

BY PARKER NEILS



*"Everything that is good
and that is bad in the flesh
is to be found in Florida."*

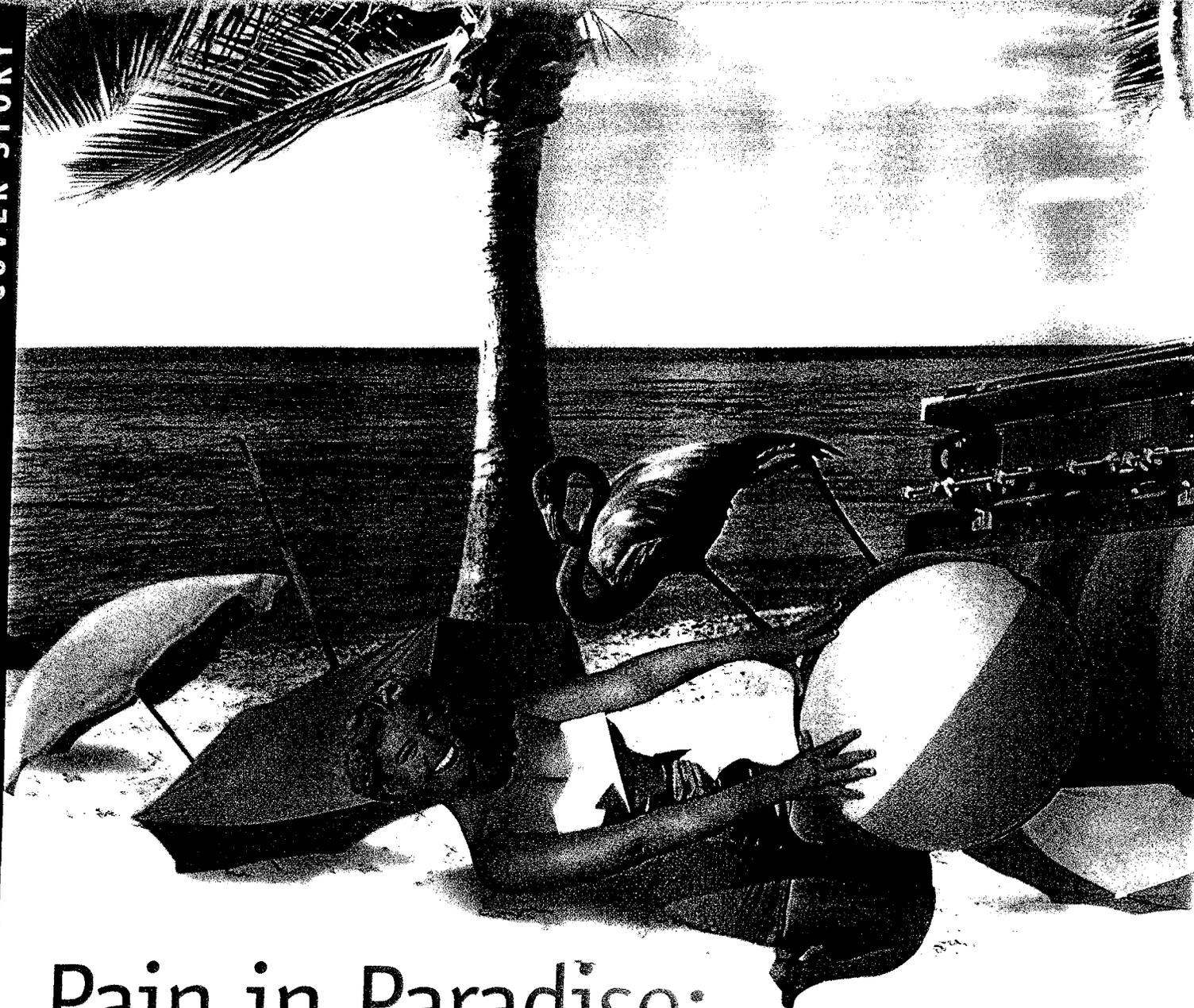
An old style evangelist's summary appraisal of Miami's sex-soaked South Beach? Not even close. But the speaker was most definitely a preacher of sorts—an evangelist for building livable cities the right way, the first time.

In the 1920s, John Nolen, a Harvard-trained Boston consultant and widely acclaimed city-planning guru, found in Florida a "great laboratory of city and town planning." In 1923, Nolen was hired by the City of St. Petersburg to draft what would become the state's first comprehensive plan for building a city.

Lauded for his work, Nolen saw in Florida enormous potential for becoming a national icon for states interested in rational expansion of their living space. Nolen called upon Florida's ➤

FIX-ALL

ecades and 7 million more Floridians, should the plan be salvaged or scrapped?



Pain in Paradise:

FLORIDA'S FAILED

A noble effort to manage growth, launched in 1985, is shipwrecked. After two

PAIN IN PARADISE

leaders to establish a system of planned cities that would model the nation's urban future and ensure that "progress in civic development in Florida will be much more rapid and thorough than in the other commonwealths."

A half-century later, the Sunshine State emerged from the backwater of Southern politics to pass a law much like Nolen had proposed. Overnight, Florida became a national leader in what had become a new imperative for cities across the country—growth management.

In 1985, Florida's Governor Bob Graham surprised critics by winning broad bipartisan support for the landmark 1985 Growth Management Act, the most ambitious city planning agenda ever to become law. The bill's passage culminated a battle that

professional city planners had been waging since the days of the visionary Nolen. Finally, Florida—already in the throes of the fastest growth in the nation—had the statutory teeth to clamp down on bad development.

Or did it? Twenty years on, has Florida's once-heralded Growth Management Act done anything to even slow down—much less stop—the worst abuses growth has wrought on wetlands, on resources—on *us*? If so, how can one tell?

Taking even a cursory glance at the state today, one can fairly ask: Has the Florida Dream morphed into the Florida Nightmare? Since 1970, the state's population has exploded, vaulting from 6.8 million to 18.3 million in 2007, a feat that more than tripled

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...the landmark 1985 Growth Management Act...the most ambitious city
...to become law.

the nation's growth rate during this period. All this new population pressure has spun a chaotic tableau that borders on bad fiction.

