

TOWN OF FORT MYERS BEACH

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



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FORT MYERS BEACH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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EFFECTIVE DATE: JANUARY 1, 1999

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

WHY A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

In 1995, residents of Estero Island launched an era of municipal governance by voting to form the Town of Fort Myers Beach. A flurry of activity began immediately, involving residents, property owners and business people in the enterprise of crafting a small but highly focused town government.

While struggling with the normal day-to-day activities, a two-year effort was begun to bring into focus the long-range goals for the town. That effort has created this Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan. To move toward those long-range goals, this plan establishes formal policies for the town government and lays the foundation for a new Land Development Code to guide further development and redevelopment.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF FORT MYERS BEACH

Fort Myers Beach faces a complex set of problems in addition to those usually faced by small towns. The town has already reached 85% of its maximum population. Nearly all of the remaining 15% is beyond the control of the new government, since development rights have previously vested to individual property owners.

Despite this lack of control, the town has responsibility for managing the peak-season congestion that results from overly

generous land-use approvals of the past. This congestion is compounded by extreme tourism impacts from southwest Florida residents and visitors who flock to the welcoming atmosphere at Fort Myers Beach. These visitors feel none of the hostility caused at other beach communities by high bridge tolls, or by “residents-only” beach parking restrictions.

Fort Myers Beach residents suffer from peak-season congestion more than vacationers because the residents need to travel to school and jobs on a daily basis. Yet most residents tolerate this congestion because it is the obvious result of so many people trying to enjoy the same assets that attracted them. Fortunately, the peak period lasts less than three months of each year.

The shortness of this period could change. This plan contains many efforts to improve the beauty, vibrancy, and livability of Fort Myers Beach. These changes might attract so many more visitors that the period of extreme congestion lengthens to an intolerable portion of each year. That result would be the ultimate irony for a community that has welcomed generations of visitors to share its many charms.



HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED

This document is organized into fifteen chapters. Following this introduction is “Envisioning Tomorrow’s Fort Myers Beach,” an optimistic look at the community that the town hopes will evolve. The next twelve chapters contain the twelve main “elements” of this plan, organized by subject area. The Community Design Element is placed first because its concepts have inspired many other parts of this plan. The final chapter contains procedures for interpreting and monitoring this plan.

Each element contains at least two parts:

- A narrative description of current conditions and possible courses of action for the town; and
- Formal goals, objectives, and policies selected by the town as its legally binding comprehensive plan.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach has decided to publish the full narrative portion of each element in this document. This provides its residents with a wealth of interesting information and an understanding of courses of action that were studied but perhaps not included in the formal plan.

The town legally “adopted” only certain portions of this document as its formal comprehensive plan. Formally adopted by Ordinance 98-14, effective January 1, 1999, are:

- All goals, objectives, and policies for each of the twelve elements;
- A “Future Land Use Map” (Figure 16 in the Future Land Use Element) and a “Future Transportation Map” (Figure 18 in the Transportation Element);
- A five-year schedule of capital improvements (Table 11-7); and
- All of Chapters 1, 2, and 15.

To help readers identify those portions of each element that are being formally adopted, the goals, objectives, and policies of

each element are printed on gray paper. The “adopted” portions of this plan become a law of the Town of Fort Myers Beach. Once comprehensive plans are adopted, “...no public or private development shall be permitted except in conformity with comprehensive plans...” (Section 163.3161(5), *Florida Statutes*).

***ENVISIONING TOMORROW'S
FORT MYERS BEACH***

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ENVISIONING TOMORROW'S FORT MYERS BEACH

This chapter takes a peek into the future. The italicized text below provides an optimistic look at the future of Fort Myers Beach, the future that the town hopes to create by adding its efforts to all others that have shaped this community:

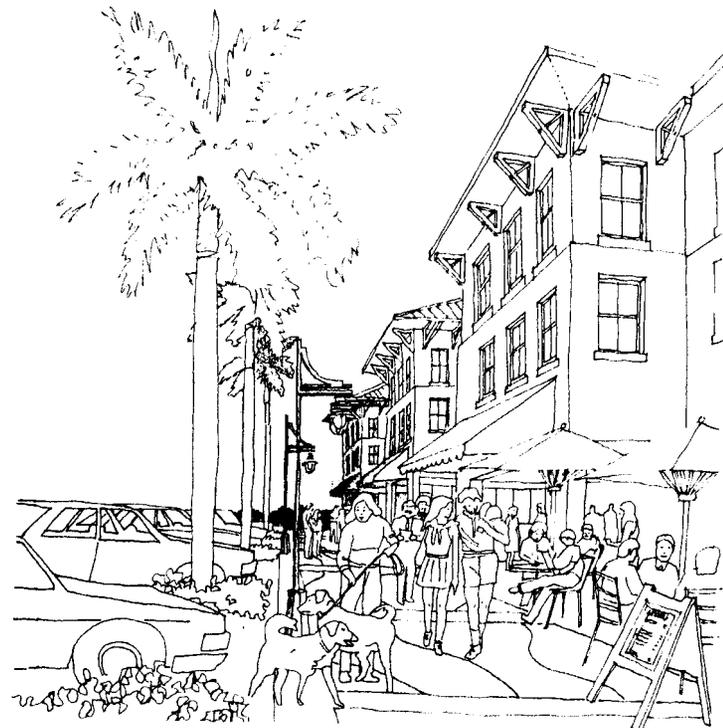
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: *“The natural features at Fort Myers Beach remain its primary yet most sensitive assets. The beaches are clean and regularly replenished with sand, and sand dunes have been recreated. The remaining mangroves and wetlands are healthy, with disturbed areas now fully restored. Little Estero Island and the Matanzas Pass Preserve contribute to the ecological integrity of the area, and are enjoyed by many residents on daily walks.”*

“Beach-going residents and visitors select their preference of quiet beaches at Bowditch Point or lively beaches near Lynn Hall Memorial Park. The degradation of water quality in Estero Bay has finally been reversed. Well-maintained channels allow the movement of a wide range of boats, operating safely in relation to one another and respecting the fragile nature of the surrounding environment and marine life.”

MOBILITY: *“A carefully planned and interconnected system of pedestrian and bicycle paths, shuttles from off-site parking areas, trolley routes, and water taxis, enables visitors, residents, and school children to reach all the recreational destinations on Estero Island and move easily from one to another.”*

TIMES SQUARE: *“The lively pedestrian scene at Times Square is fueled by those who have been swimming, strolling on the beach, or enjoying the pier, and is especially popular just before sunset. Just steps away, they enjoy the outdoor cafes, shops, and special entertainment events.”*

“The short blocks to the north along Old San Carlos Boulevard now have wide sidewalks, street trees, and mid-day shade provided by overhangs from the new shops and restaurants. At the north end, folks reach Marina Plaza, another “people-gathering place” that is the hub of activity for a fleet of excursion boats, dinner cruises, charter fishing and party boats, and water shuttles.”



