



# SPIKOWSKI PLANNING ASSOCIATES

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Fort Myers Beach Transportation Mitigation Agency  
**FROM:** Bill Spikowski  
**DATE:** October 14, 2005  
**SUBJECT:** E.A.R. Discussion on October 26, 2005, 1:00 PM

To prepare for your October 26 discussion about the transportation sections of the evaluation of the Comprehensive Plan, please review the attached draft of three sections of the evaluation and appraisal report:

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Purpose of Evaluation and Appraisal
- B. Brief History of this Comprehensive Plan
- C. Organization of this Report

### **4. ESTERO BOULEVARD – Times Square Area**

- A. Evaluation of Existing Policies
- B. Community Design Ideas from Planning Charrette
- C. Analysis of Street Alternatives
- D. Recommendations on Times Square Area

### **5. ESTERO BOULEVARD – Length of Island**

- A. Evaluation of Existing Policies
- B. Additional Data and Analysis
- C. Potential Funding Sources
- D. Recommendations on Estero Boulevard

# EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL REPORT TOWN OF FORT MYERS BEACH

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
A. Purpose of Evaluation and Appraisal .....	1
B. Brief History of this Comprehensive Plan .....	1
C. Organization of this Report .....	2
<b>2. COASTAL HAZARDS</b> .....	<b>5</b>
A. Evaluation of Existing Policies .....	5
B. Additional Analysis .....	7
<b>3. BUILDBACK AND CONVERSIONS</b> .....	<b>8</b>
A. Evaluation of Existing Policies .....	8
B. Additional Analysis on Pre-Disaster Buildback .....	12
C. Recommendations on Pre-Disaster Buildback .....	15
D. Additional Analysis on Lodging Issues .....	16
E. Recommendations on Lodging Issues .....	19
<b>4. ESTERO BOULEVARD – Times Square Area</b> .....	<b>21</b>
A. Evaluation of Existing Policies .....	21
B. Community Design Ideas from Planning Charrette .....	24
C. Analysis of Street Alternatives .....	33
D. Recommendations on Times Square Area .....	43
<b>5. ESTERO BOULEVARD – Length of Island</b> .....	<b>44</b>
A. Evaluation of Existing Policies .....	44
B. Additional Data and Analysis .....	51
C. Potential Funding Sources .....	54
D. Recommendations on Estero Boulevard .....	56

# SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

## A. Purpose of Evaluation and Appraisal

The state of Florida's growth management system requires the periodic reevaluation of all comprehensive plans that have been adopted by cities and counties. The periodic reevaluation is known as the Evaluation/Appraisal (E/A) process. This process begins with the preparation of an E/A report (often known as an EAR) by each local government. *"The report is intended to serve as a summary audit of the actions that a local government has undertaken and identify changes that it may need to make."* [F.S. 163.3191(c)]

The town's land development code assigns responsibility for preparing this report to the Local Planning Agency. [§ 34-120(10)] Final adoption of this report is the responsibility of the Town Council. The Florida Department of Community Affairs will make a final determination whether the report provides the information required by state law.

Local governments are generally required to evaluate their plans every seven years. State officials have put Fort Myers Beach on the Lee County cycle so that evaluations for all cities in Lee County are being completed at the same time.

The E/A process has two major components:

- Preparation of a formal E/A report that evaluates the existing plan and identifies what needs to be changed.
- Subsequent amendments to the comprehensive plan using the normal plan amendment process. These amendments will be processed during the year after completion of the E/A report.

## B. Brief History of this Comprehensive Plan

In 1995 the residents of Estero Island launched their own municipal government 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 normal day-to-day activities, a 2½-year effort was begun to bring into focus new long-range goals for the town. That effort created the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan. To move toward those long-range goals, the plan established formal policies for the town government and laid the foundation for a new land development code to guide further development and redevelopment. The new plan took effect at the beginning of 1999, replacing Lee County's Comprehensive Plan which had remained in effect until the new plan was adopted.

The Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan is published as a single bound volume. The plan begins with "Envisioning Tomorrow's Fort Myers Beach," an optimistic look at the type of community that the town hopes will evolve. The next twelve chapters contain the twelve main "elements" of the plan, organized by subject area. The Community Design Element was placed first because its concepts inspired many other parts of the plan. The entire volume can be purchased at Town Hall or can be downloaded at no cost from the town's web site at [http://www.fmbeach.org/comp\\_plan/](http://www.fmbeach.org/comp_plan/).

Each element of the plan contains a narrative description of current conditions and possible courses of action for the town, followed by formal goals, objectives, and policies adopted by the town as its legally binding Comprehensive Plan. The “adopted” portion of the plan also includes a Future Land Use Map, a Future Transportation Map, a five-year schedule of capital improvements, and all of chapters 1, 2, and 15.<sup>1</sup>

The preparation of this report has been the subject of numerous workshops and public meetings. The chart on the following page indicates meeting dates and the subjects of discussion.

## **C. Organization of this Report**

The state establishes certain minimum requirements for E/A reports and also allows local governments to use this process where unanticipated events have made the comprehensive plan’s treatment of certain issues obsolete. This report contains both mandatory and optional components, organized as follows.

### **i. Major Planning Issues – Sections 2 – 5**

Local governments are encouraged to use the E/A process to address whatever issues are of great importance to that community. *“The report should be based on the local government’s analysis of major issues to further the community’s goals consistent with statewide minimum standards.”* [F.S. 163.3191(c)]

Sections 2 through 5 address four major issues selected by the town or by DCA. Each is addressed in this fashion:

1. Explain the nature of the major issue.
2. Identify how the plan currently addresses each issue; this is done by reprinting, in italics, the exact wording from the adopted portions of the comprehensive plan.
3. Identify actions already undertaken to address each issue and achieve the plan’s objectives, then determine the success or failure of those actions in achieving the objectives.
4. Provide additional analysis regarding the major issue.
5. Suggest revised planning strategies or specific plan revisions to better address each issue.

### **ii. Other Planning Issues – Sections 6 – 9**

In addition to the four major issues, the town has identified several other subjects where the plan may have become out-of-date or may not have addressed important issues. These issues are addressed in Sections 6 through 9 of this report.

---

<sup>1</sup> Since 1999 there have been five annual cycles of plan amendments. Two separate amendments were adopted during each of the first three cycles (2000, 2001, and 2002); one amendment was adopted in the 2003 cycle; and two small-scale map amendments were adopted in 2004. All other amendment requests were withdrawn or denied. A summary of all proposed and approved amendments is contained on the title page of the plan.

		Coastal Hazards	Buildback & Conversions	Estero Bl: Times Square	Estero Bl: Full Length	Stormwater Management	Utilities	Housing	Special Topics	
<b>Public workshops: 2005:</b>	March 8		●	●	●					
	April 7		●	●	●					
<b>LPA workshops: 2004:</b> <i>(Local Planning Agency)</i>	June 22		●	●	●	●	●			
	September 21			●	●					
	October 19			●	●	●	●			
	November 16		●	●	●					
	December 7		●	●	●	●	●	●		
	<b>2005:</b>	February 8		●	●	●	●	●	●	
		February 15		●	●	●	●	●	●	
		March 15		●	●	●				
		April 12		●	●	●				
		May 10		●	●	●				
		June 21		●	●					
		August 9	●	●						
		September 13	●	●	●					
	October 11		●		●					
	November 15									
	<b>LPA public hearings: 2005:</b>									
<b>TMA workshops: 2004:</b> <i>(Traffic Mitigation Agency)</i>	September 21			●	●					
	December 21		●	●	●					
	<b>2005:</b>	February 9								
		April 7			●					
		May 18			●	●				
		June 22			●	●				
		July 14			●	●				
		August 11			●	●				
		October 26			●	●				
<b>Town Council workshops: 2005:</b>										
<b>Town Council public hearings: 2005:</b> <i>[list others here]</i>										

### **iii. Special Topics – Section 10**

In addition to addressing the town's own issues, there are certain specific subjects that must be addressed in this report. For instance, the content of the current plan must be compared with the latest state requirements to ensure that the plan remains legally up to date. Some of the new requirements can be met jointly with Lee County while others are specific to Fort Myers Beach.

