

## *Selecting and Analyzing Potential Blocks for Annexation for the City of Gainesville*

### **Background**

The City of Gainesville annexes areas to ensure that urban services are efficiently available to citizens. Municipalities are responsible to provide these urban services once certain areas reach high densities or level of service expectations. The three blocks that we selected were chosen due to their high population densities and close proximity to the Gainesville municipality. Some of the benefits of annexation of these areas include: greater representation in city and county elections, increased code enforcement, increased neighborhood beautification, enhanced bus services, community approach to policing, inclusion in solid waste programs, storm water management, and contributions of recreation and parks.

In order to decide which areas were achievable for annexation, we needed to understand the meaning of annexation. Annexation is defined as "the adding of real property to the boundaries of an incorporated municipality, such addition making such real property in every way a part of the municipality." Annexations must be within municipality's reserve area, if one is established; not create an enclave; be contiguous to the city limits; and be reasonably compact. All of these factors were incorporated into our decision making process.

By looking at some of the benefits of annexation we were able to determine whether or not the areas in question were worthy of being incorporated into the city limits. When annexation occurs, the city's size and population are increased. This raises the city's level of political influence and representation, as well as its capability to attract advantageous commercial

development. Annexation of an area may attract grant assistance since State Revenue Sharing funds are allocated based on county and city populations. Due to the reduced duplication of services and economies of scale provided through annexation, there are more opportunities for savings and cost-avoidance.

With our study, we wanted to specifically look at different features that would have to be examined prior to annexation of our proposed areas. The features that we chose to consider highlight the costs and benefits that the city would incur if they were to annex the blocks that our study selected. We decided to look at the following features within each block: parks and gardens, Alachua County Forever lands, wetlands, roads, bus routes, and substandard housing. We chose to look at the parks and gardens within our selected blocks because they are valuable recreation centers for citizens of the Gainesville community. The City of Gainesville's Recreation & Parks Division advocates the importance of thriving, local park systems, and the opportunity for all citizens to lead healthy, active lifestyles. We also wanted to look at Alachua County Forever (ACF) lands because these lands were acquired by Alachua County Forever in order to protect water resources, wildlife habitat, and to provide natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation. Most of these lands are managed by the ACF; this land would not be any extra effort if included in the annexation. Wetlands were looked at because they are critical resources that are important for providing regulating and ecosystem services, provisioning and livelihood services, and cultural services. Having wetlands within a community is an important asset, but it is also essential that they are preserved as a critical component of Alachua County's natural resource base, its ecology, its economy and its resident's quality of life. Since water is a finite resource - all the water we have is what exists on our earth at this time.

We chose to look at substandard housing within each block for several reasons. The first is that substandard housing tends to show a correlation with crime activity. If the city annexes an area with a substantial amount of substandard housing, they also run the risk of becoming responsible for policing that area in order to reduce crime within the city. This results in heavy monetary costs to the city to staff more police. The second reason for looking at substandard housing is that once annexed, the property taxes of that area can be collected by the city. The revenue from property taxes is dependent on assessed value of properties in the area. Substandard housing values will be lower than that of regular housing properties generating less revenue. Decreased revenue coupled with potential higher costs from crime prevention provides a strong reason for decision makers to decide against annexing areas with high substandard housing.

When proposing annexation the incorporation of major roads, tiger roads, and bus routes were very important. Within Alachua County, each municipality is in charge of their own road maintenance within their city limits. The Regional Transit System takes people to work, school, and play daily in the city of Gainesville. While, it's the only option for some, for many it's a chosen alternative to driving. In 2005, RTS provided over 8 million rides in the urbanized area of Gainesville. Reduced traffic congestion and air emissions, greater communication with the community, and saving money on automotive expenses are just a few of the assets of riding the bus that Gainesville residents can enjoy. Proposing the annexation of each of the three population density blocks touching and surrounding the Gainesville city area all has advantages and disadvantages that incorporate the Regional Transit System.

Activity centers were looked at because they offer a great opportunity for the City of Gainesville on behalf of financial support and attraction of additional commercial development.

### **Scope & Characteristics of the Study Area**

Our selected study area included the nine municipalities in Alachua County. Once our criterion was selected for, the scope of the study area was narrowed drastically. By selecting for census blocks with populations exceeding 1454 people we were left with only four blocks that were not annexed in Alachua County. The next part of our criteria narrowed the scope even further by selecting blocks within 1 mile of the Gainesville municipality lines. Following the initial criteria our remaining proposals for annexation were the 3 census blocks shown in figure 1.