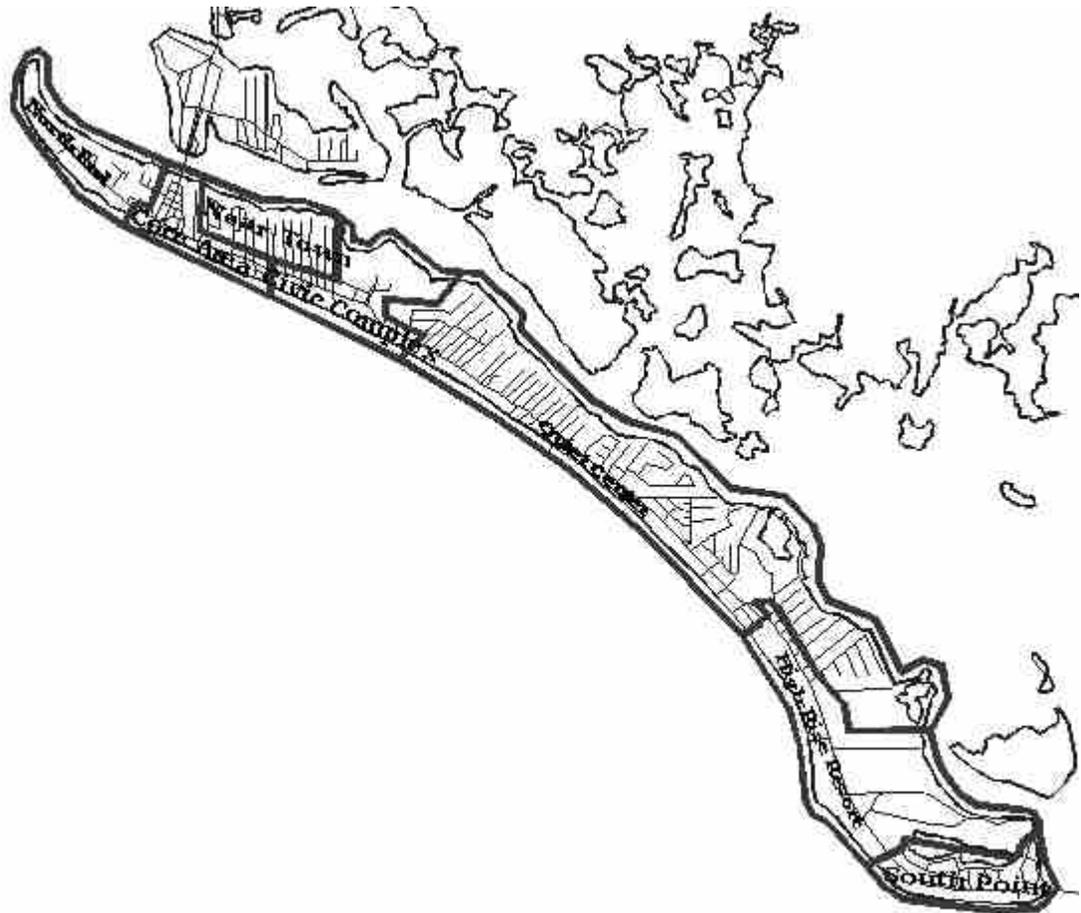
AVENUE OF PALMS: *“Estero Boulevard has become the premier public space on the Island, shaped as a memorable “Avenue of Palms” and lined with new and refurbished structures which frame the street and contribute to the pedestrian scale and ambience of the community.*

“The sidewalk and streetscape system has been continued beyond its 1997 terminus at the Lani Kai to the civic center and areas beyond. Motorists on Estero Boulevard during the peak tourist season move slowly but enjoy the beauty and interest of the public space, having learned to relax during the unavoidable season of the “beach crawl.” Bicyclists and pedestrians share the public space but can also find quieter alternate routes off of the boulevard to get to their shopping or recreational destinations. Traffic calming measures have been introduced in areas that used to invite speeding whenever congestion lessened. Pedestrians now cross safely, and many people use the expanded fleet of trolleys to move around the island.”

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS:

“School Street provides the primary entry into the heart of the island, the special place where the school, recreation center, ballfields, swimming pool, Playworks playground, Preserve, Historic Cottage, and Library are all centered. Existing and new infill development is in the spirit and scale of the Beach’s classic cottages, which can be used as homes or live-work spaces such as studios and galleries, or for small-scale retail uses consistent with the historic theme of the street.

“Detached houses or cottages are located near existing areas of single-family housing, with rowhouses, townhouses, or apartments toward the center. Mixed uses are found along the Bay side of Estero Boulevard. Neighborhood design is not dominated by garages and features porches on the front, walkable narrow streets with shade trees that double as view corridors to the Preserve and beach, and quiet internal street connections to the north and south.



Planning communities for Fort Myers Beach

“The north end of the island retains its residential and resort identity. Its motel rooms, older cottages and high-rises all benefit from their proximity to Bowditch Point and the downtown “core area,” yet are comfortably removed from seasonal traffic congestion and outdoor entertainment activities that many residents find intrusive.

“The older near-town neighborhoods across from San Carlos Island have shed the blight that had begun to appear in the 1980s. Their pleasantly varied housing types are just steps away from lively Estero Boulevard.

Apartments for tourists and local employees mix congenially with new homes, many of which contain quiet home-offices. A new urban code has ensured that renovations and new homes mix gracefully with the old in these now highly desirable neighborhoods. Neighborhoods have truly achieved a higher ambition, becoming places where the streets are shady and public spaces are friendly, unified in design by trees, with well-used front porches and little traffic.



“Renovations and infill development have borrowed from the design tradition of cottages, using porches and decks, with fronts of houses facing the street. Pedestrian and bicycle paths have been created which link to an interconnected network.



“The town’s historic past is memorialized through the designation of a large historic district. Visitors enliven the streets by strolling through revitalized neighborhoods with self-guided tour booklets pointing out buildings of historic and architectural merit.

“The quiet center of Estero Island remains peacefully between the bustling portions of Estero Boulevard and the high-rises further down the beach. Some condominiums and smaller resorts coexist with the predominately

single-family neighborhoods. This portion of the island remains low rise and residential except for a few existing towers and the big mid-island marina. Estero Boulevard now has continuous sidewalks on both sides, and the side streets have become even more walkable with the maturing of shade trees and links to the town’s “hidden path” system of neighborhood walkways.

“The high-rise/resort district is distinctly different in character. Panoramic views of Estero Bay and the Gulf of Mexico are widely available along with popular recreational amenities such as golf, tennis, and private swimming pools. The abundant wildlife on Little Estero Island are a continuing focal point for local residents and visitors alike. The town works with other agencies to provide public access and stewardship for this priceless resource.”

A SECOND “MAIN STREET”: *“The Villa Santini area has been fully redeveloped as a neighborhood-scale “Main Street” for this end of Estero Island. It also serves the needs of visitors to the vast beaches at Lovers Key. The town and the private sector have worked in partnership to bring about this*



revitalization. Tree-shaded sidewalks and bike paths link the surrounding neighborhoods to the new town center, making pedestrian trips comfortable and inviting.

“Estero Island’s south end faces the active boating along Big Carlos Pass and the popular state park at Lovers Key. Despite pressures of commercialization to serve park visitors, this area retains its strictly residential character and its mostly low-rise housing type. Sidewalks and landscaped entry features announce the arrival and departure into the town.”

FORT MYERS BEACH, A LIVING PARK: *“The Town of Fort Myers Beach, through the dedicated efforts of the community, has become a living park, existing for the comfort, safety, and quality of life of its residents and the peaceful enjoyment of its visitors:*

“An ecologically sensitive park where visitors have learned to enjoy the unique natural amenities and to take responsibility for protecting the natural environment;

“An archaeologically significant park where people come to learn about the native cultures of this area;

“An historic and livable park where residents are proud of the community’s heritage and place;

“A family friendly park where parents and children are equally nurtured and where recreation is educational;

“A semitropical island beach park where all ages enjoy the clean and safe waterfront;

“A tranquil resort park where visitors relax in the warm island ambiance and atmosphere;

“A vital community park where retired and working citizens share in a positive spirit of volunteerism to assure that future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy its magic and tranquillity; and

“An economically sustainable park which protects and promotes its commercial interests and where a partnership with the past provides the focus for the future.”

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COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The overall “vision” for the future of Fort Myers Beach was provided in Chapter 2 of this plan. The vision is refined for individual areas in this element.

This vision has evolved from many years of working together to plan for the future of Fort Myers Beach. Benchmark efforts include the 1989 convening of the Fort Myers Beach Land Use Plan Committee which resulted in the adoption of Goal 18 of the Lee County Comprehensive Plan; the formation and active implementation of the Estero Island CRA (a component area of the Lee County Community Redevelopment Agency); and ultimately the incorporation of the town as of December 31, 1995.

During this process, a significant body of work has been produced which has continuing value in the town’s efforts to develop and implement its vision of the future. These include the Core Area Master Plan, December 1995, prepared by Wallace, Roberts & Todd (WRT), Working Papers prepared by WRT in May of 1993, and the University of Florida College of Architecture study prepared in July of 1991.

In 1997, community members worked together to convert this emerging vision into specifics through two community-wide workshops: “Designing Our Town” on January 31 and February 1, and “Enhancing our Resources” on March 22. That work forms the basis of this Community Design Element.

COMMUNITY DESIGN AND LIVABILITY

This element describes how each physical piece of the town (open spaces, buildings, streets, paths) will work together to achieve a coherent whole, creating a special character and enhanced “livability” for residents and guests.

This element reinforces the small-town character of Fort Myers Beach, a place where permanent residents coexist comfortably with tourism. The policies reflect an appropriate balance among neighborhood needs, economic vitality, and tourist development, and the balance between the need to move cars and all other types of movement (on foot or by bicycle or boat).