- In a state where water once was considered a providential curse, Florida—still dependent on wells for over 90 percent of its tap water—is running dry. “Water wars,” which have cost local governments in the Tampa area millions since 1990, are migrating east and south, as communities are forced to deal with yet more growth amid a protracted drought that drops the water table lower each day.
- Even as a seven-year-old, \$10 billion effort to undo historic manmade damage to the Everglades’ ecosystem plods along, the region is getting squeezed like never before. By all accounts, huge new developments and agri-business appear to be going about business as usual, oblivious to stresses on South Florida’s existing water supplies, roads and utilities.
- Orlando, Tampa, West Palm Beach and Miami have become the most lethal places in the nation for pedestrians. Orlando and St. Petersburg are so plagued by “road rage” they’ve been called the two angriest cities in the U.S.
- Florida’s world-famous fisheries, once thought inexhaustible, are in serious trouble. Pollution from urban run-off, combined with wholesale destruction of wetlands by developers, has destroyed more than 2 million acres of the state’s seagrass, vital habitat for many fish and shellfish species. Fishing pressure on dozens of saltwater species has grown to the point where draconian catch limits are undermining the state’s \$4 billion recreational saltwater fishery, an industry heavily subsidized by tourism.

The long litany of self-inflicted woes Florida faces today may be nothing compared to what’s in store for the trendy state. If it *stays* as trendy, demographers predict Florida’s population will double to 36 million by 2060. Research by the nonprofit growth management watchdog group, 1000 Friends of Florida, predicts that growth will be accompanied by a loss of another 7 million acres of farm and wild land to asphalt and concrete.

ALL ACADEMIC?

TO BE SURE, a recent avalanche of bad press from devastating hurricanes, a nasty insurance crisis, a train wreck of a housing market, and grief over rising property taxes has cooled things down some. In fact, scattered reports have suggested that Florida’s population may actually be shrinking. But the real numbers show otherwise. People are still flocking to Florida, and by the busloads (see page 16).

Given the kaleidoscope of problems that beset the state, is



PHOTO: THE FLORIDA PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE

▲ THE LEADING POWER BROKERS behind Florida’s landmark Growth Management Act in 1985 were Senate President Harry A. Johnston II (Dem., W. Palm Beach), seated, far right, and Rep. Jon Mills (Dem. Gainesville), extreme left. Also pictured, from Mills’ left, are Sen. Fred Lippman, Sen. Ken Jenne, and House Speaker James Harold Thompson.

Florida better off for having a far-reaching set of growth management laws on the books for two decades? Reasonable people would pose the question, and finally they have. The result is a compilation of answers and insight from 20 policy makers and scholars that appeared in book form last fall.

Tim Chapin, an associate professor of urban and regional planning at FSU and one of the book’s three editors, said the work, *Growth Management in Florida: Planning for Paradise* (Ashgate Press, 2007) is the most comprehensive and detailed assessment of Florida’s far-reaching growth management legislation ever done. He and his co-editor, departmental colleagues—Harrison Higgins and Charles Connerly—believe the book provides a compelling argument for fixing Florida’s growth management system and restoring the broken promises of the 1985 Growth Management Act.

As part of a 2005 symposium sponsored by FSU’s DeVoe L. Moore Center for the Study of Critical Issues in Economic Policy & Government, Chapin, Connerly, and Higgins invited experts from 10 universities and a number of federal and state agencies to delve into a subject most Floridians face daily, yet seldom study in any schoolroom. Undoubtedly many would be amazed to know they live in the most intensely planned state in the country.

The authors’ firsthand experience compelled them in this effort

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that goes, as it does, to the very heart of their profession—essentially the science of how to build economically and environmentally sustainable communities. Working with communities struggling to solve such problems as traffic congestion, scarce water resources, and affordable housing, they all have seen growth management at its best and worst. They know more than most that Florida's growth management laws are far from perfect, but without them, Chapin said "many communities would be so busy dealing with so many fires to put out that they would rarely, if ever, find the time and energy to envision a desirable future and work towards its implementation."

Still, the FSU study holds up a mirror to a Byzantine set of laws that have had two decades to make a difference. The sobering reflection shows 20 successive years of broken promises.

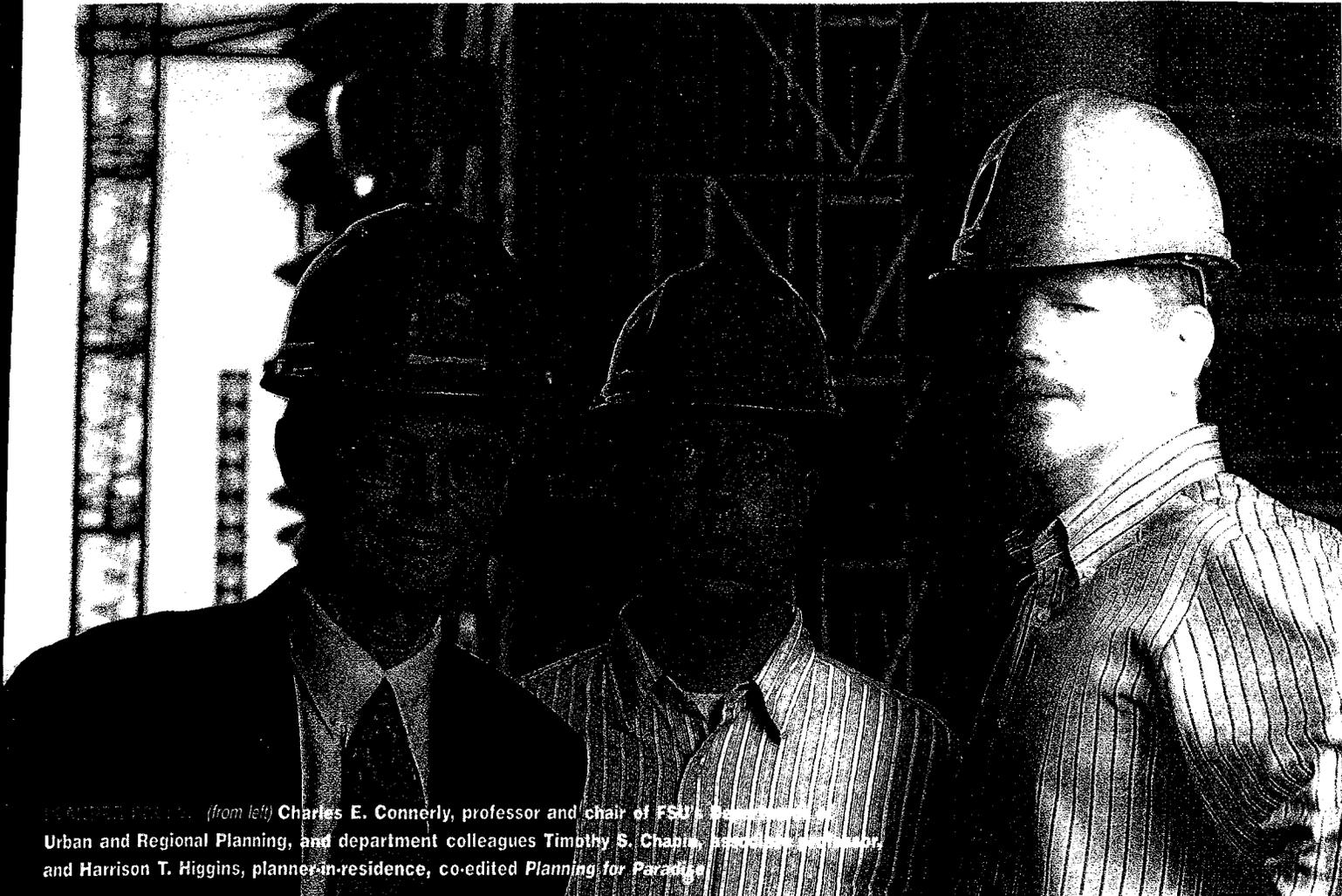
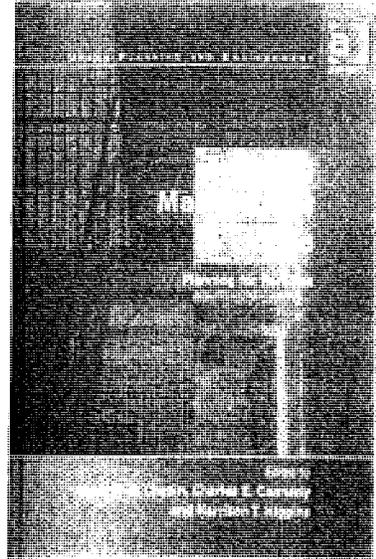
WHAT WENT WRONG?

