
CITY OF STUART
OFFICE OF THE CITY ATTORNEY



MEMORANDUM

TO: KEV FREEMAN, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: ANNEXATION OF FOUR PARCELS ON BAKER ROAD ADJACENT
TO HANEY CREEK WATERSHED

CC: DAVID DYESS, CITY MANAGER

DATE: October 1, 2020

I have reviewed the agenda item prepared by the Development Director pertaining to the City's annexation of 42.46 acres of conservation land located on or near Baker Road and Green River Parkway S.E. Federal Highway bearing parcel control nos.: 29-37-41-000-000-00111-1 (6.12 acres); 9-37-41-000-000-00260-0 (13.0 acres); 29-37-41-000-000-00010-3 (16.9 acres); and 29-37-41-000-000-00501-9 (6.44 acres) as depicted in the location maps attached as Exhibit A1-A4 to the Ordinance.

The City is the owner of the property at issue. As a result, the City is seeking a voluntary annexation to place City owned conservation land into the City boundaries. Voluntary annexations are governed by the standards of Section 171.044 Florida Statutes. The basic requirement is stated as follows:

“(1) The owner or owners of real property in an unincorporated area of a county which is contiguous to a municipality and reasonably compact may petition the governing body of said municipality that said property be annexed to the municipality.”

Because these parcels are being submitted as one annexation the review will be based upon all parcels being annexed contemporaneously.

The state statute contains four (4) general requirements. First, a petition for voluntary annexation

must be unanimously signed by all property owners in the area to be annexed. Second, the property proposed to be annexed must be contiguous and reasonably compact. Third, the proposed annexation cannot produce an enclave. Finally, county charters which provide for an exclusive method of municipal annexation override the Florida Statute. Martin County is not a Charter county and therefore, the fourth criteria does not apply to an annexation in the City of Stuart, Florida.

1. **Signed by all property owners in the geographic area being annexed.** Because the City is the sole owner of all properties, the first requirement has been met.
2. **Contiguous to the Municipality:** Pursuant to Section 171.044(1), F.S., “the owner or owners of real property in an unincorporated area of a county which is contiguous to a municipality and reasonably compact may petition the governing body of said municipality that said property be annexed to the municipality.” Property is deemed to be “Contiguous” under Section 171.031 (11), F.S., where a substantial part of a boundary of the territory sought to be annexed by a municipality is coterminous (sharing a common boundary) with a part of the boundary of the municipality. “Contiguous” has also been defined as “touching or adjoining in a reasonably substantial ... sense.” See City of Sanford v. Seminole County, 538 So. 2d 113 (Fla. 5th DCA 1989); May v. Lee County, 483 So. 2d 481 (Fla. 2d DCA 1986). The Sanford Court found that Section 171.031(11) F.S. only requires “that a substantial part of a boundary” touch municipal property as opposed to the entire perimeter of the property.

Section 171.031(11) provides that:

Separation of the territory sought to be annexed from the annexing municipality by a publicly owned right-of-way for a highway, road, railroad, canal or utility or a body of water, watercourse or other minor geographical division of a similar nature, running parallel with and between the territory sought to be annexed and the annexing municipality, shall not prevent annexation under this act, provided the presence of such division does not, as a practical matter, present the territory sought to be annexed and the annexing municipality from becoming a unified whole with respect to municipal services or prevent inhabitants from fully associating and trading with each other socially and economically.

In the current application, a review of the location map indicates that a substantial part of the boundary is coterminous with the City of Stuart. The entire frontage of the property of all four properties abuts and is bordered by the City of Stuart. Therefore, the property meets condition two and deemed is contiguous to the City of Stuart.

3. **Reasonably Compact**

“Compactness is defined under subsection (12) of 171.031, F.S., to mean a concentration of a piece of property in a single area. The requirement for compactness precludes any action which would create enclaves, pockets, or ginger areas in serpentine patterns. The purpose of the compact and contiguous requirement is to assure creation of geographically unified and compact municipalities, City of Sunrise v. Broward County, 473 So. 2d 1387 (Fla. 4th DCA 1985).

A review of the map and the application determines that this property is reasonably compact and meets Florida Statute 171.031(12). Given the configuration of the City, as well as the property requesting annexation, the annexation will not *create* pockets of unincorporated areas or serpentine finger areas.

No Enclaves

Subsection 5 of 171.044, F.S. Provides that “[l] and shall not be annexed through voluntary annexation when such annexation *results in the creation of enclaves*”. The term “enclave” is defined under Section 171.031(13), F.S., as “any unincorporated improved or developed area that is bounded on all sides by a single municipality or any unincorporated improved or developed area that is enclosed within and bounded by a single municipality and a natural or manmade obstacle that allows the passage of vehicular traffic to that unincorporated area only through the municipality.”

A review of the map, appears to indicate that property that remains dedicated to the Haney Creek Water Shed will be in an enclave. In addition, there is property on the South Side of Baker Road which will also become an enclave.

Conclusion

Based upon the foregoing facts and analysis it is my opinion that the voluntary annexation of this parcel into the municipal boundaries of the City of Stuart complies with three of the four conditions set forth in Florida Statute §171.044. If the County challenges this annexation application, it is unlikely that the City will meet the burden of proof to comply with the state statute.

This opinion is prepared solely at the request of and for the use of, the City of Stuart, and no other person or entity may rely on it for any purpose without the express written permission of the City of Stuart.