



# Toward Better Places

THE COMMUNITY CHARACTER PLAN FOR COLLIER COUNTY, FLORIDA



April 2001

# ***Toward Better Places* is the culmination of a year of intensive examination of the County's current policies and future direction in land use, transportation, and green open spaces.**

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# Toward Better Places

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## **How this Plan was Created** **page 1.1**

The Community Character Plan was developed over the course of a year using a variety of innovative methods. This chapter details the public participation techniques including hands-on workshops, focus groups, and a community image survey. The public participation was augmented by frequent input from staff and the Select Committee on Community Character and Design.



## **The Community Design Manual** **page 2.1**

The Community Design Manual is the first of the three design-oriented chapters. This document looks closely at neighborhoods, streets, centers, and the subdivided periphery in Collier County. Case studies are used to document preferred methods of developing and redeveloping in a wide variety of situations. Each case study is graphically documented and followed by specific implementation steps.



## **The Mobility Manual** **page 3.1**

The Mobility Manual addresses the transportation system in Collier County, particularly addressing the road network both functionally and in terms of its character. Suggestions are provided for each level of the transportation network, ranging from pedestrian connectedness to cross-county arterials. The Mobility Manual provides five specific strategies for creating efficient and beautiful streets in Collier County, along with implementation steps for achieving them.

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## The Greenspace Manual: page 4.1

This final design chapter addresses the county's green spaces, which range in size from neighborhood parks to large national preserves. The consensus driven greenspace model looks at creating a continuum of parks, natural lands, and linkages that add character. The recommended approaches are supplemented by detailed strategies for improving county parks and preserving natural habitats.



## Implementation page 5.1

This chapter describes specific strategic steps that will be required to integrate the Character Plan concepts into the regulations and beyond, to the built results. The Collier County government can start many of the steps immediately; others will require a number of years or will be implemented by the private sector in accordance with new land development regulations.



## Resources: page 6.1

This chapter features in depth documentation and further analysis from the preceding chapters. The appendices, charts, and other data in this chapter are referenced frequently throughout the document.



## Hallmarks of the Plan

### **1. Design...**

The spaces between buildings are as important as the private realms inside them. Development should be designed so that the architecture and neighborly arrangement impart an enduring image of beauty, confidence and societal continuity while making daily life more practical.

### **2. Choice...**

Provide more housing choices in Collier County by reintroducing walkable traditional neighborhood development as a counterbalance to the multitude of gated subdivisions that have been built over the past 20 years.

### **3. Balance...**

Create a balanced road network by improving Collier's principal arterial roads while simultaneously creating a secondary network of smaller roads that link neighborhoods.

### **4. Connections...**

Make frequent connections between new neighborhoods and the land around them, and fully integrate them with the secondary street network and with parks and other urban open spaces. Improve existing neighborhoods in the same way.

### **5. Growing smart...**

All new development approvals should be based on a resilient pattern of streets and lots, because the initial street and lot pattern will long outlast the first generation of buildings and land uses that are placed on them.

### **6. Hold the line...**

Make much better use of the remaining vacant acreage within the existing urban boundary before allowing new development to creep further into the countryside.

### **7. Respect environmentally sensitive places...**

Enhance the character of Collier's more rural and environmentally sensitive places through rural design techniques and further protection of the County's vital natural resources.

## THE CHALLENGE

Collier County stands at an important crossroads in its history. Its leaders can dramatically improve the future of the built environment in the county. Previous planning efforts like FOCUS\* have laid the groundwork, awaiting mainly an implementation mechanism with concise goals and milestones for judging success. This Community Character Plan simultaneously addresses land use, transportation, and greenspace planning to create a concerted plan for future growth and rejuvenation.

The Community Character Plan attempts to discern and respect the varied character of Collier County. Character is a combination of many things; it is exemplified by style, image, locale, mood, livability, connectedness, and sense of place. Many residents choose Collier County for its affluence, physical attributes, activities, or climate. Yet development and growth in recent years has threatened the county's character- not so much because of the pace of change or the number of people, but because of the physical form chosen for the development. There is a better way.

This plan seeks to define the different characters that coexist in Collier County and preserve them - by design. At the same time, this plan reaches beyond preservation, to the goal of restoring character and upgrading the experience of place in the county -- again, by design. The goal of the Community Character Plan is to protect and extend cherished aspects of Collier County by redirecting the inevitable growth into forms that enhance character rather than degrade it.

