Community Character & Image

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.2 History of Pearl River County Development

In 1890, the New Orleans and Northern Railroad was completed, linking the very sparsely settled Pearly County to New Orleans and Atlanta. Pearl River County was established on February 22, 1890, with Poplarville as the county seat. By 1892, the city held a courthouse and a boarding school. In 1908, Pearl River County annexed from Hancock County the land area containing Picayune, which began as a trading post along the Hobolochitto Creek.

In addition to the two cities, Pearl River County has contained several rural communities. Many of the small communities that depended on the timber industry, such as Anderson, Barth, Bola Junction, Burge Spur, Conn, Elder, Emery, Forena, Loftin, Long Branch, McGehee, New Camp Rowlands, Orvisburg, Tyler, and Wilco, disappeared by the 1930s, when much of the timberlands were cut over for the cultivation of Tung trees. Other communities, such as Carriere and Henleyfield, persisted with the support of a major institution or industry.

The Tung oil industry thrived for approximately 30 years but suffered with the introduction of synthetic paint ingredients in the second half of the century. While logging continued to some degree, at mid-century, agriculture—cattle, sheep, dairy and hog farming, truck farming, pecans, satsumas and pears—became the primary land use and economic driver.

Pearl River County saw the arrival of its first sizeable white collar population when NASA constructed its rocket-testing site on the Pearl River in neighboring northwestern Hancock County in the 1960’s. In the ensuing years, suburban residential developments for New Orleans and Gulf Coast workers have been developed on former agricultural and timberland areas, particularly in the southern half of the county.
Section 2: Lake Troy / Millard

2.1 Overview

The rapid pace of land development in Pearl River County in recent years presents both opportunities and challenges to the future of the County. Development brings with it welcome economic growth, but if allowed to expand unchallenged can result in the endangerment or even the loss of the very features that make Pearl River County so desirable a place to live: the pine forests, rolling hills, and branching streams that define the area’s geography. The conceptual plan for the development of a new community in Millard on the proposed Lake Troy seeks to balance the financial imperatives of successful real-estate development with the responsibilities of environmental stewardship in a sustainable manner.

2.2 Integration of Community and Ecology

In scenarios that have become all too common across North America, new residential communities are designed and constructed without thought to the local environment or the things that make living in a natural setting desirable in the first place. Places of scenic beauty quickly become run-of-the mill suburban developments—harming the natural environment, the quality of life of the residents, and property values of the real estate. Examples do exist, however, for the careful planning of residential and commercial development that respect and maintain look and function in the existing landscape. These examples range from the 19th-century “Emerald Necklace” of parks and woods in Boston to more recently projects such as The Woodlands, Texas, a modern subdivision design within a forested setting. In Mississippi, Canebreak, outside of Hattiesburg, and Florence Gardens in Gulfport are two local examples of successful neighborhoods designed within a natural setting.

At Lake Troy, the integration of resource management with strategies to maximize land value and quality of life is a driving factor behind the master plan. In the design of the new Lake Troy community, the elements of the constructed “natural” environment—in the form of maintained wetlands, conservation zones, recreational trails, drainage swales, and Lake Troy itself—are carefully woven together to create a vibrant, viable community that takes full advantage of its unique setting to create a special place for residents and visitors.

a. Lake Troy

The single most important feature of the Lake Troy community is, of course, the Lake itself. The preliminary design of the community provides for multiple neighborhoods of different size lots with natural areas between and within the neighborhoods. Many homes will have lakefront property and the neighborhoods can be designed to allow a view of the lake from homes that are not on the shoreline. The lake will offer boating opportunities with a public boat launch. The ability to have both motorized and non-motorized vessels in the different areas of the lake will allow recreational opportunities for a variety of lifestyles. The provision of a public beach will add to the entire county’s enjoyment of the water.
b. **Conservation Zones**

While conventional suburban development plans begin with laying out roads and lots and then (maybe) leave aside small bits of land as open space, the strategy with the Lake Troy community is to first designate areas that will remain zoned as "conservation space" within and around developed areas. Establishing conservation zones at the outset guarantees the preservation of these open spaces—wooded areas, pastures, and wetlands—that provide scenic beauty and environmental well-being, two aspects of new community design which have been proven to generate and maintain economic value. Furthermore, when tied in with the Lake and surrounding wetlands by the trail-and-swale system described below, the Conservation Zones—essentially public and semi-public park spaces—become a valuable component in Lake Troy’s recreation and resource management system. Conservation Zones in Lake Troy can occupy up to 40% of a given parcel, and are generally placed throughout lower-lying areas.

c. **Wetlands**

The water management strategy of the new Millard / Lake Troy community will be both defensive—offering protection in the case of high-water events, and constructive—creating and conserving wetlands around the Lake that tie into the community recreation system. With these twin purposes in mind, a Wetland Conservation Zone has been established between the mean elevation of the new Lake Troy and the projected 100-year flood level around the lake. By setting aside this wetland zone and restricting development within it, the health of this resource is ensured. These freshwater wetlands, properly managed, will be home to plant species such as native marsh grasses as well as to rich peat soils and, in time, may host new lowland cypress and upland pine growth—trees which once dominated the region but have since given way to the pressures of development. The plants in the wetlands support migratory waterfowl such as egrets and heron. As scenic landscapes which can be experienced up-close, these wetlands will contribute to the overall “sense of place” that will make Lake Troy so special. They also serve important ecological functions, stabilizing the slopes along the bank of Lake Troy and filtering stormwater as it enters the lake—an essential part of successful water management, as the Lake will host recreational activities such as boating, swimming, and fishing.

