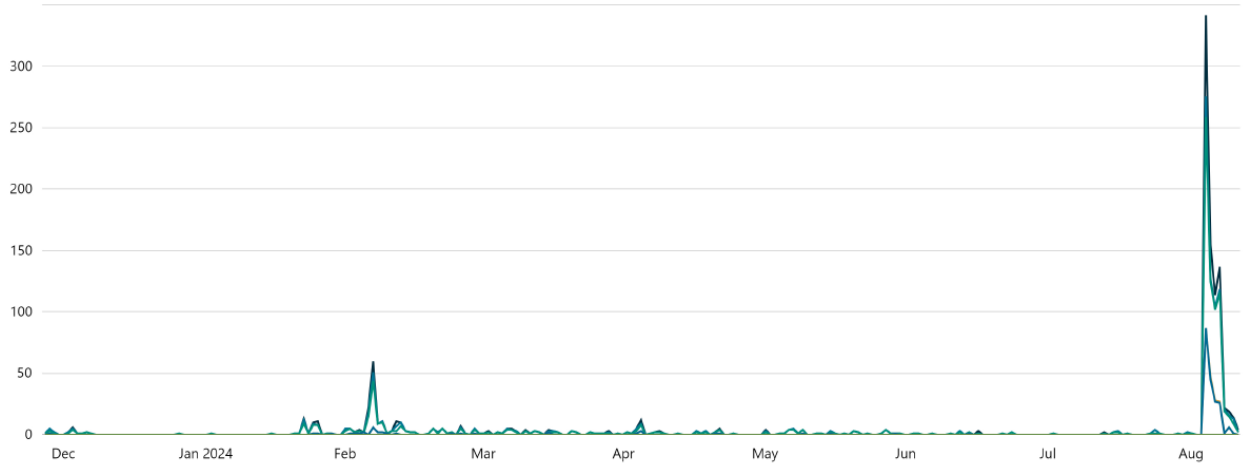
Sumter County
Land Development Code Update
Online Survey Summary

SURVEY INFORMATION

Start - Close: February 8, 2024, to August 25, 2024

Platform: Project Website - tinyurl.com/SumterLDCUpdate

The consulting team in conjunction with County staff, developed an Online Survey and uploaded it to the project website to help gather public sentiments, ideas, and preferences regarding the update of the County's Land Development Code. 233 people took the survey online and 2 in person. As shown below, most were completed during the month of August, just prior to the public workshop.



1,224 Views	1,056 Visits	881 Visitors	233 Contributions	224 Contributors	0 Followers