### **iv. Community Assessment – Section 11**

Section 11 fulfills one other statutory requirements for this report which is to provide a brief community assessment including the following subjects:

- Population growth and changes in land area.
- The location of existing development in relation to the location of development as anticipated in the original plan.
- The extent of vacant and developable land.
- The financial feasibility of implementing the comprehensive plan.
- A brief assessment of successes and shortcomings related to each element of the plan.
- Relevant changes to the state requirements since the plan was adopted.
- A summary of public participation in the planning process.

### **v. Recommendations – Section 12**

The final section of this report summarizes all recommendations made throughout the report.

## SECTION 4. ESTERO BOULEVARD – Times Square Area

**ISSUE STATEMENT:** One of the most popular and thus congested segments of Estero Boulevard is near Times Square. There is never a shortage of ideas on what to do about the congestion. Many ideas were described in the transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan, but in 2004 some new ideas have surfaced, including diverting all northbound exiting traffic onto Crescent and Fifth, reopening Center Street to traffic entering town from the Sky Bridge, and realigning Estero through Seafarers and Helmerich Plaza. Would these alternatives noticeably reduce traffic congestion? How would they affect the surrounding area? Would they be more successful than ideas previously identified? What other alternatives might be possible to reduce traffic congestion while making Fort Myers Beach a better place to live and visit?

**BACKGROUND:** The town's Traffic Mitigation Agency is investigating and experimenting with many promising transportation improvements. The TMA and its consulting engineers understand their mission is to find better ways to move traffic. At the same time, the town needs to understand how potential transportation improvements would affect the beauty, convenience, and walkability of the town's major streets before it can be decided whether they would be good, bad, or neutral for Fort Myers Beach. The following three ideas, and others generated during this evaluation process, are discussed more fully later in this section.

**(1) Diverting northbound exiting traffic:** The TMA has made it a priority to find ways to move traffic off the island more quickly. At their urging, the town has experimented with diverting northbound exiting traffic onto Crescent Street, then to Fifth Avenue past the Lighthouse Resort, then onto the Sky Bridge.

**(2) Center Street:** Consulting engineers for the town are working on final engineering plans to reopen a portion of Center Street. The purpose is to allow a second route from the Sky Bridge for drivers and transit vehicles that are traveling to Old San Carlos or the nearby public parking areas. This portion of Center Street is now a public parking lot between the foot of the Sky Bridge and Old San Carlos.

**(3) Realignment of Estero Boulevard:** Due to common property ownership, the realignment of Estero Boulevard is a possibility for the first time. Rather than waiting to see if the landowners propose a realignment plan of their own, the town is taking this historic opportunity to evaluate various alternatives, perhaps identifying one or more potential designs that respond successfully to the varied public and private interests that would be affected.

### A. Evaluation of Existing Policies

*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.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 1-A-1:** This policy remains valid and has not been called in question, with one exception. Due to continuing extreme congestion near Times Square, some traffic-enhancing alternatives are being considered that can be characterized as no longer being "scaled to people" (although "high-speed traffic" is not likely to occur due to upstream and downstream constraints on traffic flow). This issue is discussed in the background section on this page.

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

**EVALUATION OF OBJECTIVE 3-D:** This objective is a continuation of Lee County’s prior efforts to the same end. The town has formed a Downtown Redevelopment Agency and obtained \$2,000,000 in initial funding from Lee County’s former Estero Island Community Redevelopment Agency. A new master plan for Old San Carlos and Crescent Street was completed in 1999. Old San Carlos was completely rebuilt in 2002 to carry out recommendations from that plan. A new “Downtown” zoning district was added to the land development code in 2003. Many landowners have obtained development approvals in accordance with the town’s plans: Seafarer’s Plaza, Lighthouse Resort, Matanzas Inn, a new Snug Harbor restaurant, Dockside Inn, and three new mixed-use buildings on Old San Carlos. Several beachfront motels near Times Square were destroyed by Hurricane Charley; a special focus of this evaluation process has been alternative redevelopment concepts for those motel sites and for the adjoining Seafarer’s and Helmerich Plazas, as discussed beginning on page 24.

**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.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 3-D-E:** New sidewalk policies were put into the land development code in 2004. Sidewalk easements were not needed on Old San Carlos but have been obtained through negotiations with landowners on Fifth Avenue, Crescent Street, and one portion of Estero Boulevard. The new Snug Harbor restaurant coordinated its design, including paving materials and colonnades, with the adjoining public plaza at the Matanzas Pass end of Old San Carlos. The Old San Carlos streetscape uses paving materials from the sidewalks to delineate pedestrian crossings on Old San Carlos.

**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.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 3-D-4:** The following is a summary of the pedestrian circulation ideas set forth in this policy:

- i. New sidewalks on Estero Boulevard have not yet been constructed, although a 5-foot-wide sidewalk easement has been obtained along the frontage of Seafarer's and Helmerich Plazas.
- ii. New sidewalks were built along both sides of Old San Carlos in 2002, but not yet on the other streets listed in this policy.
- iii. This bike path has not yet been planned or constructed.
- iv. The public improvements on Old San Carlos were completed in 2002. Two colonnades have been constructed by private interests that provide shade over portions of the sidewalks.
- v. A new plaza on Matanzas Pass was completed in 2002 at the end of the Old San Carlos right-of-way. A pedestrian easement along the dock was obtained from Snug Harbor restaurant to allow movement between this plaza and the pier and second plaza to be built under the Sky Bridge.
- vi. No sidewalks have been constructed yet on Crescent Street, but provisions have been made for future sidewalks through negotiations with Helmerich Plaza and the Matanzas Inn.
- vii. No improvements have been designed or constructed yet on Third Street. The remaining stub of Fourth Street (between Fifth Avenue and the Sky Bridge embankment) was vacated in 1999 in exchange for new public parking spaces along Third Street and Fifth Avenue.
- viii. This coordination has been accomplished for all improvements in the Times Square area.

**OBJECTIVE 4-F REDEVELOPMENT** — *Take positive steps to redevelop areas that are reaching obsolescence or beginning to show blight by designing and implementing public improvements near Times Square to spur private redevelopment there, by supporting the conversion of the Villa Santini Plaza into a pedestrian precinct, by providing an opportunity for landowners to replace vulnerable mobile homes and recreational vehicles with permanent structures in the Gulfview Colony/Red Coconut area, and by providing building code relief for historic buildings.*

**EVALUATION OF OBJECTIVE 4-F:** Public and private improvements near Times Square are discussed beginning on page 24. Potential redevelopment plans for future improvements at Villa Santini Plaza and Gulfview Colony/Red Coconut have been added to the land development code, as has code relief for historic buildings.

**POLICY 7-H-1 PEDESTRIAN OVERPASSES:** *Although pedestrian overpasses are often ignored by pedestrians, an overpass providing a panoramic view of the Gulf might be attractive enough to reduce at-grade crossings at Times Square without discouraging foot traffic in this highly congested area. Even without an overpass, the pedestrian-actuated stop light may be replaceable with a flashing caution light to minimize effects of the crossing on traffic flow.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-H-1:** No physical changes have been made in accordance with this policy, but evaluations are ongoing. One alternative is shown in Figure 8, where a pedestrian overpass would be provided to link the two major buildings in a hotel complex. This overpass would be fully open to the public but it would be constructed by the hotel operator because it would primarily benefits hotel guests.

**POLICY 7-H-3 LEFT-TURNS AT TIMES SQUARE:** Northbound traffic headed for Lynn Hall Park now turns left just past Times Square. These turns could interfere with traffic flow on Estero Boulevard; if so, alternatives using Crescent Street should be considered.

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-H-3:** Eliminating left turns for northbound traffic headed toward Lynn Hall Park would require those vehicles to instead travel north on Crescent Street, under the Sky Bridge, and south on Old San Carlos to reach their destinations. Unfamiliar drivers who miss the turn at Crescent Street would have no choice but to leave the island then circle back and return. These difficulties have to be balanced with any minor improvements in traffic flow that would occur by eliminating this left turn. As described beginning on page 33, new alternatives have been examined for this area that are more promising than the simple closure of the turn lane as described in Policy 7-H-3.

