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Saving a lifestyle

Valkaria-Grant residents deserve chance to vote on becoming own city

There's a revolution going on in the most unlikely of places:

Valkaria and Grant, those off-the-beaten-track areas in southern Brevard County where people love their laid-back rural lifestyle and don't want it ruined by subdivisions and traffic jams.

So they've decided to fight to save it.

Residents have started a drive to incorporate and become a city, putting the power in their hands to control growth and make sure what's happening to other parts of the Space Coast doesn't happen to them.

We strongly encourage county and state officials to give them the chance to chart their own course.

Together, Valkaria and Grant have about 2,700 citizens who live amid 100 square miles of mostly undeveloped land. Large wooded lots are the norm, along with horses and plenty of wildlife.

The hamlets are part of unincorporated Brevard, and to residents, that's the problem.

Sprawling Palm Bay is carving into their neighborhoods, annexing hundreds of rural acres and rezoning property to build more homes and businesses. Residents fear -- with justification -- that more development is coming.

And the only way to stop it and save their lifestyle is to become a separate city.

That's not easy to do. Before it can happen:

The County Commission has to pay for a feasibility study, there has to be a special act by the state Legislature, and a majority of Valkaria-Grant voters must back the move in a referendum.

Similar local efforts have failed in recent years after residents took a hard look at incorporation -- including taxes -- and said no.

Residents of Suntree voted it down in 1997, as did those in Port St. John in 2002.

Citizens of Valkaria and Grant deserve the same yes-or-no opportunity, so county commissioners should agree to conduct a feasibility study that would provide the data for residents to make an informed decision.

Meanwhile, we're glad to hear state Sen. Mike Haridopolos, R-Indianapolis, whose district includes the communities, say he'll help residents if the majority want to create a new identity.

What's going on in Valkaria and Grant is the latest example of how Brevardians are confronting rapid growth.

Rarely a day goes by that citizens aren't fighting a new development in some city, or decrying the construction of more condos that are erasing the few sections of open beach that remain.

It's why nearly 70 percent of voters supported expansion of the county's Environmentally Endangered Lands program last fall, and why people demanded county commissioners not roll back impact fees on new construction to help pay for needed schools.

Now Valkaria and Grant have moved squarely into the debate, and it will be interesting to see what decisions their residents make.