

TOWN OF FORT MYERS BEACH — 2008 PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS

Application #: 2008-07-TEXT

Description: Amend Policy 7-B-3 to make its second clause permissive rather than mandatory and to reference the potential for other reasons that might cause the town to negotiate turnover of maintenance responsibility for Estero Boulevard; amend Objective 7-E in a corresponding manner

Pages to be changed: Comprehensive Plan Pages 7-A-44—7-A-45 (no changes required) and 7-28—7-29 (proposed changes are attached)

Discussion in E/A Report From Page 46:

(adopted on Jan 16 '07): **EXISTING POLICY 7-B-3 IMPROVEMENTS TO ESTERO BOULEVARD:** *The Town of Fort Myers Beach shall initiate additional pedestrian and streetscape improvements along Estero Boulevard beginning in 1999, and shall negotiate with Lee County for the turnover of responsibility for its maintenance if necessary to carry out these improvements.*

“EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-B-3: ...Serious discussions of transferring maintenance responsibility for Estero Boulevard to the town have not taken place. However, the county and town are now jointly carrying out an important study of the feasibility of a transit-only lane on Estero Boulevard (see page 52). Detailed plans for improvements have been delayed until the feasibility can be determined.

“This policy would be improved if two changes were made to its second clause: the second clause should be permissive rather than mandatory, and it should also reference the potential for other reasons to cause the town to negotiate turnover of maintenance responsibility for Estero Boulevard.”

Action by LPA: During a public hearing on May 20, 2008, the LPA recommended that the Town Council approve changes to Policies 7-B-3 and Objective 7-E of the Transportation Element. The LPA’s suggested revised wording has been incorporated into this report. ~~The minutes of the public hearing are attached.~~

Action by Town Council: During a public hearing on November 17, 2008, the Town Council voted unanimously to transmit this amendment for state review.

DCA Objection: None

DCA Recommendation: None

Response to DCA: N/A

Proposed Final Action: The Town Council should adopt the transmitted amendment, as described above, as part of Ordinance 09-03.

Final Action: The Town Council adopted this amendment on August 17, 2009, as part of Ordinance 09-03.
(Text shown in red is new or has changed since the initial transmittal of this amendment in January 2009.)

along Estero Boulevard to emphasize heavy pedestrian use there. In addition, the new “zebra” pedestrian crossings alert motorists of pedestrian crossings, primarily at beach access points (13 out of the 36 beach access points have pedestrian crossings) and more intense commercial and residential nodes (Times Square, Villa Santini Plaza, and Red Coconut RV Park). Their effectiveness cannot be gauged yet but some reduction in injuries and property damage have already appeared. Lee County is now considering new signs that would encourage northbound traffic to use Crescent Street to reach the bridge or the north end of the island.

Hurricane evacuation signs are currently located only at Lovers Lane, Donora Boulevard, Washington Street, and Lenell Road, with the first two directing the traffic towards San Carlos Boulevard and the last two towards Bonita Beach. The point of division is about 2 miles south of Times Square, although no data has been located that would support this split of traffic. The signs at Donora and Washington face traffic from the local roads, while the signs at Lovers Lane face northbound traffic and signs at Lenell face southbound traffic along Estero Boulevard. The location and adequacy of these signs needs to be evaluated now that San Carlos Boulevard and Bonita Beach Road have been widened and any low points on the evacuation routes can be identified. The current division of evacuation traffic should be considered preliminary and subject to further evaluation.

During an evacuation, instructions from law enforcement and emergency management personnel will supersede the signs, but prior to those agencies taking control, opportunities for an early, orderly, and safe evacuation could be lost without proper attention to details such as roadway elevations and properly located signs. Also, the signs provide a constant reminder of the potential danger and general instructions on how best to proceed if evacuation is needed.

Tolls on Bridges

Currently, road maintenance at Fort Myers Beach is divided between the state, the county, and the town. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) maintains San Carlos Boulevard from the signalized crosswalk at Times Square to McGregor Boulevard on the mainland. Lee County DOT maintains Estero Boulevard from the crosswalk south to Big Carlos Pass and beyond. The county has retained maintenance of this portion primarily because Estero Boulevard is part of the county’s arterial network and an evacuation route.

The town is responsible for maintaining all other public roads, including Old San Carlos and Estero Boulevard from Times Square north to Bowditch Point. The town does not have its own maintenance crews; it contracts maintenance work to private firms or to Lee County DOT through an interlocal agreement. Under this agreement, the county agrees to provide maintenance as requested by the town at rates that are specified in the agreement. The town and the county have recently extended this agreement through September 1998.