## B. Community Design Ideas from Planning Charrette

All four major issues highlighted in this report were discussed at public workshops in March and April of 2005. However, the bulk of attention went to redesign ideas for the Times Square area, which is the heart of town for tourists, and increasingly so for seasonal and permanent residents as well.

Although this area has been extensively studied in the past, three factors led to this new attention. The first is the on-going efforts of the town's Traffic Mitigation Agency to quickly implement new ideas for moving traffic on and off the island; some of these efforts could change the pedestrian character of this area. The second is that Hurricane Charley destroyed the Sandman, Howard Johnson, and Days Inn beachfront motels in August 2004, making their replacement by new buildings imminent. Third, major consolidation of land ownership has taken place, with the three destroyed motels now sharing common ownership with the adjoining Ramada Inn and two large commercial parcels across Estero Boulevard (Seafarer's and Helmerich Plazas).

These factors led to the wide circulation of a drawing showing Estero Boulevard being relocated landward of its current alignment. This concept would expand the pedestrian-only zone at Times Square onto the existing alignment and might help traffic flow by reducing conflicts with pedestrian movements.

The realignment of Estero Boulevard had never been contemplated, partly because the town does not control this road and partly because the diverse property ownership would have made the idea impractical from the outset. With three beachfront motels about to be replaced in one form or another plus the new common ownership, the idea of realignment became worthy of serious study and in fact is an opportunity that is not likely ever to be repeated.

There are important federal and state regulatory programs that complicate all redevelopment plans in this area. In the years since the original buildings were constructed, the federal government has established

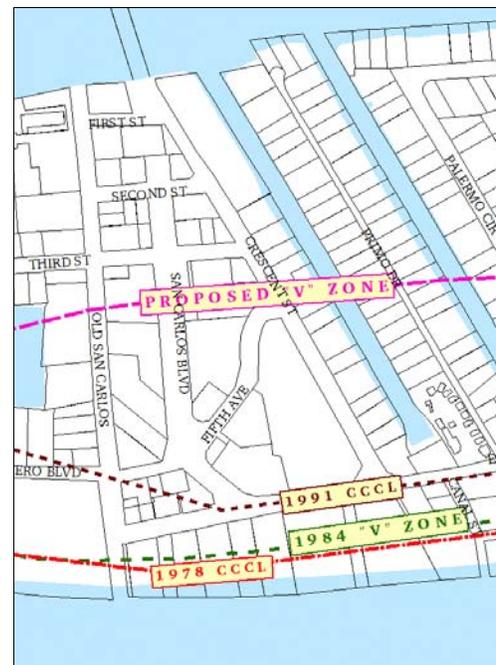


Figure 1

“velocity zones” (V-zones) and the state of Florida has established two “coastal construction control lines” (CCCL), all of which run roughly parallel to the beach. These lines demarcate areas that are subject to stringent rules designed to make future buildings less vulnerable to flooding. Figure 1 shows the location of these lines near Times Square, including a new V-zone boundary proposed by FEMA in September 2005; Figure 2 provides technical details on each program.

Design teams at the March 2005 planning charrette examined two approaches to minimizing the difficulties that these regulatory programs could cause to the redevelopment effort. One approach would be to move Estero Boulevard slightly away from the beach, thus putting both sides of the street outside the regulatory influence of the 1991 CCCL. This would allow both sides of the street to be rebuilt with doors, windows, and shopfront along wide sidewalks.

### **Technical Details on Flood Protection**

*In V-zones, buildings cannot have any permanent walls at ground level, even if the walls are “dry-floodproofed” to prevent the contents within the walls from flood damage. V-zones, established in 1984, run near enough to the beach that they have had little effect on commercial buildings along Estero Boulevard in this area. The original CCCL line was adopted in 1978; no buildings may be constructed seaward of that line. In 1991 the state established a new type of CCCL that in many cases reaches as far inland as Estero Boulevard itself. New buildings that are seaward of the 1991 CCCL are limited at ground level to enclosures by “permanent walls” of only 20% of the building’s width, thus precluding viable commercial space in the main structure. The purpose of this rule is that in the case of the strongest storms, “permanent walls” would be struck by breaking waves and might collapse in such a way as to endanger the upper floors of the structure.*

*There is an important strip of land about 30’ deep along Estero Boulevard where the 1991 CCCL requirements could preclude the very kind of pedestrian-oriented activities that the Comprehensive Plan and land development code so strongly favor; this strip is landward of the V-zone but seaward of the 1991 CCCL, mainly along the beach side, as shown in Figure 3.*

Figure 2



Figure 3

Figure 4 illustrates the character of a classic two-sided Main Street that could be ensured through this minor realignment. This new alignment is shown in site plan format in Figure 5; two versions are shown, one using a simple intersection at the foot of the Sky Bridge similar to what exists there today, the other using a roundabout at that location.

### **Streets & People**

Streets don't have to be mere traffic channels. Streets can be also be attractive and recreational when citizens and government work together to fulfill public desires for pleasant and stimulating public places.



VIEW DOWN RELOCATED ESTERO BOULEVARD

WSP | PARSONS  
BRINCKERHOFF  
Dover, Kline & Burman  
PLANNING

Figure 4

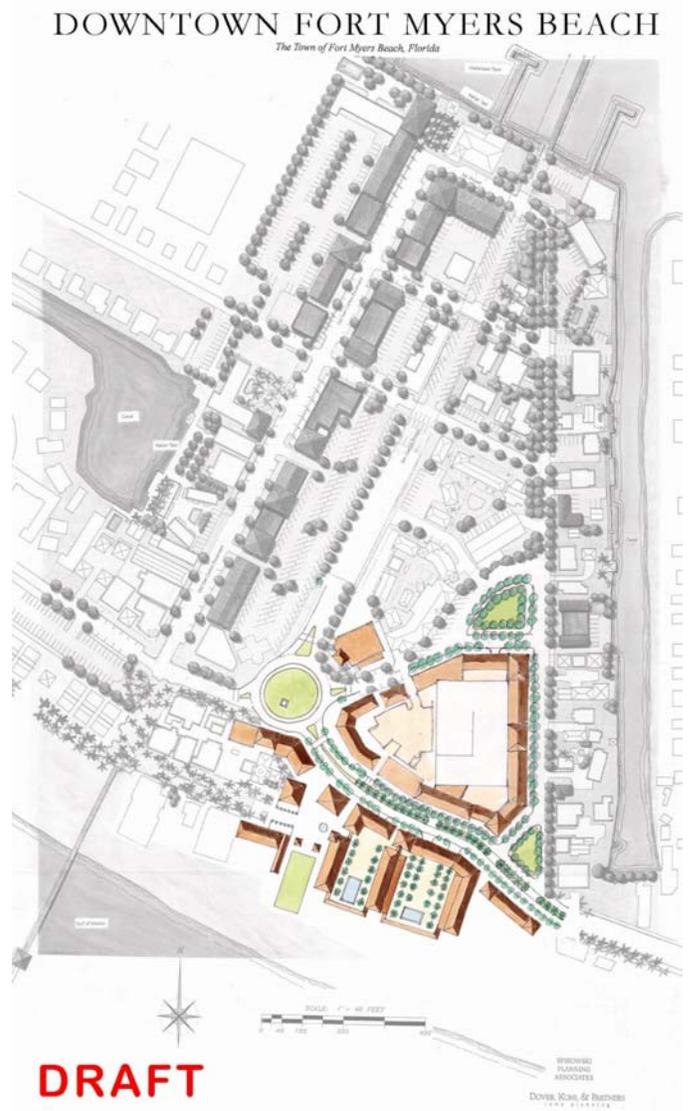
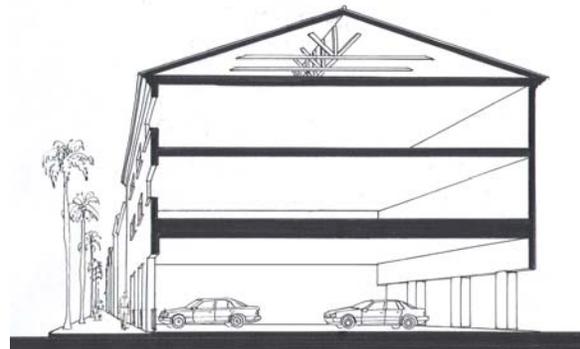


