

MIAKKA with an "I"
February 2021
By Becky Ayech

HAPPY FEBRUARY! And not only is it hard to believe we are already in February, but 2021!

SO, what are the signs about in front of Hi Hat Ranch?

Hi Hat Ranch is seeking two actions from our County Commissioners.

1. They are requesting a change from Hamlet to Village. Hamlets and Villages are options for developing on the Ranch.
2. They are requesting that their Master Development Plan (MDP) and their Master Development Order (MDO) be adopted under the Development of Criteria Concern (DOCC) review process.

Is that enough alphabet soup?

WHAT IS HI HAT RANCH?

Hi Hat Ranch is an undeveloped 9,942.95 acre± site, predominately used for cattle ranching and other agriculture activities. Characteristic of Southwest Florida, the site is comprised of mixed rangeland, improved pasture, lands of high environmental value, as well as a number of freshwater marshes and wet prairies. Located to the east of the Urban Growth Boundary, the Hi Hat Ranch site is governed under both the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Regulations, as well as the optional 2050 Comprehensive Plan overlay (that is the Hamlet and Village designations) and Zoning Regulations. The land that comprises Hi Hat Ranch has the designation of Rural (R) on the Sarasota County Future Land Use Map. This designation is intended to preserve the agricultural lands, open space and natural habitats within the County; typically, these rural areas are limited to a maximum density of **one unit to five acres**.

Hi Hat Ranch is made up of three optional designations: Village, Hamlet, and Greenway.

THE PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE AMENDMENT CPA-2019-D

The Comprehensive Plan Amendment {CPA} seeks to change the Resource Management Area (RMA) designation for 1,259 acres± in the northeastern area of the property from Hamlet (H) to Village {V}.

Hi Hat says "**This change in designation will allow for the more thoughtful and comprehensive planning and development of the Hi Hat Ranch in its entirety**. Allowing for this change in designation enables the Hi Hat Ranch to achieve the goals of the district giving the **"flexibility to respond to market demands and the needs of tenants, and residents, which provide a variety of physically functionally integrated land uses."** With the proximity of the Village RMA designated land on Hi Hat Ranch to the south, the re-designation of the northern Hamlet area to Village will thoroughly enable consistent residential access to Village services across the ranch."

What does that mean/? You got it, they want to pave over more of the rural area. Counting the 6,000 acres on the north side of Fruitville Road, there is only 7,259 acres remaining in "country". How can 8,683 acres not be enough? Make no mistake, the Village design is URBAN.

The Village overlay, in theory, provides an opportunity for higher density, compact, mixed use development as an alternative to large lot Urban Sprawl in order to minimize infrastructure costs, traffic congestion, and environmental degradation.

Hi Hat says they want to be able to spread the Village out. How is that compact?

Hi Hat says that if they don't get this change, people won't have consistent access to services across the Ranch. Are they going to put up a road block between the Hamlet and Village if they don't get the change?

At the Sarasota Planning Commission meeting, Jim Turner (Hi Hat) said "the land was environmentally benign". Yet, the United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in the Soil Survey of Sarasota County, Florida says "*Habitat for openland wildlife* consists of cropland, pasture... Wildlife attracted to these areas include bobwhite quail, dove, meadowlark, field sparrow, cottontail, red fox, armadillo, and sand hill crane." So much for having no environmental value.

Jim Turner also said all that is there is row crops and who wants to look at that, just tomatoes and wooden sticks. Frankly, I like to look at them. When I am in the country, I like to see vegetables growing, isn't that rural? When someone asks me what it is, I tell them that is where we grow wooden sticks. That pretty soon there will be leaves on the sticks. I also tell people chocolate milk comes from brown cows. People who believe these comments will probably end up living in a Village.

Another thing that will change is the allowable density. Villages allow up to 6 units per acre. Hamlets maximum density is 1 unit per acre. Villages only require 50% open space, while Hamlets require 60%.

Mr. Turner said because they are going to have a high school on 70 acres to meet the current deficient and 100 acres for a needed sport complex, they should get the change. I can't figure why 1,200 acres is needed to make up for the 170 acres of public use.

And, if the Village is suppose to be for the villagers needs, why are we concerned about there not being enough high school space now? The Village is supposed to eliminate the need for using cars to get your daily needs and here we are proposing to bring people into the Village from somewhere west of the Village?

This development is not supposed to start right away. How can it then meet the current high school needs deficit?

Flexibility to market demands means I can change the plan so I can make more money regardless if it is good planning or rural destruction.

And finally, will they be thoughtless in their planning gif the proposed CPA-2019-D is not adopted?

The second request is to have the MDP/MDO adopted.

This is what the Miakka Community Club provided to the Planning Commission:

The Applicant, Hi Hat Ranch has provided you with a plethora of information.

Unfortunately, one criterial piece of information is missing and many of the guarantees hinge upon that information.

While many maps were provided, the map showing where the Villages are going to be located is not clear at all. I understand there may be 3 or 4 Villages, but I could not find a map that so indicates the locations.

Much of the information provided is relative to the timing of the Villages, specifically infrastructure, discussing the incremental development of utilities.