The following design principles will help achieve the town's vision of livability:

- Foster neighborliness and face-to-face interactions. Reinforce a positive family environment and sense of community safety and stability through design measures such as:
 - Shaping public spaces to feel like outdoor rooms, the “floor and walls” being the streets, trees, and building facades that encompass places to shop, park, meet a friend, eat, hold a parade.
 - Promoting walkable streets designed for pedestrian comfort, with shade and interesting vistas.
 - Promoting streets as the neighborhood realm, differentiated from fully private areas; bringing buildings closer to the street, with the private space on the other side of the structure's wall; using the elevation required by flood regulations (rather than a deep front yard) to create privacy; using front porches, decks, picket fences, and other “cottage” elements to define space and promote a natural surveillance of the street.
- Rejuvenate the existing fabric of the community, encouraging its special character without being stuffy, and treasuring the eclectic nature of the town's physical structures through such means as:
 - Using design to promote compatibility of mixed land uses, making good neighbors of commercial uses (somewhere to walk to get a quart of milk), and accommodating residential uses of varying types and affordability.



- Changing the behavior of motorists through traffic calming techniques to avoid speeding during off-hours and off-season.
- Planning for interconnected streets and pedestrian paths to allow mobility despite seasonal congestion on Estero Boulevard.
- Encourage private investment in the economic life, physical form, and natural amenities of the town, directing infill change and redevelopment toward the town's vision through such means as:
 - Focusing planning efforts on specific areas that are in transition, and reinforcing the quality of existing stable neighborhoods.
 - Improving linkages to and sharing the town's precious sensitive resource areas in ways that sustain their viability over time, and creating mechanisms for responsible stewardship of these areas.
 - Reserving the most important sites at the end of street vistas for civic and religious buildings or monuments, and designing other buildings to fit together as ensembles rather than standing out as icons.
 - Strengthen views to the waterfront to promote a feel of shared use of these irreplaceable amenities.
- Establish clear and consistent rules governing both public and private sector development to integrate all of the pieces.

HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT

Planning for the future begins with an appreciation of the special character and the physical form of Estero Island. The boundaries of the town encompass all of Estero Island, which has a rich early history including proximity to Mound Key, the apparent capital of the Calusa kingdom.

In the late 1800s the Koreshan Unity homesteaded Estero Island. The “Mound House” was built in 1906 on an Indian mound on the bay side. In 1912, the first beach hotel was constructed, beginning Estero Island’s colorful entertainment and recreation era of beaches, dance halls, and gambling casinos.



Visitors and residents arrived on the island by way of a swing bridge built in 1926, passing through memorable stone arches and a palm-lined San Carlos Drive to the beach (then called Crescent Beach). The swing bridge made the island convenient for many new winter residents and tourists.

By the late 1930s many other cottages were being constructed. Stone was being brought in from the mainland for seawalls, and most houses were built on short pilings to protect against high seas and hurricanes. The first church, Chapel by the Sea, was built in 1936. In the 1940s, mail delivery was extended beyond the mid-island area. The island was growing rapidly, with land being dredged for canals, larger homes replacing smaller cottages, and businesses centering around Times Square. In 1965 the south end of the island was connected to Black Island by a

bridge spanning Big Carlos Pass; a two-way flow of traffic began. In 1979, the new Sky Bridge replaced the decrepit swing bridge.



Despite these road improvements, or perhaps because of them, the old traffic problems reappeared as more and more tourists came. Many chose to stay permanently. High rise condominiums sprang up. Seawalls began to line the back bay. Condos, restaurants, and manicured lawns replaced the mangroves and sea oats. Times Square needed a face lift, and traffic congestion during the season became an established way of life.



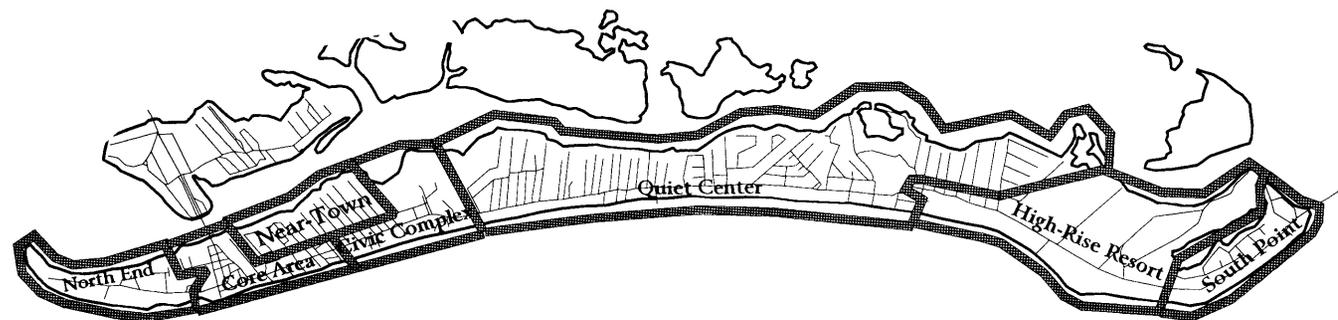
WORKING TOWARD THE VISION

Achieving the vision for the future of Fort Myers Beach also requires an understanding of current conditions and opportunities. The island's development has evolved such that it can be divided into seven areas, each with a quite different character.

During 1997, community members worked together with urban designers and planners to identify the unique characteristics that represent the best of "what is." They discussed what should be enhanced in order to develop a common vision for these areas. They identified the sensitive and historic sites; areas which function as neighborhood centers; and naturally occurring focus points in terms of social contact and civic or commercial activity. They developed proposals about how lost space could be recaptured to private and public benefit; how pedestrian links could be strengthened; and what constraints or incentives could apply to future infill development and redevelopment in the town.

The community reviewed the design concepts that were developed by Dover, Kohl & Partners from the proposals made in the "Designing Our Town" workshop and then provided additional input. The result of that work, combined with the Core Area Master Plan, is described below in the vision for each planning area, and then translated into the goals, objectives, and policies of the Community Design Element at the end of this element.

The following sections provide an overview of the existing characteristics and the collective vision for each of the seven areas, and for Estero Boulevard which links all of them together.



Downtown Core Area

Existing Characteristics and Opportunities

The Times Square area, also known as the downtown core area, begins at the base of the Sky Bridge, extends from the Bay to the Gulf, and is bounded on the north by Lynn Hall Park, the commercial area across the street from Lynn Hall Park, and the north side of Old San Carlos Boulevard. The canal south of Crescent Street defines the southerly boundary, with another portion of the planning area extending southward along Estero Boulevard to Pearl Street.

For planning purposes the Core Area is further divided into Districts, each with its own characteristics. District 1, Old San Carlos Boulevard, used to be the main entrance to the island but is currently characterized by several vacant lots, the bridge ramp, some seriously deteriorated structures, and little pedestrian activity. However, at the Bay end it is anchored by an active marina where gambling and cruise ships dock, and at the beach end it is anchored by Times Square and Lynn Hall Park.

District 2, Times Square, the lively commercial/tourist center of town, is on the upswing following the recently completed CRA improvements. The new pedestrian mall, with its palm trees and outdoor dining areas, sets the design theme for further public and private improvements. Sidewalk and streetscape

improvements have already been extended on the beach side of Estero Boulevard to the Lani Kai, and construction plans have been completed to do the same directly across on the Bay side. Existing conditions that are being addressed through these efforts include: the need for facade improvements; strengthened mix of businesses and services; reduction of traffic congestion and pedestrian vehicular conflicts; inadequate (or unorganized) parking to serve the needs of business and visitors; drainage problems; and the removal of unsightly and potentially hazardous overhead utilities.

District 3, Crescent Street, consists of a mix of commercial and residential uses, many of which are showing signs of deterioration.

District 4, Estero/Beachfront Residential District, consists of traditional beach cottages, tall condominiums, and resort structures on the beach side. Estero Boulevard here is characterized with tourist and retail uses on both sides with extremely constrained right-of-way and setback conditions.

The Core Area Master Plan consists of a Vision Statement, a Vision Plan, the Regulating Plan, and Design Guidelines. The recently adopted “Regulating Plan” provides optional changes to the development regulations to encourage redevelopment that furthers the vision for the area.

The vision will take shape incrementally as improvements are made to private property and as additional public improvements are made. Specific recommendations for further actions to be taken by the public sector to implement the vision for the Core Area are found in the goals, objectives, and policies at the end of this element.