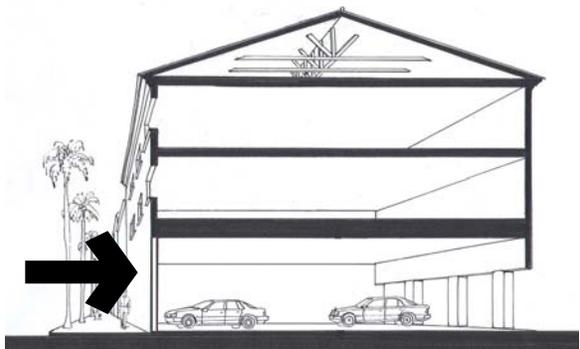
Figure 5

A second approach to the CCCL problem was also considered that would be far less expensive, in that Estero Boulevard would not need to be realigned. This alternative is illustrated in the three sketches in Figure 6 which show typical buildings that could replace the beachfront motels destroyed by Hurricane Charley:

- The top sketch shows the entire building elevated to meet all CCCL and V-zone requirements. The only uses at ground level would be parking and open storage. This is the prototypical building for coastal locations where protection from flooding is the major design criterion.



- The second sketch shows a solid wall built to “breakaway” standards that would separate the parked cars from the sidewalk. This wall would visually screen the parking, but may be nearly as unfriendly to pedestrians and motorists as a full view of the parking area.



- The third sketch shows a creative approach that includes shops at ground level. These shops must be shallow enough to avoid extending into the V-zone. Walls would have to be built to structural standards so they would withstand the forces of rising water yet collapse if confronted with breaking waves (to keep from harming the remainder of the building). If this can be done, the building may comply with current CCCL requirements.

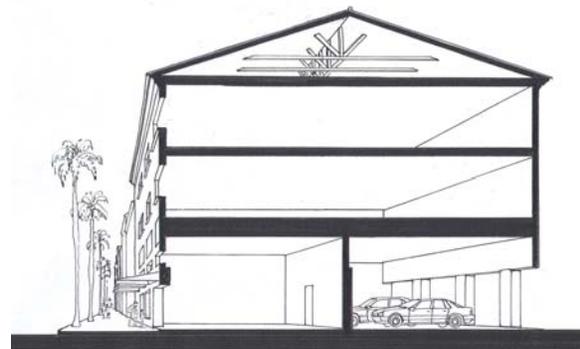


Figure 6

In September of 2005 the town learned that the federal government was contemplating moving the V-zone boundary further inland (see Figure 1). If this change comes to pass, the approach shown in the third sketch may no longer be a viable solution. Pending this determination, further evaluation of this idea has been postponed.

For the same reason, further evaluation of the street realignment shown in Figure 5 has been postponed.

A quite different approach was also developed and evaluated during the charrette which offers greater promise for improving both traffic flow and livability. This approach would maintain the existing alignment of Estero Boulevard but would create a short new street running parallel to Estero Boulevard from Crescent Street to the foot of the Sky Bridge.

This new street could serve traffic in both directions, providing an alternate route for traffic coming off and on the bridge. With the traffic flow split onto two streets, the interference now caused by pedestrians crossing Estero would be less detrimental to overall traffic flow. A raised pedestrian island in Estero could further assist traffic by allowing pedestrians to cross more easily without stopping traffic. This approach is shown in Figure 7 with the same two variations from Figure 5: one uses a simple intersection at the foot of the Sky Bridge similar to what exists there today, the other uses a roundabout at that location. A major advantage of adding the roundabout is that it provides the traffic-splitting benefits in both directions instead of only for motorists leaving the island.

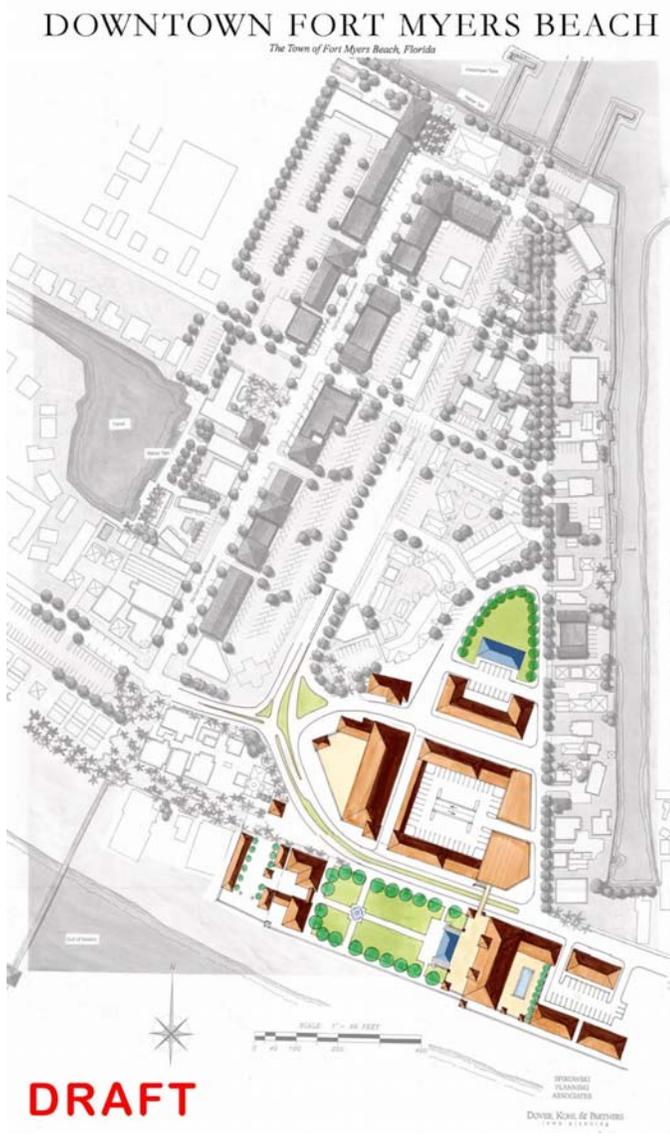


Figure 7

One variation on these plans would move all traffic onto the new street, allowing the existing Estero to be converted into a pedestrian mall; pedestrians could move freely across the mall without any interference to through traffic. A second variation would allow vehicles to use both the existing Estero and the new street, but both streets would operate as one-way streets; a roundabout would not be needed with this travel pattern, but an alternating light could help the two southbound travel lanes merge back into one lane near Crescent Street. A third variation would reserve the existing Estero for trolleys, trams, pedestrians, emergency vehicles, and perhaps other permitted vehicles such as those with several occupants or for local residents or businesses.

All of these variations involve acquisition of right-of-way and redesign of adjoining buildings. The town should be able to acquire additional right-of-way at the same time to provide wider sidewalks, pedestrian median refuges, and trolley/tram lanes.

#### **Great Streets**

*"There is magic to great streets. We are attracted to the best of them not because we have to go there but because we want to be there. The best are as joyful as they are utilitarian. They are entertaining and they are open to all. They permit anonymity at the same time as individual recognition. They are symbols of a community and of its history; they represent a public memory. They are places for escape and for romance, places to act and to dream. On a great street we are allowed to dream; to remember things that may never have happened and to look forward to things that, maybe, never will."*

— Great Streets,  
by Allan B. Jacobs

A major benefit of all of these variations would be the creation of a new beachfront part on the site of the old Howard Johnson and Days Inn motels. This would be possible because the new street described above was designed to create a complete city block that could accommodate a fully internalized parking garage surrounded by building space on all sides. This building space, if expanded one to three stories taller than preexisting rules, could accommodate the same floor space that would otherwise be reconstructed on the Howard Johnson/Days Inn sites. Thus the park could be provided as a major public amenity without damaging the development rights on that property; those rights would simply be transferred across the street.