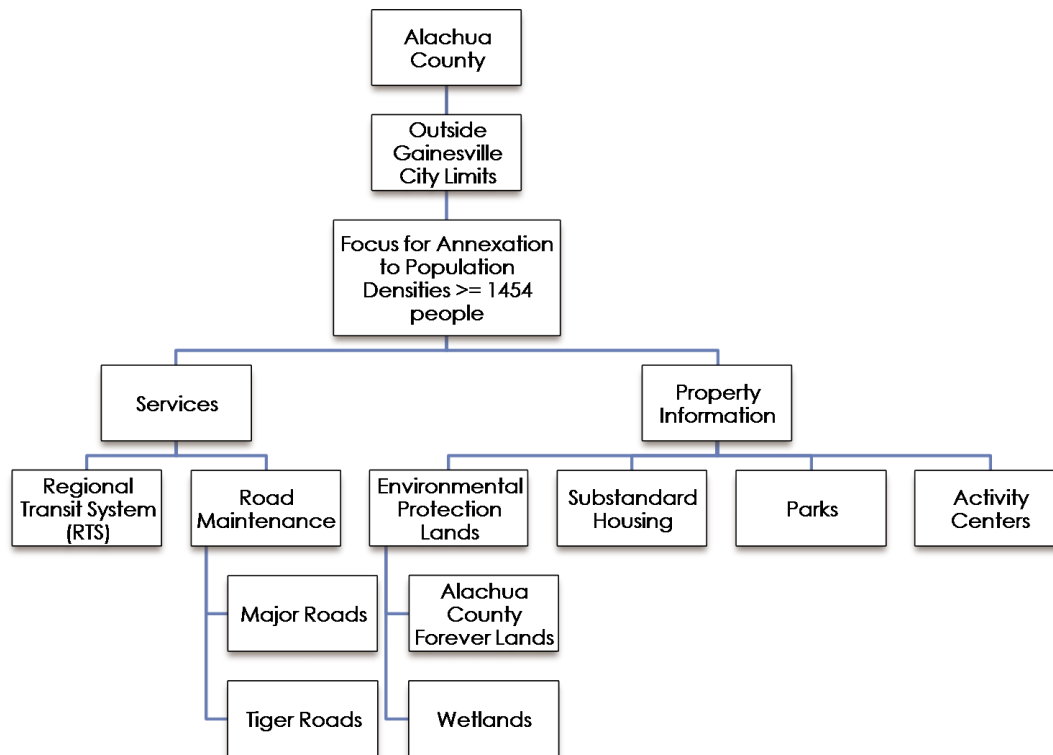
### **Objectives and Criteria**

The objective of our study was to identify areas for annexation on the border of the Gainesville municipality that met our primary criterion. We wanted to find areas to annex that were hotspots for population sizes. These highly populated areas are prime choices because one the main reasons why cities choose to annex a new area is due to population size. We chose to search for blocks that had a population size that was at least 1,454 people, half of the largest population size block within Alachua County.

Our secondary criteria was to look at block features that could create costs and benefits to the city if annexed. These features fell into two categories: 1.) Services within each block, and 2.) Property information of area within each block.

## Methodology

We started out with the whole of Alachua County and then focused specifically on areas outside the Gainesville City limits. Then we looked at the ArcMap to only select blocks that had a population size greater than or equal to 1,454 people. This gave us three blocks that met our criteria (see Figure 1). Then we chose to analyze each block by the services required and information about the property within each selected block.



Under Services, we focused on RTS bus services and road maintenance. For the transit system we used ArcMap to select existing city bus routes within a mile of the selected blocks. For road maintenance, we selected only major intersecting the blocks. We also chose to only display tiger roads that were within each block.

Under Property Information, we looked at environmental protection lands, substandard housing, parks, and activity centers. For the Alachua County Forever lands and the wetlands, we selected any lands that met this criterion that were entirely within the block. For substandard housing, we selected only property that was considered substandard within each block. To look at parks we initially looked at only parks that overlapped the area of our blocks. We then used ArcToolbox to overlay the intersecting areas in order to highlight the areas of the park to be excluded from annexation (Figure 2). For the major roads and bus routes, we used the select by location method and including a one mile buffer of any existing RTS bus routes near the proposed annexation blocks. We also chose to look at any activity center that was located within a mile of our selected blocks.