Core Area Vision:

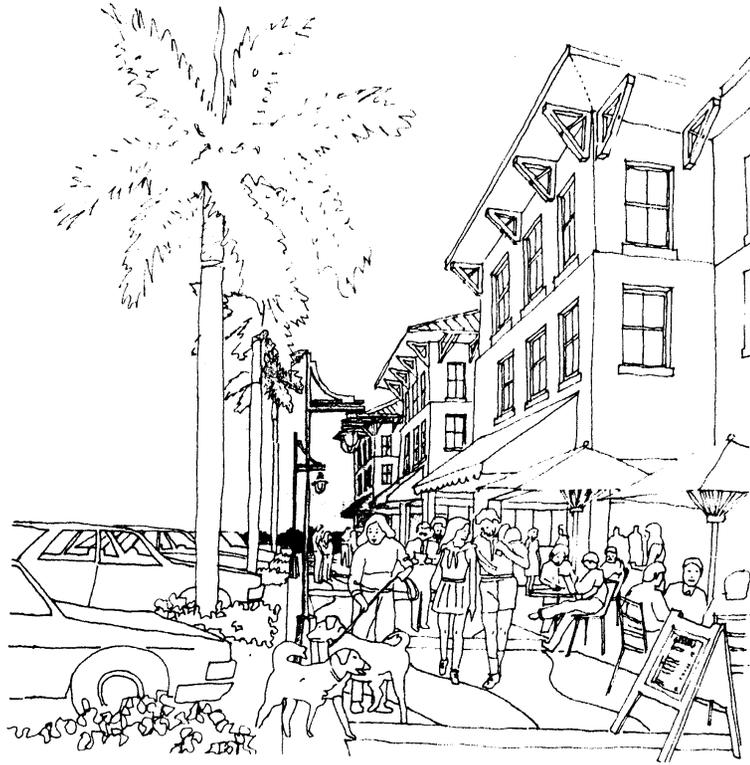
“The Downtown Core Area boasts a revitalized entertainment area with tree-shaded outdoor cafes, pedestrian streets, and an

“old Estero Island” character to the buildings. A Gulf-front boardwalk system connects beachfront uses. The expanded Lynn Hall Park hosts regular beach volleyball tournaments and remains the most lively and popular beach in Lee County. Shopping areas are served by convenient on-street parking and large reservoirs of shared off-street parking, screened from view. A broad array of shopping opportunities serves both residents and visitors. On the Bay side, tree-shaded plazas surround the expanded marina which hosts vessels from excursion boats to water taxis to commercial fishing boats bringing fresh seafood to sell from scattered kiosks. New buildings add to the theme originally developed for the Times Square area.

“Old San Carlos Boulevard is an active pedestrian-friendly “Main Street” linking Times Square and the marina on the Bay side. The street is framed with refurbished and new buildings designed to flood regulations with stores on the ground level. On-street parking is available. Continuous tree-lined sidewalks and safe intersections promote pedestrian safety and comfort. The corner at Third Street has become as a focal point midway between Times Square and the Bay side, with “corner stores” providing a variety of goods and services.

“Crescent Street, now linked to Old San Carlos by the pedestrian plaza, provides in-town housing for persons who wish to live or work here. The redevelopment overlay zone has been successful in encouraging compact development on Crescent Street. A sidewalk have been added on the south side, with regularly spaced shade trees growing along the street.

“Along the beach side of Estero Boulevard, infill development is designed to minimize traffic congestion and has opened new view corridors to the Gulf. Existing refurbished small cottages provide a human scale to the beachfront, and new development is taking the form of long narrow buildings or in clusters rather than massive structures of the past.”



Looking east on Old San Carlos — what could be...

Estero Boulevard Vision:

“Estero Boulevard has become the premier public space on the island, with a strong sense of place, shaped as a memorable “Avenue of Palms” linking the revitalized downtown to the civic center, the new “heart of the island.” The Boulevard is lined with new and refurbished structures that frame the street and contribute to the pedestrian scale and casual ambience.

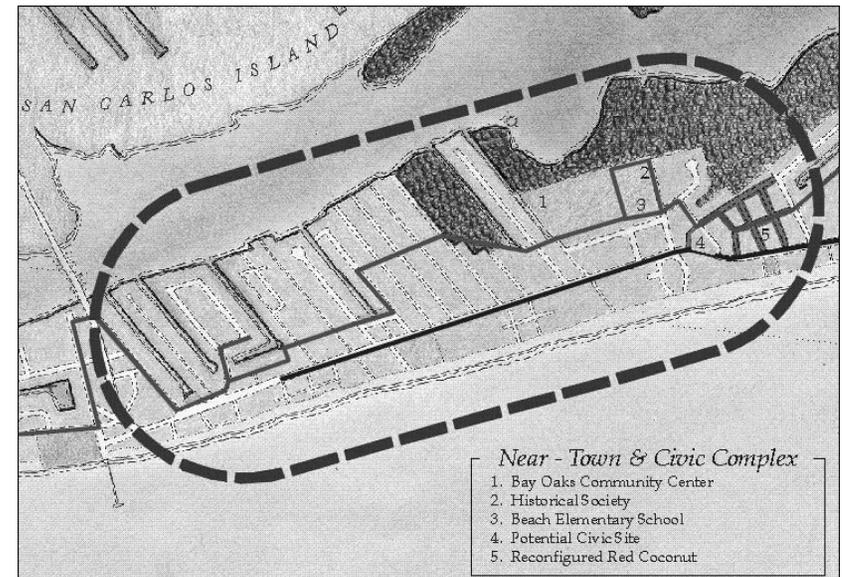
“The sidewalk and streetscape system has been continued beyond its 1997 terminus at the Lani Kai to the civic center and areas beyond. Motorists on Estero Boulevard during the peak tourist season move slowly but enjoy the beauty and interest of

the public space, having learned to relax during the unavoidable season of the “beach crawl.” Bicyclists and pedestrians share the public space but can also find quieter alternate routes off of the boulevard to get to their shopping or recreational destinations. Traffic calming measures have been introduced in areas of the boulevard that used to invite speeding whenever congestion lessened. Pedestrians now cross safely, and many people use the expanded fleet of trolleys to move around the island.”

Civic Complex – “Heart of the Island”

Existing Characteristics and Opportunities

This area includes both sides of Estero Boulevard from about Pearl Street to Donora Boulevard, and extends to the Bay behind the Bay Oaks Recreation Center and the Matanzas Pass Preserve. Currently along Estero Boulevard there is a mix of commercial and residential uses with little coherent integration among them. The current floodplain and coastal setback regulations severely restrict what can be done here.



Many community facilities are in this area, including the temporary quarters of Town Hall in the NationsBank building, Topps Grocery (formerly Winn-Dixie), the public library, the Beach United Methodist Church, Bay Oaks Recreation Center, and the historic elementary school. Also located here is the Matanzas Pass Preserve, with developed trails, boardwalks, and a restoration site, and the recently renovated Historic Cottage which will serve as a museum and interpretive center for the Preserve. A community swimming pool is being built just south of the market and west of the ballfield. To the south of the Preserve is the Gulf View Trailer Park and the Red Coconut RV Resort. While there are no current plans to change the use of either property, consideration has been to appropriate future uses in the event of a change of ownership or plans or a natural disaster.

Civic Complex Vision:

“The civic complex, centered around the public library and Bay Oaks Recreation Center, has expanded and serves as the “other end” of the revitalized portion of Estero Boulevard, with its rows of coconut palms, wide colorful sidewalks, and lively street scene. It has truly become the “Heart of the Island” and embodies the traditional neighborhood concepts that minimize unnecessary trips onto the boulevard. It is the keystone of the system of interconnected pedestrian and bicycle paths extending throughout the island.

“School Street provides the primary entry into the “Heart of the Island,” the special place where the school, recreation center, ballfields, swimming pool, Playworks playground, Preserve, Historic Cottage, and Library are all centered. Internal connections have been made to the grocery complex to the north and, through a new internal street network, to areas to the south. Many residents now have access here without traveling on Estero Boulevard. School Street itself has also become a key connection from the bay to the beach, a palm-lined showcase of restored and new cottages. Motorists catch a glimpse of a

replica of Estero Island’s stone arches, which had been absent since the late 1970s. The town’s cooperative spirit is captured in this project, a civic effort that memorializes its pride in civic life and a historic past. Existing and new infill development on School Street is in the spirit and scale of the Beach’s classic cottages, which can be used as homes or live-work spaces such as studios and galleries, or for small-scale retail uses consistent with the historic theme of the street.



“Proceeding south along Estero Boulevard just past the library, the boulevard curves, offering an exemplary civic site on the Bay side at the end of the long straight view from Times Square. This site would be ideal for a prominent civic or religious building.