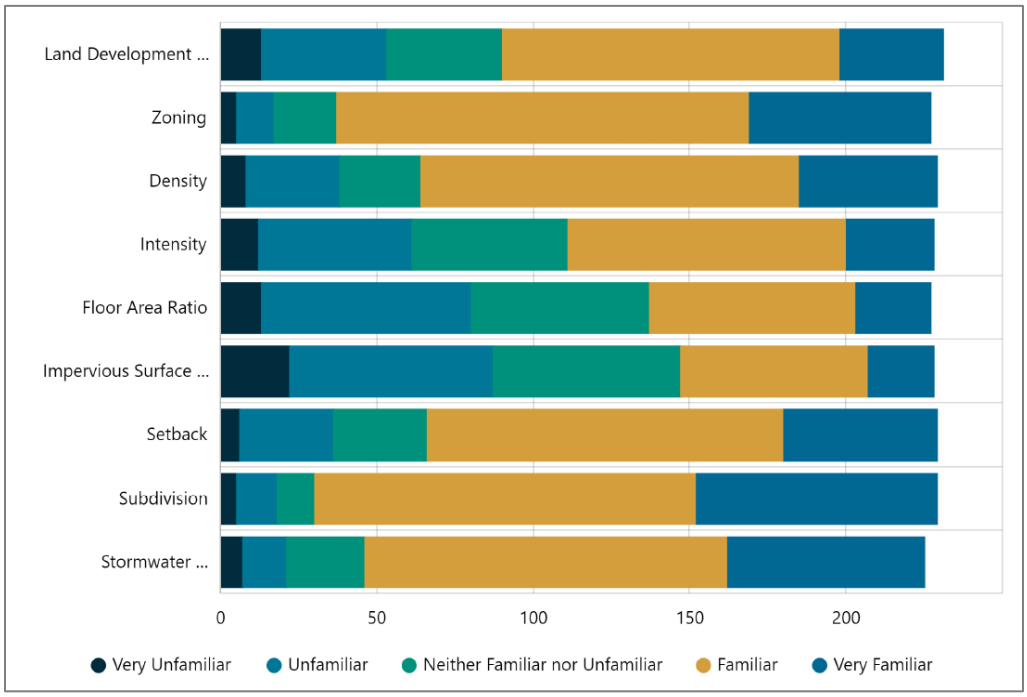
SURVEY RESULTS

The survey included 9 questions. The following sections summarize the answers received.

Question 1: **What is your zip code?** The following word cloud shows the prominence of zip codes provided (the larger the font the greater number of repeat answers).

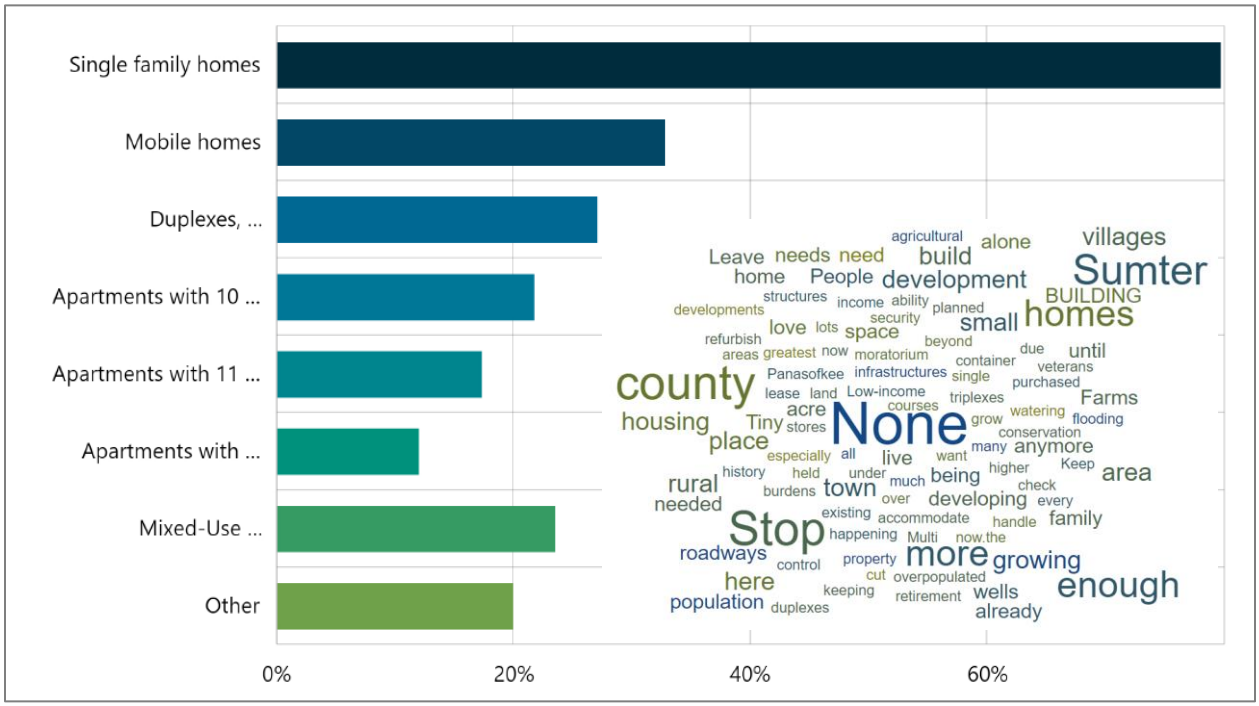


Question 2: **How familiar are you with the following terminology? (Very Unfamiliar, Unfamiliar, Neither Familiar nor Unfamiliar, Familiar, Very Unfamiliar)**



