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September 11, 2006

Doug Coward, Chairman
St. Lucie Board of County Commissioners
2300 Virginia Avenue
Fort Pierce, FL 34982

RE: Rural Lands Stewardship Program

Dear Chairman Coward:

I am writing this letter as the past Chair of the Governor's Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast and as a resident on the Treasure Coast who is greatly concerned about the future of our region. I apologize for not being able to be present for the September 12th BOCC meeting where you will be voting on the proposed comprehensive plan amendment addressing the St. Lucie County Rural Land Stewardship Area. My hope was to speak in person in support of this plan amendment, but with the rescheduling of the meeting and vote, I unfortunately have a conflict.

As you are aware, programs like Rural Land Stewardship were identified and supported by the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast, established in 2004 by Governor Jeb Bush. The specific project being proposed in St. Lucie County is critical to the preservation of over 12,000 acres of undeveloped land that have not only social and historical attributes, but also significant environmental resources. Past efforts to purchase the Adam's Ranch have not been successful because of the family's desire to keep the property in agriculture for the family's future generations. If the family were willing to sell the land for conservation easement, which I understand they are not interested in doing, the public cost to taxpayers would be prohibitively expensive. The Stewardship Program provides a way to preserve the majority of this property in perpetuity without placing the burden for purchase and management on the backs of current and future residents.

I know that in concept you support the Rural Land Stewardship program, but understand you have concerns regarding the density of the proposed town and the open space requirements. With due respect for your issues, I still strongly encourage you to vote in favor of the Rural Land Stewardship program on September 12. Moving forward, you will have many opportunities to use your planning background and expertise during the public review process to work with the applicant to design a truly sustainable community.

As you are aware, during our time working together on the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast, our committee debated and discussed at length the critical need for collaboration and consensus building and the use of innovative and progressive planning tools to help us achieve a vision for a Sustainable Treasure Coast. This is one of the tools we identified, and a way we can begin to use the market forces of development to drive our conservation efforts. Please do not let this opportunity pass.

Sincerely,



Melissa L. Meeker

Cc: Commissioner Chris Craft
Commissioner Frannie Hutchinson
Commissioner Paula Lewis
Commissioner Joseph Smith
Doug Anderson, SLC Administrator
Bob Nix, SLC Growth Management Director