"BRIMMING WITH GOOD INTENTIONS," is how a *New York Times* reporter described the opening of Florida's 1985 Legis-

ature. Gov. Bob Graham was backing a bold new slate of bills aimed at reducing Florida's growing pains while doing more to protect the state's besieged environment at the same time. He'd soon get his wish—the first comprehensive set of laws built on more than a decade of Florida's efforts to come to grips with pressing social and environmental problems caused by the state's soaring popularity.

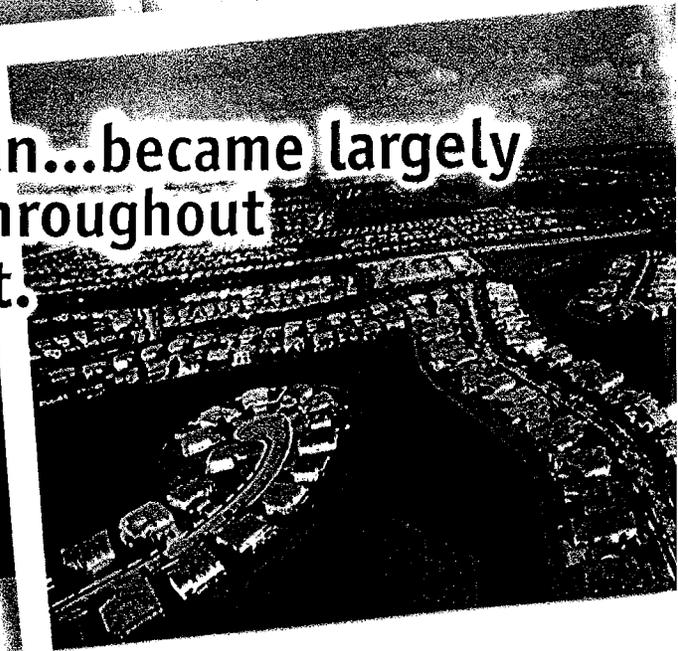
As the contributors to *Planning for Paradise* underscore, it was clear to anyone paying attention that by the close of its first

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PLANNING FOR PARADISE (from left) Charles E. Connerly, professor and chair of FSU's Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and department colleagues Timothy S. Chapin, Associate Professor, and Harrison T. Higgins, planner-in-residence, co-edited *Planning for Paradise*.

Ultimately, the state plan...became largely ignored by planners throughout state government.



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decade, the best-laid plans of Florida's landmark growth management law had gone awfully awry.

In the book's second chapter, Tom Pelham succinctly outlines how the law jumped the tracks and now lies today in what he simply calls "a mess." In 2007, Pelham was tapped by Gov. Charlie Crist to return to his old post as secretary of the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), a job he first held under Gov. Bob Martinez from 1987 to 1991. The 1985 law designated the DCA as the state's chief land-planning agency, and charged it with making sure local governments complied with the new policies. By far the most radical of these was a requirement that all local jurisdictions (67 counties and over 400 cities) draw up detailed comprehensive plans for guiding future growth and development and submit such plans to DCA for review and approval.

In his criticism of the shambles Florida has made of its well-intentioned growth management policies, Pelham pulls no punches. His analysis starts with the fate of the State Comprehensive Plan, a prominent part of the growth management package passed in 1985 that was supposed to lay a rational blueprint for dealing with growth.

Pelham writes that this plan was intended to be the key "direction-setting document" to help guide local governments in designing their own comprehensive plans. The state comp plan would provide "long-range policies covering a wide range of social, economic, environmental, natural resources, conservation and land planning issues." Whatever local governments ultimately planned

on doing, the new law required that such plans be "consistent" with the guidelines set forth in the state comp plan.

Ultimately, the state plan—perhaps because it was never linked in any way to the state *budget*—became largely ignored by planners throughout state government. Through various amendments "and administrative neglect," Pelham writes that the plan "never became a factor in the implementation of the (larger growth management) process." With no playbook to go by, local governments had nothing to make their plans "consistent" with, and thus a key tool that Pelham believes could have been a powerful agent against the worst elements of urban sprawl went by the boards. His summation of the status quo:

"Consequently, the State Plan currently is the object of criticism and even ridicule because it is seldom used (and) has little or no effect on governmental decisions; and, except for DCA's urban sprawl policies, has little impact on the review and approval of local plan amendments."

CONCURRENCY: THE UNFUNDED MANDATE

IN A SUBSEQUENT CHAPTER, Efraim Ben-Zadok, a professor of public administration at Florida Atlantic University, explains how the architects of the 1985 growth management legislation essentially built the law on three legs—or in his word, "faces" —

PHOTOS: SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT



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of policy: consistency, concurrency and compact development. These hallowed “3 c’s” were intended to be the primary gears that drove the growth management bus.