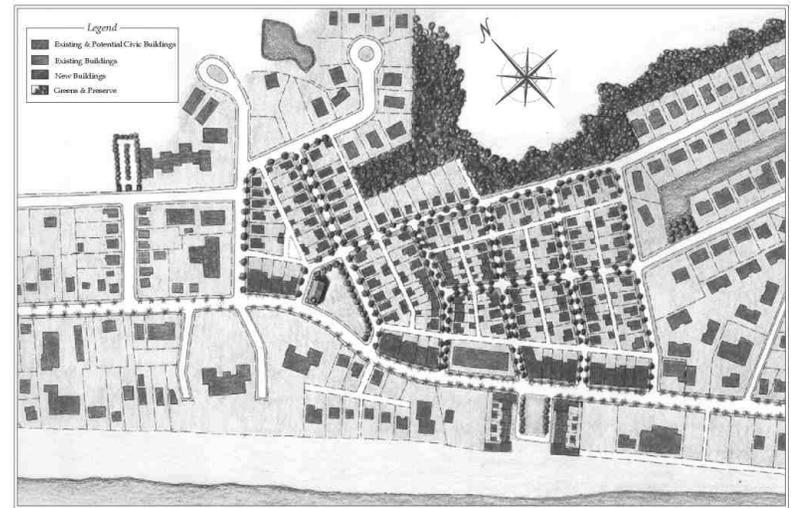
“The Red Coconut – Gulfview Colony area is the southern end of the “Heart of the Island,” whether continuing its current use as a pleasant home for visitors and long-term residents or in some other traditional neighborhood form. A vision for this area, if redeveloped at some point in the future, is as a complete neighborhood with an internal circulation system making it possible to walk or ride bikes to school, recreation areas, and shopping without using Estero Boulevard. An ideal plan would retain the psychological connection and views both directions to the preserve and the beach, and offer a variety of housing types and opportunity for mixed uses including some continued commercial uses on the Bay side of Estero Boulevard.



photo courtesy Mohsen Salehi

“In this vision, detached houses or cottages are located near existing areas of single-family housing, with rowhouses, townhouses, or apartments toward the center. Mixed uses would be found along Bay side of Estero Boulevard. Neighborhood

design is not dominated by garages and features porches on the front, walkable narrow streets with shade trees that double as view corridors to the preserve and beach, and quiet internal street connections to the north and south.”



Red Coconut Village

at the
Town of Fort Myers Beach

The Town's "small town" concept for this property and Seaside, Florida are the inspirations for the proposed Red Coconut Village. A pedestrian-oriented mix of land uses centered on the Red Coconut Crescent is proposed.

RED COCONUT CRESCENT

The Crescent is the center of the Red Coconut Village. This open space may be a green or a plaza with trees. A trolley stop will be accommodated.

STREET TYPES

Streets within the Red Coconut Village are relatively narrow, tree-lined and are laid out in a grid pattern. A street connection to the south and a future connection to the north is provided. Three street types are illustrated on the concept plan. Sidewalks, alleys and on-street parking are included in the design concept.

BUILDING TYPES

Variety in building type and architecture is important to the village concept. There are five building types proposed for the Red Coconut Village. Within these general types, a myriad of variations is possible. The proposed concept illustrates the intensity and density of the residential building types. Development regulations and architectural controls will be developed for the Red Coconut Village property.

Cottages

These are detached single family cottages with optional detached accessory units in the rear. They are located near the existing single family residences. Cottages may be located on alleys but access directly from the streets is acceptable.

Townhouses

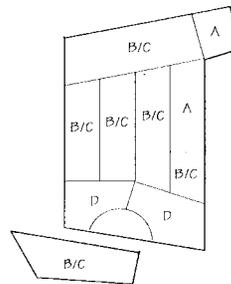
Included in this building type are rowhouses, townhouses and residential units in a other configurations. Eight to ten units are anticipated in each building. Required parking may be under the townhouse and/or in a lot to the rear. An island version of Seaside's "Ruler Plans" is the prototype for these buildings.

Lodging/Residential

To ensure a variety of housing types, small free-standing lodging and small residential apartment buildings are included as an alternative to some "townhouse" buildings. Setbacks are required on all sides of the buildings. Josephine's Home Country Inn in Seaside, an eleven-room bed and breakfast inn, is a prototype for a "Lodging/Residential" building. Required parking may be under a building and/or in a lot screened from the street. Alleys are optional.

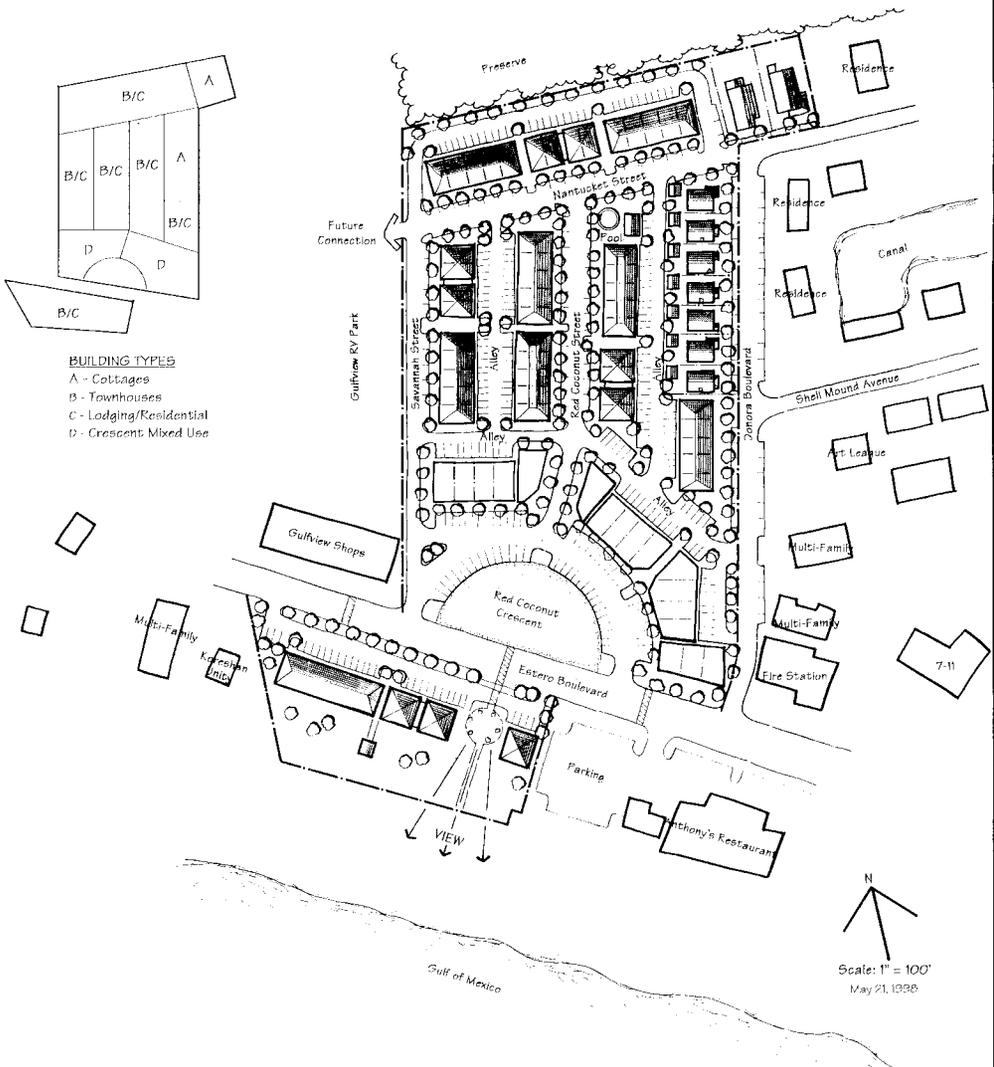
Crescent Mixed Use

These buildings, detached or attached, are located around the Red Coconut Crescent. Shopfronts would occupy the ground floor with up to two floors of lodging or residential units above. Parking is located in lots and on the street. Island versions of Seaside's "Dreamland Heights" and "Snooze" are prototypes for the Crescent Mixed Use buildings.



BUILDING TYPES

- A - Cottages
- B - Townhouses
- C - Lodging/Residential
- D - Crescent Mixed Use



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Bowditch/North End

Existing Character and Opportunities

North of Times Square, Estero Boulevard is lined with generally low-rise homes on the Bay and taller condominium and resort structures on the Gulf. The residential areas on the Bay consist of mostly single-family homes on larger lots than some of the older subdivisions, although multiple units are allowed in some areas. This area is anchored at the far end by Bowditch Point Regional Park. The park, now with its first phase of improvements, consists of quiet beaches and trails, picnic and changing area facilities, and a trolley turn-around. Lee County's new public parking lot will increase the number of visitors to the park.