The survey responses indicate varying levels of familiarity with terminology typically used in land development regulations. Zoning is the most understood, with most respondents marking themselves as familiar or very familiar. Land Development Code, Density, Setback, Subdivision, and Stormwater also show strong recognition, with many respondents indicating familiarity. However, terms like Intensity and Floor Area Ratio received mixed responses, with a notable portion of respondents unfamiliar or neutral. The least understood term was Impervious Surface, where a considerable number of participants expressed unfamiliarity.

Question 3: **Florida Law requires local governments to plan for future population growth. What types of housing should be developed to accommodate Sumter County's growing number of prospective residents? Select all that apply.**



Those who selected "Other" provided an explanation (summarized below).

Opposition to Further Growth.

- Many respondents feel that Sumter County is already overdeveloped and believe that growth should be halted or significantly restricted.
- Respondents expressed concerns about the adverse effects of development, including water shortages, environmental degradation, and increased demands on infrastructure.

Support for Specific Types of Housing.

- Affordable and Specialized Housing. Some respondents suggest developing elderly low-income housing, veteran housing, and low-income housing.
- Rural and Small-Scale Housing. Some respondents prefer ranch-style homes, tiny homes, and small farms. There is also support for developing only on currently purchased land and refurbishing existing structures.

- Multi-Family Housing. Some respondents advocate for multi-family homes to accommodate growth.

Preservation and Environmental Concerns.

- Responses emphasize preserving rural areas, farmland, and conservation efforts.
- Many responses suggest limiting development to protect aquifer recharge areas and to avoid overbuilding on wetlands.

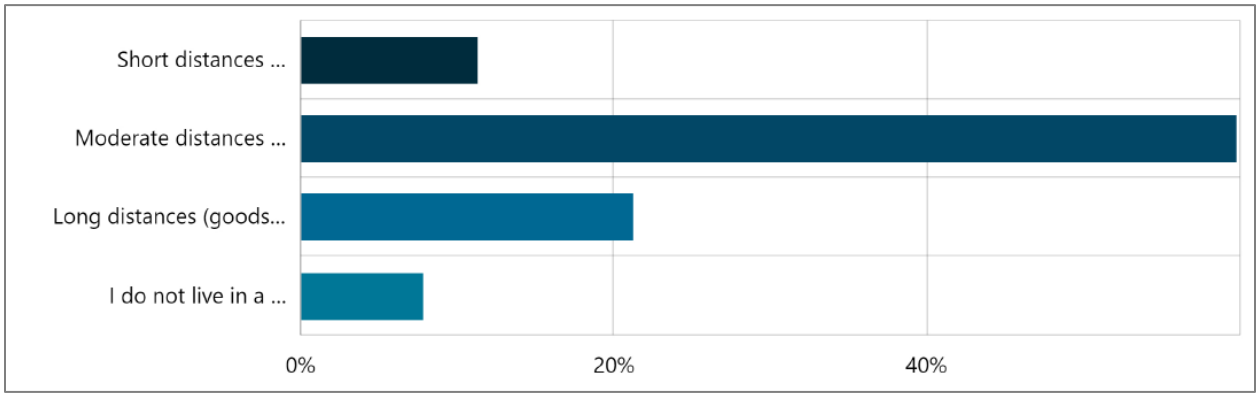
Geographic and Structural Recommendations.

- Respondents suggest focusing development in specific areas, building up rather than expanding out, and avoiding villages or large-scale infrastructure projects.

