

July 8, 2013
PLANNING COMMISSION HEARING
“OTHER BUSINESS”
MID-YEAR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT

AGENDA ITEM #2

PURPOSE

For the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing and consider a recommendation for the 2013 Mid-year Comprehensive Plan Amendment covering the Austell Road Area.

BACKGROUND

Periodically, situations occur on corridors or properties that necessitate actions to be taken out of the normal yearly Comprehensive Plan Amendment process. These could be issues that may be potentially controversial; issues that may have a major impact on the health, safety, or general welfare of the community; or issues that necessitate a change in policy such as passage of a small area master plan or a corridor study.

After the passage of the Austell Road Corridor Livable Centers Initiative Study in 2007, staff proposed alterations to the land use plan along the corridor as described in the study document, which the Board of Commissioners approved in 2008. Unfortunately, this only changed the land use dynamics on a small portion of the corridor. Currently, Staff is recommending a more comprehensive evaluation of the entire Austell Road corridor from South Cobb Drive to the city limits of Austell. The evaluation of the corridor will be undertaken in a manner that seeks to concentrate a higher intensity of development in the area surrounding Wellstar Cobb Hospital while making more appropriate transitions in scale in other sectors of the corridor. These should be accomplished with the intention of meeting current and anticipated future market demand and enable private investment that will assist redevelopment along the corridor.

In pursuing this mid-year Comprehensive Plan Amendment, staff has undertaken the normal process of evaluating the proposal, notification of property owners via letter, area road signs to inform the community, and the public hearings with the Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners. In addition, staff was able to host a Public Information Meeting with property owners to answer questions about the recommended changes prior to the Planning Commission public hearing on June 18th. The Public Information Meeting was warranted in this case because the proposal is being considered out of the normal annual amendment cycle.

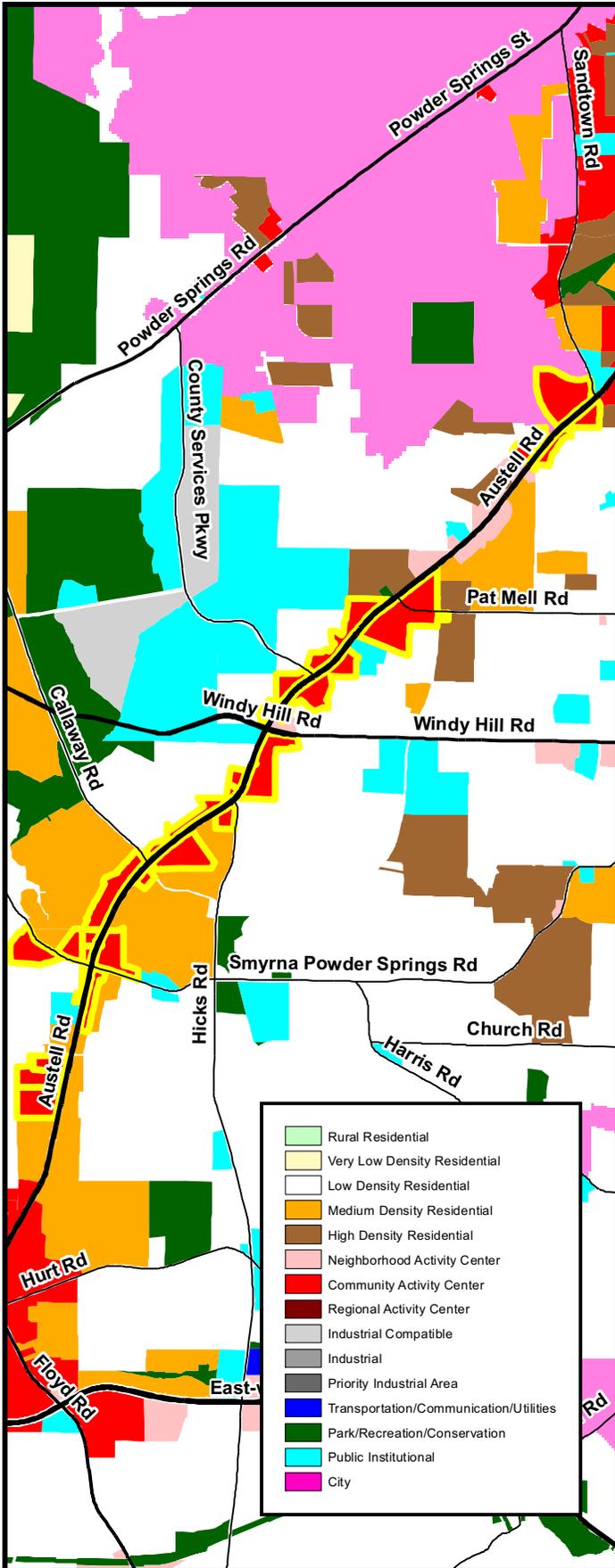
RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission consider a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners regarding the 2013 Mid-year Comprehensive Plan Amendments.