Bowditch/North End Vision:

“The Bowditch/North End retains its residential and resort identity. Its motel rooms, older cottages and high-rises all benefit from their proximity to Bowditch Point and the Times Square area, yet are comfortably removed from seasonal traffic congestion and outdoor entertainment activities that many residents find intrusive.”

Near-Town Neighborhoods

Existing Characteristics and Opportunities

This plan refers to the Bay-side residential areas between the downtown core area and the Bay Oaks as the “near-town neighborhoods.” These neighborhoods are pleasant, walkable, and close to lively commercial areas. Most of this area has been resubdivided into fairly small building lots along streets and canals that run perpendicular from Estero Boulevard to the Bay. Most homes weren’t built until the 1950s, although a large portion of the island’s remaining historic homes are in these neighborhoods. These older neighborhoods often have higher densities than are allowed by Lee County’s comprehensive plan, which can restrict redevelopment efforts. There are many rental units, some of which have been poorly maintained.

Near-Town Vision:

“The older near-town neighborhoods across from San Carlos Island have shed the blight that had begun to appear in the 1980s. Their pleasantly varied housing types are just steps away from lively Estero Boulevard. Apartments for tourists and local employees mix congenially with new homes, many of which contain quiet home-offices. A new urban code has ensured that renovations and new homes mix gracefully with the old in these now highly desirable neighborhoods. Neighborhoods have truly achieved a higher ambition, becoming places where the streets are shady and public spaces are friendly, unified in design by trees, with well-used front porches and little traffic.”



“Renovations and infill development have borrowed from the design tradition of cottages, using porches and decks, with fronts of houses facing the street. Pedestrian and bicycle paths have been created which link to an interconnected network.”

Quiet Center

Existing Characteristics and Opportunities

These quiet residential areas consist of predominately single-family neighborhoods with a few existing condominium towers. They extend southward from Donora Boulevard to Flamingo Street with mostly single-family homes on the Bay side. Residential uses also dominate along the Gulf, with high-intensity condominiums in the center from Bayview Avenue to Pescadora Avenue, interspersed with several hotels and with single-family neighborhoods to the north and south. From this point south to the Mid Island Marina, and from Avenida Pescadora south to the bend in the Boulevard at Flamingo Street, is the longest corridor of Estero Boulevard that is characterized by single-family residential on both sides. The boulevard has very generous right-of-way and setback dimensions and more widely spaced beach access points than exist to the north. This area is not in need of substantial redevelopment and should be treated as an area to be protected rather than modified.



Quiet Center Vision:

“The Quiet Center of Estero Island remains peacefully between the bustling portions of Estero Boulevard and the high-rises further down the beach. Some condominiums and smaller resorts coexist with the predominately single-family neighborhoods. This portion of the island is designated to remain low rise and residential except for a few existing towers and the big mid-island marina. Estero Boulevard now has continuous sidewalks on both sides, and the side streets have become even more walkable with the maturing of shade trees and links to the town’s “hidden path” system of neighborhood walkways.”

High-Rise / Resort Area and Santini Plaza

Existing Characteristics and Opportunities

The High-Rise /Resort area, which extends south of the “quiet center,” is characterized by large scale Gulf-front condominiums, large lot single-family homes, and extensive vacant land that will become part of the Bay Beach community. From Albatross south to Lagoon Street is one of the most densely developed sections of Estero Boulevard, with mid- and high-rise development on both sides but with generous dimensions of the right-of-way and landscaped setbacks. A dominant trend will be the completion of the remaining approved phases of Bay Beach.

This area is home to the Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area, one of the region’s most sensitive and precious pristine dune and lagoon areas extending into the Gulf from the Holiday Inn south to the Sun Caper resort.

The Villa Santini Plaza shopping center serves the south end of the island. Although it is an active center, it has greater market potential than is currently exhibited and is ready for updating of its buildings and site layout. It is located in the center of a large concentration of population but in an area of Estero Boulevard where the current design of the road and public space is very

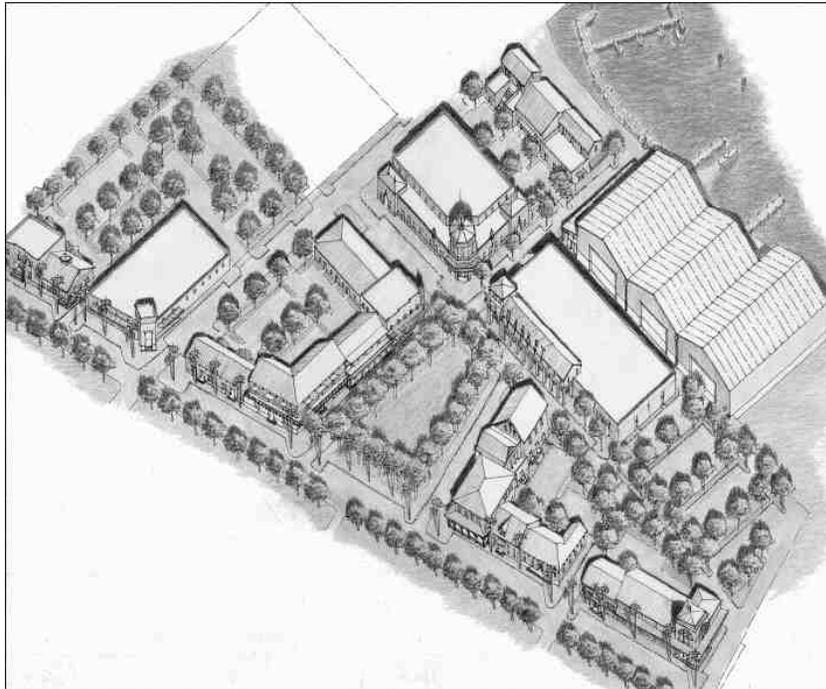
hostile to pedestrians. The Villa Santini Plaza has the potential to become a centralizing focus to the south end of the island, providing a second “town center” for Fort Myers Beach.

High-Rise / Resort Vision:

“The High-Rise/Resort district is distinctly different in character. Panoramic views of Estero Bay and the Gulf of Mexico are widely available along with popular recreational amenities such as golf, tennis, and private swimming pools. The abundant wildlife on Little Estero Island is a continuing focal point for local residents and visitors alike. The town works with other agencies to provide public access and stewardship for this priceless resource.

“The Villa Santini area has been fully redeveloped as a neighborhood-scale “Main Street” for this end of Estero Island, replacing its former life as a conventional shopping center. It also serves the needs of visitors to the vast beaches at Lovers Key.



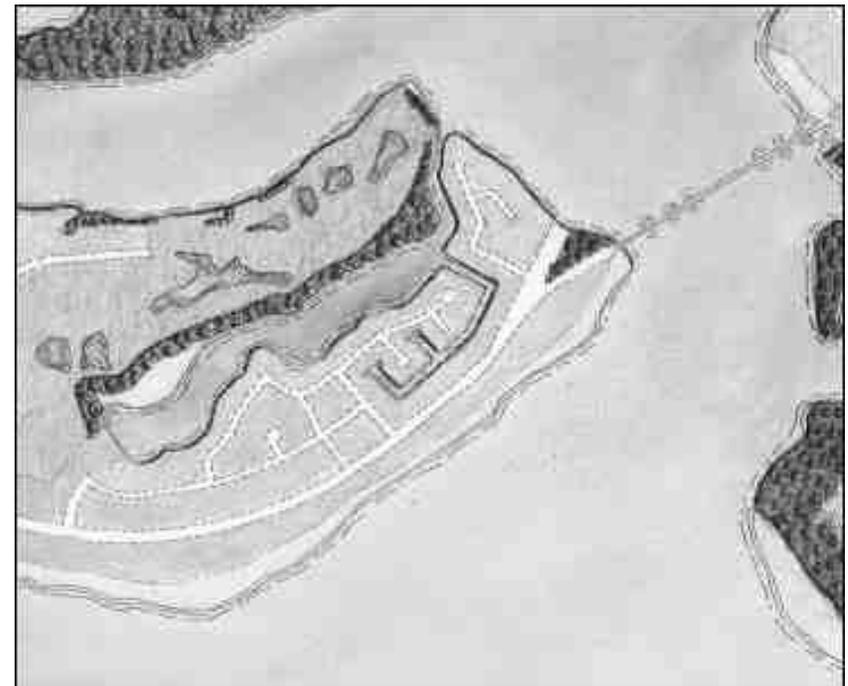


“Tree-shaded sidewalks and bike paths link the surrounding neighborhoods to the new town center, making pedestrian trips comfortable and inviting.”