## CHARACTER: READY FOR BETTER

Collier County residents have tired of seeing new development that does not add to the County's unique setting of interesting towns surrounded by natural beauty. The regulatory systems and industry habits in place today have not proven adequate to ensure that new development becomes an asset to community character. Unsustainable development patterns have marched north and east, consuming more and more land and threatening the ecosystems that make Collier one of the most beautiful counties in the state. The disconnected development patterns have overburdened major roads, creating peak-hour demands that have almost everyone declaring a roadway emergency.

As this plan was undertaken, Collier residents clearly communicated that they don't want to stop the development that makes the County prosperous, but they want new development to enhance the community in other ways as well. This plan looks at growth not simply as an engine of prosperity, but also how it interacts with mobility, green spaces, and livable results.

This plan provides Collier County with a blueprint for building a community that improves as it grows. It cannot provide prescriptive solutions for every situation, but through illustrated case studies it provides a framework for improving development and redevelopment throughout Collier County. It also proposed specific steps to implement the community-wide vision on how to move toward a community of greater character.

\*The Future of Collier Created by Us

# How This Plan Was Created

<b>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION</b>	<b>Page 1.2</b>
The Community Image Survey (CIS)	Page 1.2
The 3 Highest-Rated Images	Page 1.4
The 3 Lowest-Rated Images	Page 1.5
More CIS Results	Page 1.6
<b>THE DESIGN CHARRETTE</b>	<b>Page 1.10</b>
The Study Tour	Page 1.10
Designing Our Future, Hands-On	Page 1.10
<b>SELECT COMMITTEE &amp; STAFF</b>	<b>Page 1.12</b>

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

### THE COMMUNITY IMAGE SURVEY

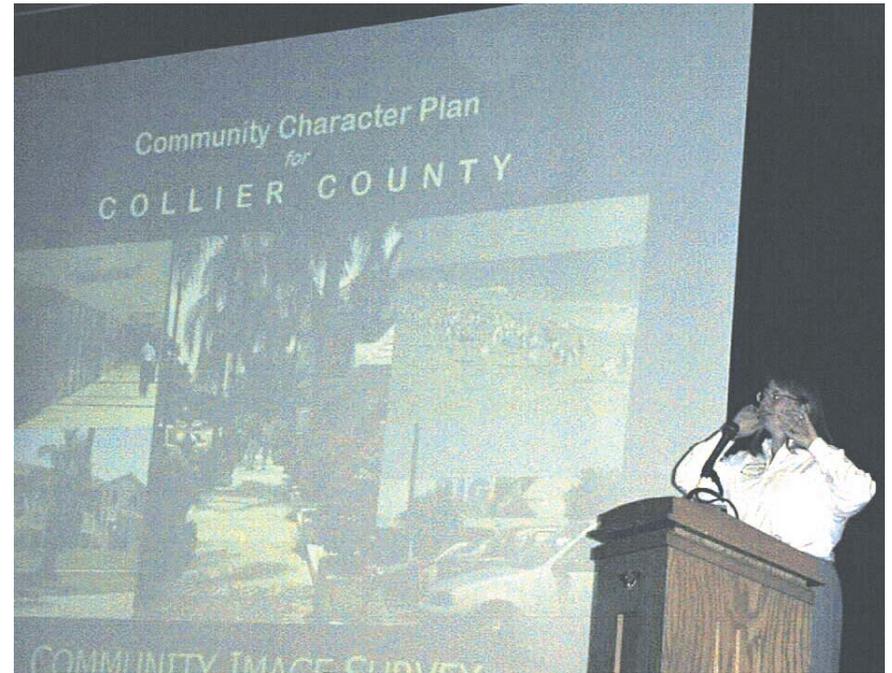
The Community Image Survey (CIS) is an effective public participation tool that uses visual images to educate community members about their choices in development types and patterns, and involve the public in a positive, collaborative, and useful way.

#### How the CIS Works

The Community Image Survey is a two-part process consisting of a slide survey and a facilitated discussion process. First, participants are asked to look at a series of slides, assign each a number value from -10 to +10 based on how much they like or dislike the image, and its appropriateness for the area. Later, participants review the slides again and are told the average "score" each image received. This time, the slides are roughly paired based on subject matter for discussion purposes. A facilitated discussion in which participants brainstorm what they like and dislike about each image helps people understand and discuss design and development alternatives.