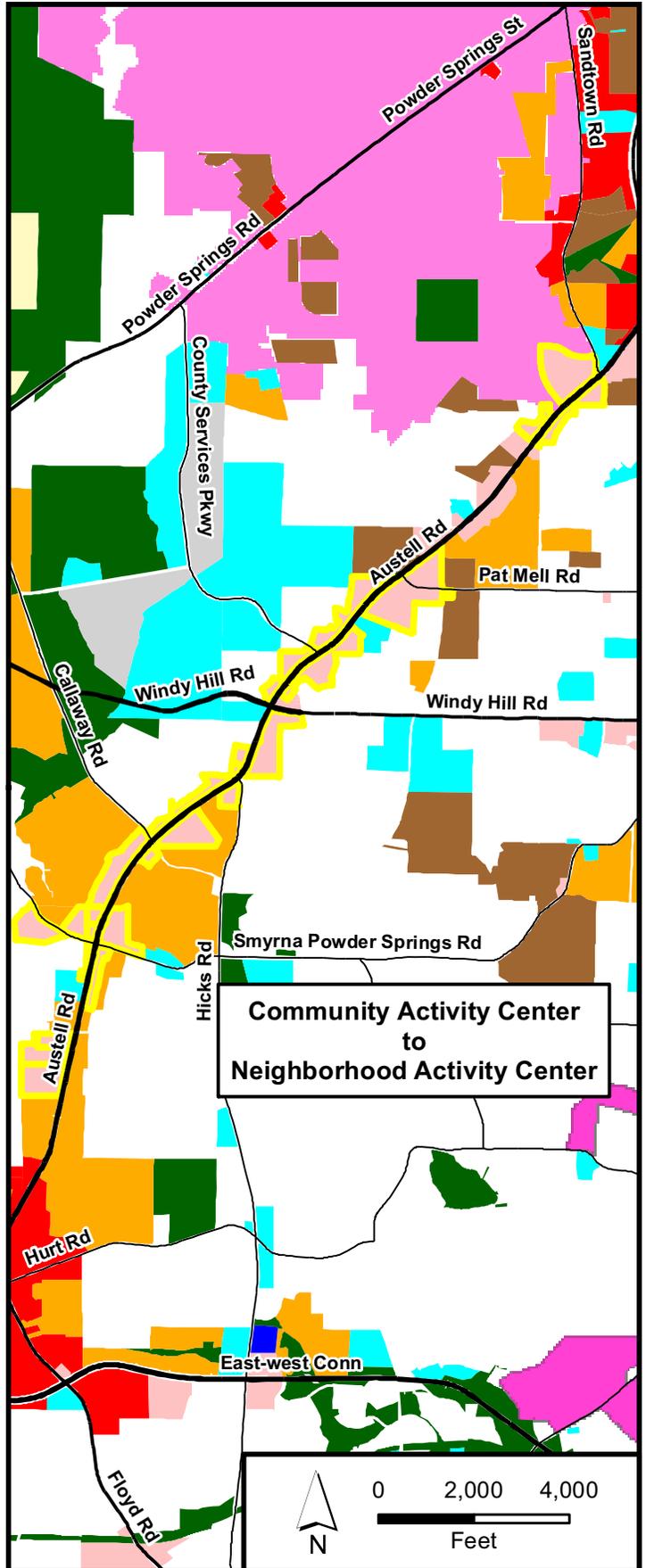
ATTACHMENTS

Comprehensive Plan Analysis

Austell Road Corridor (North Section)

