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Dec. 7, 2022

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RURAL RESIDENTS SUE SARASOTA COUNTY OVER URBAN SPRAWL PROJECT

SARASOTA — Mike Hutchinson and Eileen Fitzgerald, long-time residents of Bern Creek Ranches in rural northeast Sarasota County, have filed an Administrative Challenge on a recent Sarasota County Commission approval of a comprehensive plan amendment for Lakewood Ranch Southeast. The petition for an Administrative Hearing was filed against Sarasota County on Nov. 28, 2022.

With the comprehensive plan amendment, the county commission approved the construction of 5,000 dwelling units in a rural area that currently provides important agricultural, wildlife, wetlands, floodplain, and other benefits to the entire county. The additional vehicle trips generated by this development will overload roadways, such as Fruitville Road and University Boulevard, that are already experiencing serious congestion and projected to be even more congested in the year 2045. The proposed development is incompatible with existing nearby rural homestead development, including Bern Creek Ranches, and will damage the quality of life and rural lifestyle for existing and future residents.

The Administrative Challenge asserts that the comprehensive plan amendment, CPA 2022-B, will result in prohibited urban sprawl development, is inconsistent with state law, is internally inconsistent, and is inconsistent with the county's comprehensive plan. Given these defects, the comprehensive plan amendment should be found invalid after a hearing before an administrative law judge.

Representing the petitioners are Richard Grosso, Esq. of Richard Grosso, P.A., Robert Hartsell, Esq. and Shai Ozery, Esq. with Robert N. Hartsell, P.A., with Charles Gauthier, FAICP, as a planning expert.

Keep the Country, Inc., a not-for-profit organization formed to preserve and protect the rural areas of northern Sarasota County, is providing funding support for the challenge. For more information, go to SarasotaCountry.net.