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Town of Southwest Ranches

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Community Background Report

Town of Southwest Ranches

Boundaries

North: City of Weston

East: The Cities of Davie and Cooper City

South: City of Pembroke Pines

West: Florida Everglades

Community Type: Municipality

Report Last Updated: December, 2011

History¹

In 1996 the City of Pembroke Pines proposed annexation of the unincorporated area bounded by Griffin Road to the north, Sheridan Street to the south, Flamingo Road to the east, and State Road 27 to the west, known as Southwest Ranches. The community protested the “attempted takeover” and began to advocate for the right to form a city.

The Southwest Ranches Homeowners Association, an umbrella group of homeowners associations in the Southwest Ranches area, took the lead in promoting incorporation and formed a feasibility committee to explore this option. The viability of a new city would be dependent on potential revenues adequate for covering the costs of running it. The feasibility committee determined that a contract city would be the best option. Contracting would allow the city access to experienced professionals without having to hire these individuals on a full-time basis. This would save taxpayers money and avoid many costly capital expenses.

The grassroots effort to incorporate led to passage of a bill in the State Legislature in 1997, calling for a vote among the residents of Southwest Ranches in 2000. At that time, voters would have three choices: annexation to the City of Pembroke Pines, annexation to the City of Davie, or incorporation of a new city. If the vote was for a new city, a charter was to be drawn up, and elections for public office held in 2001. However, community leaders realized that if a charter could be drawn up sooner, it could be approved in 2000 and the city formed a year earlier. Thus, a committee was formed to draw up a charter using the Weston charter as a boilerplate (Weston is a master-planned community incorporated in 1996), and the city was incorporated the same year.

Community Dynamics

The key motivation for the formation of the Town of Southwest Ranches was to preserve the residents' semi-rural lifestyle and stop encroaching development.² As the town's motto, "Preserving our rural lifestyle" indicates, the municipality has gone to extraordinary lengths to support this pledge. For example, the town has established zoning that is almost entirely rural residential and agricultural, and requires that the lots be a minimum of one full acre to two acres. Consequently, the town's density is the lowest of any municipality in Broward County.³ In addition, Southwest Ranches has increased the amount of land zoned as open space, which also entails designating and developing dozens of miles of greenways with multi-use trails in place of sidewalks.⁴ Furthermore, the town's rural environment is filled with grazing animals, nurseries, farms, and abundant wildlife. In one instance, the town fought off a street light proposal because residents didn't want the lights to interfere with their view of the stars.⁵

The town has become embroiled in a controversy that many in the community feel jeopardizes the lifestyle of Southwest Ranches. At the center of the controversy is a plan to build one of the nation's largest immigration detention centers in the town.⁶ Residents who oppose the detention center are considering a lawsuit to block it from being built, citing concerns about crime and traffic. Other residents are worried about how the value of their homes will be affected, as well as the overall image of the town.⁷

The plan for the detention center had been publicly discussed for many years, but the uproar didn't erupt until 2011, after US Customs and Immigration Enforcement announced it had tentatively selected Southwest Ranches as the site for the facility.⁸ The proposed site has a long history, beginning in 1991, when Broward County agreed to buy about 70 acres in what was then an unincorporated area for a 4,000-bed county jail—it would have been the country's fifth largest jailhouse.⁹ The county eventually expanded a jail in Pompano, instead. In 1998 a private company bought 24 acres at an adjacent site east of US 27, between Sheridan Street and Stirling Road, expecting that a government entity might be interested in developing a detention center in the future.¹⁰ When Southwest Ranches incorporated as a town in 2000, administrators annexed the site as a prospective revenue generator.¹¹ The town signed a deal to build a facility that could only be used by the federal government in exchange for a cut of its eventual revenues and annual fee.¹² Today, the plan is to build a detention facility with up to 1,500 beds. Once the detention center is built and fully occupied, the town could earn as much as \$1 million a year in taxes and fees.¹³

It should be noted that the site in question is near a women's prison and a trash dump.¹⁴ Another controversial project in the area is a proposal to expand the existing county dump, which is currently restricted to construction and landscape debris, to include household waste.¹⁵ Both projects are near US 27 and Sheridan Street, and the land is already zoned properly for the projects—meaning that there is little that residents can do to stop them.¹⁶ In fact, the zoning was in place for a correctional facility before the town incorporated in 2000.¹⁷ The tension lies in the fact that the idea for the detention facility lay dormant for a few years, planned for an area deemed to be industrial, but with no homes close by. As the community grew and people moved closer to the women's prison

and the dump site, many of those who moved in probably never realized what might one day be developed near their homes.