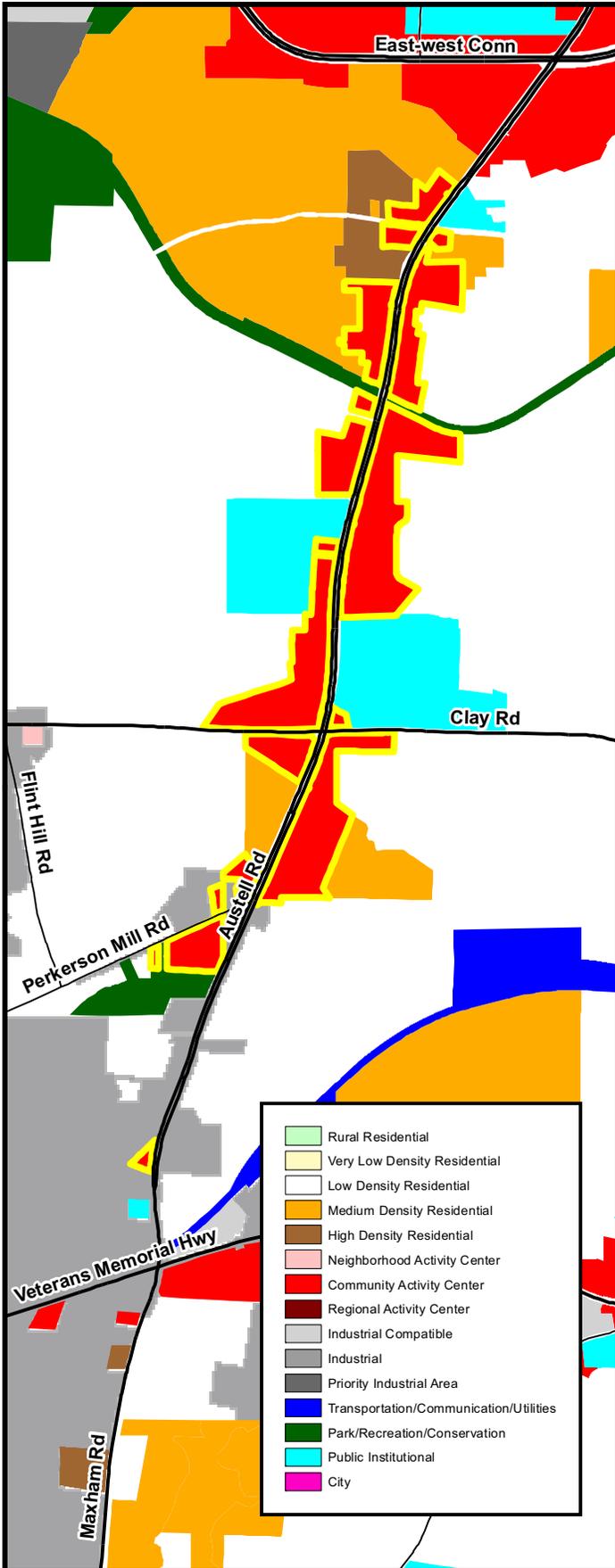


CURRENT

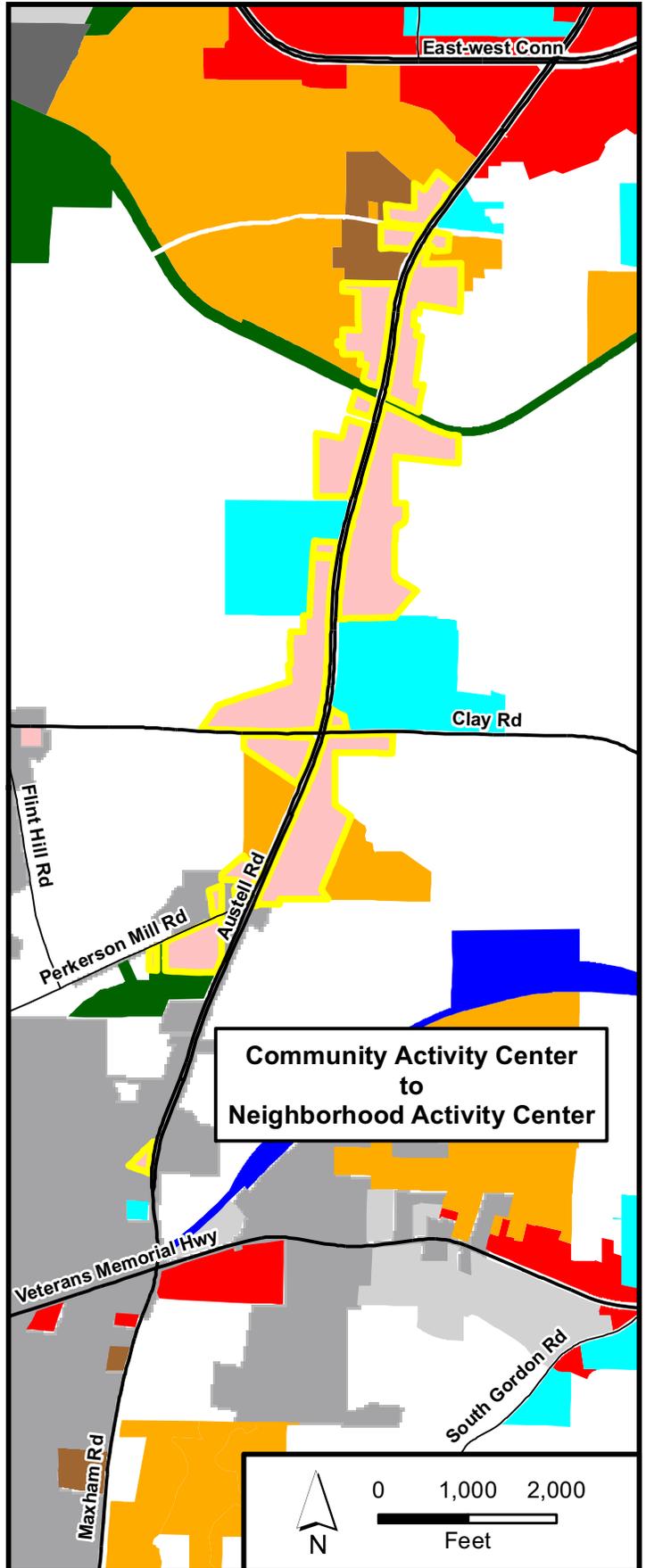


PROPOSED

Austell Road Corridor (South Section)



CURRENT



PROPOSED

2013 CPA- Mid-year Comprehensive Plan Proposal Analysis

AMENDMENT NUMBER: P-1

COMMISSIONER DISTRICT: 4

ACREAGE: approximately 370 acres

PARCEL ID NUMBER: Multiple parcels (D 19/LL 555, 556, 557, 628, 631, 632, 701, 702, 706, 993, 1006, 1066, 1067, 1080, 1081, 1140, 1141, 1154, 1155, 1213, 1214, 1230, 1287 and D 17/LL 14, 15, 16, 58, 59, 60, 84, 85, 132, 133, 154, 207, 208)

EXISTING FUTURE LAND USE: Community Activity Center (CAC)

PROPOSED FUTURE LAND USE: Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC)

GENERAL LOCATION: Parcels located along an eight-mile long segment of Austell Road stretching from the city limits of Austell to Sandtown Road with the exception of those parcels located between Amy Road and Orange Hill Drive.

BACKGROUND:

Intent of Proposed Amendment:

Establish an appropriate future land use category for properties along Austell Road so that current and possible future uses could be taken into consideration. Also to provide a better transition in scale from the residential properties existing in the county to the commercial street frontage along Austell Road

Definitions:

The purpose of the Community Activity Center (CAC) is to provide for areas that can meet the immediate needs of several neighborhoods or communities. Typical land uses for these areas include low to mid-rise office buildings and department stores.

The purpose of the Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC) category is to provide for areas that serve neighborhood residents and businesses. Typical land uses for these areas include small offices, limited retail and grocery stores.

Planning History:

This area has been subject to two previous planning efforts: The Austell Road Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) Study and the Austell Road Access Management Plan. The purpose of the LCI study was to recommend land use policy changes and transportation improvements, while the purpose of the Access Management Plan is to recommend additional transportation improvements that will improve safety and mobility along the corridor.