South Point

Existing Characteristics and Opportunities

This area is characterized by low-rise residences. The generous dimensions of Estero Boulevard continue here, and new standard sidewalks will fill in missing gaps along Estero Boulevard in late 1998. There is potential for an island “gateway” or entry feature just north of the Big Carlos Pass Bridge where excess right-of-way is available for landscape treatment.



“The town and the private sector have worked in partnership to bring about this revitalization. For a section of about 1,000 feet along Estero Boulevard, buildings have been brought closer to the street, providing greater visibility for retail frontage. Drainage has been rerouted or piped, and the sidewalks, street, landscaping, and building frontages have been integrated to “frame” the street and invite pedestrian activity. On-street parking and other design features have been added to slow high-speed traffic through the area. The shopping center has been reconfigured with a design that includes a central green plaza with a trolley transfer point and land for new structures such as a small cinema which shares parking spaces with other tenants at the center and provide overflow parking for special events.

South Point Vision:

“Estero Island’s South Point faces the active boating along Big Carlos Pass and the popular state park on Black Island and Lovers Key. Despite pressures of commercialization to serve park visitors, this area retains its strictly residential character and its mostly low-rise housing. Sidewalks and landscaped entry features announce the arrival and departure into the Town of Fort Myers Beach.”

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE CONNECTIONS

Although the preceding discussion divided Estero Island into seven distinct planning areas, the town is of course more than just the sum of its parts. Estero Boulevard and the water bodies that surround Fort Myers Beach integrate this seven-mile-long island. Both provide opportunities for people to move from place to place by car or boat. The missing element is a way for pedestrians and bicyclists to circulate safely and comfortably

throughout the entire island. During the “Designing Our Town” workshop, participants identified some pedestrian and bicyclist pathways that do exist parallel to Estero Boulevard, at least for short distances. Participants illustrated how pedestrian paths could be created to bridge the gaps and ultimately create an interconnected network.

This plan’s vision for the future includes this system of “hidden paths” off Estero Boulevard, meandering through the island, interconnected where possible. A local foundation or a community land trust working patiently over time could, as opportunities arise, acquire existing vacant lots, rights-of-way, or easements to gradually compile the network. The town could assist this process by removing regulatory barriers that would inhibit the assembling of the path system, for example by changing the land development code to avoid penalizing lot owners who donate or sell a strip of land for one of these paths. The town could also provide some funding for this effort. An initial idea for this network is depicted on the map below.



Dover, Kline & Partners
Architects

The Town of
FORT MYERS BEACH, FLORIDA
Scale: 1" = 100'

Seidman, Peck, Givner & Associates
Landscape Architects

GOALS - OBJECTIVES - POLICIES

Based on the design options evaluated during this planning process, the following goals, objectives, and policies are adopted into the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan:

GOAL 1 To continually improve the appearance and functioning of transportation corridors, commercial areas, and links to natural and recreational areas.

OBJECTIVE 1-A ESTERO BOULEVARD — Improve the functioning and appearance of Estero Boulevard as the premier public space and primary circulation route of Fort Myers Beach.

POLICY 1-A-1 Changes along Estero Boulevard should improve on the characteristics that make it a boulevard in character and not just in name: safe and interesting to walk along, impressive landscaping, and scaled to people rather than high-speed traffic.

POLICY 1-A-2 The town should develop a sidewalk and streetscape plan for all of Estero Boulevard that builds on the design theme of the 1997 improvements from Times Square and to the Lani Kai. This plan should recreate the historic “Avenue of Palms” concept by adding appropriate palm trees such as coconuts on both sides between the sidewalk and new curbs. This plan should also address related needs such as parking and trolley pull-offs, and should be sufficiently detailed to estimate costs and suggest potential phases of

construction. Priorities should include positive impacts on:

- i. stimulating revitalization consistent with the town’s overall vision in this comprehensive plan
- ii. completing pedestrian and bike path linkages from one end of the island to the other;
- iii. managing traffic flow;
- iv. improving pedestrian crossings; including push button (demand) lights; textured materials to emphasize crossings to drivers; and covered seating areas and other “oasis” amenities at trolley stops and beach accesses;
- v. lowering construction and maintenance costs from the original design;
- vi. correcting drainage problems;
- vii. coordinating with utility undergrounding; and
- viii. working within new and available sources of funds.

After completing that plan, the town shall establish a phased schedule of capital improvements to complete this network.

POLICY 1-A-3 In commercial and mixed-use areas, the town shall identify specific portions of Estero Boulevard where changes in land development regulations could work towards a more coherent “framing” of the Boulevard. New regulations should accomplish the following design goals over time through infill and redevelopment:

- i. bringing buildings closer to the sidewalk;
- ii. encouraging or requiring compatible means of meeting the mandatory flood

- elevation requirements (for example; using dry-floodproofing techniques, or designs such as the old hardware store which is built close to the street with outside steps up, but with added steps up inside to reach the flood elevation);
- iii. locating most parking to the rear of buildings, limiting curb cuts, and promoting shared parking areas;
- iv. facilitating pedestrian and bicycle access and contributing to the interconnectedness of the circulation system;
- v. adopting design guidelines that encourage architecture and urbanism along Estero Boulevard that contributes to the human scale and “beach cottage character” (such as the Huston Studio or Hussey tourist information center).

OBJECTIVE 1-B OTHER PUBLIC SPACES — Beautify public spaces throughout the island.

- POLICY 1-B-1 Create Estero Boulevard gateways or entry features at the south end near Big Carlos Pass and near the touchdown of the Matanzas Pass bridge.
- POLICY 1-B-2 Improve the appearance of the town throughout by landscaping public property and rights-of-way with native vegetation.
- POLICY 1-B-3 Identify potential mechanisms to implement and maintain special amenities such as entry features, monuments, or other special landscape projects.
- POLICY 1-B-4 Monitor the effectiveness of the county’s program for removing trash and debris from the beachfront and Bay accesses.

- POLICY 1-B-5 Develop a program for placing utilities underground that addresses both public and private sector development.
- POLICY 1-B-6 Conduct regular and adequate street cleaning (sweeping or vacuuming) throughout the town. Evaluate effective methods to keep streets and drainage systems clean despite the abundance of blown sand and the absence of curbs.

GOAL 2 To upgrade residential neighborhoods throughout Estero Island.

OBJECTIVE 2-A HIDDEN PATHS — Create an additional interconnected system of pedestrian and bicycle pathways throughout the island to improve mobility and promote community interaction.

- POLICY 2-A-1 The town should encourage a community-sponsored program to identify and build a system of existing and potential “hidden paths” parallel to but behind Estero Boulevard. A local foundation or community land trust could identify and acquire existing vacant lots or easements to gradually complete the network. These parcels could be transferred back to the town for long-term maintenance.
- POLICY 2-A-2 The town shall adopt changes to the land development regulations to allow small portions of existing lots to become a part of the hidden-path network without diminishing future uses of those lots.
- POLICY 2-A-3 The town shall ensure coordination between efforts to develop this hidden-path network

and its new streetscape plan for Estero Boulevard.

OBJECTIVE 2-B SIDE STREETS — Encourage residents to achieve a higher ambition for their residential streets, improving their walkability, comfort, beauty, interconnectedness, and safety.

- POLICY 2-B-1 The town strongly supports the planting of regularly spaced street trees in public rights-of-way on residential streets. The selection of specific trees shall be guided by public input and the following criteria:
- i. amount of shade provided, especially during the summer months;
 - ii. the amount of water and other regular maintenance that will be required (such as types of leaves, fronds, and fruit);
 - iii. potential damage from extensive root systems or other characteristics of specific trees;
 - iv. variety and beauty, including flowering characteristics;
 - v. the potential for wildlife utilization;
 - vi. a strong preference for native trees such as live oak, gumbo limbo, sea grape, cabbage palm, mastic, Jamaica dogwood, mahogany, black olive, strangler fig, pigeon plum, and buttonwood; and
 - vii. a prohibition on the use of invasive trees such as Australian pine, Brazilian pepper, melaleuca, and Java plum.

POLICY 2-B-2 The town should develop a residential streets program that provides guidelines and technical assistance to neighborhoods that wish to improve their public spaces as civic

projects. The program could include the following elements:

- i. assistance in developing a workable approach on a street-by-street basis, consistent with the island-wide concept;
- ii. volunteer local arborists to provide specific advice and technical assistance;
- iii. assistance in preparing a planting plan for street trees;
- iv. financial assistance for planting street trees;
- v. a booklet describing the characteristics of desirable street trees for Fort Myers Beach;
- vi. a guidebook for tree planting, irrigation, and pruning methods;
- vii. a plan for short- and long-term maintenance of planted areas and street trees;
- viii. a current list of contact persons and a description of the process for requesting street repairs and maintenance and for reporting code violations; and
- ix. information on how to form a street lighting district.