This park would be about 300 feet wide along Estero Boulevard and about 140 feet deep to the beginning of the beach. The park would be a town facility and would not be used for parking or restrooms like the nearby Lynn Hall Park. An aerial rendering of an initial concept for this beach park and a new hotel surrounding the park is shown in Figure 8. In this concept the hotel would be split into two major buildings connected by a pedestrian bridge that would also be open to the public. The park would provide a shaded public space near the beach in place of the existing buildings and parking lots. To make this concept possible, the town would have to enter into a development agreement with the property owner that would simultaneously transfer title for the beach park and the new street to the town while granting approval for the surrounding private development.



## VIEW OF BEACH PARK

SPEROWSKI  
PLANNING  
ASSOCIATES  
DOVER, KOHL, & PARTNERS  
LAW PLANNING

Figure 8

About five years ago a landscaped roundabout was proposed as a distinctive entry feature at the foot of the Sky Bridge. This idea never gained community support. A roundabout is worth reconsidering now because it would provide many traffic circulation benefits at this difficult location. At present, very few turns are allowed at this intersection, requiring many motorists to use circuitous routes to reach their destinations. These detours are confusing for visitors and add to the traffic congestion on nearby streets.

A properly designed roundabout would allow vehicles approaching from all four directions to select the most direct route for their own purposes. This choice of movement in every direction, including left turns, is available only with a roundabout; with other intersection designs, left turns often cause unacceptable delays to the flow of traffic and must be prohibited.

A roundabout would be particularly useful if the new street is constructed from this location directly to Crescent Street as shown in Figure 7. Some traffic coming onto the island would use this new street as an alternative to Estero Boulevard (mainly local residents who would understand its advantages, especially during congested periods). Visitors would tend to continue straight on Estero, the obvious and historic through-route. A traffic signal would be required at Crescent and Estero for optimal utilization of the parallel streets.

Reducing the traffic flow on this block of Estero, even slightly, would soften the impacts of heavy pedestrian usage there. The roundabout would also allow maximum flexibility to experiment with other traffic patterns in this area, as described beginning on page 33.

A roundabout could be heavily landscaped as previously proposed, or the design could be more formal with the visual emphasis being placed on the surrounding buildings. The latter approach is illustrated in Figure 9. The first rendering is from the Sky Bridge; the second is from the

immediate approach to the roundabout, looking straight through onto Estero Boulevard. The beach park has been sited so that it provides an open view to the Gulf of Mexico at this visually prominent bend in Estero Boulevard.

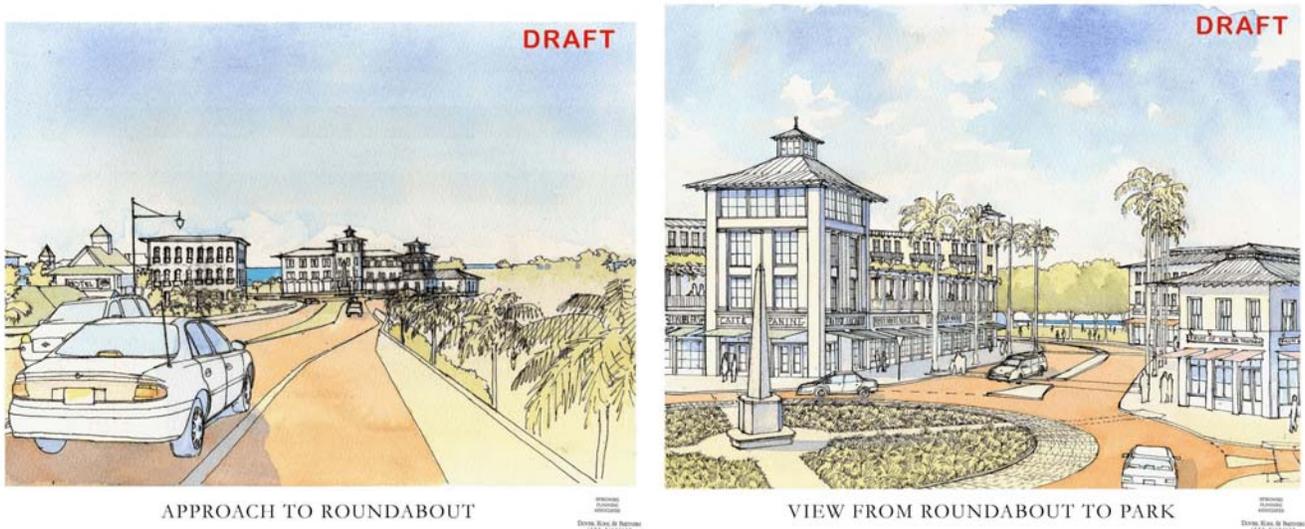


Figure 9

### ***New Intersection Design Concepts***

*“Modern roundabouts are increasingly being recognized as design alternatives to the use of traditional traffic signals for intersections for arterials. They improve both safety and efficiency for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as motor vehicles. So far, roundabouts have been built in such states as California, Colorado, Maryland, Nevada, Florida, and Vermont. These roundabouts are different from rotary or traffic circles that have been used in the United States for a number of years to give entering traffic the right-of-way and encourage higher design speeds.*

*“The modern roundabout is designed to slow entering traffic and allow all the traffic to flow through the junction freely and safely. Unlike the older rotary design, entering vehicles must yield the right-of-way to vehicles already in the circle. A deflection at the entrance forces vehicles to slow down. Traffic signals are not used, and pedestrians cross the streets at marked crosswalks.*

*“The average delay at a roundabout is estimated to be less than half of that at a typical signalized intersection. Decreased delay may mean that fewer lanes are needed. Signalized intersections often require multiple approach lanes and multiple receiving lanes, which leads to a wider road.*

*“Perhaps the greatest advantages of roundabouts are their urban design and aesthetic aspects. Roundabouts eliminate the clutter of overhead wires and signal poles and allow signage to be reduced. They can be distinctive entry points into a community or mark a special place. The central island offers an opportunity for a variety of landscape designs, as well.”*

*— Flexibility in Highway Design,  
published by the Federal Highway Administration,  
U.S. Department of Transportation*

Members of the public who attended the April 7, 2005, workshop were requested to give their opinion on six questions about the community design ideas discussed above which were presented that evening for the first time. The written responses that evening were as follows:

<b><i>Question # 1: Do you think the idea of the beachfront park should be pursued further?</i></b>			
<u>Yes</u> 56	<u>No</u> 3	<u>Not Sure</u> 12	<u>[no answer]</u> 2
<b><i>Question # 2: Do you think the idea of relocating Estero near Times Square should be pursued further?</i></b>			
<u>Yes</u> 30	<u>No</u> 17	<u>Not Sure</u> 17	<u>[no answer]</u> 9
<b><i>Question # 3: Do you prefer the beach park or relocate Estero approach?</i></b>			
<u>Beach Park</u> 44	<u>Relocate Estero</u> 17	<u>Neither</u> 4	<u>Not Sure</u> 8
<b><i>Question # 4: Do you think enough drivers would use the new parallel street to provide relief on Estero Blvd?</i></b>			
<u>Yes</u> 42	<u>No</u> 13	<u>Not Sure</u> 14	<u>[no answer]</u> 4
<b><i>Question # 5: Do you think the pedestrian bridge over Estero Blvd should be pursued further?</i></b>			
<u>Yes</u> 48	<u>No</u> 13	<u>Not Sure</u> 10	<u>[no answer]</u> 2
<b><i>Question # 6: What is your reaction to a roundabout at the intersection of Estero Blvd and Fifth Street?</i></b>			
<u>Love It</u> 33	<u>Hate It</u> 4	<u>Neutral</u> 7	<u>Want to Learn</u> 29

## C. Analysis of Street Alternatives

Ten distinct options for improving Estero Boulevard between Crescent Street and the Sky Bridge were developed as a result of the 2005 planning charrette and ongoing work by the Traffic Mitigation Agency. All ten options were analyzed for traffic performance using the “Synchro” traffic simulation model and were ranked using professional judgment of the consulting team using a walkability/livability index and as to right-of-way and feasibility. This section describes the ten options and presents a comparative analysis of existing conditions and each option.

The first five options have one common aspect: they require the town to acquire right-of-way to build a short new street between Crescent and the foot of the bridge, as shown in Figure 7.