## **Results & Discussion**

When analyzing our selected blocks for annexation it was determined that there were three distinct parks and gardens intersecting our selections. The two larger blocks include San Felasco State Park. This preserve has one of the few remaining mature forests in Florida and is of great importance to the Alachua County community and the state of Florida. San Felasco State Park encompasses over 44% of the entire selected block area; 724.7 hectares out of the total 1655.7 hectares. Our suggestion for this particular area would be to alter the annexed part of the selected block to exclude San Felasco State Park. Possibly redefining the census blocks would create less controversy when dealing with urban services and city representation. Altering the areas of the census blocks is the logical conclusion. Since the State Park is already managed by

the state and does not need to be included in separate census blocks, it does not need to be annexed.

The only Alachua County Forever lands were within our first northern block. While it is important for the conservation lands to remain intact and free from excessive encroachment of development, these areas are already protected by law and not at risk. The remaining areas in the selected blocks are mostly urban areas with high population densities that would greatly benefit through annexation.

The top two proposed annexations would provide the City of Gainesville with generous amounts of additional wetlands improving the infrastructure of the entire city (Figure 3). If these selected blocks are chosen for annexation, management and sustainable use of the included wetlands is crucial to the livelihood of the city's residents and natural areas. The importance of parks and natural areas within municipalities adds to the overall community appeal and aesthetics. By incorporating these selected blocks into the City of Gainesville, the entire community will benefit from urban services as well as activities provided by the surrounding parks. By excluding San Felasco State Park from the annexation, less would be required of the City of Gainesville while still providing services and benefits to citizens and community members residing in the remaining areas.

Substandard housing in each proposed annexation was varied in size. Figure 4 shows the substandard housing within each proposed annexation blocks. The map shows that the top two blocks have little substandard housing in relation to their total area. However, the bottom third block has around a third of its total area covered by substandard housing areas. This means that

the top two will have higher property taxes on average than the third will resulting in the top two blocks generating a greater amount of revenue.

When looking more in depth at the major roads and bus routes, we found many advantages and disadvantages for each proposed annexation block. Block 3, with a population density equal to or greater than 1454, there are much more advantages that help to propose a smooth annexation to the city of Gainesville. Block 3 is surrounded by existing bus routes that are within one mile of the proposed annexation block. Using Arc GIS, our group used the select by location to incorporate all regional transit bus routes, with a buffer of one mile, near the proposed annexation block. Routes 75, 5, 21 and 10 are the existing bus routes that are within one mile of the block. If annexed, no new bus routes would be needed to incorporate this community block.

Unlike Block 3, Blocks 1 and 2 are not surrounded by existing bus routes, using the same, select by location method, with the one mile buffer. Though creating new bus routes or expanding existing routes maybe expensive to the tax payers and city of Gainesville, these two blocks are surrounded by major roads and could bring in more money to the RTS Corporation. Both blocks contain a population density of 2908, which could bring more commuters and therefore, more money to the city of Gainesville. Annexation assures that urban services are provided in the most proficient way to citizens. Urban service foundation is the obligation of all municipalities. Once areas reach certain densities, it is reasonable to assume, that urban services should be provided by a municipality.

The three major blocks our group focused on, all encompass a handful of secondary roads and were surrounded by major roads in the Gainesville city limit. Blocks 1 and 2, did contain



more tiger roads and were surrounded by three major roadways, including NW 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a major road in the Gainesville community. Block 3, which is much smaller in area than the other two blocks, was completely surrounded by major roadways and only contained three tiger roads. Block 3 is also neighboring the Oaks Mall, of Gainesville. If annexation were to occur, Block 3 would have the most potential for a smooth and reliable annexation. Annexations must be within municipality's reserve area, if one is established; not create an enclave; be contiguous to the city limits; and be reasonably compact, which Block 3 would have the best chance of becoming a part of the Gainesville municipality.