Demographic Highlights¹⁸

The Town of Southwest Ranches was incorporated after the 2000 Census. Therefore, it is not known how the population changed between 2000 and 2010. Census estimates indicate that population growth has remained flat.

The town's population in 2010 was 7,345. It is hard to say how the area's population had changed over the previous decade because the city was incorporated right after the 2000 Census was completed. However, the Census Population Estimates Program can provide a population figure for 2000, the year the town was incorporated-- approximately 7,152 people.¹⁹ Based on this estimate, the town's population has basically remained stable over the last ten years.

Southwest Ranches is mostly White, but nearly one third of the White residents are Hispanic.

The majority of the town's population is White (86 percent), and about two-thirds of this racial group is made up of White Non-Hispanics. The balance of the town's racial composition is Black (5 percent), "other race" (6 percent), and "two or more races" (3 percent). With regards to ethnicity, approximately 33 percent of the town's population is Hispanic, of which the vast majority is White.

The majority of the town's residents are US citizens, mostly native-born.

The majority (79 percent) of the town's population is native-born. Of the foreign-born population, most are naturalized citizens (85 percent) who entered the country before the year 2000 (93 percent), and were born in Latin America (79 percent).

Most of the residents of Southwest Ranches speak English, including those that speak other languages at home.

The majority of the town's residents speak only English (65 percent). The majority of those that speak a language other than English speak Spanish (29 percent), of which only 5 percent don't speak English well.

There is a very low rate of housing unit vacancy in the town. Of those units that are occupied, a significant majority are occupied by homeowners. There is an extraordinarily low rate of rental occupied units (6 percent).

There are 2,389 housing units in the Town of Southwest Ranches, of which the great majority are occupied (94 percent). Of those units occupied, 94 percent are occupied by homeowners. With regards to the vacancy rate (6 percent), most units are vacant due to the properties being for sale (32 percent), or for unknown reasons (32 percent) other than being rentals or for seasonal use.

Transportation Trends²⁰

The tables below illustrate projected transportation trends in the Town of Southwest Ranches:

Means of transportation to work, 2010		
	City	County
Car, truck, or van	90%	90%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	0%	3%
Other transportation	3%	3%
Worked at home	7%	4%

Number of vehicles per household, 2010		
	City	County
0 vehicles	2%	3%
1 vehicle	7%	25%
2 vehicles	34%	46%
3+ vehicles	57%	26%

Travel time to work for the employed population (excludes work at home), 2010		
	City	County
Less than 15 minutes	16%	21%
15-29 Minutes	28%	36%
30-59 Minutes	40%	36%
60+ Minutes	17%	7%
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	34.4	26.8

The information provided below briefly summarizes transportation services and projects in the Town of Southwest Ranches:

Summary of Evaluation and Appraisal Report-Based Changes to the Comprehensive Plan²¹

Despite being located within the urbanized portion of Broward County, the Town of Southwest Ranches has adopted policies aimed at maintaining its rural lifestyle which have forced it to accept a lower Level of Service (LOS) grade for its roadways. Streets and roads wider than two lanes are inconsistent with the town's rural lifestyle and character, and are therefore prohibited.

Revisions and new objectives and policies in the Transportation Element direct the town to implement a proportionate fair-share mitigation system, and foster a roadway system

that is consistent with and complements the town's semirural character. The town proposes adding new policies that would:

- Adopt the Level of Service (LOS) standard of "D" for US Highway 27 and I-75, as well as roadways functionally classified as a collector road or higher, except for Dykes Road;
- Establish a mechanism to balance the potential future development pressure of expanding Dykes Road, while maintaining the town's rural character (limiting roadways to two lanes); and
- Maintain and construct all existing and future trafficways and local streets within the town as two-lane facilities, except for Griffin Road, Sheridan Street, US-27, Flamingo Road, and Stirling Road.