In Option 1, the new street would serve traffic in both directions, providing an alternate route for traffic coming off and on the bridge. With the traffic flow split onto two streets, the interference now caused by pedestrians crossing Estero would be less detrimental to overall traffic flow. A raised pedestrian island in Estero would further assist traffic by allowing pedestrians to cross more easily without stopping traffic. Option 1 includes a roundabout at the foot of the Sky Bridge so that the traffic-splitting benefits would be available for traffic traveling in both directions. A traffic signal would be needed at Crescent and Estero to balance traffic flow on both streets.

Option 2 would move all traffic onto the new street, allowing the existing Estero to be converted into a pedestrian mall. Pedestrians could move freely across the mall without any interference to through traffic. The roundabout is shown for Option 2 because without it, vehicles leaving the island from the north end would have to be routed along Old San Carlos, under the Sky Bridge, and then onto Crescent to reach the bridge. A similar arrangement for exiting traffic was tested during the winter and spring of 2005; it stopped performing well when traffic was at its heaviest, at which times those vehicles were unable to smoothly join the main traffic stream leaving the island.<sup>4</sup> However, with the addition of a roundabout, this traffic could enter the bridge directly rather than first traveling under the bridge.

Option 3 would allow vehicles to use both the existing Estero and the new street, but both streets would operate as one-way streets. A roundabout is not needed with this travel pattern. Part of Estero would have a raised pedestrian island, possibly using an alternating light to help the two southbound travel lanes merge back into one lane near Crescent Street. (A similar traffic pattern was suggested in 2004 last year by a subcommittee of the Fort Myers Beach Civic Association.)

Option 4 would be physically similar to Option 1 but would reserve the existing Estero for trolleys, trams, pedestrians, emergency vehicles, and perhaps other permitted vehicles such as those with several occupants or for local residents or businesses.

Option 5 would be similar to Option 1 but would not use a roundabout. The traffic benefits of the new street would not be available to traffic entering the island from the Sky Bridge, but the cost of (and potential controversy over) the roundabout would be avoided. Option 5 could probably be converted to Option 1 at a future date if retrofitted with a roundabout.

Option 6 would realign Estero Boulevard using gently sloped curves typically used for highways, thus avoiding the sharper turns used in Options 1 through 5. This option would not need any traffic signals or a roundabout. Traffic on Estero Boulevard destined for the north end of the

---

<sup>4</sup> The results of this test are presented in “Speed Delay Study Technical Memorandum” by CRSPE, Inc., July 2005

island would use Crescent, Third, and Old San Carlos in place of the current left-turn lane at the foot of the Sky Bridge.

Option 7 is similar to Option 6 but the main traffic flow at the foot of the Sky Bridge would be partially elevated to allow pedestrians to use an underpass to avoid interfering with traffic flow.

Options 8 and 9 assume that the center turn lane beyond Crescent would be converted to allow transit vehicles to use that lane (presumably in the direction of peak congestion). Options 8 and 9 would allow the continuation of the transit lane from Crescent to the foot of the Sky Bridge.

Option 8 uses existing streets only. A two-way trolley/tram lane would be provided on Estero Boulevard between Crescent and Fifth, replacing the existing travel lane on Estero furthest from the beach. Regular traffic heading north on Estero would turn right on Crescent; vehicles heading toward the Sky Bridge would then turn left on Fifth, while all others would continue on Crescent, then use Third and Old San Carlos to return to Lynn Hall Park and points further north.

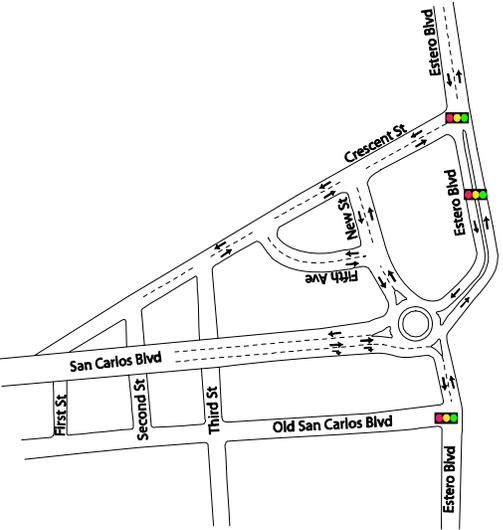
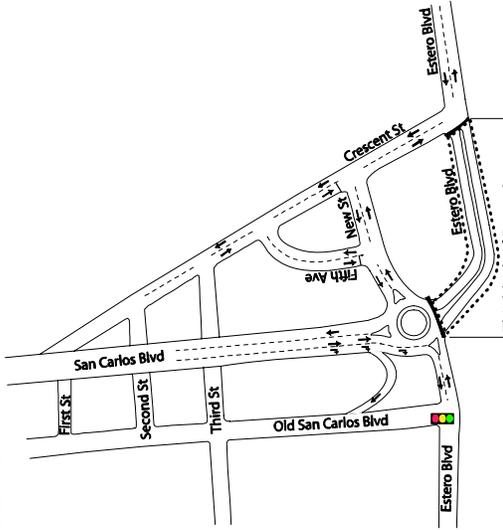
Option 9 also uses existing streets only. Estero Boulevard between Crescent and Fifth would be widened to add a third lane, which would be used by transit vehicles only. The pedestrian signal at Times Square would be removed and replaced by a pair of regular traffic signals on Estero Boulevard, one at Fifth (at the foot of the bridge) and one at Crescent Street.

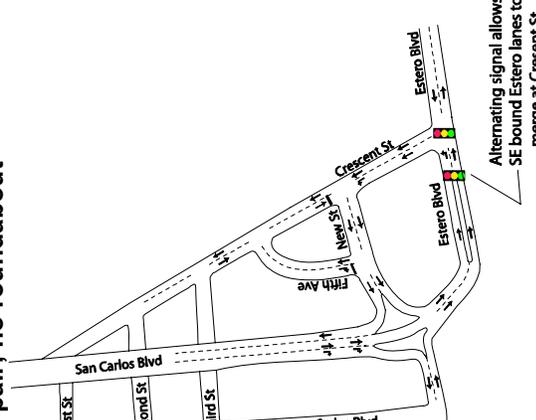
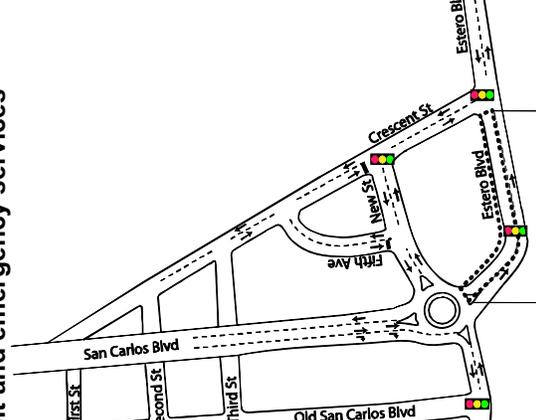
Option 10 is similar to Option 7 except for three factors. First, traffic coming onto the island on the Sky Bridge would not return to ground level and then rise again, as in Option 7, but would remain elevated until it passes over a pedestrian underpass. Second, Estero Boulevard would be relocated northward slightly to follow the same path as the new street in Options 1 through 5, but its intersections with Crescent Street would use gentle curves rather than angled intersections. Third, Center Street would not be reopened.

