

**FORT MYERS BEACH
LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY WORKSHOP
MARCH 25, 1998
NationsBank Building, Council Chambers
2523 Estero Boulevard
FORT MYERS BEACH, FLORIDA**

Mayor Anita T. Cereceda opened the workshop on Wednesday, March 25, 1998 at 6:38 P.M. She said the name of the workshop is "Making It Happen." Just three years ago people were trying to make the town happen, and now we are working to build our community and create something we can be proud of. She thanked so many residents for attending. She introduced Roxie Smith and Betty Davis Simpson, co-chairs of the LPA. Ms. Simpson, on behalf of LPA, welcomed everyone and thanked them for their participation. This meeting will make it possible for everyone to see and hear what the LPA has been doing for the past 2 years. In addition the LPA has land use hearings. They meet every week, are all volunteers, and are appointed by the Town Council. Ms. Smith said that the LPA has worked hard, but they haven't always agreed on everything. But when they disagreed, they disagreed with respect. Their motivation has always been to make this the best town you have ever lived in. She encouraged the public to come to the hearings and tell the LPA how they can make it even better.

Bill Spikowski said that a Comprehensive Plan is a printed document that will be made up of elements, what are the same as chapters. But it is more than a document--it is a shared vision. They have tried to make it as visual as possible, because they felt that drawings, maps and charts can communicate better than words. The Comprehensive Plan is required by state law, and states that "no public or private development shall be permitted except in conformity with the comprehensive plan." It will be adopted by town ordinance. It is the town's road map into the future, where we want to go and what you have to do to get there. It takes a long time and is a very deliberate process.

He said that the Town was formed largely because of land use issues, because of disappointment with Lee County. One of the major land use issues has been mother-in-law apartments. (They may be legal if it was built before 1962 and has been in continuous use; if it was built between 1962 and 1984, it needs to comply with all current laws except density cap and floodplain elevations; if it was built after 1984, it may be legal if they meet the new density caps in the plan, if it is in an owner-occupied home, and if it meets the floodplain regulations.) Other issues are flood regulations (V-zone and A-zone); high densities; and building height.

There will be eight land-use categories: Low Density (single family neighborhoods – down from 5 units per acre to 4); Mixed Residential (areas that are already a mix of duplex, multi-family, high rise – maximum density of 6 units per acres); Boulevard (area along Estero that already has a mix of residential and commercial); Pedestrian Commercial (Times Square, Old San Carlos, Crescent Street, and Villa Santini); Marina; Recreation (parks, Matanzas Preserve and the sandy beach); Wetlands; and Tidal Water (which includes our jurisdiction out to 1000 feet and all the canals.)

The post-disaster redevelopment policy in the event of a big storm will be that you will be able to build back the same number of units, but they will have to be built to current standards. But the plan also addresses pre-disaster redevelopment, in case you need to rebuild without waiting for a disaster.

Over commercialization is another of the major land use issues. The commercial area in the south end is already surrounded by high rise development.

Victor Dover spoke about community design – how new buildings can improve our community. He said that not only is a town physical, but it is also a projection of the town's values, which translates into a greater place to live. All pieces, including open spaces, right-of-way, buildings, paths, etc., should come together into one ensemble. The special small town character of the Town could be imperiled without being guided. We have to balance the needs of neighborhoods and tourism. We also must balance the use of cars and other modes of travel. We can do things to encourage pedestrian life.

The design needs to foster neighborliness and face-to-face interactions. It needs to reinforce a strong family environment and a feeling of safety. We can capture the special character of the town, extend it, and protect it; we can direct private investment toward town-building; and we must establish clear and consistent rules. We need to shape the public spaces in a way that promotes walkable streets that are shaded, interesting and safe. We want the public places to be designed, not ignored. We can reinforce our special character by promoting a compatible mixed use (like having a corner store near a residential area) and mixed affordability within neighborhoods. We can promote a loose architectural style that is funky,

eclectic, and fits the image of the historic Beach, within a reasonable range. We need to get our traffic calmed, and promote a system of interconnected streets and paths as an alternative to pedestrians and bicycles.

We need to point private investment toward town-building by focusing on areas in transition and encouraging development in those areas (like Old San Carlos.) We need to be proactive in encouraging the kind of development we want, but we also need to reinforce the stable neighborhoods. We need to improve our linkages to the waterfronts. Property values will continue to rise and there will be an effort to rebuild on those lots, but we can say that water view is important to the town and try to reserve special sites for civic purposes and landmarks. We must create a result-oriented illustrated land development code.

The island has been divided into seven distinct areas: North End, Core Area, Near-Town; Heart of the Island; Quiet Center; High Rise Resort; South Point. In the Quiet Center, the streets are narrow but would be helped by adding a canopy of trees. In the Heart of the Island area, School Street is the key between the Boulevard and Recreation zones. It would be good to add trees and sidewalks along the street to lead into the recreation area. Perhaps we would want to build a stone arch entrance like the one that used to lead onto the island. Red Coconut may be interested in redevelopment, and the plans shows how it can be accommodated using detached cottages and houses, row houses and apartments, B& B, or mixed-use buildings. That area also has a good site for a civic building, which could be acquired by creative land swap. The Villa Santini area is centered in an area of high rises and is in transition. The area is pedestrian-hostile. It area would become the village center of the south part of the island, though milder and less entertainment-oriented than Times Square. Residents could walk there, enjoy a meal, walk to grocery store, etc. Parking would be distributed in smaller lots behind the buildings and the area would have on-street parking. Estero does not have to be a high-speed parkway. It is no longer a highway in the country, but is a road through the town.