Other Improvements.

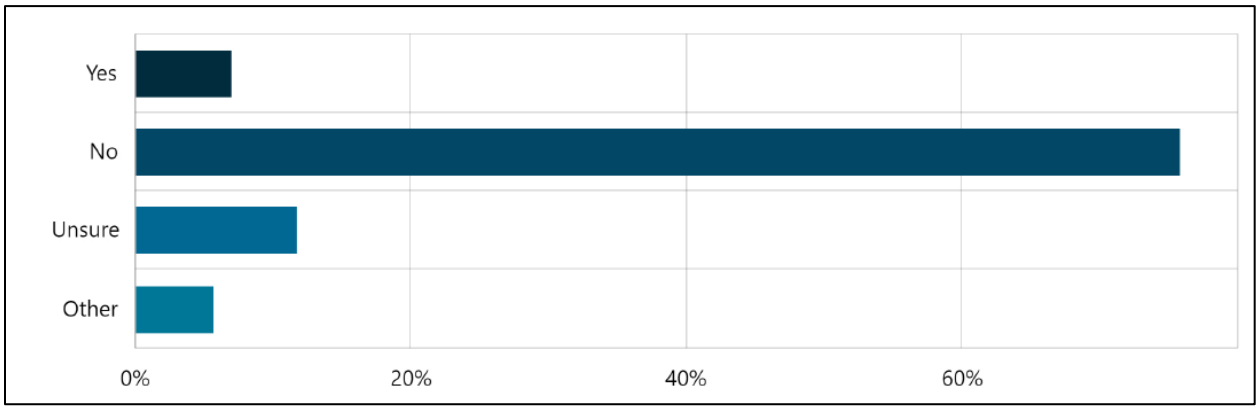
- Several responses highlight the need to address existing infrastructure issues, such as roads and water management, before accommodating more growth.
- Respondents suggested providing shelters, gymnasiums, and an activity center with housing apartments.

Question 4. If you live in a rural area of the County, how far do you think it is ok to travel to receive basic goods and services (e.g., grocery stores, gas stations, barber shops)?



When asked about acceptable travel distances for basic goods and services in rural areas, 59.74% of respondents favored moderate distances, believing that goods and services should be available in select rural locations. Another 11.26% preferred shorter distances, supporting the idea that services should be provided in rural areas. Meanwhile, 21.21% felt that services should never be in rural areas, indicating a preference for longer travel distances. Lastly, 7.79% indicated they do not live in rural areas. Overall, most respondents support having some level of services available within rural communities.

Question 5. Do you think that the County does a sufficient job in protecting natural resources (e.g., trees, habitats, waterbodies, etc.) from new development?



Most respondents, 75.76%, believe that the county does not do a sufficient job in protecting natural resources from new development. Only 6.93% feel the county is doing enough. Approximately 11.66% are unsure, while a small percentage (5.63%) provided other responses. These respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the County's handling of development, particularly with projects like The Villages, which they believe have negatively impacted natural resources such as forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. There are concerns that the County's efforts are insufficient or inconsistent, with criticisms directed at both the permitting process and the management of growth. Specific locations, like Lake Panasofkee and Highway 470, are mentioned as needing more attention or protection, particularly from overdevelopment and flooding issues.



Question 6. How can the County ensure that new growth occurs in a manner which retains what you feel makes Sumter County an ideal place to live, work, play, and grow? (Short answer)

The word cloud below represents the most frequently-used words used in the responses received. Also below is a summary of the responses received.

Preserve Rural Character.

- Respondents strongly favor restricting development in rural areas and preserving the county's farmland, ranches, wetlands, green areas, rural charm, and scenic/natural beauty.
- Respondents suggest prioritizing growth near existing towns and resources instead.

Limit Large Developments.

- There is significant opposition to the rapid expansion of large developments like The Villages. Many believe these projects are overwhelming the County and eroding its rural character.
- There is strong opposition to rezoning agricultural land for industrial or residential purposes.



