a cooperative initiative between Bay County, The Panama City-Bay County International Airport Authority, and The St. Joe Company. The goal is to effectively balance the dynamics of growth, development, business and community through compatible land use and sequenced development in order to foster enduring communities. There's also a strong commitment to natural greenways, wide-open spaces, parks and buffer-lands that will retain the biodiversity and protect the watershed.

"When you step back and look at the area," Buzzett continues, "it becomes obvious that a few bold moves now can have a truly beneficial long term effect for the region. There's no doubt more growth is coming. By acting now, we can manage it and maintain our quality of life." Most local visionaries agree that one of the key steps in this process is relocating and enlarging the airport, allowing easier access into and out of the area. Such relocation would assist in noise abatement for current and future area residents, create better ground traffic patterns, and provide a clearer path to preserving the character of residential areas. There's also a huge economic development impact. Currently, there's

very little room for industry to locate near the current airport. So a new relocated airport will not only boost tourism and convention travel, it could also be a catalyst for new economic growth. Even Tyndall Air Force Base is supportive of the positive impact of airport relocation, which potentially reduces the threat of military base closing.

Adds Buzzett, "Once an area is 'discovered' growth is a given. How that growth occurs can be managed for the benefit of all. We have here an unprecedented opportunity to prove that."