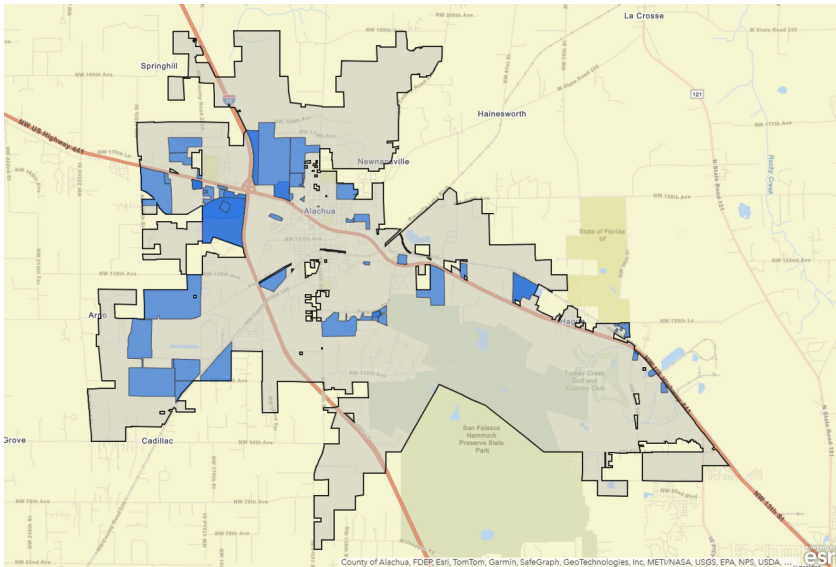


Ex-city planner alleges Alachua development was inappropriately rushed through approval process

WUFT | By [Rose Schnabel](#)

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The City of Alachua approved more than 1,500 lots for development last year. New allegations from a former city planner say some of the proposed developments shown above in blue were pushed forward prematurely. (Courtesy of City of Alachua)

A City of Alachua planner who resigned last month said he was “being asked to put the interests of a developer above the interests of the public,” in his former role.

Justin Tabor alleged City Manager Mike DaRoza disregarded planner recommendations and prematurely pushed developments for approval under the influence of former city manager turned private consultant, Adam Boukari.

Neither DaRoza nor Boukari responded to WUFT’s requests for comment.

Tabor spelled out the accusations in a six-page [open letter](#) sent to the Alachua City

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developer edged mountains. The five Tara developments comprise three residential neighborhoods, a commercial complex and a stormwater area.

Tabor said current City Manager Mike DaRoza instructed staff on multiple occasions to put Tara development plans up for board or commission voting before staff deemed them ready.

While reviewing plans for the 523-home subdivision called Tara Forest West in May 2024, planners noticed the initial phase of the development only had one connection to the city's main thoroughfare: U.S. Highway 441. Other Tara projects would add more connections to 441, but those hadn't yet been approved.

Planning staff shared their concerns with DaRoza and cautioned that the plan wasn't ready for voting by the commission-appointed Planning and Zoning Board. DaRoza told them to put it on the board's next agenda anyway, according to Tabor's letter.

Tabor said staff ran what he referred to as a "fire drill," scrambling to add five traffic-related conditions before the June 11 meeting.

The Planning and Zoning Board recommended approval of the development by a vote of 3 to 1 and the City Commission [approved it](#) on July 22.

Public opposition to the project grew and [reached the Alachua County Commission](#). After receiving a [concerned letter](#) from the county, the city canceled a Sept. 11 hearing scheduled for Tara April: the stormwater complement to Tara Forest West.

The developments sit on a sensitive area, the letter explained, underlied by a vast network of water-filled caves. The county recommended additional geologic studies and, according to Tabor, an independent consulting engineer that met with DaRoza and other city staff "advised these matters should be further investigated."

A letter sent on Nov. 15 by Jeff Childers, the lawyer representing Tara April, criticized "unnecessary hearing delays" based on "irrelevant and unfounded issues raised by Alachua County. Childers' letter also stated that the city was obligated to reschedule the Tara April hearing for Dec. 10.

A response by the city's representation, David Theriaque, denied the request to have the public hearing, noting "deficiencies associated with [the] client's pending applications."

By January 2025, the developer hadn't done any new geologic studies.

Mike DaRoza allegedly told planning staff on Jan. 23 to schedule the hearing for February, which would require them to send out notice before the end of the day. When asked why the item couldn't wait until March, DaRoza reportedly responded it "would be too late."

Tabor alleged former City Manager Adam Boukari influenced DaRoza's haste.

DaRoza had previously served as an assistant to Boukari, who spent 12 years with the city in various positions and founded the private consulting firm Abbfortis Strategies after his resignation in August 2021. Boukari also [co-founded](#) a business that administers homeowners associations with his brother Ben Boukari, an Alachua-area realtor.

The city contracted Adam Boukari to serve as a consultant to the City Manager for [six months after his departure](#), though Tabor alleges his influence outlasted the agreement.

Boukari "has been essentially co-managing the City with Mr. DaRoza, while representing developers' interests in a private capacity," wrote Tabor.

"His involvement with development applications submitted to the Planning Department for review progressively increased over several years," he said, "and is likely continuing to occur."

Tabor was one of three staff members to leave the city's Office of Planning and Zoning within three weeks. The others, fellow principal planner Adam Hall and Director of Planning & Community Development Kathy Winburn, did not respond to WUFT's request to corroborate Tabor's claims.

The city commission voted unanimously on Feb. 10 to explore options for opening an investigation into why the planners left. They canceled the process at the next meeting, two weeks later, with a vote of 3-2.

“To say this reversal was shocking, disappointing, and discouraging to me is an understatement,” wrote Tabor.

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Rose Schnabel

Rose Schnabel is WUFT's Report for America corps member, covering the agriculture, water and climate change beat in north central Florida. She can be reached by calling 352-294-6389 or emailing rschnabel@ufl.edu. [Read more about her position here.](#)

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