d. **Drainage Swales**

A second key component of water management in Lake Troy is the planted swales which drain the developed areas into the Lake. Situated in naturally-occurring troughs, these three-to-four foot deep, tree-and grass-lined swales collect stormwater from the developed areas around the Lake, transport it through the wetlands, and drain into the Lake itself. Like the wetlands, these swales are both scenic and functional. The swales direct stormwater away from developed areas into wetlands and the Lake; at the same time they form natural “fingers” of green space that
intersect with the developed areas, creating additional scenic views and recreational areas.

e. **Trail System**
While the community’s road system makes getting around by car easy enough, an extensive network of pedestrian and bike-only trails runs through the community’s conservation zones. These alternate transportation and recreation paths are semi-paved with bark, mulch, and boardwalk, and connect neighborhood lots to one another.

f. **Dam Breach Zone**
According to safety codes, the area surrounding the spillway side of the Lake Troy Dam (opposite of the Lake reservoir) must remain undeveloped in the unlikely event of a dam breach. This restriction, while essential to maintain the safety of the community, also results in 400+ acres of undeveloped open space available for recreational use in the Dam Breach Zone. It is suggested that an equestrian park and trails can be established in the dam breach area.

### 2.3 Community Design to Create a Sense of Place

**a. Development Zones**

i. **Low-Density Suburban Residential**
The Low-Density Suburban Residential Zone is characterized by detached single-family homes placed at 2-6 units per acre (approximately 1500+ units total). The slightly higher density than conventional suburbs allow for “conservations zones” to be effective resources for recreation and environmental quality. Lots will be placed to maintain wooded buffers along roads and to maximize views to Lake Troy. Premium lots will be located along the lakefront. Home designs should be designed to be energy and water efficient to fit with the overall community objectives and to benefit residents in the form of lower utility costs.

ii. **Medium Density Residential**
Around 20% of residential construction, these properties will be located throughout the low-density parcels, in the form of duplex townhouses and walkups in mixed-use locations in “Town Center” (see below). These units will serve several markets, including affordable housing, senior housing, and young professionals.

iii. **Medium Density Commercial/Retail**
Local retail and commercial services will be concentrated in one of three “nodes” serving future Lake Troy neighborhoods along major roads. Each neighborhood will be less than a mile from shops to reduce travel time and make walking and biking an option. Where possible, these centers will be designed to front the street and sidewalks, as traditional small town centers were designed before the automobile, to make storefronts and walking the focal point, instead of parking lots and car traffic. Land use controls should not allow “Big Box” retail within the new community, but
should accommodate the needs for local/smaller scale groceries, professional offices, small businesses, pharmacies, restaurants, etc. The Big Box development should be within other cities or along the Interstate Highway. The Town Center will have some additional specialty stores attracting customers from inside and outside the Lake Troy community.

b. **Road and Lot Layout**

The road and lot layout is designed to work with the existing lay of the land wherever possible, reducing the need for culverts and crossings, and to maximize views over conservation areas. This also creates many winding roads and a feeling of privacy for residents. The lots will follow the winding road layout. The major road is a “half-ring” road laid out around lake connecting Highway 11 to Interstate 59 through the Northwest, Southwest, and Southeast quadrants around the lake, serving as the main circulation through the community and main entrance/exit to the highways on either side. Secondary roads branch off from the main road leading into developed residential areas. Planted buffers, represented in the siteplan as contiguous with the Conservation Zones, separate the main road from nearby residential developments.

c. **Public Beach and Boat Launch**

There are two public beaches in the community site plan, along the western bank of Lake Troy. The northernmost beach will include a boat launch for recreational boaters. The southernmost beach sits in between the Town Center and scenic hotel area, geared more for swimming and other non-motorized recreational activities.

d. **Scenic Hotels and Private Beach**

Situated south of Millard Lake Road, near the Town Center, the beach and hotel area will be a premier destination. Hotels will maximize lake views and wooded settings.

e. **Equestrian Park**

The Dam Breach Zone will be used as semi-private Equestrian Park to maximize the available recreational space. Permanent structures here are highly restricted due to safety concerns in the unlikely event of a dam breach, which makes a passive recreational activity such as horseback riding as ideal use.

2.4 **Design and Construction Phasing**

Any development of this size is quite rightly not going to be built as one, large project. It will be necessary to break it up into phases. The choice of which portion to design and build first will be impacted by several factors and will depend on priorities of the County and the Developer. A suggested option is to build the Town Center and hotel area first to attract tourism and visitors bringing attention to the area as a new destination not only for visiting but also a future residential community. This is will likely involve greater investment and commitment of funds because of more infrastructure and pay-back time. Another option may be develop a residential area with corresponding retail center. The northeast corner might be the best site to start
with because of its proximity to existing developments. This would show what residents could expect from the rest of the development and could require less financial commitment because funds would be recouped from home sales.