#### A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words"

By focusing on concrete visual images, instead of relying on words like "mixed use," "pedestrian-friendly," "higher density," and "transit-oriented" to describe development, CIS participants are able to move beyond static arguments about use and density toward more useful discussions about the specifics of a particular place. The facilitated discussion process helps CIS participants identify the design details that make a place feel more safe, livable, and walkable.



Kristen Paulsen administers the CIS at the Kickoff event.

It should be noted that the CIS is neither an endorsement nor an indictment of a particular place or city. By using real-world examples, the CIS illustrates that even with the best example, there is always room for improvement.

For the Collier County Community Image Survey, Kristen Paulsen of Communities By Design captured digital photographs in Collier County of all different types of development: from downtowns and neighborhood centers to strip commercial and shopping malls, from rural roads to residential streets to arterials and collectors, from single- and multi-family housing to office and mixed use, from transit and bikeways to parking lots and parking structures, from beaches and parks and golf courses to agriculture and nature preserves, waterways and open space. Ms. Paulsen then used the nearly 1000 digital images she collected to develop a Community Image Survey for Collier County.



Once each audience member scored the CIS pictures, the Dover Kohl team and programmer Ken Golding rapidly tabulated the results using a computer program especially written for the Character Plan



The Collier County CIS was first shown on Thursday, April 6, 2000 as part of the Community Character Plan Kick-Off presentation at Naples High School Auditorium. Following that presentation, the CIS was put on the Collier County website so that additional individuals could take the Survey and also log-on to view the results.

### Analysis of Results

As of January 30, 2001, 372 people had taken the Community Image Survey (CIS) [ The Collier County Community Image Survey is available on-line at [www.kengolding.com/doverkohl](http://www.kengolding.com/doverkohl) ]. The results illustrate the types of development that are valued by Collier County residents, as well as the development types that people dislike. By examining the results of the CIS, we learn what is important to local residents, and thus what they would like to see more of in future development. We also learn what things they do not like, which may also be

that which they fear most, and therefore would like to see less of in the future. At the broadest level, the CIS helps us to identify overall patterns of preferences, while at a more subtle level, the CIS can help call attention to the design details that influence whether people like or dislike a particular place.

**+8.7****+8.6****+8.4**

### **THE 3 HIGHEST RATED IMAGES**

The top three rated images in the Survey clearly indicate that the natural environment, open space, and the recreation opportunities provided by such are extremely important to Collier County residents. The images depicting a walking path at Corkscrew Park nature preserve (+8.7), a beach scene with the Naples Pier in the background (+8.6), and Outer Clam Bayou at Pelican Bay (+8.4) are the Survey's three highest rated slides.



-7.6



-4.7



-4.6

### THE 3 LOWEST RATED IMAGES

The three lowest rated images in the Survey all show places where development has not been done well. The image that Collier County residents dislike the most (which may also represent residents' greatest fear) is that of a congested roadway (-4.7), where people are stuck in traffic (this particular image happens to be from the East Tamiami Trail, but it could be Anywhere, USA). The other images which Collier County residents rated the lowest both showed places that were extremely auto-oriented, unattractive, and pedestrian-unfriendly. One of the images (taken from the Isle of Capri Road) shows an isolated sidewalk, bordered on one side by a drainage ditch and the other by parking lots and strip commercial development, with power lines and sterile cobra-head lighting overhead (-7.6). The other image shows an underutilized strip commercial shopping center (Naples Town Center), with a flat and uninteresting facade, minimal landscaping, and a very large (and mostly empty) parking lot separating the buildings from the street (-4.6).

## MORE CIS RESULTS



+6.5



-3.3

### Neighborhood Centers

Results pair #13 depicts two very different neighborhood centers. Both contain retail and restaurant uses, but in the one image (from Third Street South in Naples), the pedestrian realm is generous, with benches and outdoor dining creating interest and activity on the sidewalk, the building facades are varied and well-maintained, the landscaping is beautiful, and even details such as the street lights are attractive. (+6.5). In the other image, a view from the sidewalk of a strip commercial center in East Naples, the pedestrian realm is cold, sterile, and uninteresting, due in part to the lack of architectural details and signage, and the sterile grays and whites along the long, monotonous run of poorly marked doors and windows (-3.3).



+5.8



+1.5

### Single-Family Residential

Results pair #5 illustrates that even modestly-sized homes are more highly rated when the garage is not the dominant feature of the home. The small white house with the sidewalk leading up to the front stoop and front door, has ample windows fronting the street (+5.8). The orientation of the home, with the garage not visible from the street, combined with the mature landscaping, are the details that make this image receive a much higher rating than its pair. The dominance of the garage door and driveway cause the other single-family home to receive a much lower rating (+1.5).



