

VILLAGE OF ESTERO, FLORIDA
Planning & Zoning Board
2019 Annual Report to the Village Council

INTRODUCTION

The Planning and Zoning Board (PZB) serves as the Village of Estero's state required Local Planning Agency. The PZB is responsible for conducting all public hearings on zoning requests for proposed Estero land developments and then makes recommendations to the Village Council and/or takes actions itself on variances, deviations and special exceptions.

The PZB usually meets monthly to review action items and conduct Public Information Meetings (PIM). A PIM is a workshop session where applicants can make presentations, questions can be asked but no decisions are made. Public input is invited and encouraged at all meetings.

The PZB is directly accountable to the Village Council. The seven Board members serve staggered three-year terms. The District 2 Village Councilor serves as the liaison to the PZB. The Village Director of Community Development and staff provide necessary staff support, field studies, developer/owner dialogue and reports and recommendations to the PZB. The Village has also retained a prominent land use attorney who advises the PZB on all legal matters that come before the PZB. Their efforts are immeasurably helpful to the PZB, enabling it to conduct its assigned responsibility.

THE GOAL OF THE PZB

The PZB has the goal of overseeing the development, redevelopment and other changes to various properties within the Village in such a way that Estero grows responsibly. This means that proposals need to be consistent with the Village's Comprehensive Plan (CP) and Land Development Code (LDC) and are consistent or complimentary with the values and design concepts that Estero has created over a continuum predating its incorporation in 2014 and continuing as an incorporated government unit.

It also includes monitoring and planning to make sure that the Village infrastructure is able to support new development without overtaxing existing infrastructure. The PZB, being the Local Planning Agency under the State of Florida Community Planning Act, recommends to the Village Council, after review of land development regulations and development proposals, whether they are consistent with the Village Comprehensive Plan. In concert with the Village Council and staff, the PZB properly evaluates development proposals' effect on infrastructure and makes necessary recommendations to the Village Council to ensure that Village growth occurs responsibly and in a fashion that maintains the safe and efficient operation of the Village.

The PZB seeks to effectively serve several constituencies. First the residents, second the Village Council, and third, landowners and developers who wish to develop properties within the Village.

PZB PROCESS

The PZB reviews a wide variety of requests from landowners, developers or their representatives. These items range from minor changes to reviewing complex zoning change proposals and Comprehensive Plan Amendments. In 2019, the PZB began to use the new Village of Estero Comprehensive Plan. The transitional Land Development Code (developed years ago by Lee County) is in use during the development of the Estero's own Land Development Code, which is underway.

The PZB often conducts zoning hearings in a quasi-judicial capacity. Quasi-judicial hearings occur with regard to site-specific zoning applications. The purpose of a quasi-judicial procedure, which is somewhat more formal than normal public hearings, is to assure due process to all concerned parties and to bring evidence to the PZB (and ultimately the Village Council) that allows the PZB to apply the existing adopted regulations/policies/requirements to a specific application (i.e. to determine whether the application for the requested action meets the existing requirements). Presenters and witnesses are sworn in; ex-parte communications and any conflicts of interest are disclosed. The hearing is open to the public with public comment encouraged. Witnesses are subject to cross-examination.

2019 POLICY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

As 2019 began, the Village's new Comprehensive Plan, which had been approved by the State of Florida, was on hold while a developer filed a legal challenge to the plan. Negotiations continued for several months until agreement was reached in the summer. The agreement included a \$750,000 contribution from the developer to the village to be used for purchase or maintenance of sensitive village lands. It also reduced the number of buildings planned on the property from 724, approved by Lee County in 2007, to 590. The types of housing units changed from primarily multi family to more single family and twin villa-style homes.

With the settlement of the legal challenge, the Village's Comprehensive Plan was implemented and is now in effect. The plan will guide future growth in the village. In less than 20 years, Estero's population is projected to increase from just under 52,000 Florida residents and seasonal residents to 75,000. The Village is mostly built out with just 10 percent of its land available for future development. The Comprehensive Plan identifies what is important to Estero's residents: sustainable development, responsible growth, excellent public safety, adequate and high quality water supply, a first rate school system, high quality architectural and design standards, access to the Estero River, well maintained parks and recreation facilities, reduced traffic congestion, effective storm water management and other factors to provide the positive life style that Estero residents deserve and expect.

Also, as the year started, the village completed the \$24.5 million purchase of 62 acres of land located north of Corkscrew Road and east of US 41. The purchase assures public access to the Estero River and adequate park and open space adjacent thereto. Studies are underway to develop a specific land use plan for the 62 acres. As the year closed, the Village was in the final stages of taking ownership of the 5-acre Happehatchee Center, which the 62-acre parcel surrounds. The Village will preserve and protect the property as a unique environmental asset for future generations, and it is perfectly complimentary with the 62 acres.

The Village is actively considering annexation of a 10-acre parcel of land on the north side of Coconut Road west of US41. If annexed, it is planned by a developer that approximately 25 single-family homes would be constructed on the parcel. It would provide significant impact fees and tax

revenue to the Village. This type of development is preferable to multifamily housing in an area with limited access and egress such as exists on Coconut Road west of US41.

Meanwhile, the City of Bonita Springs and a developer settled litigation and reached agreement to develop a continuing care retirement community consisting of 300 condominiums in several mid rise and hi rise residential towers on lands at the west terminus of Coconut Road. Coconut Road is an Estero road, and will need to be reviewed to determine if improvements are needed. Limited widening opportunities exist due to the relatively narrow right of way and the presence of several structures very close to the existing roadway.