ANALYSIS:

The subject properties are currently under the Community Activity Center (CAC) future land use category. They are mainly surrounded by Low Density Residential (LDR), with some areas abutting High Density Residential (HDR), Medium Density Residential (MDR), Public

Institutional (PI) and Industrial (I) land use. Due to the proximity of this eight-mile long commercial corridor to a largely single family residential community and in recognition of the need to establish an appropriate land use transition from commercial areas to residential areas surrounding it, staff recommends a Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC) land use category.

A windshield survey was conducted in May 2013 to accurately assess the existing land uses within the corridor. The pattern of land uses found is predominately retail, office and general services. This corridor is suburban in nature and generally automobile oriented. Commercial strip development lines the major arterial (Austell Road), with single and multi-family residential development found along quieter streets behind. A significant portion of the homes built are primarily one-story ranch-style residences of which some have been converted to retail and office uses. Given the current economic and market conditions the vacancy rate is low. Many businesses are operating but have a dilapidated or rundown appearance. This is in vast contrast to the well-maintained residential neighborhoods located just behind the corridor. Generally speaking, many of the lots fronting Austell Road are smaller in size, due to many years of road widening on Austell Road, making them able to support floor area ratios recommended in the NAC future land use category (0.5 or less for office use and 0.25 for retail use) rather than the CAC category (0.75 for office use and 0.25 for retail use).

