I’ve just attended the annual Greenprints conference sponsored by Southface Energy Institute. Nearly 1200 participants from around the world meet to discuss ways to continue to grow communities that are healthy, economically strong, environmentally functional and socially just. Sessions support the theme, Sustainable Communities by Design, and invite design and construction professionals to learn, share and interact.

Green building and sustainable development incorporate all aspects of the construction process from conceptual design through construction, owner occupancy and deconstruction. The planning process includes factors such as water conservation, energy conservation, durability, materials selection, indoor air quality and waste management.

David Eisenberg, Director of the Development Center for Applied Technology, explained, "Green building will be an obsolete term". As people learn more about changes in building materials and new building science research and technology, they will begin to think differently and green building practices will become standard instead of an option. Think back about seatbelts and airbags that used to be options but are now standard vehicle equipment. Builders will no longer offer less efficient construction options that have detrimental effects on human health and the environment just because they cost less. The benefits will not just be philosophical but obvious.

Green improvements often add to the cost of construction and development, resulting in customer "sticker shock" and perceptions that lower priced competitors are the best deal. Builders offering "green" features understand the long term benefits and consider it the "cure for the common call back" which costs businesses thousands of dollars in followup labor and repairs after owner occupancy. When customers are given adequate information about the long term personal and community savings and the less tangible benefits of health, safety and comfort, the choices for sustainability and green construction become more obvious. New finance packages take into account monthly savings and make green homes more affordable than standard construction.

The Florida Green Building Coalition, a team of building professionals, business leaders, researchers, government officials and utility companies was established to help communities and building professionals move the effort forward across the state. The group developed voluntary standards and reference documents for Green Home construction and green development.

University of Florida/IFAS Osceola County Extension offers classes for home buyers and builders to help them understand green practices and learn about new finance options that make green buildings affordable. Call 321-697-3000 for a schedule.

Several local builders have embraced green building and sustainable development. The Board of County Commissioners has indicated support as well and the Osceola County Planning Department is working to develop a plan to support this goal for our communities.

Citizens are invited to help in development of the County’s new plan to meet those goals known as the Comprehensive Plan or Comp Plan. This document includes many chapters that outline, in general terms, steps to help decision makers and various county offices work toward the goals. Chapters address issues relating to protecting our drinking water supply and environment, transportation, public education, economic development, drainage, social services, historic preservation and growth. Later, following adoption of the Comp Plan, specific regulations, called the Land Development Codes, will be drafted.
The County Planning Department is in the process of posting updated drafts of the chapters of the Comp Plan on their web site. The revisions are a result of a process called Evaluation Assessment and Review (EAR) which reviewed the old document for a variety of factors like a report card. The updated amendments include suggestions based on changing issues and awareness. Go to osceola.org, use the search feature and enter the words EAR based amendments.

Each chapter of the Comp Plan has a section that includes data and analysis (D&A) with loads of background information and an inventory of the current situation. An additional section contains goals, objective and policies (GOP) that outline things that should be done based on the current status and desired future situation. These must be measurable and often include a timeline so it will be easy to determine if the policy has been implemented. County staff feel this is important for accountability to the citizens. Many of the chapters are interrelated and have policies that link one to the other.

Citizens are invited to review chapters of interest and provide comments and suggestions to the Planning Department before March 13 in order to be included in drafts reviewed by the Planning Commission on April 17 and the Board of County Commissioners on May 5, 2003. Revised drafts will be posted on the web site as they become available so look at the document date.

Citizens are also invited to attend a series of workshops for the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners and hear summaries presented by county staff. Input will be accepted at these meetings as well. For more information about the Comp Plan or to confirm dates of the public workshops, contact the Osceola County Planning Department at 407-343-3100.

You have a stake in your future. Become involved now as your future is being planned, either with or without you.

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