The Village also continued creation of Estero's own Land Development Code that will replace the transitional Land Development Code developed by Lee County over a continuum and presently used in Estero. The highly regarded firm, Clarion Associates, is working with the Village, and the plan is to complete development in 2020 for PZB review and Council approval which will be followed by reviews of other government units. The Land Development Code augments the Comprehensive Plan by providing vast amounts of detail to guide future development with specific policies, procedures, specifications and process.

The Village is significantly impacted by development that is adjacent to Estero either in unincorporated Lee County to the east or as noted previously, Bonita Springs to the south. Of particular concern is the impact of several large residential projects already under construction or planned on the Corkscrew Road corridor east of Estero. These residential projects must use Corkscrew Road as their primary access and egress. Plans have been completed and work is underway to improve the Corkscrew Road/I-75 interchange including additional turn lanes, 1500-foot extensions of on and off ramps, new traffic signals and street lighting. Also, plans to widen Corkscrew Road to 4 lanes east of Ben Hill Griffin Road to Alico Road were completed, and construction is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2020. Since Corkscrew Road is a county road, Lee County will fund the widening project.

2019 MAJOR MILESTONES

Lee Health at Coconut Point completed a successful first year of operation. The state Certificate of Need law was repealed by the Florida legislature and signed by the Governor. As a result, Lee Health Coconut Point converted its observation beds to inpatient beds and now operates as a medical surgical hospital, the realization of a long sought after goal for Estero and South Lee County residents. It uses the latest technology in healthcare and patient convenience. The facility also offers extensive services designed to improve health and wellness. It is a health and wellness destination.

Extensive planning and public input was conducted in 2019 regarding the needed improvement of Estero Parkway, and plans were completed that include widening and the installation of storm water drainage, street lighting, 7 foot bike paths, 6 foot sidewalks and significant landscaping. The project will begin early in 2020. Lee County is providing the renovation of the 1.6 mile pavement surface while the village will fund the other improvements. It is a 9.2 million dollar project. Improving storm water management is an important component in response to flooding that occurred following Hurricane Irma. When completed, Estero Parkway public safety and appearance will be dramatically improved.

As Estero continues to experience population growth, monitoring and addressing water quality

takes on even more importance. Accordingly, the Village teamed up with Florida Gulf Coast University to monitor and measure the types of bacteria found in the Estero River and their source. The Village also contracted with engineering firms to conduct sedimentation analyses and study how water and sewer could be expanded to those areas with septic systems.

The Village successfully worked with the state of Florida to upgrade the median landscaping along US41 in Estero. The project will be completed shortly into 2020. Work on the one million dollar project started at the south and is moving north.

The Village is also assisting the Lee County school district with preliminary work to locate two new schools in Estero including a new middle school that would be situated adjacent to Estero High School.

2019 DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

During the year, the PZB held 9 meetings, conducted 15 public hearings, conducted 7 public information meetings and held a joint meeting with the Design and Review Board to review the bicycle and pedestrian master plan. It also reviewed and transmitted draft ordinances relating to incorporating the village capital plan and school district schedule into the Comprehensive Plan, and amendments to the Comprehensive Plan regarding the water supply facilities work plan and wetlands.

The PZB approved 3 developer/resident applications as submitted, approved 4 applications with conditions, denied 2 applications, transmitted 15 recommendations to the Village Council, and the Council approved 12 recommendations, some with conditions for approval as recommended by the PZB.

Approved development applications include a hotel adjacent to Hertz Arena and a residential development, Corkscrew Crossing, for 590 homes and villas. The Genova condominium project, Estero Grande's apartment and retail project and Tidewater Phase 2 single-family housing construction continued. An Aldi grocery store is starting construction on the north side of the Estero Wal-Mart store. A Sprouts grocery store is being built in Estero Grande. Edera at Coconut Point, a 180 unit apartment project, received permits as 2019 ended, and preliminary site work started. Details on all Estero development applications can be found on the Village's website under Planning & Zoning Board agendas and minutes.

In addition to the Estero approved development activity, Lee County approved Verdana Village for up to 2400 residential units, which is situated along the Corkscrew Road corridor east of Estero. Corkscrew Road corridor construction continues at other Lee County approved developments, The Place at Estero, 1,325 homes; Coconut Shores, 625 homes; Wild Blue, 1,000 homes; and other smaller developments.

IN MEMORIUM

Robert King, a valued member of the Planning and Zoning Board and incoming President of the Estero Council of Community Leaders, passed away suddenly after an illness. His expertise, particularly in the area of transportation matters, was special, and the Village honored his service posthumously.

ESTERO IS GROWING

In 2000, the Florida resident population of Estero was just over 9,000. The 2018 US census update calculation places the resident population at 34,631. Most of this growth occurred when Estero's 35-gated communities were built, but development continues principally along the Corkscrew Road corridor, Coconut Point, US41 and Coconut Road.

When all current developments pending, approved or under construction are added together in both Estero and unincorporated Lee County immediately east of Estero and along the Corkscrew Road corridor, there are developments representing over 8,000 residential units. Using a 2.2 resident per household multiplier, the potential Florida resident population growth from these developments is over 17,500.

This growth will take several years to mature but it requires advance planning to provide necessary infrastructure including not only roads, storm water management, water supply and utilities but also public safety (police, fire and EMS), public education and other essential public services. Work is underway to develop a 5th fire station and 2 new schools.

The work of Village staff, the Village Council and the Planning & Zoning and Design & Review Boards will grow along with new development activity. The goal remains responsible development.

Respectfully submitted to the Village Council:

The Village of Estero Planning & Zoning Board

Scotty Wood, Chairman
Marlene Naratil, Vice Chairman
Dr. Tim Allen
Anthony Gargano
Robert King (in memorium)
James Tatooles
John Yarborough