With the recent widening of San Carlos Boulevard and improvements to Estero Boulevard, the routine maintenance costs in the short term will be relatively low. The town could absorb those costs if Lee County and FDOT are willing to relinquish their responsibilities for these facilities. Table 7-A-9 summarizes the maintenance costs for these facilities in 1996.

Table 7-A-9 — Reported Maintenance Costs

<i>Facility</i>	<i>1996 Maintenance Cost</i>
Big Carlos Pass Bridge*	\$70,000
Estero Boulevard	\$37,500
Matanzas Pass Sky Bridge**	\$1,000
San Carlos Boulevard***	\$45,000

* Includes bridge tenders salaries

** Hurricane Pass Bridge not available individually

*** Includes up to US 41 via McGregor/Colonial

The benefits and costs of such a roadway turnover, however, need to be carefully evaluated. The immediate benefit of maintaining all the roads and bridges within the town would be the ease in decision-making about operational improvements such as traffic signals, speed limits, and reversible lanes. The immediate costs might be similar to those found in Table 7-A-7-A-4, plus the cost of professional engineering assistance.

The longer-term benefit of assuming responsibility would be the ability to implement the town's policies from a focus on "vehicle moving" to "people moving," without having to persuade several other jurisdictions every time an operational change is desired. The long-term costs would include major highway renovation and bridge replacement, including unexpected costs from hurricane damage. Avoiding those costs would be the likely motivation for the state and county to give up their current responsibilities. An independent engineering evaluation of the condition of both bridges would be essential before seriously negotiating over their future.

The turnover of county facilities to the town might be relatively easy due to the county's recent efforts to turn over responsibility for a wide variety of county facilities, especially those in cities, including neighborhood and community park maintenance (such as Bay Oaks) and arterial road maintenance (such as Periwinkle Way and Sanibel-Captiva Road on Sanibel).

The transfer of maintenance responsibility from the state, however, may be more complex. FDOT's general policy disfavors a piecemeal approach to turning over their facilities. Since the sky bridge is part of San Carlos Boulevard, FDOT can be expected to suggest that turnover of the bridge be connected with assuming responsibility for an entire link of San Carlos Boulevard to a logical terminus as far away as Summerlin Road (which is about 3 miles outside the town's boundary).

FDOT proposed a similar approach in 1995 during negotiations with Collier County about placing a toll on the bridge to Marco

Island. FDOT cited its formal policy against imposing tolls where they are not needed to repay revenue bonds; this policy is designed to keep motorists from "paying a second time" for a facility that was built with traditional user fees such as gas taxes. However, FDOT will consider exceptions to this policy after examining the effect of tolls on the overall transportation system and how they relate to local transportation planning. (Whenever tolls are in excess of costs to maintain a road or bridge, FDOT uses them for other roads in the same county.) In the Marco Island case, FDOT suggested that Collier County might take over the Marco Island Bridge, but only in a package with all of State Road 951 from Marco Island to U.S. 41 (a distance of 7 miles). Then FDOT policy would not affect any decisions on tolls.

The imposition of tolls has the potential to modify travel behavior as well as be a significant revenue source for transportation purposes. Properly used, tolls can help manage congestion, with toll levels varying by season or time of day. There are potentially suitable sites for a toll facility off the island, but none on the island. Maintaining former county and state roads and bridges could allow the use of tolls if they prove desirable. The impact of tolls on the tourism-based economy of Fort Myers Beach, however, must be carefully evaluated before this possibility forms the basis of assuming additional road maintenance responsibility.

The town may also wish to consider the potential for future annexations in the same discussion on road turnover. For instance, a terminus on San Carlos Boulevard might be negotiated with FDOT in conjunction with establishing a maximum future boundary of the town, or considering the use of the San Carlos Boulevard right-of-way as the required contiguity with the town for land that doesn't directly abut the town's current boundaries. The same issues might arise in taking over responsibility for the Big Carlos Pass Bridge and portions of Hickory Boulevard beyond the bridge. The town

will be required to address both concerns.

POLICY 7-B-2 **WIDENING:** Under no circumstances shall conventional four-laning of Estero Boulevard be considered as a desirable means of improving traffic circulation on Estero Island.

POLICY 7-B-3 **IMPROVEMENTS TO ESTERO BOULEVARD:** The Town of Fort Myers Beach shall initiate additional pedestrian and streetscape improvements along Estero Boulevard beginning in 1999, and may shall negotiate with Lee County for the turnover of responsibility for its maintenance if necessary to carry out these improvements or to further other town policies.

OBJECTIVE 7-C EVACUATION ROUTE — Estero Boulevard’s critical function as the sole evacuation route for Fort Myers Beach shall be considered in all planning and development activities.