Mr. Spikowski said that the main traffic problems are congestion, speeding, and parking.

Mobility needs to be improved using a variety of travel modes: make it easier for visitors to arrive without a car (regularly scheduled airport service that is privately owned and improved trolleys after they get here; use impact fees to build sidewalks to help congestion; encourage privately-owned water taxis landing at marinas, hotels, and restaurants by easing parking regulations; create a system of hidden paths.)

He spoke about ideas for upgrading Estero Boulevard: Expand the Times Square streetscape project (add sidewalks to the other side of the street); calm speeding traffic (put trees toward the curb instead of toward the buildings which makes pedestrians feel safer and makes the drive more pleasant); change the physical design of the larger intersections by adding pedestrian islands, making shorter turn radius, etc.) ; put buildings closer to the street in key areas (more pedestrian friendly); improve sidewalks and bikeways (hopefully on both sides of the street); and require new developments to study traffic impact professionally.

He spoke about optimizing the parking supply: use shared parking lots behind buildings so that you don't have to move your car for several errands); direct visitors to available spaces (signs with live information so people will know if parking spaces are available; if not, they can park and take the trolley).

He stated that the Sky Bridge is not the cause of traffic congestion, it is simply the site of the backup from narrow Estero Boulevard.

Regarding the Coastal Management element, he said that sand dues need to be re-created (for storm protection, to protect the boulevard, and because they are interesting to walk on and are good for wildlife). We will need walkways above the dunes at key access points. The element also addresses flood damage due to buildings being too low, and evacuation.

The Conservation Element addresses the Estero Bay State Buffer Preserve, the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve; Little Estero Island (sandbar in front of Holiday Inn); sea turtles; and dolphins.

The Utilities Element is required by the state but the town does not have a big role in this because our drinking water is provided by Florida Cities Water (franchised by the state), our sewer service is provided by Lee County (even though we can't franchise this service, we need a voice because we are downstream of effluent), and our trash is provided by a private company under contract to Lee County (when that contract expires, the town can contract for it if they want to.)

The Stormwater Management element addresses two kinds of flooding: rainfall and rising tide. Since most of the island was developed before modern regulations, many retrofits are needed (re-digging swales, pumps for stormwater, etc). Some pools discharge directly on the beach even though they should

not. Swales can be retrofitted so more water sinks in than runs off, and parking lots should be made of porous material rather than impervious asphalt.

The Recreation Element addresses Bay Oaks and Matanzas Pass preserve; the swimming pool that is coming soon; Bowditch Point and Lynn Hall Park; and beach accesses.

The Housing and Historic Preservation Element recognizes our long and proud history. The Calusa kingdom was headquartered at Mound Key, we still have many cottage homes, and the elementary school may soon be on the National List of Historic Places. Buildings have been inventoried, but the list needs to be updated. The Plan suggests that we make one or two historic districts and perhaps promote them with walking tours.

The Intergovernmental Coordination Element addresses the Town's relations with Lee County, the state, the Regional Planning Council, the fire district, the mosquito control, and the library district.

Mr. Spikowski stated that the next step for the Comprehensive Plan will be the public hearing process. Residents will be able to get copies of the elements at Town Hall, the library, or the Print Shop. Seven of the 12 elements are ready now and the next four will be ready within a few weeks. The hearings will consider the elements in their draft form. The first hearing will be April 21 at 7:00 PM for the LPA. The Council will have hearings in May. It will not be adopted into law until after we send it to the state, who approves or suggests changes. Then the third public hearing will probably be in late summer. Final adoption will be in the late summer or early fall, unless the Plan is challenged. He invited the audience to make any comments on the sheets provided and turn them in by March 27.

Ms. Simpson and Ms. Smith introduced the other members of LPA and the members of the Town Council. Ms. Simpson invited questions from the public. Question: Does the plan for street trees call for canopy trees rather than just tall palms? The council has approved the printing of a booklet for appropriate side street trees to create a sense of neighborhood. The book will suggest 8 types of trees, mainly native with fruit or flowers that will all be low maintenance like gumbo limbo. Question: What type of trees are OK in a hurricane? The booklet will discuss the pros and cons of each tree. Question: Doesn't the county require a setback of 25 feet? Many of our buildings were built before the county code and are already non-conforming, so we can change the rules to make conformity along the street. Question: Why is acquisition of land not addressed in the plan? Earlier drafts did address it but the recent referendum put cold water on it. It could be brought back later. Question: What is pre-disaster re-development? It is re-development any time other than after a storm, including now. Fixing them up now would help protect them from damage during a storm. For example, if an old building is on a slab, it would be in the best interest of everyone to rebuild it now rather than waiting for it to be knocked down. Many of our private homes were built before 1984 and are on the ground. Federal law says you can't improve more than 50% on those homes. But he feels that if you put on something like storm shutters to protect your home, it shouldn't be included in the 50%. Question: Why do you show no telephone poles in your pictures? Are you planning to underground them? In the sidewalk area, yes, but it is not economic unless you are putting in other improvements at same time. The Plan encourages undergrounding.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Salfen
Recording Secretary