Easily the stickiest element of this policy triad was—and still is—concurrency, a policy that prohibited local governments from approving development projects before all the necessary resources were in place, e.g. roads, sewerage, solid waste recovery, drainage, potable water systems, parks and recreational facilities, that the projects would need. (The concurrency mandate deliberately omitted the construction of schools as a prerequisite because of the prohibitive cost involved, although school concurrency eventually became law in 2005.)

In theory at least, even from the outset this “pay as you go” concurrency policy made a lot of sense. Ostensibly, the policy meant that development would pay for itself. But it didn’t take long for reality to set in for both state and local planners. Just where was the money supposed to come from to pay for all this new infrastructure, which was projected to cost nearly \$53 billion throughout the law’s first decade? The ‘85 law had essentially written a large check that the state somehow magically expected to cash.

In 1987, Gov. Bob Martinez, a Republican, announced a plan to pay for the law’s commitments—a statewide sales tax on a wide variety of previously tax-free services, ranging from legal and accounting services to newspaper advertising. With surprisingly little hullabaloo, lawmakers put party squabbling aside and passed Martinez’s bill. This “services tax” was projected to raise upwards of \$16 billion annually, an amount that would mean the state would be picking up the lion’s share (66 percent) of the cost of concurrency each year.

But the story of what became of Florida’s now infamous services tax highlights a chapter written by Chapin and James Nicholas, professor emeritus of urban and regional planning at the University of Florida. The chapter contrasts the fiscal theory against the fiscal reality of the growth management act, and paints a portrait of the 1985 legislation as an exercise in fiscal irresponsibility, if not outright hubris.

Within just six months of its passage, Florida’s services tax was repealed by a special session of the Legislature, called, ironically enough, by a chagrined Gov. Martinez himself. Newspapers had successfully marked the tax on advertising as an infringement of the First Amendment, and the most promising cord in Florida’s already anemic tax-raising muscle was cut. From that moment on, write Nicholas and Chapin, it was clear that state government wouldn’t be a big player in the concurrency-funding business.

“The repeal of the Services Tax brought an end to broad-based

and state funding of concurrency. Since then, the burden has been shifted largely to the local level on increasingly narrow sources of revenue.”

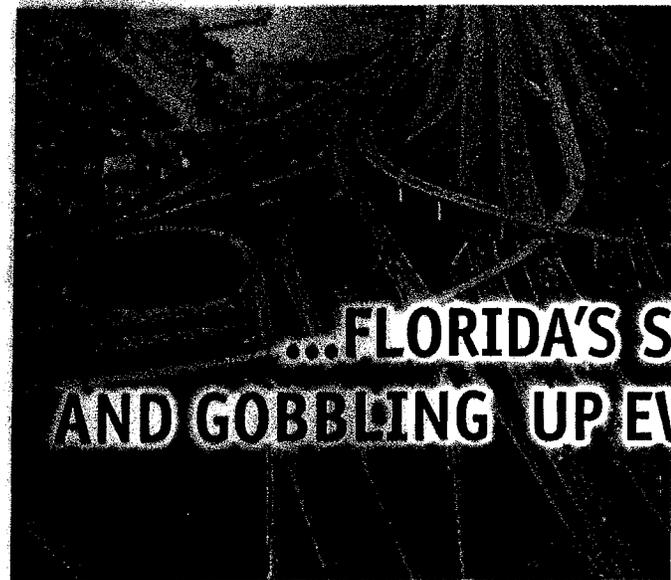
The real upshot for local government administrators?

“The reality for local governments in Florida is that they have needed to become entrepreneurial agents, constantly on the lookout to generate new resources,” Nicholas and Chapin wrote. By 1990, almost every county in Florida was hiking up local gasoline and diesel fuel taxes, creating special taxing districts and imposing all sorts of impact fees to pay for development.

Since then, state lawmakers have on occasion tried to ease the burden on local governments, but with only moderate success. As the 20th anniversary of the ‘85 act approached, concurrency stood out as the largely unfunded heart of the law. As a result, Nicholas and Chapin conclude, Florida’s heralded attempt to rein in some of the worst aspects of growth got derailed, giving a green light to full-throttled urban sprawl and uncontrolled growth.

SPRAWL YA’LL

WITH “CONSISTENCY” AND “CONCURRENCY” largely empty chambers in Florida’s new growth management gun, the goal of pursuing more compact development soon loomed larger in the hopes of Florida planners. The central idea seemed practical, at least in theory: Meet growth’s demand by making already existing urban cores more attractive, build with more density, yet enhanced “livability” in mind with services, recreation and other amenities within walking distance. The concept was seen as a major—if not



A CHAT WITH TOM PELHAM

continued

ment in our major urban areas, our urban centers. But the way in which transportation concurrency has been implemented is to create a huge obstacle to development in the very areas where we say we want development and to drive it out to where land's cheaper, where there's more road capacity, and you don't have to pay as much for transportation improvements. So we've been working at cross purposes.

RinR: As I understand it, with most of the state's coast already built up, the next development front in Florida is the state's rural interior.

Pelham: Exactly right. In Florida's heartland, which I now call the state's last frontier now that the Panhandle has been discovered in a big way, you have the heart of Florida's agricultural industry, a lot of small, rural coun-

ties that are under enormous pressure. Right now—today—we have roughly two million acres of land that are under proposal of some kind or other to convert them to urban development. Our department gets proposals for large new developments and even new cities in these areas, small, rural counties all the time—it's no exaggeration to say we get one every month. For example, in Okeechobee County we got in a proposal for a new city that is larger substantially than anything that exists in Okeechobee County today. We have someone who in Osceola County is talking of a new city with 100,000 residential units and a population of 250,000 people. And that's with an economic downturn.

RinR: What are people telling you about the water crisis in Florida?

Pelham: The south Florida water management district tells us that they are greatly concerned about the declining supply of water in south Florida. They've been issuing very strong objections to plan amendments to increase development on the basis of lack of water. So I think it's becoming a very, very critical problem in the southern part of our state, perhaps in the Tampa Bay area on down. Actually, the technical people say that we can generate or create new water supplies but it's going to be much more expensive. Most people are saying that we probably can come up with enough water but it's going to be more expensive, possibly a lot more.

RinR: Is it fair to say you're a fan

of New Urbanism? If so, why?
Pelham: Yes. It accomplishes a lot of things that the growth management act is trying to accomplish. It's a way to create a more livable community, with less dependence on the automobile. And a lot of it is all about cars. Compact urban development can internalize traffic and create a mixed use community that affords people opportunities to live and work and recreate in one place without having to jump into a car and drive everywhere. This is really key to making growth management work.

RinR: So, in your view is dealing with transportation the biggest challenge the state faces during the next, say, 20 years?