GOAL 3 To revitalize and improve specific transitional neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVE 3-A HEART OF THE ISLAND — Redevelop the School/Library/Bay Oaks area as the new “heart of the island.”

POLICY 3-A-1 The complex of civic activities in the Bay Oaks area is a key community asset. Its access and significance would be enhanced by creating a main entryway; School Street

could become a walkable palm-lined street of restored and infill cottages that announce the entry to this center of civic activity.

POLICY 3-A-2 A prominent civic structure benefits the community most when its location serves the public conveniently and when its design helps shape the surrounding public spaces and provides a new and symbolic vista from other public places.

POLICY 3-A-3 If the town ever decides to build a Town Hall rather than renting office space, a new building, even if modest in size, should help complete a center of public activity and should be visually prominent as a showcase of urban design.

POLICY 3-A-4 A “heart of the island” plan should be prepared to coordinate the public and private actions needed to fully implement this concept, including identifying the sequence of actions, responsibilities for implementation, and potential funding sources. Initial actions should include:

- i. develop a design concept consistent with the new streetscape plan for Estero Boulevard, identifying approximate costs, potential funding sources, and suggested phasing;
- ii. refine regulations that would allow a compatible mix of uses such as residential, live-work spaces such as studios or galleries, and small-scale specialty retail uses consistent with the historic theme, including eased setback and parking regulations to accommodate the unique needs of renovations of existing and move-on cottages; and

- iii. prepare architectural guidelines for cottage renovations and for infill development.

POLICY 3-A-5 Provide in the new Land Development Code a pre-approved option for the future redevelopment of the Red Coconut/Gulfview Colony properties consistent with the town’s vision of traditional neighborhoods — neighborhoods that recreate a small-town feel; which are pedestrian and bicycle friendly with an internal circulation system that makes it possible to walk or bicycle to schools and services without always using Estero Boulevard; which retain the psychological connection and views to both the Bay and the beach; and which offer a variety of housing types and opportunity for mixed uses.

POLICY 3-A-6 In accordance with Policies 4-E-1 and 4-F-2 of the Future Land Use Element, evaluate any alternative redevelopment concepts for any portion of the Gulfview Colony/ Red Coconut properties as to the following design principles:

- i. retains and/or creates water views through street layout, site design, and architectural design;
- ii. provides a variety of housing types rather than uniformity;
- iii. locates the more durable housing types and mix of uses along the Bay side of Estero Boulevard;
- iv. new streets create a highly connected network which includes mid-block paths or alleys;
- v. streets have sidewalks and street trees;

- vi. local streets are interconnected from Donora and Shell Mound through to the north.

OBJECTIVE 3-B NEAR-TOWN NEIGHBORHOODS — Revitalize older residential areas using traditional neighborhood techniques for renovations and infill.

POLICY 3-B-1 The town shall prepare and adopt land development regulations to apply to the older “near-town neighborhoods” that will encourage renovations and compatible infill development, using the following types of techniques:

- i. modifying lot size, setback, and parking requirements where the current regulations hinder redevelopment;
- ii. adding design guidelines to encourage front porches, decks, and other elements from the cottage design tradition to help frame public spaces and define private areas;
- iii. modifying permitted uses to accommodate quiet home offices and possibly other mixed uses;
- iv. modifying current limitations on the number of guests and/or length of stays to protect residential areas from excessive intrusion by poorly regulated short-term rentals.

OBJECTIVE 3-C SANTINI “MAIN STREET” — Redevelop the Villa Santini Plaza and its environs as a “Main Street” town center for the south end of the island.

POLICY 3-C-1 The town wishes to convert, over time, the existing Villa Santini Plaza and surrounding

land from its current configuration of auto-oriented commercial uses. The desired plan would create a new “Main Street” shopping and civic center to serve residents of the south end of Estero Island and visitors to the state park on Black Island and Lovers Key (see Policy 4-F-2(ii) of the Future Land Use Element). To accomplish this goal, the town wishes to structure a public/private partnership agreement that provides for the following:

- i. outlines the public improvements necessary to implement the concept, and identifies the agencies and entities involved and their respective roles;
- ii. provides the town’s design criteria to guide the preparation of the development plan by the property owners; and
- iii. sets forth the process for the partnership, identifies responsibilities, areas of commitment, timing and process, order of magnitude costs, fiscal impacts/benefits, and any reimbursements.

POLICY 3-C-2 The town shall adopt new development regulations for this area to bring about the desired redevelopment pattern in the Villa Santini area. Along the nearby section of Estero Boulevard, buildings being constructed or renovated shall extend closer to the street and provide front access to pedestrians and on-street parking. Internal site layouts shall be reconfigured to accommodate a central green/plaza area for overflow parking and a trolley transfer point generally consistent with the 1997 design concept prepared by Dover, Kohl & Partners.

OBJECTIVE 3-D TIMES SQUARE — Stimulate the revitalization of the downtown core area (near Times Square) as the nucleus of commercial and tourist activities.

POLICY 3-D-1 The town shall create a Downtown Redevelopment Agency to assist the Main Street program in revitalizing downtown as a lively, inviting, comfortable, and safe public environment.

POLICY 3-D-2 Downtown revitalization shall be based on the concepts in the Core Area Master Plan prepared for the Estero Island CRA Committee in 1993-94, as refined during the continuing implementation of that plan. Those concepts are summarized in the following policies.

POLICY 3-D-3 Continue with sidewalk improvements:

- i. Standard sidewalk widths should be provided by the public sector and/or private developers in each development project as it is implemented. Consider a program for private sidewalk reservation through dedication or easement, particularly along Old San Carlos.
- ii. Use selected materials in public rights-of-way and private property improvements adjacent to sidewalks, such as in plazas or building setbacks.
- iii. Provide special design treatment (e.g. continuation of sidewalk paving patterns) at major intersections of the primary pedestrian streets to create a visual link and distinguish the pedestrian surface from the vehicular right-of-way.

POLICY 3-D-4 Implement the pedestrian circulation plan:

- i. Complete the Bay-side sidewalk and streetscape improvements for Estero Boulevard within the Core area with underground utilities and improved sidewalks.
- ii. Construct sidewalks (5' wide minimum sidewalk) along all streets in the Core Area.
- iii. Provide a bike path along Estero Boulevard utilizing Crescent Street to Third Street across to Old San Carlos and then connecting back to Estero Boulevard and north to Bowditch Point.
- iv. Promote the function of Old San Carlos as a pedestrian spine linking Times Square and the marina by implementing public sidewalks and major crosswalks designed to work in conjunction with arcades or plazas located on private property.
- v. Work with the private sector to establish a site for a new public pedestrian plaza at the east of Old San Carlos.
- vi. Provide new on-street parking and sidewalk on the south side of Crescent Street.
- vii. Reconfigure Third and Fourth Streets with on-street parking and sidewalks on both sides of the street.
- viii. Coordinate all proposed improvements with the pedestrian, parking, mass transit, and traffic circulation concepts in the Transportation Element of this plan.

POLICY 3-D-5 Improve the current parking situation near Times Square through the means outlined in the Transportation Element of this plan.

Suggestions from the Core Area Master Plan include:

- i. Implement parking management practices that create a positive experience for visitors and business operations.
- ii. Encourage the private sector to build and operate expanded parking areas, using public sector assistance if needed for land assembly and regulatory relief.
- iii. Expand the supply of shared on-street parking with 165 new parallel and angled spaces.
- iv. If the new supply of parking will be inadequate and a parking garage must be built, appropriate locations would be to the rear of new storefronts facing Old San Carlos.

POLICY 3-D-6 Design and construct streetscape improvements for Old San Carlos, Crescent Street, Center Street, and First through Fifth Street. These include on-street parking, new sidewalks, buried utilities, and landscaping.

POLICY 3-D-7 Continue to implement the stormwater management plan (an exfiltration system that integrates the existing storm sewer pipe system and inlets with exfiltration trenches under Estero Boulevard). Similar systems can be installed for private development under parking lots or open space.

POLICY 3-D-8 Provide technical assistance regarding dry flood proofing methods and design to individuals seeking to develop or improve their properties.

POLICY 3-D-9 Enhance Lynn Hall Park with continuing beach renourishment, beach volleyball areas, and possibly a performance pavilion (in the southeast corner of the park next to Times

Square). Include a pedestrian path linking the beach and the northern portion of Estero Boulevard.