



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Karl Albertson

FROM: Jason Hahner

DATE: March 6, 2026

RE: Newfield Open Space Conservation Easement Amendment; Environmental Evaluation

During the overall master planning for the Newfield Planned Mixed Use Village (PMUV) property it was understood that open space area would be provided for and placed under protective easement. As detailed site planning and design has progressed, it has become apparent that an amendment to the Open Space Conservation Easement is necessary to provide for cohesive design and fulfillment of the Newfield PMUV Development Agreement and Master Plan.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide supporting natural resource environmental information regarding the proposed exchange of 21.986 acres of open space conservation easement area within the Newfield Planned Mixed Use Village (PMUV) property. The 21.986 acres of current open space conservation easement is a cumulative total of area located within four distinct portions of the Newfield PMUV property. The proposed exchange of area entails removal of the 21.986 acres from the open space conservation easement and replacement with 33.35 acres of open space comprised of native upland habitat located within two portions of the Newfield PMUV property that are not currently included in the open space conservation easement.

### **Background -**

On June 14, 2024, a “Deed of Conservation Easement for Newfield Open Space” was recorded with the Martin County Clerk of Circuit Court (O.R. Book number 3442, Page 2548). The purpose of the easement is for the preservation of open space outside of the Primary Urban Service District for the preservation, management, and maintenance of open space in perpetuity. The conditions of the open space easement differ somewhat from those of a typical conservation easement provided for the preservation of native habitat and wetlands.

The Open Space Easement allows for public access, passive recreation, limited agricultural use, construction of infrastructure and facilities for permitted uses, and clearing for the purpose of infrastructure and facility construction. A summary of the four distinct areas requested to be replaced in the open space conservation easement follows.

### **84<sup>th</sup> Avenue Extension –**

During the overall master planning for Newfield, it was understood that 84<sup>th</sup> Avenue would be extended through the Newfield PMUV property to connect with Newfield Parkway. However, the specific detailed alignment of the future right-of-way had not been determined at that time. Careful consideration was made in the planning of the right-of-way to avoid impacting any wetlands or PAMP preserve areas within the Newfield property. Considering that the open space conservation easement extends across the entire portion of the southern Newfield property boundary where 84<sup>th</sup> Avenue is to be extended, complete avoidance of the easement is not feasible. Now that the alignment of the right-of-way has been determined and development approval is imminent, 7.63 acres of open space conservation easement have been identified as needing to be relocated elsewhere within the Newfield PMUV property.

The 7.63 acre portion of the property that is currently included in the Open Space Conservation Easement is located south of Newfield Parkway and west of Boat Ramp Avenue. A review of historic aerial imagery indicates that this area was previously cleared in the early 1950s for conversion to agricultural use. Subsequent disturbances occurred in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s for agricultural use purposes including silviculture and pasture management for cattle grazing. The property has historically been and continues to be used for cattle grazing.

Approximately 28% of this parcel is currently improved pasture for grazing with a vegetation assemblage comprised predominantly of native and non-native pasture grasses. The remaining 72% consists of pine flatwood habitat that reflects the past disturbances related to pasture management and silviculture harvesting. Dominant vegetation species within the pine flatwood portions of this property include slash pine, dahoon holly, cabbage palm, saw palmetto, and gallberry.

### **FP&L Substation –**

During overall master planning for Newfield, it was understood that a 5.596 +/- acre parcel would need to be set aside for construction of an FPL substation. There was no specific geographic location selected, however, access and proximity to existing FPL infrastructure would be primary considerations in locating the parcel. Given these criteria, a location in

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the far northeast corner of the Newfield property, adjacent to the C-23 Canal right of way and Florida's Turnpike with access from existing Boat Ramp Avenue was eventually selected. The 5.0 acre portion of property that is currently included in the Open Space Conservation Easement is bounded to the north by the C-23 Canal and to the east by Florida's Turnpike. This 5.596 acres is not contiguous with or adjacent to any PAMP I, PAMP II or PAMP III preserve areas.

A review of historic aerial imagery indicates that this 5.596 acre area was previously cleared in the early 1950s for agricultural use. Subsequent disturbances occurred through the 1960s and 1970s including earthwork to widen the C-23 Canal, construction of Florida's Turnpike, and other infrastructure improvements to the Turnpike and C-23 Canal. The property has historically been and continues to be used for cattle grazing.

Approximately 70% of this parcel is currently unimproved pasture for grazing with scattered native plant species. The native species present include slash pine, cabbage palm, live oak, laurel oak, saw palmetto, and gallberry. The remaining 30% of this parcel reflects past and ongoing disturbances related to the C-23 Canal and Florida's Turnpike.

### **Newfield SD-W East –**

As detailed site planning and design has progressed, it has become apparent that, to provide for cohesive neighborhood design, a minor shift in the boundary of the open space easement area would be beneficial. Specifically, a 1.17 acre portion of the open space conservation easement area will be included within the Master Site Plan for the Newfield SD-W East development area.