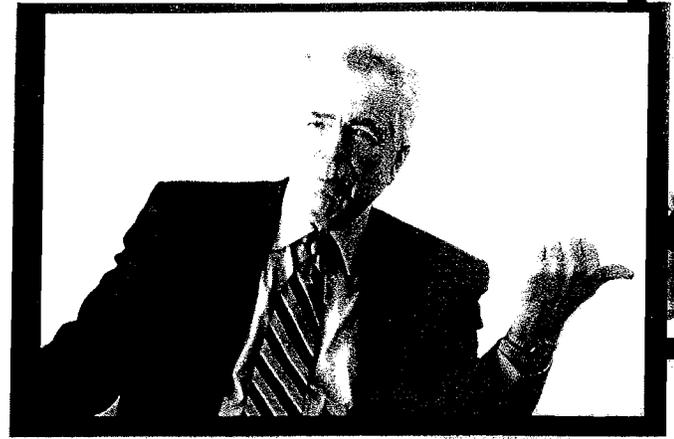


PHOTO: RAY STANFORD



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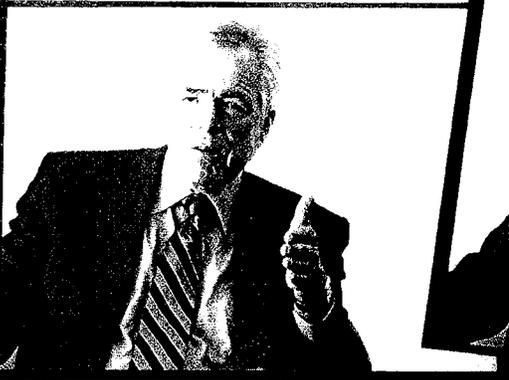
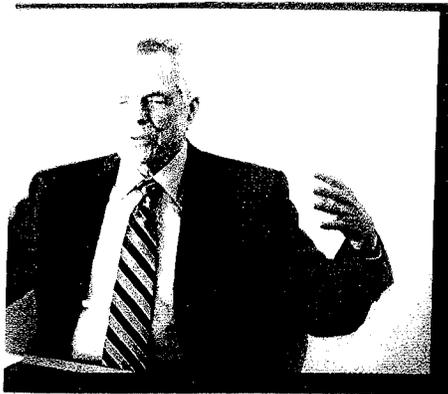
growth management in 1985, of course, all talk of planning for growth began with what traffic engineers called “mobility” and the “demand to travel between and through communities.”

Ruth Steiner, associate professor in UF's department of city and regional planning, takes a close look at Florida's transportation dilemma. She reflects on the early, “cars-first” thinking of “mobility” planners that took center stage from coast to coast in the decade following World War II. Steiner writes that given the exalted status of the automobile, it wasn't at all illogical to design “six-lane highways that cut through neighborhoods, reducing accessibility to goods and services that are within walking distance

and putting pedestrians and bicyclists at risk.”

As a consequence, reducing the multi-dimensional aspects of transportation planning to traffic flow had a cold but simple efficiency in Florida: it produced an environment engineered to move machines, but at the expense of the human lives. Not surprisingly, Florida's horrific pedestrian death rate—among the highest in the nation—is a phenomenon seen by some as a product of design, not accident.

Besides its human toll, car-fueled sprawl has brought Florida some of the most congested roads in the country, a traffic headache that turns out to be quantifiable. From 1990 to 2000, Florida's largest cities grew by 23.5 percent, and, as Ben-Zadok writes, in these metropolises “traffic became heavier and slower (with) daily commuting time increased.” Ben-Zadok writes:



Pelham: I believe transportation is the number one challenge we face. Water supply is a big challenge, too. Both are essential for sustainable growth. But we can and will develop new water supplies, even if water will become increasingly more expensive as I've said. But the biggest problem, in my view, is what we're going to do about transportation and how we're going to pay for it. To maintain mobility of people and goods as we continue to grow, particularly in our major metropolitan areas, roads alone will not suffice, and we will have to invest in multi-modal transportation systems. If we do not, Florida's economy and quality of life will suffer.

RinR: "Multi-modal transportation systems?"

Pelham: Yes, more modes of travel, everything from walking, to bicycling, to riding the bus. City-to-city, regional commuter rail systems are going to be increasingly important, and there are already some encouraging signs about that. There's a commuter rail project that's very close I think to fruition in the Orlando area, for example, and one I believe in the planning stages by the new Tampa Bay transportation authority. Our current transportation concurrency system is geared strictly to the automobile. And it focuses all of our resources on roads. If that's the only thing we have to offer—the interstate highway—we're in serious trouble. The car will always be there, but we simply have to offer people options. One recent report (by

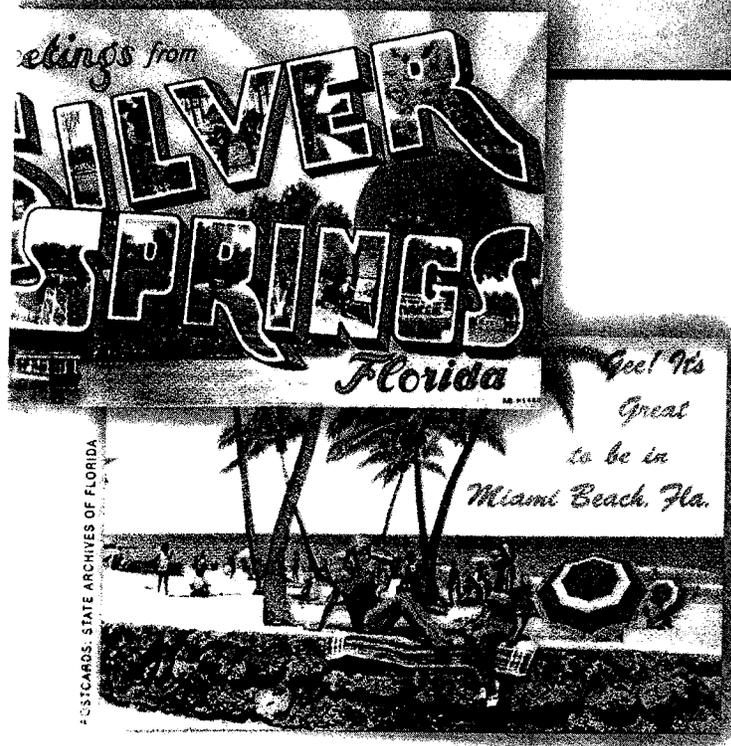
1000 Friends of Florida) projects 18 million more people living here in the next three or four decades. How are we going to maintain mobility? Our major metropolitan areas will become dysfunctional if we don't have transportation options.

