Alachua County, Florida Open Space Program

Alachua County in Florida is incentivizing low impact development (LID) and acquiring natural areas in order to protect water resources, wildlife habitat, and provide for outdoor recreation. To assess the effect on tax revenues of natural area conservation, Alachua County evaluated how land conservation is impacting property value and associated tax revenues. The analysis showed that, by increasing property values by an estimated $197 million, preserving open space increased annual property taxes in the county by $4.6 million. The analysis did not consider how property taxes would have increased if the land were developed.

Objectives of the Program

- Protect open space to enhance quality of life for residents.
- Enhance water resources.
- Protect wildlife habitat.
- Provide natural areas for outdoor recreation.

Program Costs and Funding

A key objective of the county’s land acquisition program is to maximize local investment by partnering with all levels of government, from local to federal. Between 2001 and 2013, two-thirds of natural area land acquisition funds came from outside sources, which have included state and federal grant programs, acquiring lands in partnership with regional water management districts, transportation mitigation funds, partnering with non-profit organizations, and facilitating charitable donations of land and cash. In both 2000 and 2008, residents voted to raise taxes in order to help fund the program.

Similarly, in North Central Texas, the City of Cedar Hill has established the goal of open space comprising 20 percent of Cedar Hill land use. The city is actively acquiring land for parks and open spaces to reach this goal. The city aims to preserve natural landscapes and serve the city’s population by integrating park, greenbelt, streetscapes, and other public open spaces into its urban area.

Key Program Benefits

- Proximity to open space resulted in higher property values of $10,500 to $13,100 per property, or an approximately 5 to 7 percent increase.
- Increased property value increased tax revenues by approximately $4.6 million.
- Preserving natural areas also enhances overall resident quality of life, not just residents of homes proximate to natural areas.
- Natural areas provide recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, enhanced air quality, and protection of water resources.

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