The 1.17 acre portion of property that is currently included in the Open Space Conservation Easement is located along the south boundary of the Newfield SD-W East Parcel. There is a PAMP II wetland and upland buffer preserve area adjacent to the south. In its current location, this 1.17 acre area will be bounded by developed areas to the north, east, and west.

A review of historical aerial imagery indicates that this area was previously cleared for conversion to row crop agriculture in the mid-1950s and was maintained as cleared agricultural property through the 1990s. Following the use of the area for row crop agriculture, the property was and continues to be used for cattle grazing. The network of ridges, furrows, and drainage swales from the conversion to row crop agriculture remain. The current vegetation assemblage consists of naturally regenerating pine flatwood habitat with a developing canopy stratum of slash pine, laurel oak, and cabbage palm and an understory and groundcover dominated by saw palmetto, gallberry, and myrsine.

**Rosette Park –**

During the review of potential conflicts between future planned development in accordance with the Newfield master plan and the open space conservation easement, an overlap of development and open space easement area was identified to have already occurred. The 7.59 +/- acre overlapping portion of property is located north of and adjacent to Newfield Parkway, across from the Newfield Community Fields development, within the Newfield Crossroads Phase 1A-2 and 1A-3 approved development areas.

The 7.59 acre area falls within both the Open Space Conservation Easement and area that has been approved for development. Given that construction of the approved development has already been completed, the 7.59 acres of open space conservation easement must be replaced elsewhere within the Newfield PMUV that is currently outside the open space easement.

The 7.59 acre portion of property that is currently included in the Open Space Conservation Easement is located north of and adjacent to Newfield Parkway, west of Boat Ramp Avenue, and is adjacent to approved development areas. This 7.59 acre area is not contiguous with or adjacent to any PAMP I, PAMP II, or PAMP III preserve areas. The area was previously evaluated for natural resources and listed wildlife species in November 2022 and in February, April, and June 2023 in support of preparing an Environmental Assessment Report for the Newfield Crossroads Phase 1A development.

A review of historic aerial imagery indicates that this 7.59 acre area was cleared and converted for agricultural use in the mid-1950s. The property was later converted to citrus grove in the early 1990s and subsequently converted to row crop agriculture around 2017. The portion of property remained in row crop production until clearing and construction was authorized in 2023.

Field reconnaissance for the environmental assessment confirmed the absence of wetlands and native upland habitat and did not identify the presence of any listed wildlife species within the 7.59 acre area. Aside from cultivated row crop plants, vegetation was limited to a windrow of non-native invasive Brazilian pepper and scattered wax myrtle along the property boundary and Newfield Parkway right-of-way interface.

**Amendment Request –**

The 21.986 acres of open space easement described above will be replaced by 33.35 acres of native upland habitat that is not currently under open space conservation easement. This represents a replacement ratio of greater than 1.5:1. The replacement areas are located within two portions of the Newfield PMUV property as described below.

Proposed replacement area will consist of 32.18 acres of high quality native pine flatwoods habitat that contains a PAMP III wetland and is contiguous with PAMP II wetland preserve areas. The 32.18 acre area is located north of Newfield Parkway, east of and adjacent to Boat Ramp Avenue.

As with the other areas described in this memo, this area was previously cleared in the 1950's. However, other than occasional agricultural practices for the maintenance of unimproved pasture, no other disturbances are discernable in historic aerial imagery or were observed during field reconnaissance.

The 32.18 acre replacement area currently consists of high quality native pine flatwoods habitat and dry prairie consisting predominantly of native herbaceous species. The pine flatwood habitat contains a canopy stratum dominated by slash pine of various sizes, a subcanopy consisting of cabbage palm, live oak, laurel oak, and dahoon holly, and an understory and groundcover predominantly comprised of saw palmetto, rusty lyonia, tar flower, gallberry, shiny blueberry, and wire grass.

From a vegetative composition standpoint, the proposed replacement parcel is much higher habitat quality with minimal disturbance when compared to the areas proposed for removal from the open space conservation easement. In addition, the proposed replacement parcel is contiguous with several designated native preserve areas and will add habitat functions and value to those adjacent PAMP II and PAMP III preserve areas.

Additionally, 1.17 acres of open space area is proposed within the Newfield SD-W East Parcel and is located east of and adjacent to the development parcel. This area is bounded by a PAMP III wetland and upland buffer preserve area and is contiguous with a preserve area located on Martin County owned park property located to the south. As a result, this 1.17 acre area would be bounded primarily by preserve areas.

A review of historic aerial imagery indicates that the 1.17 acre proposed replacement area was also previously cleared in the mid-1950's but unlike the area in SD-W that is proposed for removal, this area was never converted to row crop agriculture and therefore does not contain remnant ridges, furrows and drainage swales. The current vegetation assemblage consists of naturally regenerating pine flatwood habitat with a developing canopy stratum of slash pine, laurel oak, and cabbage palm and an understory and groundcover dominated by saw palmetto, gallberry, and myrsine.

For these reasons, it is clear that there will be a net environmental/natural resource functional gain from the proposed exchange of open space acreage. This will further the goals of both the PAMP II Preserve and the open space easement as a whole.