RinR: From your perspective and experience, what's the best hope we have for keeping Florida livable for our kids and their kids?

Pelham: I think we have to have at the top of our agenda creating and maintaining a sustainable Florida. We have a great opportunity now, in these rural areas we talked about earlier, to show that we can accommodate growth and development in a way that sustains those areas as viable agricultural economies, viable rural

economies that protect environmental resources and agricultural lands. We have an opportunity to show that we can do a lot better than we did in the past. And I think that means taking a firm line and holding people's feet to the fire on the fundamental requirements of our growth management and environmental laws. They're still there. We just have to be serious about them. If we ignore the increasing water problem, for example, if we continue to sprawl all over the state, Florida will not be a very livable place down the road. I think that requires working at it every day. Our growth can be a blessing or it can be a curse. And it's up to us to make sure that it's a blessing.

RinR

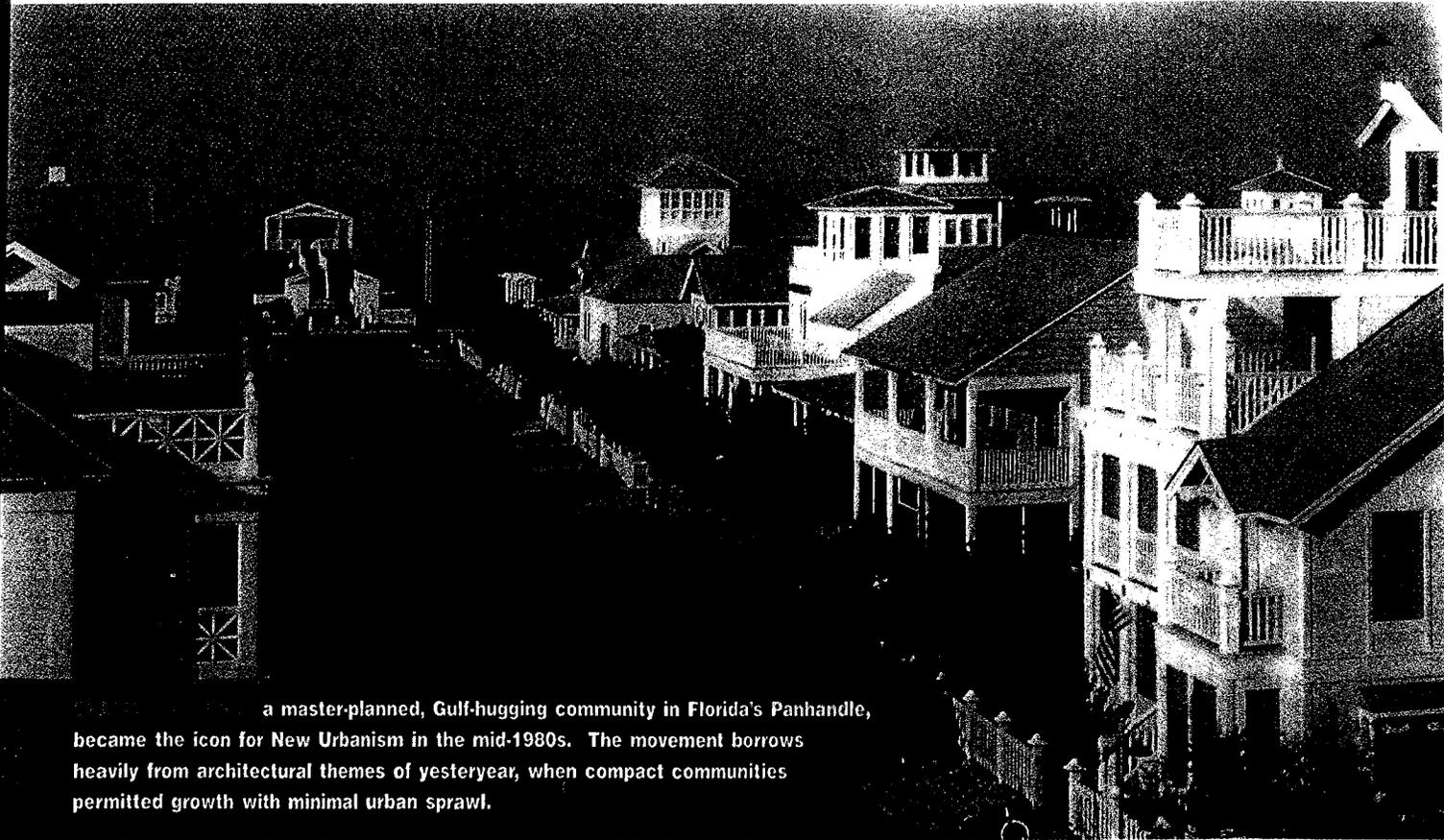


"From 1983 to 1997, the average daily miles traveled by vehicles went up by 96 percent in Miami-Dade and by 177 percent on Broward freeways; travel speed declined by 23 percent and 18 percent respectively. The average time 'stuck in traffic' during 2001 was 42 hours in Miami-Dade and 30 hours in Broward."

In 1999, the Florida Legislature tacked on yet another amendment to the already amendment-heavy growth management act, this one directly addressing the sprawl debacle, which Ben-Zadok describes as "a by-product of poor transport planning, a problem that should be resolved via compact urban economic development." Through "a co-ordination of compact land uses" and "transport modes such as public transit and pedestrian ways" Florida can keep sprawl in check, he concludes.

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a master-planned, Gulf-hugging community in Florida's Panhandle, became the icon for New Urbanism in the mid-1980s. The movement borrows heavily from architectural themes of yesteryear, when compact communities permitted growth with minimal urban sprawl.

PHOTO: VISIT FLORIDA

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and other high-risk coastal counties may not be just the end product of market forces at work, the writers suggest. Land-use regulations spelled out in the state's own comprehensive plan "promote higher density redevelopment and infill" as a means of discouraging urban sprawl.

Then, too, there's the fact that since 1995, local governments in Florida are subject to being sued if they try to prevent some people from living where they choose. Under the Bert Harris Act, local governments must pay landowners if regulations "inordinately burden" their land or they must relax these restrictions. This means that if counties are earnest about doing all they can to restrain development in the areas most vulnerable to hurricanes, they have little option but to buy their property and take it out of development, an option that Deyle said "isn't practical on any significant scale."

Local governments could charge "risk-based special assessments" to property owners who build in hazardous areas, a tax aimed at defraying the costs of emergency management planning, hazard mitigation, and disaster recovery services. "Such assessments would not preclude development in hurricane hazard areas, but they would just mean that those who impose greater costs on local

governments pay their fair share," Deyle told *Research in Review*.