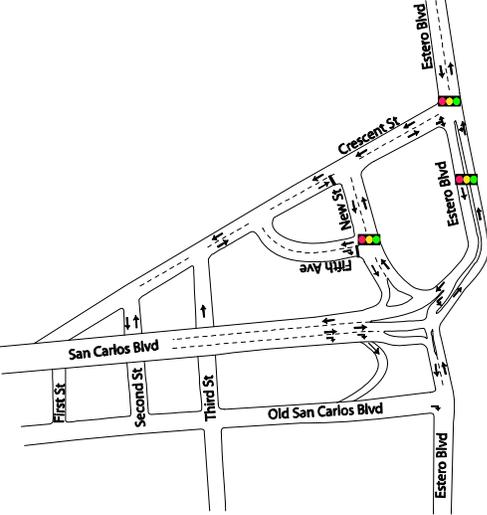
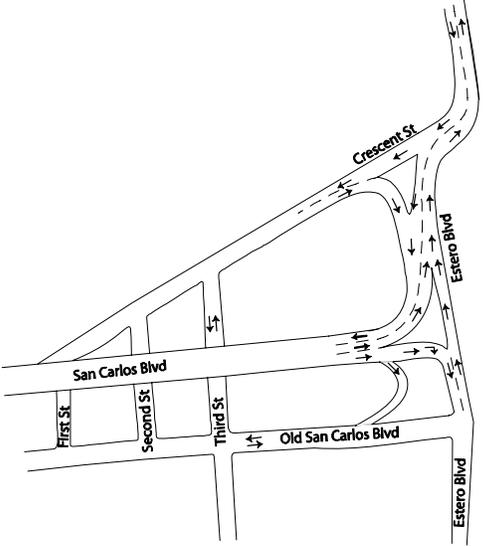
Options 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 all include the reopening of Center Street to traffic from the Sky Bridge to Old San Carlos. However, the computer model was not able to measure whether this street opening would improve traffic flow.

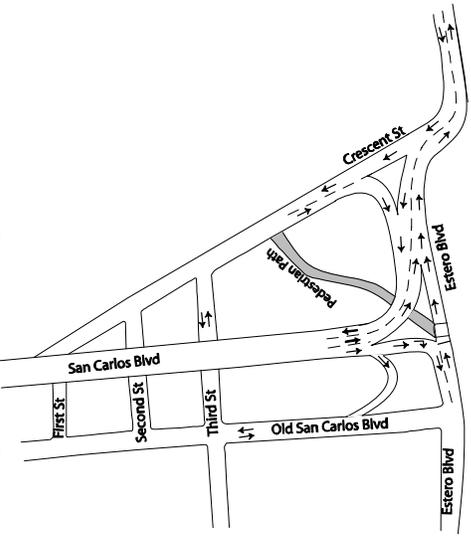
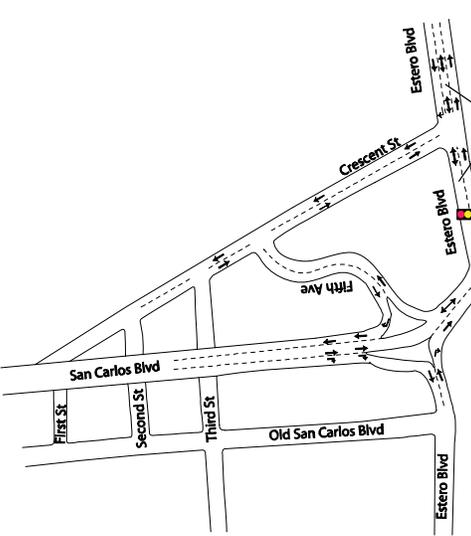
The following pages present simple sketches of each option and a numerical ranking of 1 to 5 on three separate scales. For each scale, 1 is the least favorable ranking and 5 is the most favorable, as described in Table 1. Table 2 presents the analysis of all ten options, followed by a summary of the rankings for all options.

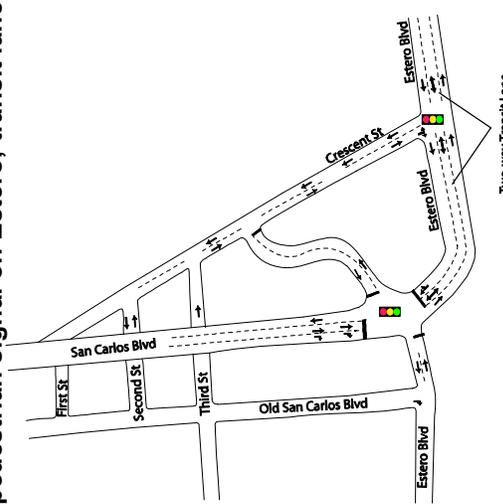
<b>TABLE 1 — SCORING KEY</b>		
<b>A. Traffic Performance</b>		
<b>1</b> = <i>gridlock or poor local circulation</i>		<b>5</b> = <i>acceptable traffic flow, minimal queuing, good local circulation</i>
<b>B. Walkability/Livability</b>		
<b>1</b> = <i>fast speeds, auto-oriented urban design and land use, low livability and sense of place</i>		<b>5</b> = <i>moderate traffic speeds, pedestrian-supportive urban design and land use, strong sense of place</i>
<b>C. Right-of-Way/ Feasibility</b>		
<b>1</b> = <i>high anticipated R-O-W cost, significant technical hurdles</i>		<b>5</b> = <i>low anticipated R-O-W cost, few technical hurdles</i>

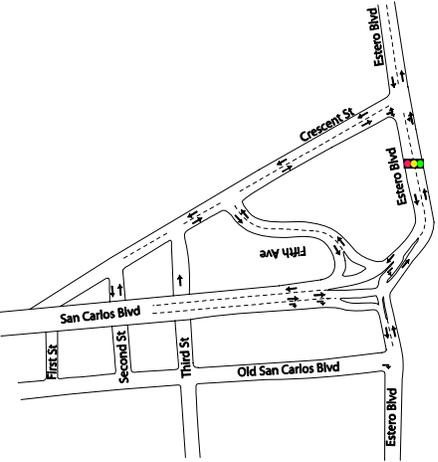
Option	Traffic Performance	Walkability/Livability	ROW/Feasibility
<p><b>Option 1 – Roundabout with full circulation</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 1</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Through Traffic: Moves traffic through area at a moderate pace. Occasional queues at some intersections.</p> <p>Local Traffic: Allows traffic to move on and off the bridge as well as providing a full range of route choices for local trips.</p> <p>Through and Local Traffic: As with all options, congested conditions beyond Crescent will continue to cause delays for incoming traffic and for local traffic.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Highly walkable. Lower traffic speeds and frequent intersections provide a safe and attractive pedestrian environment and also allow pedestrian-scale development to line the streets. Strong potential to build upon and magnify the existing sense of place.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Requires construction of “New Street”, a parallel road to Estero between 5<sup>th</sup> and Crescent. As discussed in the design charrette, this street would be part of the redevelopment plan of the property and need not incur additional ROW costs. Some land may be needed for the roundabout, depending on final design.</p>
<p><b>Option 2 – Roundabout with Estero closed between 5<sup>th</sup> and Crescent; reopen Center Street</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 2</p> <p>This block of Estero becomes a pedestrian mall (seasonally or year-round)</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Through Traffic: Putting all northbound traffic onto New Street unbalances the roundabout and exacerbates pedestrian crossing delays. Lack of gaps in the roundabout for traffic and concentration of pedestrian crossings on New Street create extensive queuing on all legs of the roundabout.</p> <p>Local Traffic: One-way movement on Center Street (exiting the bridge) might provide a convenient trolley transfer point.</p> <p>Through and Local Traffic: This option is not optimal for either traffic movement or pedestrian movement.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Highly walkable. Traffic speeds are frequently reduced to zero due to queuing problems -- crossings at the roundabout will be easily accomplished between the static vehicles. Lower traffic speeds and frequent intersections provide a safe and attractive pedestrian environment and also allow pedestrian-scale development to line the streets. Strong potential to build upon and magnify the existing sense of place; however, the very poor traffic performance limits the desirability for either local or through traffic.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Requires construction of “New Street”, a parallel road to Estero between 5<sup>th</sup> and Crescent. As discussed in the design charrette, this street would be part of the redevelopment plan of the property and need not incur additional ROW costs. Some land may be needed for the roundabout, depending on final design.</p>