Protect Rural Areas and Environmental Assets:

- Emphasis on environmental sustainability, including conserving green spaces and natural landscapes, lakes, hunting areas, wildlife habitats, and old oak trees.
- Suggestions include planting more trees and creating wildlife corridors to prevent habitat loss and ensure quality of life.
- Desire to keep rural communities like Lake Panasoffkee unchanged, maintaining their peaceful and laid-back atmosphere without succumbing to large-scale development pressures.

Manage Growth/Development Planning Thoughtfully.

- Respondents express a desire to avoid high-density and cookie-cutter subdivisions. They favor larger lot sizes and innovative, aesthetically pleasing designs for new developments. Many suggest slowing down growth to allow infrastructure to catch up and to ensure that new developments are well-planned.
- Support for stricter development controls, such as low-density housing and setbacks, and avoiding further development in rural areas and certain towns.
- Concerns about the rapid pace of development leading to poor-quality infrastructure and flood-prone areas.
- Suggestion for strategizing traffic flow to maintain safe road and sidewalk pedestrian traffic during construction.

Enhance Local Services. Desire for affordable housing, improved roads, better parks, recreational facilities, and local amenities without expanding/compromising the rural character of the county.

Promote Aesthetic and Creative Design. Respondents suggest preserving rural identity/character and providing innovative and aesthetically pleasing architectural designs in new developments to enhance the county's appeal and prevent monotonous, uninspired building styles.

Involve and Inform Residents. There is a call for greater community involvement in development decisions and for making residents aware of proposed developments before planning begins, particularly criticizing the "One Sumter" plan and the influence of large developers.

Focus on Infrastructure and Services. Suggestions include improving current infrastructure and service plans for traffic, road maintenance, sewer systems, utilities, and other public amenities, as well as attracting family-friendly businesses, rather than focusing on new developments.

Increase Developer Fees. Suggestions to raise impact fees and infrastructure costs for developers to ensure they contribute fairly to the county's resources and mitigate the strain on services, particularly for large-scale developments. Prioritize quality over quantity.

Regulate and Enforce Zoning Laws. Strengthen enforcement of zoning and code violations, especially concerning parking and the use of private roads. Ensure that violations are addressed consistently to prevent exploitation of loopholes.

Support Small Businesses. Provide spaces and incentives for small business development to ensure that new growth does not push out local enterprises. Ensure that new developments include opportunities for small businesses.

Question 7. What uses would you like to see developed less often within the County moving forward? Please provide up to three answers. (Short Answer)



Housing.

- Many respondents expressed a desire to see less development of high-density housing, including apartments, multi-family dwellings, and large subdivisions.
- There is a preference to reduce the development of retirement communities and other age-restricted housing.

The Villages and Similar Developments. A significant number of responses mentioned a desire to reduce or halt the development associated with The Villages and similar large, planned communities, including age-restricted communities.

Rural, Environmental, and Agricultural Preservation. There is strong sentiment favoring the conservation of rural and undeveloped areas, as well as protection of agricultural land. Respondents are concerned about preserving natural spaces, rural settings, and agricultural land, and want to see less deforestation and disruption of natural habitats.

Infrastructure, Utilities and Road Improvements.

- Several comments indicated a preference for fewer roundabouts and a focus on improving existing roads in rural and southern parts of the County, rather than constructing new ones.
- There are requests to limit new sewer systems, particularly in rural areas, and to focus on improving existing infrastructure such as roads and drainage systems rather than expanding new developments.

Miscellaneous Concerns.

- Other specific issues include a desire to limit RV parks, mobile home parks, and storage units.
- Limit commercial and industrial developments, including large shopping centers, fast food restaurants, dollar stores, and gas stations.
- Limit specialized recreational areas like golf courses and game rooms.
- Suggestions for spaces for sports, schools, plazas, learning centers, colleges, libraries, company meeting spaces, and libraries.
- Limit seasonal housing, gambling establishments, and unnecessary retail spaces like banks and liquor stores.