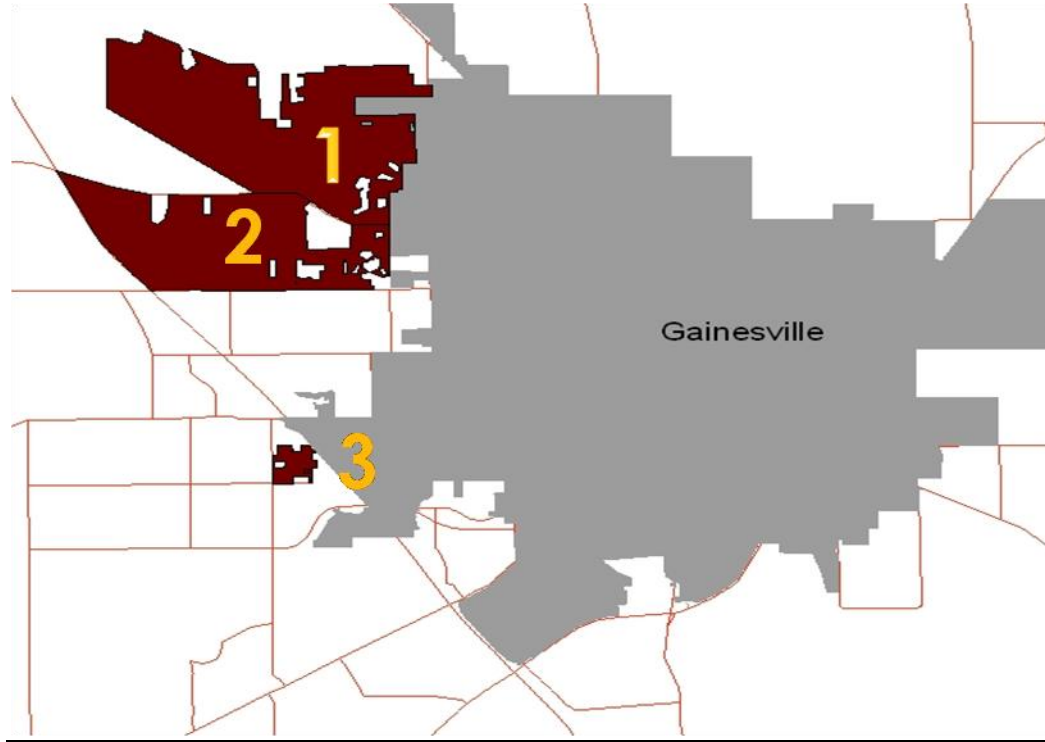
There are two activity centers located near the proposed annexation blocks. The first is the Springhill activity center located around the intersection of Interstate 75 and NW 39<sup>th</sup> AVE where 469.56 acres (190 hectares) of the total 822.07 acres of it are located within block number 2 (Figure 5) . The second is the Oaks Mall activity center, located next to block 3, around the intersection of Interstate 75 and Newberry road, encompassing 281.26 acres in area. This center represents a significant commercial income for the region. The importance of the activity centers located near the blocks considered for annexation is that these areas bring additional financial support with taxable commercial income. Also, these centers improve the image of commercial zones that are already established in the city to attract new and better commercial development that will in turn benefit the city and its citizens in more than one way.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the three proposed annexation blocks had many advantages and disadvantages for annexation. Though, we are not claiming annexation should be the direct effect





of our findings, we do believe that Block 3 does have the most supporting evidence to be annexed within the city of Gainesville. With existing bus routes, large activity center touching the boundary, multiple substandard housing locations, little wetlands, and no conflicts with state parks or gardens, Block 3 seems to be a great asset to the city of Gainesville. Blocks 1 and 2 also portrayed assets for annexation due to their high population densities, close proximity to the Gainesville municipality, and would be ideal for annexation if able to exclude areas including San Felasco State Park and Alachua County Forever lands. We have taken into consideration many of the most important factors in order to determine areas best suited for annexation. Through this process we have learned how to better analyze and prepare GIS data in real world situations.

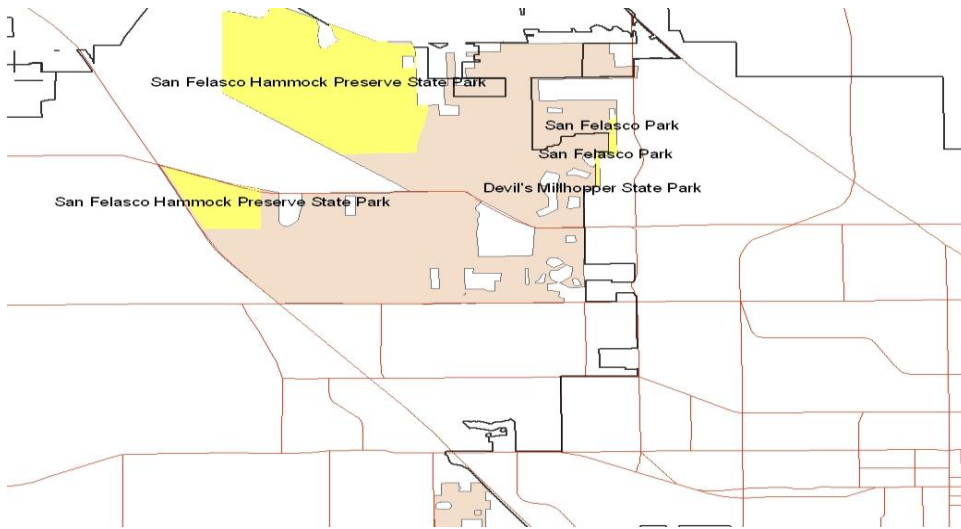
**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