+4.7



-2.2

### Multi-Family Residential

Results pair #27 illustrates that multi-family housing also becomes more highly rated with the orientation to the street, instead of to a parking lot, and with the addition of attractive landscaping. The older multi-family courtyard-style building has a pedestrian oriented entrance and is of a scale and style that is compatible with a single-family neighborhood (+4.7). Those features, combined with the colorful flowerbeds and lush greenery, make this a nice addition to the neighborhood. The other multi-family building is completely auto-oriented (-2.2). The wide, asphalt driveway and the carports/parking areas serve to set the building back from the street and leave little room for landscaping. It is as if the entrance for the vehicles was given much more emphasis than the entrance for the people who live at or visit (or even walk by) this project.



+0.3



+6.5

### Residential Streets

Results pair #7 depicts two residential neighborhood streets. One is very clearly oriented almost entirely to the automobile, with a wide street, no sidewalks, and few trees; even the housing seems to reflect this auto-orientation, with the garages being the most dominant feature (+0.3). The score for this image is so close to zero that it may reflect the fact that housing developments like this are becoming so commonplace that residents no longer know what to think of them (0 is a neutral response). In contrast, the other image of a residential street has many features which raise the rating: the street is heavily landscaped with the street edge punctuated by evenly spaced and like trees, there is a median with street trees and flowers, there is a dedicated bike lane which visually narrows the vehicle lane, and there is a sidewalk separated from the street by a landscaped planting strip (+6.5).



+5.0



-1.9

### Mixed Use

Results pair #18 show two different ways of handling office and retail. The three-story building is attractive and very pedestrian-oriented, with retail uses on the ground floor and offices above, doors and windows and balconies facing the street, the building coming up to the back of the sidewalk, and landscaping separating and protecting the pedestrian on the sidewalk from the street (+5.0). By contrast, the one-story building has a combination of retail and office uses sharing the space, which means that retail businesses are more spread out and less pedestrian-friendly. The building itself lacks architectural details and is oriented entirely to the parking lot (-1.9). A low shrub and the parking lot further separate the pedestrian on the sidewalk from the storefronts, which besides making pedestrian access dangerous, makes it nearly impossible for the pedestrian to see what is for sale.



-3.3



+6.7

### Getting Around

Results pair #24 shows how we get around, with the first image illustrating the current conditions where the automobile is the primary mode of transportation. Big, wide roads are lined by auto-oriented businesses, with the pedestrian stranded on a small strip of sidewalk at the side of the road, with nothing to protect him or her from the speeding traffic (-3.3). By contrast, the other image shows a big, wide road where the tree-lined median is the dominant feature, and pedestrians can walk or linger on the generous sidewalk in the middle of the median (+6.7). It should be noted that even though the latter does not exist in Collier County (the highly-rated photo shows Commonwealth Avenue in Boston), residents still rated it extremely positively when asked if they liked it and if the image was appropriate for Collier County.



+6.3



+7.8

### Greenspace

Almost all greenspace was positively rated by Collier County residents. Whether used for agricultural purposes or for natural habitat, as in results pair #19 which showed both grazing (+6.3) and nature preserve/habitat uses (+7.8), open space is highly regarded by residents.



+2.9



+5.7

Surprisingly, golf courses were the lowest rated of the greenspaces, though still positive (+2.9, as shown in results pair #30). Agriculture - in the form of citrus groves (+5.7, as shown in results pair #30) - consistently received high ratings. (Also see the discussion of the “3 Highest Rated Images” for other greenspace images.)



## THE DESIGN CHARRETTE

Charrette is a French word that translates as "little cart." At the leading architecture school of the 19th century, the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, students would be assigned a tough design problem to work out under pressure of time. They would continue sketching as fast as they could, even as little carts- charrettes- carried their drawing boards away to be judged and graded. Today, "charrette" has come to describe a rapid, intensive, and creative work session in which a design team focuses on a particular design problem and arrives at a collaborative solution. Charrettes are product-oriented. The public charrette is fast becoming a preferred way to face the planning challenges confronting American communities.

The Community Character Plan used the charrette method for eliciting public input at the beginning of this yearlong process. The charrette was held from April 4 - 14, 2000, and included workshops at several widespread locations throughout the county. Over the course of this historic two weeks, the design team took up residence in Collier County, set up a studio at the Naples Beach Hotel, brainstormed concepts for the plan, and invited local citizens to share their ideas.