In addition, proposed changes to the Future Land Use Element would encourage greenway trails along rural roadways in lieu of paved local sidewalks.

Interstate 75

The Town of Southwest Ranches is bisected by the Town of Davie on either side of Interstate Highway 75.²² This is important to note mostly due to the fact that plans to expand this important artery can impact the Town of Southwest Ranches, despite the interstate not being located directly within its jurisdiction. When I-75 was built in the 1980s, it was constructed by rural design standards and designed for light traffic.²³ Today the average daily traffic is 126,500 cars, and by 2040 the projected use is expected to be anywhere from 176,000 to 240,000 cars each day.²⁴ Current and future congestion on I-75 has motivated the state to invest \$1.5 billion in a plan for the interstate's first major makeover, which would help to expand its capacity for growth over the next 25 years.²⁵ If fully funded, the plan calls for: the addition of new express lanes, new park-and-ride lots, auxiliary lanes between major interchanges, modifying existing interchanges, providing a rapid transit bus system in the express lanes, and preservation of a future transit corridor.²⁶

The planned improvements apparently have not been popular in Southwest Ranches. According to the president of the Country Estates Homeowners Association in Southwest Ranches, the short-term upgrades at the interchanges added traffic signals that have made congestion worse or aren't necessary. He was recently quoted in a newspaper as stating: "We don't need the cookie cutter design that has turned Pine and I-75 into a dysfunctional nightmare."²⁷ Regarding the long-term plans, it is one of the potential park-and-ride lots that has one of the Southwest Ranches councilmen worried. Two lots are in the proposal, one at Pines Boulevard and I-75, the other at the intersection of Griffin Road and I-75. According to the councilman, since the town boasts more wide open space than most other communities, and doesn't have many shopping centers or commercial properties in the area, the lots would be better suited elsewhere. The councilman was quoted in the newspaper as saying: "Our residents have clearly stated that they do not want this park-and-ride there, with its added ramps and traffic lights. . . I think Weston or Pembroke Pines, as far as shops, have a lot more to offer a park-and-ride scenario."²⁸ Opposition to changes to I-75 is deeply rooted in the community. In 2001 the town passed a resolution in opposition to the construction of express lanes,

combined with collector-distributor roads, and/or exit or entrance ramps onto I-75 at Stirling Road.²⁹

Special Events

The Town of Southwest Ranches hosts many events throughout the year. Below is a sample of the recurring events. Please visit the community calendar for a full list of events that is periodically updated, on the town's official website:

<http://www.southwestranches.org/calendar.php>

The official town newsletter is available at:

<http://www.southwestranches.org/About/about.html>

Town's Birthday Celebration – Every April, Southwest Ranches celebrates the town's birthday with an event featuring family activities at the Sunshine Ranches Equestrian Park (5840 SW 148th Ave.).

Solstice Celebrations - In June and December the town celebrates the summer and winter solstice by watching the sun set over a saddle. A concrete sculpture of two saddles, set into a horseshoe-shaped earth mound, was designed to catch the setting sun on the longest and shortest days of the year. The events take place at sunset at Sunshine Ranches Equestrian Park (5840 SW 148th Ave.).

Town of Southwest Ranches Country Roads Arts and Crafts Festival – This annual festival draws crafters from the region, who display and sell original handmade items. The event takes place in October at an open field south of the South Broward Drainage District and Town Hall buildings (6591 Dykes Road).

Business Landscape

The Town of Southwest Ranches currently does not have business-related initiatives or recent business developments, due to its status as a primarily residential community. In fact, the zoning in the town is almost entirely rural residential and agricultural, which requires that lots be a minimum of one full acre to two acres.³⁰

The following statistics from the US Census Bureau's 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates help to describe the economic climate of Southwest Ranches:

- The town's median household income is \$108,245.
- The unemployment rate is very low (2.1 percent); however, it is interesting to note that a considerable portion of the population is not in the labor force (37.9 percent).
- Of those that are employed, the majority work in the following industries: educational services, health care and social assistance (19.5 percent) and wholesale trade (10.1 percent).

