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**DADE COUNTY FARM BUREAU**

# **Know who makes the decisions that shape your area**

**By Katie A. Edwards**

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If you want a lesson in the "not in my backyard" politics, all you have to do is attend a community council meeting.

Community councils were created in 1996 to make zoning and land-use decisions more accessible to the community, according to the Miami-Dade Department of Planning and Zoning. They double in size when you add the community zoning appeals boards, which make all zoning decisions in our unincorporated county.

Community councils decide whether to allow a new residential development, shopping center or church. They also review technical specifications for zoning uses, such as the required number of parking spaces or building setback distances.

Within each council are members who ardently favor low-density housing projects over a builder's original requests. Residents attend meetings to speak out against projects, citing mainly traffic concerns. What they are really saying is that they do not want any new development in their community.

Then there are the residents who are against projects because they moved to the country to escape traffic and congestion. One man actually asked the council to deny a developer's request for street lights and sidewalks because these requests are not in sync with rural living. Widening roads and installing street lights are an improvement to the quality of life, but there are residents who favor dirt roads and unlit streets over improvement and safety.

What these residents don't realize is that they are the ones who created the sprawl. They came to the Redland to escape from the cities and suburbs, and now that they have a little piece of heaven in the countryside, nobody else can.

Some are against farmers and nursery growers who want their land rezoned from agriculture. How quickly they forget that the land their country homes are built on was more than likely once farmland.

The council approves, with alarming frequency, projects at a lower density than requested.

Miami-Dade County is not in full accordance with its Comprehensive Development Master Plan. The county allows 10 units per acre, yet councils only grant six units on average. So, the county operates at 60 percent of its housing capacity.

Proponents of the "Hold the Line" campaign use water's future quality and availability as a reason for not moving the Urban Development Boundary . What about the future availability and quality of land? County planners maintain that there is enough land inside the UDB to accommodate housing needs until 2018.

How can this be accurately determined when community councils don't allow maximum use of the available land?

It's important for residents to understand the forces behind land use decisions in this county. There are community council members who take a more holistic and balanced approach to these making land-use and zoning decisions, but they are often outnumbered by the residents who actively seek to maintain their rural lifestyle.

So, ask yourself, who is responsible for the inefficient use of land in the county?

I'm not in favor of paving over the Redland with concrete. I am, however, in favor of making the best decisions about the use of our most finite resource, land.

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