Between August 2004 and October 2005, Florida absorbed its worst mauling by hurricanes in 80 years. In 2004, four major storms—Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne—belted the state from Vero Beach to Pensacola, inflicting more than \$40 billion in property damage throughout Florida and the southeastern U.S. The horror got ratcheted up the following year, when Dennis, Katrina, and Wilma slammed ashore, exacting an even more terrible toll—more than 50 dead and combined property loss exceeding \$23 billion, all in Florida. Suddenly, the Sunshine State found itself in a perfect storm of terrified homeowners, wary buyers, skyrocketing wind insurance rates, a teetering, hyper-inflated housing market and concern about rising property taxes.

Deyle summed up Florida's dilemma in having no choice but to live with nature's most dangerous storms: "There remains a lack of political will in most of Florida to significantly limit development in the areas most vulnerable to hurricanes despite the state's recent experiences and the ensuing wind insurance debacle," he said. "Long-term occupation of such areas is not sustainable without financial subsidies from people who live in higher, drier, and less exposed locations. If the federal government isn't willing

to ante up a national catastrophe fund, it may very well become too expensive to continue with 'business as usual' in the most hazardous areas of Florida."

NEW URBANISM PANACEA?

DESPITE A MULTITUDE OF PROBLEMS associated with compact developments, the idea of building full-blown communities in smaller spaces—even in the nation's number-one hurricane-prone state—resonates with most of the writers in *Planning for Paradise*.

In general, they say the concept, especially when married to efficient and attractive mass transit systems—the automobile clearly isn't a sacred cow in the movement's cosmology—represents the most sensible course for Florida's future. Regarded as the key element of what planners now call "smart growth," compact development, at least in theory, has powerful potential for doing much for the common good, such as protecting Florida's natural environment, conserving energy, even enhancing safety, livability and a sense of community.

In the mid-1980s, the concept of compact urban development took physical form in Seaside, a small development nestled into a stretch of Gulf coast sand dunes in the Panhandle's Walton County. The brainchild of developer Robert Davis, and architects Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Seaside reintroduced the nation to the historic, pre-World War II pattern of town-building.

With services and recreation within walking or biking distance around a people- and pet-friendly setting, Seaside's design actually resurrected many of the planning principles John Nolen helped pioneer in Florida decades before. Evangelical in their mission to reform suburbia, in 1993 Seaside's architects drafted a *Charter for New Urbanism* that, in effect, nailed "99 theses" upon the door of the urban planning profession. The New Urbanism movement was born, and Seaside soon became the most studied town-planning project in a generation.

Even before the phenomenon had won fame, the philosophy behind New Urbanism had caught on at the highest levels of state planning. In 1990, the idea was hailed by DCA Secretary Pelham as "a model

for a new area of urban design in Florida." New Urbanism soon became grafted into the fiber of Florida's growth management policy.

Twenty years on, Florida has become the veritable incubator of New Urbanist projects for the nation. The state is home to more communities and downtown revitalization projects based on New Urbanism principles than any other. In 1996, the Walt Disney Company rolled out a \$2.5 billion, 5,000-acre town—Celebration, near Orlando—that was touted as a New Urbanist utopia of sorts. Last year, a coalition of Orlando citizen groups and corporations launched "2050 Future Vision," an ambitious blueprint for Orlando's projected growth. The plan places a third of the city's future population into New Urbanist-style town centers and compact neighborhoods.

But the movement has never been without its critics. Despite their optimistic buzz, New Urbanist projects have so far captured only a fraction of the national residential market. Developers have rarely opted for a New Urbanist plan when they had a choice, mainly because they tend to be more costly and take longer to build than the standard strip mall.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to growth plans based on New Urbanism is consumer choice, says Randall Holcombe, a Florida State professor of economics. Holcombe wrote a chapter in *Planning for Paradise* that summarizes his analysis of counties' use of urban growth boundaries, politically drawn areas where development is permitted. Such boundaries are planning tools ostensibly aimed at curbing some of the negative aspects of urban sprawl. An unavoidable side effect of boundaries is that they reduce the amount of developable land and thereby force prices up on what's left. Developers and buyers can escape such traps by running to suburbs and rural areas, which they eagerly do. Holcombe told *Research in Review* that even for people with the wherewithal to

live in denser neighborhoods, many simply choose not to.

"Two of the main tenets of New Urbanism are more compact urban development and getting people to use alternative means of transportation other than automobiles. Both of these tenets go against consumer preferences," he said. "As people get wealthier, they want more living space, and they prefer



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single family detached housing to apartment style living, especially when they have families. New Urbanism (thus) has to be forced on people by land use planners who argue they know better what's good for us than we do."

Holcombe said that New Urbanism also undermines one of the chief original goals of the 1985 Growth Management Act, namely affordable housing. In his critique, Pelham describes the "affordable housing provisions" of the 1985 legislation as "probably the most neglected part of the growth management system." Wherever they've been built, New Urbanist enclaves tend to be marked by exclusivity and escalating costs of living, pushing housing costs beyond the reach of many.

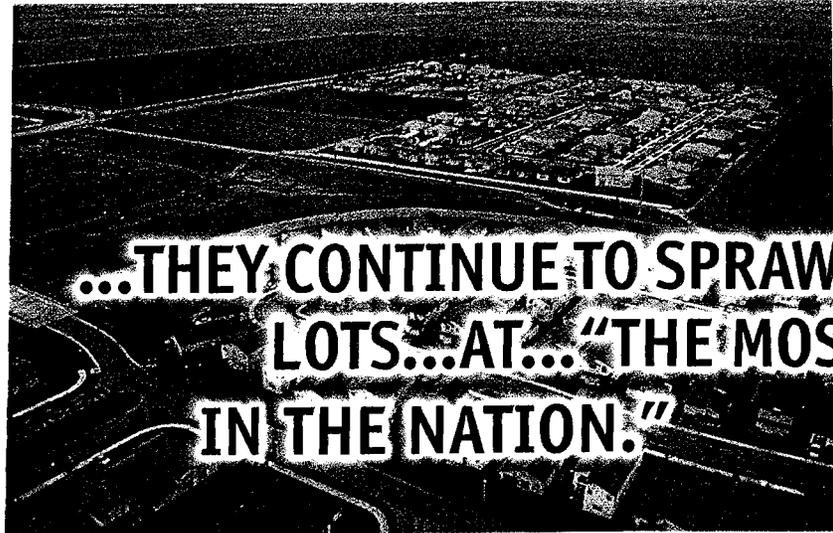
PARADISE POLITICS

ALTHOUGH UNINTENTIONAL, the sub-title of the growth management study, *Planning for Paradise*, strikes a nostalgic chord for the storied Florida of yesteryear, truly a land of Eden-like beauty, replete with promise.