Question 8. If you have been involved in processing a development application in Sumter County, how do you feel about the County's current development review and approval process? How can it be improved? (Short answer)

Perceptions of Fairness and Efficiency.

- Some respondents find the process fair and easy.
- Others criticize it as slow and inefficient, with complaints about inconsistent application of rules, lengthy delays for approvals and inspections and bureaucratic hurdles.

Concerns about Bias and Corruption. Multiple comments suggest a perception of bias towards The Villages, with complaints about favoritism and corruption. There are calls for removing corrupt officials and addressing what some see as a "good ole boy" mentality.

Suggestions for Improvement.

- Improve transparency and communication with the public, including better call center services and more accessible meetings.
- Implement better software and streamline the process to reduce delays and improve efficiency.
- Ensure that the process is fair and consistent for all applicants, regardless of their connection to The Villages.
- Increase environmental reviews and community input.

- Some responses mention poor-quality construction and issues with underground work.

General Sentiments:

- A few respondents have no opinion or have not been involved in the process.
- Some express dissatisfaction and a desire for change, while others seem satisfied or indifferent.

Question 9. Are there any other items you wish to discuss relating to the Land Development Code or about future development within the Sumter County? (Short answer)

- Concerns about the affordability and quality of housing and services, with a desire for more focus on residents' needs. There is a demand for more affordable housing options beyond just workforce housing to accommodate various income levels.
- Concerns about the financial loss due to the removal of natural areas and the importance of considering ecosystem services are highlighted.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of excessive lighting from residential properties, which affects neighbors' ability to enjoy their homes. Suggestions include implementing regulations to control neighborhood lighting.
- Some responses indicate a desire for cleaner properties and better management of zoning violations, including addressing abandoned buildings and enforcing codes more effectively.
- Suggestions for future economic sustainability include developing diverse business opportunities and focusing on economic diversification beyond residential development.
- Recommendations include improving public education on navigating roundabouts, allowing flag poles, and considering regulations for multi-use of abandoned buildings.
- Specific suggestions include creating truck bypasses to avoid congested areas and addressing the need for more effective and efficient infrastructure planning.
- Strong opposition to forcing sewer systems on low-income and rural areas, with calls for developers to cover these costs.
- Consider adding office hours after natural weather events and emergencies.
- Time management for construction, traffic, and storm slowdowns.

Key Takeaways

The following are the main takeaways from the survey.

1. **Familiarity with Development Terms:** While most respondents understand general zoning terms, there is a noticeable decline in familiarity with technical terms like Intensity, Floor Area Ratio, and Impervious Surface Ratio.
2. **Opposition to Growth:** Strong opposition exists against further development in Sumter County. Concerns focus on overdevelopment, water shortages, and environmental degradation. Respondents prioritize preserving rural and agricultural areas and suggest focusing on redevelopment rather than expanding into new areas.
3. **Housing Preferences:** Opinions on housing types vary, with some supporting affordable and rural housing options. However, many oppose high-density housing, including apartments and age-restricted communities.

4. **Services in Rural Areas:** Rural residents generally support moderate travel distances for goods and services, though some prefer shorter distances. A significant portion opposes locating services directly in rural areas.
5. **Environmental Concerns:** A majority believe the County fails to protect natural resources from development, particularly criticizing projects like The Villages for harming forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats.
6. **Community Involvement and Services:** Respondents desire more local services, greater involvement in development decisions, improved infrastructure, and increased support for small businesses to sustain the county's rural character.
7. **Development Review Process:** Mixed views exist on the development review process. While some find it fair and efficient, others see it as slow and biased towards large developments. Suggestions include more transparency, streamlined processes, equitable treatment, more thorough environmental reviews, and improved construction quality.