

RESOLUTION #RES2018-16

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF DUNNELLON CITY COUNCIL REQUESTING THE HONORABLE GOVERNOR RICK SCOTT TO DIRECT THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, FLORIDA'S TURNPIKE ENTERPRISE, TO REJECT ALTERNATIVE CORRIDORS PROPOSED FOR THE COASTAL CONNECTOR IN WESTERN MARION COUNTY.

WHEREAS, the Florida Department of Transportation, Florida's Turnpike Enterprise, is conducting an Alternative Corridor Evaluation (ACE) for the Coastal Connector, a new transportation corridor proposed in Citrus and Marion Counties and five alternative routes have been identified in western Marion County; and

WHEREAS, the Dunnellon City Council held a public workshop with representatives of the Florida Department of Transportation and Montgomery Consulting Group, regarding the Coastal Connector project, and received public input from city residents and property owners from the greater Dunnellon area that encompasses properties within Marion and Citrus Counties thereon, on May 9, 2018; and

WHEREAS, additional discussions and deliberations were conducted by the Marion County Board of County Commissioners on May 18, 2018 and the Transportation Planning Organization on May 22, 2018; and

WHEREAS, the City Council recognizes that the growing population of Florida will require additions to critical transportation infrastructure within the State; and

WHEREAS, in furtherance thereof, the City Council strongly supports the recommendations of the I-75 Relief Task Force, to expand the capacity of that facility, contained in the final Task Force Report, dated October 1, 2016; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Department of Transportation's ACE process is to help identify and evaluate corridor alternatives by considering transportation needs and environmental issues early in the project development, encourages the public to be involved, and integrates opportunities for community input into every step of the study to allow for meaningful participation in the process; and

WHEREAS, in consideration of the compelling public testimony received by the Dunnellon City Council, the Council concludes that the five alignments proposed through western Marion County must be rejected for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- A. In 2016, the I-75 Relief Task Force considered the suitability of three "Areas of Opportunity" through western Marion County (see Exhibit "A," attached hereto) as part of that analysis, and none of them were adopted by the Task Force. Now, the five proposed alignments would have significant negative impacts within some of the Areas of Opportunity previously rejected, or not recommended by, the Task Force; and

- B. While some have characterized the Coastal Connector as a facility for hurricane evacuation, the Dunnellon City Council urges that making the improvements to I-75 recommended by the Task Force should be given a much higher priority for hurricane evacuation than the Coastal Connector project; and
- C. Marion County's unique limestone-based soil classified as locally important and prime farmland, provides key natural agronomic benefits to the equine industry and increasingly diverse agricultural industries such as blueberry and vineyard production; and
- D. Marion County is recognized as the Horse Capital of the World, particularly western Marion County, whose equine industry impacts the local economy with a \$1.6 Billion value added contribution to the gross domestic product, \$2.62 Billion added contribution in industry outputs, and 19,209 full and part time jobs, which was more than 15% of Marion County's overall economy in 2012; and
- E. The Greater Dunnellon area's unique karst geology provides high recharge to the Floridian Aquifer, the key source of freshwater for central Florida and numerous springs, including Dunnellon's world class Rainbow Springs and Ocala's Silver Springs, both first magnitude springs within Marion County, along with providing a nutrient laden freshwater source which supports and enhances our extensive agricultural production; and
- F. It would not be possible to construct any Coastal Connector Turnpike Route from the Suncoast Parkway at State Road 44 to I-75 without significant adverse impacts to some of the important Conservation Land tracts in Marion County, including Halpata Tastanaki Preserve, Ross Prairie, Rainbow Springs state park (and its additions), Lake Rousseau and the Cross Florida Greenway; and
- G. Dunnellon's adopted Comprehensive Plan includes the Future Land Use and Conservation Elements which recognize the unique environment of Dunnellon, , regulating the use of natural resources, open space and flood prone areas and protecting wetlands, potable water well fields, natural aquifer recharge areas, endangered species, intact ecological systems, air and water quality consistent with the requirements of the Conservation Element; and
- H. Dunnellon's Conservation Element further recognizes the Rainbow River and Withlacoochee River are irreplaceable recreational and aesthetic resources to the City. This element provides that the City shall ensure existing and future land uses do not contribute to a decrease in surface water quality, including lakes, rivers and wetlands, which shall be designated conservation areas; and
- I. The City further recognizes the need to protect the natural resources to include the Rainbow and Withlacoochee Rivers as well as the wildlife, flora and fauna pursuant to the City's Land Development Regulations, Article III, Chapter 78 River Corridor Protection; and

- J. It must be recognized that the issue is not simply the payment of “full compensation” to owners of the most valuable equine and agricultural properties in Marion County. Rather, it must be recognized that as a result of any of these corridors, the required right-of-way acquisitions and resulting construction of the proposed facility will not only damage, but may destroy many of these important operations in the greater Dunnellon area of Marion County, and consequently, negatively impact the economic vitality and long-range growth of Marion County; and
- K. While it is understood that the evaluation and study of major new transportation facilities is a long term activity that may go on for decades, where, as here, some proposed alignments are manifestly not viable options, they should be affirmatively and unequivocally removed from consideration at the earliest possible date, so as to remove the cloud of economic uncertainty that their very existence leaves on all properties within their footprints.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Dunnellon, Florida:

Section 1. In order to protect our rural lands, our vital ecotourism, our precious conservation land tracts, our rivers, springs and the quality of life of our citizens and the overall objectives of our adopted Comprehensive Plan, the City Council hereby opposes each and every one of the five alternative corridors of the Coastal Connector currently under consideration through western Marion County, as well as any new proposed corridor that would traverse the Farmland Preservation Area of western Marion County.