The Applicant has indicated that the first Village would be located at the Hi Hat Ranch offices. This location is akin to a hole in the doughnut. The road to the offices is located on Fruitville Road, 2.1 miles from the Ranch's western boundary. It would be safe to say this would most likely be the same distance from Bee Ridge Road. This would necessitate running utilities' lines either from the Bee Ridge Road facilities or from the extension of utilities out to the Hamlet known as Lakepark Estates. This would be 'leaping' over lands where it would make more planning sense to begin the Villages and then move easterly.

Therefore, the responses provided discussing these phasing approaches is meritless.

The MDP MUST show the location of at least the first Village

WATER QUALITY

The Applicant has provided information on monitoring and testing the SURFACE water quality, but is offering nothing for ground water protection.

The Applicant has several wells for the agricultural operation (see attached Water Use Permit).

The Applicant is purporting to use these ag wells as back up wells for lawn irrigation, if the backup lakes and stormwater ponds fail and that is only after the reclaimed water is not available.

The agricultural wells MUST NOT be used as the third way to water lawns. Existing legal users that are in the Hi Hat Ranch area only have their domestic wells to meet ALL their needs. Many of the wells on Hi Hat are drilled deep and cased shallow, allowing upward migration of poor-quality water, when then moves laterally into domestic wells. (See attached minutes from the Southwest Florida Water management District Governing Board {SWFWMD] meeting. And well construction records from Sarasota Health Department)

The Ranch is located in the SWFWMD's Southern Use Water Caution Area (SWUCA) where ground water withdrawals are not only causing upward migration of poor-quality water but also saltwater intrusion. The proper plugging and abandonment of these wells would help the existing legal domestic well users and the Florida Aquifer and the Arcadian Aquifer.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The Applicant stated that the aggregate mining will continue, not only for financial reasons, but because the development will need the fill.

There are NO NATURAL LAKES on the property. While ultimately, they will provide nice lake front property, this changes the whole ecosystem. Species that are currently not on the property will be drawn to the large water source. These may include predator species that would kill exiting species. The flora and fauna would change as well and again the existing flora and fauna support a myriad of species which may not be able to utilize the deep water.

Recognition MUST be given to the potential species changes and plans MUST be provided to show how this change would be mitigated.

The Applicant states they will create new wetlands by scraping off the top soil and importing the appropriate wetland soils. Healthy, thriving wetlands need a hydrological regime.

The Applicant did not provide data and information on sites where this type of creation was successful not data showing how many have failed. There wasn't any information provided to show how the hydrological needs of the wetlands would be met. In phosphate mining, as an example, wetlands that are mitigated are held to a hydrological regime that is artificially maintained by the phosphate company until they are released as 'successful' by DEP.

The Applicant must show how they are going to accomplish this wetland by" scrape land and create a new wetland" scheme.

TRAFFIC

During the Workshop and then in a smaller meeting, the Applicant lamented the ugliness of the approach to the Mai Entrance to the Villages from extending Bee Ridge Road, forcing residents to pass the County's Water Treatment Plant, the Hazardous Waste Collection Facility, the Animal Shelter and Rothenbach Park. He stated the roadway in this area would have to be realigned and that the Applicant would have to build a bridge across Cow Pen Slough.

An alternative road, with a beautiful country (at least for now) view would be to use the existing road leading into the Ranch from Fruitville Road. This would add additional congestion to an already over taxed, constrained scenic road.

Again, this is why at least **the first Village should be located on the western boundary of the Ranch and should so be indicated on the map.**

DO NOT ADOPT THE MASTER PLAN AND DEVELOPMENT ORDER FOR HI HAT RANCH UNTIL THESE ISSUES HAVE BEEN ADDRESSED.

PLEASE CONTACT SARASOTA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AND LET THEM KNOW YOUR FEELINGS ON CHANGING THE "HAMLET" TO "VILLAGE" PROPOSAL.

USE THE ISSUES RAISED BY THE MIAKKA COMMUNITY CLUB TO JUSTIFY YOUR REQUEST TO NOT ADOPT THE MASTER DEVELOPMENT PLAN and DEVELOPMENT ORDER.

SARASOTA COMMISSIONERS;

MIKE MORAN -mmoran@scgov.net; NANCY DETERT – ncdetert@scgov.net; AL MAIO – amaio@scgov.net; CHRISTAIN ZIEGLER – ziegler@scgov.net and RON CUTSINGER – rcutsinger@scgov.net.

THE DATE FOR THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S IS MARCH 23.

FENCES

I am sometimes asked about different types of fencing for containing your animals. My response is always the same" It is not about the type of fence, it is about making your animals want to stay in the fence. I have never seen a fence that will keep an animal in if it wants to get out'.

With that in mind, REMEMBER, we are a rural community and our animals can get out when they want. It is a good thing that most of the time they don't want out, but there is always the chance that they will.

My neighbor's horses got spooked and went through the fence and ended up on Miakka Road. Someone hit one of them, almost ripping off it's head. Whoever killed this horse choice not to own up. I am sure they were not following the 40 mph speed limit.

Take your time on your way home. Enjoy the rural view. Follow the speed limits. This is a community, not the means to an end.

Have a good un'

Thank you to Miakka Schoolhouse Supporters Myakka Rand and Feed, Florida Native Plants, and Fruitville Feed.