That was the dream; here's the reality—Floridians are getting fed up with: • roadways that could pass for parking lots • nearly year-round water rationing • utility bills that rival monthly mortgage payments • over-crowded and dysfunctional schools • green areas being bulldozed for more malls and condos • mounting restrictions on recreational saltwater fishing and boating • insurance premiums that simply await the next, inevitable hurricane to go higher • property taxes completely out of sync with a collapsing real estate market yet to hit bottom • and, of late, a tanking state economy sure to make everything even worse. For this growing legion of the disenchanted, any lingering notion of Florida as "paradise" has left the building.

In 2007, a new Mason-Dixon survey conducted by Leadership Florida, a group run by the state Chamber of Commerce, showed just how real residents' disillusionment has become. Fully 43 percent of 1,100 Floridians interviewed said that their quality of life had dropped in the past five years. Only 24 percent expected things to get better in the next five; 37 percent believe things are only going to get worse.

But despite their glum outlook, 62 percent of the respondents said they would still recommend Florida as a final destination for friends and relatives. The finding underscores what is *the* Florida phenomenon: In the minds of millions already here and those yet to come, a Florida address will always represent a personal stake in paradise, no matter how compromised America's Eden has become.



If nothing else, *Planning for Paradise* dispassionately reveals the intractable complexity of Florida's growth management dilemma and wisely proffers no easy remedies. There's consensus among contributors to the book on at least two things—Florida's decades-old campaign to get a grip on growth management hasn't been a complete failure and deserves beefing up instead of being abandoned; and any plan, no matter how improved, is doomed to fail without strong political will, a commodity few will argue has been lacking from the day the growth management act was signed into law.

Casey Gluckman, an environmental attorney who also worked as a bureau chief for the state's Department of Environmental Protection back in the 1980s, witnessed the steady watering-down of the law she helped write. In 1999, a reporter from the *St. Petersburg Times* asked Gluckman if the law had been effective. "Has the Growth Management Act worked? No," she was quoted as saying. "Show me a mall that's been denied. Show me a big developer who has made major campaign contributions who has had his project denied. Show me a road extension through sensitive areas that's not been built. There are pitifully few examples."

To the legion of fans of Florida-born novelist Carl Hiaasen, Gluckman's plaint is as familiar as traffic stalled on hot Orlando asphalt. Hiaasen, also a weekly columnist for the *Miami Herald*, has made a fortune off his dark-edged fiction that draws its power from real-life accounts of greedy developers, demented hucksters and corrupt politicians running amok through what's left of Florida's natural landscape.

In a 2006 interview for CBS's *60 Minutes*, Hiaasen summed up his opinion on Florida growth management and politicians' role in that. "This is an economy that's based on growth—growth for the sake of growth," he said. "The one word that no politician



ONTO QUARTER-ACRE UNSUSTAINABLE RATE

PHOTO: FRANK STEPHENSON

will ever speak is 'enough.'"

In a recent *Herald* column, he picked up on the same theme. "Politicians who resist calls for strict land-use reforms and continue to shill for special interests risk being dumped from office by those they've ignored," he wrote. "Because growth is an exalted industry unto itself...lawmakers have always focused on attracting hordes of new residents at all costs. The first casualty of such a fast-buck mentality is the quality of life."

SATAN OR SAVIOR?

POPULAR POLEMICS ASIDE, in *Planning for Paradise* sordid development, idealistic visions, and human nature also comes to light, but here there are no heroes or villains—just a scenario that obliges 18 million Floridians to reconcile a fast approaching future with their own sense of good and evil.

When assessing growth management, the devil will always be in the details and, given the nature of the beast that is city planning, biblical references often spice appraisals of the profession. Such is the case for the book's closing chapter, "The 1985 Growth Management Act: Satan or Savior," written by Chapin, Connerly and Higgins.

The authors provide considerable evidence that Florida's future isn't all bleak. For one thing—a *big* thing, in fact—Florida has preserved more natural lands than any other state in the past two decades. On the theory that outright land purchases trump even the best land-use regulations—subject to political vagaries as these inevitably are—no harder line may ever be drawn in the battle over Florida's growth than locking away land forever from the clutches of development. If nothing else, the anguish wrought by the flawed 1985 Growth Management Act, as FSU's 20-year

analysis reveals, tests this theory.

As shot through with loopholes as the now 23-year-old growth management law is, Chapin believes it still forces municipal officials to "have their eyes on the horizon rather than on their own feet." This has produced a number of ancillary benefits, not the least of which is the law's success in getting professional planning capabilities installed at the local level throughout Florida. Before 1985, one could count the number of county planning offices almost on one hand. Today, most communities in the state maintain highly trained planning staffs armed with the know-how to deal effectively with issues that 20 years ago would have given county and city commissions fits. Without the '85 legislation, that never would have happened.

"The art of comprehensive planning has been advanced in Florida, and the state is seen as a model for comprehensive plan development in the United States," the writers assert. In the bargain, Florida has also become a nationally recognized leader in transportation planning, as well as in finding innovative, local means of financing it.

Furthermore, there's evidence that growth management laws still enjoy plenty of popular support in Florida, even among developers. Most residents want to see the excesses of growth curbed by better laws, even if surveys show they are decidedly conflicted on the matter—they want to see Florida's environment protected, but at the same time they continue to sprawl onto quarter-acre lots and consume land at what some analysts describe as "the most unsustainable rate in the nation."

Florida's epic struggle to deal with a human flood unmatched in U.S. history should be seen as a work in progress, the writers conclude. Given the number and enormity of challenges the state faces, giving up the struggle now makes no sense in the middle of what they see as an evolutionary process. The "final verdict" on whether the struggle has produced any lasting benefits they write, is still "decades in the making."

So, whether Florida's growth policies are "Satan or savior" is a call for tomorrow's Paradise-seekers to make—and to live with. Meanwhile, in many ways Florida remains John Nolen's "great laboratory of city and town planning." It's much the same old game of matching humans to habitat. Only this time around, Floridians are playing for stakes far higher than Nolen—or anyone—could have thought possible 80 years ago. **RinR**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Contributing to this article was R. Bruce Stephenson, associate professor and chair of the environmental studies department at Rollins College in Winter Park. Stephenson has written extensively on city planning in general and in particular, Florida's pioneer planner, John Nolen (1869-1937).