Related Links

Town of Southwest Ranches

<http://www.southwestranches.org/>

Town of Southwest Ranches Comprehensive Plan (2003)

<http://www.southwestranches.org/Official%20Docs/planningzoning/CompPlan-Part2.pdf>

Town of Southwest Ranches EAR-Based Comprehensive Plan Amendments (2009)

<http://www.southwestranches.org/Meetings/files/ofcmeetings/090804-Policy%20Documents%20-%20Transmittal.pdf>

Aster Knight Parks Foundation

<http://asterknightparksfoundation.com/>

Zoning Map

http://www.southwestranches.org/Plans_Permits/files/zoning_map_enlarged.pdf

Sources

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http://www.southwestranches.org/About/about_history.html

² Town of Southwest Ranches. “Home.” <http://www.southwestranches.org/home.html>

³ Town of Southwest Ranches. “Home.” <http://www.southwestranches.org/home.html> and the South Florida Regional Planning Council. “Memorandum: TOWN OF SOUTHWEST RANCHES PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT.” September 14, 2009.

http://www.sfrpc.com/council/AgendaSep09_6b.pdf

⁴ Town of Southwest Ranches. “Home.” <http://www.southwestranches.org/home.html>

⁵ Town of Southwest Ranches. “Home.” <http://www.southwestranches.org/home.html> and Politifact Florida. “A controversial immigration detention center project gets Pembroke Pines mayor riled up.” November 5, 2011. <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2011/nov/10/frank-ortis/pembroke-pines-vote-southwest-ranches/>

⁶ Miami Herald. “Opposition grows for proposed immigration detention center in Southwest Ranches.”

August 4, 2011. <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/08/04/2345923/opposition-grows-for-proposed.html>

⁷ South Florida Sun Sentinel. “Opposition grows to detention center in Southwest Ranches: Residents worried site may bring crime, traffic, decreased home values.” July 15, 2011. http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-07-15/news/fl-detention-center-ranches-20110715_1_nestor-yglesias-house-immigrants-undocumented-immigrants

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⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ New Times. “History Repeats Itself in Southwest Ranches, NIMBY Capital of Broward County.” October 31, 2011.

http://blogs.browardpalmbeach.com/pulp/2011/10/history_repeats_itself_in_southwest_ranches.php

¹² Politifact Florida. “A controversial immigration detention center project gets Pembroke Pines mayor riled up.” November 5, 2011. <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2011/nov/10/frank-ortis/pembroke->

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¹³ Politifact Florida. “A controversial immigration detention center project gets Pembroke Pines mayor riled up.” November 5, 2011. <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2011/nov/10/frank-ortis/pembroke-pines-vote-southwest-ranches/>

¹⁴ New Times. “History Repeats Itself in Southwest Ranches, NIMBY Capital of Broward County.” October 31, 2011.

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¹⁵ South Florida Sun Sentinel. “Southwest Broward residents brace for double whammy: Detention center, expanded dump causing concern in Southwest Ranches, Pembroke Pines.” October 19, 2011.

http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2011-10-19/news/fl-prison-dump-mayocol-b102011-20111019_1_detention-center-garbage-dump-state-prison

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Miami Herald. “Opposition grows for proposed immigration detention center in Southwest Ranches.” August 4, 2011. <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/08/04/2345923/opposition-grows-for-proposed.html>

¹⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics cited in this section are from US Census Bureau 2010 Summary Files 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data; US Census Bureau 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, and the South Florida Planning Council Comparative Profile for 2000 and 2010 Census for the City of Southwest Ranches (http://www.sfrpc.com/census/PL2010/SFTCPL2010_SouthwestRanches.pdf).

¹⁹ US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program. July 1, 2000.

²⁰ All statistics in this section is from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey. Please note that projections were not available for this municipality from Simply Maps.

²¹ State of Florida Department of Community Affairs. “Memorandum: Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment Review Objections, Recommendations, Comments.” October 13, 2009.

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