POLICY 7-C-1 **EVACUATION CAPACITY:** Evacuation routes do not need to be designed as high-speed roadways. The critical factor is the total number of cars that can evacuate in a given period of time. The town shall evaluate all efforts by Lee County or by the town to reduce speeding on Estero Boulevard during the design phase to ensure that these efforts will not hinder an effective evacuation.

POLICY 7-C-2 **FLOODING:** The town shall analyze actual flooding of evacuation routes that occurs due to tropical storms or hurricanes, and shall initiate physical improvements that can avoid future flooding at those locations.

OBJECTIVE 7-D VARIETY OF TRAVEL MODES — The Town of Fort Myers Beach shall make efforts every year to improve mobility

for its residents and visitors, striving for a balanced transportation system that allows safe movement even during peak periods of traffic congestion. These efforts may include further subsidies to improve the trolley system, the use of impact fees to improve sidewalks, and creation of critical links on the hidden-path system.

POLICY 7-D-1 **ARRIVE WITHOUT A CAR:** Fewer vehicles would be driven to Fort Myers Beach if scheduled airport shuttle service were available. The town shall encourage this service and the designation of a central drop-off point that could include a trolley stop and taxi stand.

POLICY 7-D-2 **IMPROVE TROLLEY SERVICE:** Trolley ridership increases when service is more frequent and when fares are low or free, yet no long-term funding or operational plan has been developed for providing higher service levels. Practical measures to improve trolley usage include:

- i. Recurring subsidies from tourism sources so that service can be enhanced and congestion minimized during heavy seasonal traffic;
- ii. Pull-offs at important stops along Estero Boulevard so that passengers can safely board and traffic is not blocked excessively; these pull-offs could be built during other improvements to Estero Boulevard or required by the Land Development Code during the redevelopment process.
- iii. Clear signs at every stop with full route and fare information;

- iv. Bus shelters at key locations, with roofs, benches, and transparent sides;
- v. Replacement of the existing trolley buses with clean-fuel vehicles so that businesses won't object to having trolleys stop at their front doors; and
- vi. Accommodation of the special needs of the transportation disadvantaged.

POLICY 7-D-3 **ALTERNATE TRAVEL MODES:** The town shall support alternatives to car travel to free up road capacity for trips that do require a car. Public funding sources shall include county/state gasoline taxes and road impact fees. The town shall modify its road impact fee ordinance by 1999 to allow these fees to be spent (within legal limits) on capital improvements that relieve road congestion, such as better sidewalks, trolley improvements, and off-island parking areas. The town seeks to at least double the usage of the trolley system by the year 2001 (from its 1996 total ridership level of 238,754).

POLICY 7-D-4 **ENCOURAGE WATER TAXIS:** Fort Myers Beach has great potential for water transportation, with its canals, natural waterways, and high levels of tourism. To encourage the private sector to provide this service, the town shall ease regulations that require a water taxi to provide dedicated parking spaces at every stop and shall encourage restaurants, motels, and marinas to provide dockage for water taxis. Where possible, water taxi drop-off sites should avoid areas of high manatee concentration, or use protective measure such as propeller guards, jet propulsion, or electric motors.

POLICY 7-D-5 **HIDDEN-PATH SYSTEM:** The town shall support the creation of a quiet network of

“hidden paths” running on the Bay side parallel to Estero Boulevard. This network would provide an alternative to walking and cycling along Estero Boulevard (as described further in the Community Design Element). Initial land acquisition shall begin in 1999.

OBJECTIVE 7-E UPGRADE ESTERO BOULEVARD — As part of its congestion avoidance strategy, the town shall methodically upgrade Estero Boulevard to reduce speeding and encourage walking, as higher traffic speeds and car-oriented businesses are antithetical to its pedestrian character. (If a suitable partnership to this end cannot be achieved with Lee County, the town may shall consider taking on maintenance responsibility for Estero Boulevard.)

POLICY 7-E-1 **TIMES SQUARE STREETScape:** The town shall begin work by 1999 toward extending southward the curbs, colorful sidewalks, and street trees installed by the Estero Island CRA in 1996. Similar sidewalks should be placed on both sides of Estero Boulevard as far south as the public library, including drainage, lighting, and trolley improvements. Unspent funds from the Estero Island CRA should be sought from Lee County toward this end. Generous urban sidewalks should also be built in the future around the Villa Santini Plaza as part of its redevelopment (as described in the Community Design Element).

POLICY 7-E-2 **TRAFFIC CALMING:** The town shall support two types of traffic calming to reduce speeding, which endangers lives and