**Legend**

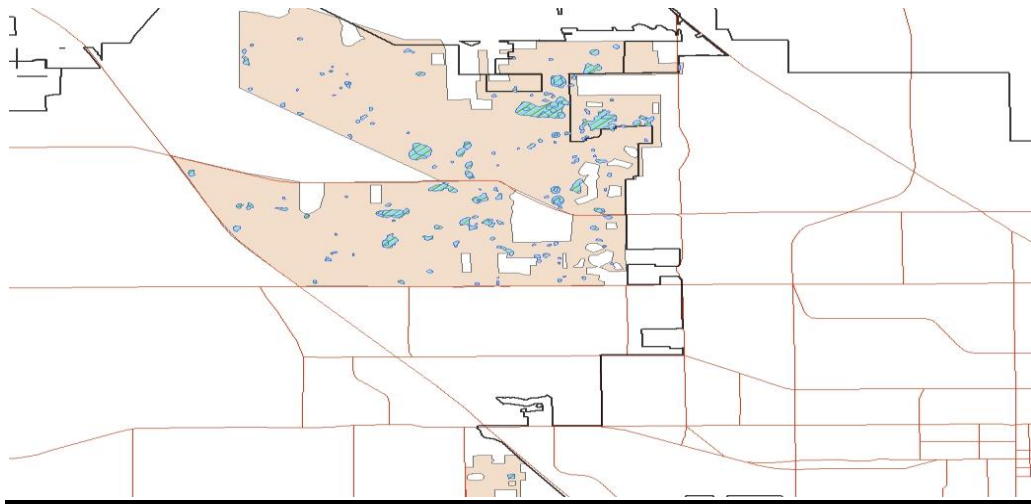
-  Parks and Gardens Intersecting
-  Municipalities
-  Major Roads
-  Blocks  $\geq 1454$  outside Gville



**Figure 3**





**Legend**

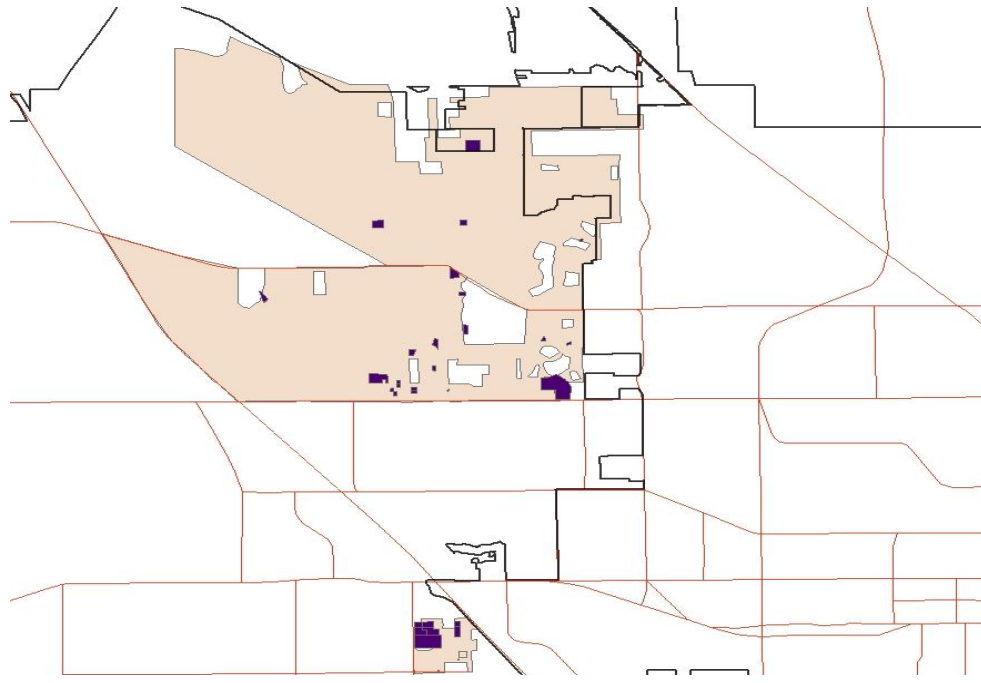
-  Wetlands Within Blocks
-  Municipalities
-  Major Roads
-  Blocks  $\geq 1454$  outside Gville



**Figure 4**

**Legend**

-  Major Roads
-  Substandard Housing
-  Blocks  $\geq 1454$  outside Gville
-  Gainesville Municipality



**Figure 5**