Section 2. The City Council respectfully requests the Honorable Governor Rick Scott to intervene in the Coastal Connector project and to direct the elimination of all of the five currently proposed corridor alignments in western Marion County; and further that no alignment be proposed or considered that would traverse the area of western Marion County.

Section 3. The Dunnellon City Council further urges the Honorable Governor Rick Scott to direct that the Florida Department of Transportation and Florida Turnpike Enterprise refocus their efforts upon achieving the primary recommendation of the I-75 Relief Task Force made on October 1, 2016, which provides: “*Transform I-75 from Hernando to Columbia counties by expanding its capacity and improving its safety, efficiency, and reliability through potential strategies such as express lanes and truck-only lanes.*”

Section 4. EFFECTIVE DATE. This Resolution shall take effect upon its adoption.

DULY ADOPTED this 11th day of June 2018.

ATTEST:

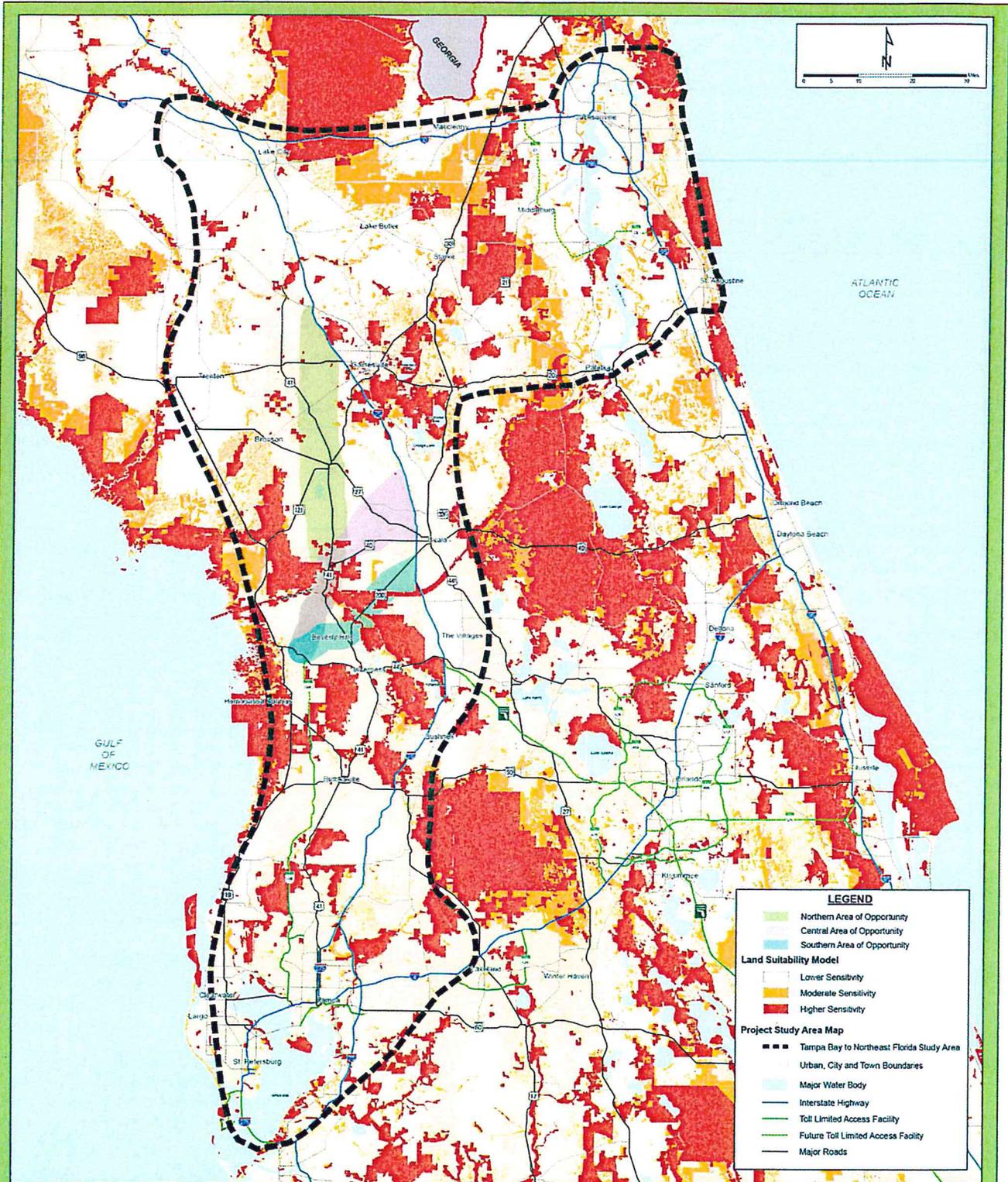
CITY OF DUNNELLON

Amanda L. Roberts, CMC
City Clerk

Walter Green, Mayor

Approved as to form and legality:

Andrew J. Hand, City Attorney



**DRAFT Areas of Opportunity, 4/6/2016
Preliminary for Review and Comment**



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