

Environmental Perspectives on East Orange Land Development

WRITTEN BY MONICA KING

THURSDAY, 31 MAY 2007

Visit: www.insighteatorlando.com

Creating a balanced environment fostering preservation and coexistence of Florida's delicate, natural assets with the influx of civilization migrating into Orlando's Southeast corridor is a hardy challenge for development contractors. Publishing thousands of pages of environmental protection requirements, the State of Florida requires diligent adherence prior to turning a spade of dirt on any project. **Geotechnical and Environmental Consultants (GEC)**, is one of the areas major players in assuring due diligence prior to the actual sale and development of building sites. What are major considerations for commercial and public land purchasers during pre-sale inspection periods? **Michael Orcino, P.E, GEC Environmental Services Manager** describes, "Future land use planning and zoning for the area, geotechnical considerations with regard to ability of soils to support planned development, and environmental issues such as wetlands, ecology, and contamination." With Everglades' headwaters in the area, preservation of wetlands is essential. Previous articles discussed long range plans connecting East Orlando area into Iron Bridge. Excitement builds and rumors swirl when signage announces the "future home" of long awaited amenities. Excitement turns to frustration when the project appears more mythical than real. Reality is property assessment and evaluation is a lengthy process. "Typically, we see inspection periods of 30 to 90 days," says Orcino. "For most developments, 60 to 90 days is sufficient to evaluate a project; however, longer periods are beneficial for large or very complex projects. If potential issues arise during the evaluation process, such as onsite chemical contamination, land use permitting issues, etc., more time may be necessary to effectively evaluate project validity. Therefore, it is important to try and pre-negotiate inspection extension periods in purchase agreement in the event issues arise affording a ready evaluation period." "Prior to a land sale, environmental due diligence can be the single most, critical factor in the long-term economics of a project", continues Orcino. "After sale, if a site is found to be contaminated, as the new owner, the State holds you responsible for any required remediation clean-up." Compliance with standards is critical. If new regulations are not followed, State mandatory action could substantially impact the overall project budget. Brownfields, land contaminated by toxins, are potentially less concern for the Lake Nona/Moss Park area as the area centered on farming and cattle ranching. Once costly to determine, innovative land development techniques have eased the determination of Brownfields. **Gary Kuhns P.E., GEC's Chief Engineer** describes, "We have achieved great results using ground penetrating radar (GPR) for subsurface profiling on many land development projects. GPR is a cost-effective tool that can discover buried tanks, drums, construction debris, landfills and other site issues that can impact site selection and planning. For land development in urban areas, GPR is an excellent first line of investigation to rapidly evaluate man-made underground conditions that challenge future construction". GEC, under the direction of Joanie Schirm, is responsible for major projects in East Orlando such as OIA's 4th runway and the most recent terminal expansion. Added to their noteworthy resume is the area's "benchmark" Burnham Institute project. From **GEC's Charley Williams**, "GEC is providing the geotechnical engineering for the Tavistock Group for the Burnham Medical Research Institute at Lake Nona. Burnham, headquartered in LaJolla, California, chose the Lake Nona site for its east coast expansion for world-class biomedical research operations. Burnham will launch Lake Nona's plans for a Medical City including the University of Central Florida College of Medicine, Orlando's Veterans Administration Medical Center and plans for a 500-acre science and technology park. " "GEC is delighted to provide geotechnical engineering for this addition to the Central Florida community," said **Joanie Schirm, GEC President**. "Our GEC motto has always been: "at the very foundation of our community". I am positive the life sciences industries associated with Burnham will provide the keystone for an entire generation of new opportunities." Building booms in the area. A Home Depot Opening is eminent. Soon welcoming new residents, just south of 528 - a budding apartment community. Surrounded by potential retail spaces, new banks and restaurants are taking shape north of 417. Beyond ground studies, environmental considerations transcend to brainstorming transportation alternatives. Schirm continues, "It's a challenge bringing new roadways online in less than seven years." "Right of way costs are escalating. We have recently seen an extraordinary spike in construction costs. Preliminary design and environmental considerations easily take 3 years; then you have right of way acquisition, construction and potential budgetary adjustments. This is already 2007. Do you see where this timeline takes us?" "As East Orlando continues to mature and find it's niche, Orange County is going to conduct a study evaluating how to integrate effective and efficient transit into the mix of transportation choices", said Schirm. "Clearly we can't continue meeting regional transportation needs relying solely on roads. It's good to see the County, City of Orlando and those involved in east side development begin to evaluate transportation alternatives: how to offer citizens choices to leave their home and go places such as work, play, and airport without having to go by car."