## THE STUDY TOUR

For the first two days of the charrette, the team of designers from around the country toured Collier County. Staff and citizens led tours that included airplane tours of the entire county, in-depth tours of ecologically sensitive areas by boat and by foot, agricultural tours, and many automobile tours of Naples and Collier County neighborhoods. The tour included rural areas and Immokalee.

## DESIGNING OUR FUTURE, HANDS-ON

### A Variety of Locations

The first public input sessions were held in remote and strikingly different parts of the County. The first evening event (held at the IFAS/UF Ag Extension facility) sought input from residents of Immokalee, Golden Gate Estates, and large agricultural landowners in the unincorporated areas to the north of the county. The second evening event (held at Lely High School in East Naples) sought input from residents of the southeast sections of Collier County, including Everglades City, Goodland, and Marco Island. These events provided a glimpse of the differences between urban and rural parts of the county, and the wide-ranging outlooks of its residents.

The largest public hands-on session took place at Naples High School on Saturday April 8, 2000. More than one hundred and fifty concerned residents from throughout the county attended this event. These participants sketched ideas for creating and maintaining character on large maps of the county. More than a dozen groups formed around tables to look at case study areas around the county, including neighborhoods, commercial, and rural lands. The input from these exercises eventually led to the case studies within this report.



## A Variety of People

The designers were aware that the turnout for public events would allow the gathering of input from a large number of adults, including retirees, homeowner activists, and those with a vested stake in development or development regulation. But what about those who will inherit this plan?

To reach some of Collier's young population, and learn how they see their built environment, two workshops were also held at schools.

On Wednesday April 5th, a hands-on session was held in the Lely High School cafeteria for over 250 high school students with an interest in planning the future of their home county. The students drew on maps and took part in a park-planning workshop. The suggestions of this enthusiastic group of students were taken seriously and can be seen in the results.

The second hands-on session for youngsters was held at St. Ann's School in Naples. About 75 third and fourth grade students offered a candid and refreshing voice that might get overlooked in planning studies. They may be young, but these young planners were well informed and not at all bashful about asking for smarter growth: they asked tough questions about sprawl and ecological problems, and called for more walkable, friendlier neighborhoods.

## Teamwork

Since many of the key decision makers in Collier County were unable to attend the hands-on sessions, the designers brought the results of the sessions to them. During the remainder of the charrette, several key groups of stakeholders were invited to the "studio" set up at the Naples Beach Hotel. These groups joined in intense design workshops that focused on creating a plan that was implementable and acceptable to the most citizens possible. These meetings included a "builder/developer forum;" workshops with County staff departments such as transportation, MPO, and long range planning; and roundtable meetings with local business leaders including architects and financiers. Other specialized sessions were held to discuss greenspace issues with environmental groups representing a wide variety of views. Throughout the process, citizens dropped in to check on the work and offer new ideas; citizens from Naples Park showed particular interest, for example.

At the conclusion of the charrette, a "work-in-progress" presentation was delivered at the Naples Beach Hotel. The presentation detailed the three major categories (*Community Design*, *Mobility*, and *Greenspace*) that are echoed throughout this document and served as an outline for this document.

The input and information gathering did not end on the last day of the charrette. During the second half of 2000, the designers and County continued presenting the ideas gathered at the charrette and soliciting input from civic groups, homeowners associations, architects and landscape architects, the development industry, and individual homeowners.



## **SELECT COMMITTEE & STAFF**

The preparation of this plan was overseen through the hard work and team effort of a dedicated multi-stakeholder group. On April 13, 1999 the Collier Board of County Commissioners established a Select Committee on Community Character & Design. This action by the Board was in part a response to a five-year community based "visioning" and planning effort sponsored by the Greater Naples Civic Association. The Board charged this group with selecting a consultant and creating the Collier County Community Character Plan. Although much of their work took place behind the scenes, it was central to the creation of the document.

Throughout 2000 and early 2001, the Select Committee dedicated themselves to disseminating information about the events, attending bi-weekly meetings of the select committee, and creating public awareness and support for the plan. As portions of the plan were readied in draft form, the committee met to discuss each piece of the plan and provided overall direction on content.

The Collier County staff played a pivotal role in the creation of this document. Staff provided assistance in all phases of the project, including the creation and dissemination of base information, the publicity and setup for all public workshops and events, and frequent assistance providing and interpreting documentation of previous planning studies.