The most noticeable aesthetic concerns were the inconsistency of signs and streetscape fronting the corridor. There was no cohesive sign design in height, size or graphics. The existing streetscape along Austell Road is stark in most areas with pockets of improved areas. There is a discontinuity in landscaping, concrete medians and lighting. Sidewalks are present on both sides of Austell Road. Although many of the parcels are small and irregularly shaped with inadequate parking, there still remain some opportunities for redevelopment of both vacant and currently occupied commercial properties.

Assessing the existing commercial area has provided staff with information needed to address compatibility between land uses when making land use decisions and to mitigate possible adverse impacts of commercial properties on residential properties. The recommended Comprehensive Plan change seeks to provide more neighborhood scale commercial, reflecting the areas existing commercial uses while upholding individual's property rights.

1) Applicable Goals from the Comprehensive Plan:

1. Cobb County is a business-friendly community that supports business development and entrepreneurship. This orientation along with other attributes, has established Cobb as one of the best places to start a new business, expand an existing business, or relocate a company.
2. Cobb is proud of being a regional leader and supportive partner in making the Atlanta Region a great place to live, learn, work, and play.
3. In the year 2030, Cobb is recognized as Georgia's most complete community, a place that combines the best of urban, suburban, and rural life to appeal to a broad spectrum of people.

2) Applicable Policies from the Comprehensive Plan:

1. Promote the continued development of our major business districts to support employment growth, provide retail services, and serve as a hub for the community.
2. Provide sufficient opportunities for each land use type to serve the needs of the community, maintain the current tax base, and balance/sustain a desired mix of residential types.
3. Address compatibility between land uses when making land use decisions.

4. Provide transitions in scale and/or land use between high and low intensity land uses.

3) Consistency with existing Corridor Studies and Other Plans:

This property is partially located within the boundaries of the Austell Road Corridor Study and the Austell Road Access Management Plan.

4) Adherence to Nodal Development Patterns:

This proposal is in compliance with a nodal pattern of development as approval of this request will maintain a concentrated CAC node at area around Cobb Wellstar Hospital (East West Connector and Austell Road). The change of the northern and southern peripheries of the corridor will still encourage office and commercial development, albeit at a smaller scale more in keeping with the surrounding residential development and existing lot dimensions

5) Consistency with Revitalization Goals:

Some of the commercial properties in this area are underutilized and/or near end of their lifecycle as currently designed and built. As new investment comes into this area, it is important that it be done in a manner that ensures quality design.

6) Environment Impact:

At this level of analysis, staff is not able to identify any known environmental resources, restraints or concerns that may be affected by this application. The undeveloped properties in this area should strive to protect tree canopies and redeveloping properties should be brought into compliance with the county's tree ordinance.

7) Transportation Analysis:

1. Major Thoroughfare Plan (Roadway Classification):
Austell Road: Arterial
2. Number of Lanes (Existing):
Austell Road: 4 travel lanes, divided with median
3. Number of Lanes (Proposed):
Austell Road: 4 travel lanes, divided with median
4. Traffic Volume (ADT):
Austell Rd, South of Hicks Rd 3/5/2013 (30600)
Austell Rd, North of Milford Church Rd 4/17/2012 (30100)
Austell Rd, North of Windy Hill Rd 11/16/2006 (34,500)
5. Sidewalks:
Austell Road: Sidewalk Present (both sides)
6. Bicycle Lanes/Trails:
Austell Road: None present on Austell Road along the corridor; Austell Road crosses Silver Comet Trail near (Drennon Ave and Austell Rd)
7. Transit: **Route 15 and Route 30**

8. Proposed Projects of Impact:
No Propose Project of Impact.

9. CTP Recommendations:

The 5 year update of the Cobb 2030 Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) is currently in the beginning stages of development. Selected transportation projects recommended in the 2008 Board adopted CTP and other transportation investment studies have been funded through the county SPLOST program and the Regional Transportation Improvement Program and Long Range Transportation Program. Those projects are listed in the “Proposed Projects of Impact” item previously stated. A revised listing of recommended transportation improvements will be available by the end of FY 13 for consideration when approving future Comprehensive Plan Amendments.