Option	Traffic Performance	Walkability/Livability	ROW/Feasibility
<p><b>Option 3 – Estero/New Street one-way pair; no roundabout</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 3</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><b>Through Traffic:</b> Southbound traffic coming over the bridge is forced down Estero, due to no left turn onto New Street. With this volume of traffic, the pedestrian signal on Estero creates queuing onto the bridge, but it clears with the signal change and does not create a permanent queue on the bridge.</p> <p><b>Local Traffic:</b> Traffic pattern could allow for left turns from New St. onto Estero, but heavy volumes coming over the bridge would create serious queuing.</p> <p><b>Through and Local Traffic:</b> This option is suboptimal for either local or through traffic movement.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Minimally walkable. The unrestricted flow over the bridge creates a less walkable condition that is mitigated by the pedestrian signal to some extent. However, the pedestrian signal neither prevents nor mitigates the undesirable effects of the higher speeds in the area upstream of the signal. Pedestrian crossing to the beach is restricted to the pedestrian signal and the signal at Estero and Crescent (this is the alternating lane signal). Potential for urban development is more limited than in Options 1, 2 and 4 due to the higher speed of traffic during off-peak periods.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Requires construction of “New Street”, a parallel road to Estero between 5<sup>th</sup> and Crescent. As discussed in the design charrette, this street would be part of the redevelopment plan of the property and need not incur additional ROW costs. This option does not include a roundabout, so there is no roundabout ROW cost. This option could be constructed within existing ROW, except for New Street.</p>
<p><b>Option 4 – Roundabout with northbound Estero between Crescent and 5<sup>th</sup> reserved for transit and emergency services</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 4</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><b>Through Traffic:</b> Only transit and emergency vehicles would use Estero NB between Crescent and New Street; all traffic would be allowed SB on this section. Performance is similar to Option 1, but direction of all NB traffic from Estero onto Crescent and New Street creates some imbalance in the roundabout and queuing along New Street, Crescent and Estero. A signal at Crescent and New Street reduces (but does not eliminate) the delay. Works well for transit.</p> <p><b>Local Traffic:</b> Roundabout provides all options for local circulation except for restricted NB traffic on Estero. Imbalance noted for through traffic also affects local traffic circulation.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Highly walkable. As with Option 1, lower traffic speeds and frequent intersections provide a safe and attractive pedestrian environment and also allow pedestrian-scale development to line the streets. Strong potential to build upon and magnify the existing sense of place.</p> <p>In addition, the transit way option provides a foundation for greater use of transit as a part of a more balanced transportation system.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Requires construction of “New Street”, a parallel road to Estero between 5<sup>th</sup> and Crescent. As discussed in the design charrette, this street would be part of the redevelopment plan of the property and need not incur additional ROW costs. Some land may be needed for the roundabout, depending on final design.</p>

Option	Traffic Performance	Walkability/Livability	ROW/Feasibility
<p><b>Option 5 – Addition of New Street with unsignalized intersection (no roundabout)</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 5</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><u>Through Traffic:</u> Provides a range of route choices through two-way design of all streets. Left turns from North Estero onto the bridge are prohibited as they are today. This option provides good vehicle access on and off the island. Synchro model runs of this option did not display significant queuing.</p> <p><u>Local Traffic:</u> Local traffic circulation is constrained – left turns are not possible onto or off of the bridge. Local traffic that is west of the bridge will have to travel under the bridge in order to reach the bridge using New Street.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Speeding during non-peak periods is a primary concern, as cars coming over the bridge have no reason to slow down until reaching either a pedestrian signal or the signal at the intersection of Crescent and Estero. These higher speeds would decrease pedestrian comfort and safety. However, the two-way operation of the streets and the frequent intersections still provide a walkable environment appropriate for urban scale development. This option does not preclude creating a sense of place in the local area.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Requires construction of “New Street,” a parallel road to Estero between 5<sup>th</sup> and Crescent. As discussed in the design charrette, this street would be part of the redevelopment plan of the property and need not incur additional ROW costs. This option does not include a roundabout, so roundabout ROW is not a factor. This option could be constructed within existing ROW, except for New Street.</p>
<p><b>Option 6 – Highway-geometry reconstruction of Estero Blvd.</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 6</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><u>Through Traffic:</u> This option reconstructs portions of Crescent and Estero to create a road designed for high speeds at the foot of the bridge. This option provides efficient travel through the area and onto or off of the bridge.</p> <p><u>Local Traffic:</u> This option provides for very limited local circulation onto or off of Estero.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Not walkable. Road designs of this type are suburban in nature, and experience since the 1950’s has shown that these road designs tend to blight to the areas through which they pass. Attempts to improve the character of the local community would be severely hampered by a design of this type. The high speed design (45 mph) would provide a dangerous pedestrian crossing obstruction. This design will curtail access to the waterfront and change the character away from its small-town roots.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>The high speed geometry of this design requires the realignment of Estero and Crescent Streets, limiting adjoining redevelopment to more highway-oriented uses. The setbacks and design requirements for this type of road would reduce the developable area of the site. The property owner’s willingness to donate the property is not known; all ROW may have to be purchased. Alternatively, if Estero is abandoned, a land swap might be arranged with the land owner for the new alignment.</p>

Option	Traffic Performance	Walkability/Livability	ROW/Feasibility
<p><b>Option 7 – Highway-geometry reconstruction of Estero Blvd. with a pedestrian underpass</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 7</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><u>Through Traffic:</u> This design is similar to Option 6, except that Estero Blvd. would remain elevated as it enters and exits the bridge and would pass over a pedestrian path before returning to grade. Traffic benefits are expected from the pedestrian underpass but could not be quantified by the model. Due to the complete channelization of the road, traffic would move well through the area onto and off of the bridge.</p> <p><u>Local Traffic:</u> This option provides for very limited local circulation onto or off of Estero.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Not walkable. The pedestrian underpass would provide grade-separated access beneath a "Great Wall of China" barrier of Estero Blvd., but the previously walkable areas nearby would be degraded. The suburban highway geometry design precludes pedestrian-oriented development, so that even if sidewalks and pedestrian connections are provided, they will be less usable for pedestrians.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>This option will require at least as much ROW as Option 6, plus add't ROW for the on-ramp from Estero to the west. The feasibility of this design is in question. A complete preliminary design has not been attempted, but rudimentary calculations of the area required to construct the pedestrian overpass and related elevated facilities indicate the physical space may be too constrained for this option. In addition, the expense of constructing elevated facilities is far in excess of the expense for the at-grade facilities.</p>
<p><b>Option 8 – Existing street geometry with transit lane on Estero between Crescent and 5<sup>th</sup></b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 8</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><u>Through Traffic:</u> Queues form on the bridge SB whenever the pedestrian signal is activated, but queues are not permanent and traffic does move over the bridge in both directions.</p> <p><u>Local Traffic:</u> Left turns from North Estero onto the bridge are prohibited as they are today; left turns onto North Estero would also be prohibited by this design. Southbound traffic on the bridge would continue to have only one convenient opportunity to enter the local traffic pattern (the right turn at the foot of the bridge). Transit lane would not have left turn at the foot of the bridge. Northbound traffic on Estero would have to turn onto Crescent and 5<sup>th</sup> to reach the bridge.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Continuous right-turns from Estero onto Crescent and from 5<sup>th</sup> onto the bridge will create difficulty for pedestrian crossing. The longer block of Crescent without the new street may discourage vehicles from using this bypass or create higher speeds that are detrimental to safe and comfortable walking conditions.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>This option uses existing ROW and street geometry, so no additional ROW is required.</p>

Option	Traffic Performance	Walkability/Livability	ROW/Feasibility
<p><b>Option 9 – Existing street geometry; signal at 5<sup>th</sup> /Estero and Estero/Crescent; no pedestrian signal on Estero; transit lane</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Option 9 Two-way Transit Lane</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><u>Through Traffic:</u> Some queuing on the bridge southbound, but cars clear within a few cycles. Northbound traffic moves fine.</p> <p><u>Local Traffic:</u> In order to get LOS D at the intersection of Estero and 5th, left turning movements had to be eliminated, which hampers local traffic circulation. Also, as at present, no east-west through movements would be allowed at this intersection. The transit lane on Estero can be added with a permitted northbound left turn at Estero and 5<sup>th</sup> and still allow the intersection to operate at LOS D.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Removing the pedestrian signal on Estero creates a long block (&gt;600') encouraging mid-block crossings. The increased through-traffic along Estero, in addition to higher speeds during off-peak periods, are two factors making mid-block crossings less safe.</p> <p>Also creates situation of an arterial road optimized for through traffic separating two pedestrian-oriented locations. Intersection cycle lengths of 90 seconds (Estero/5<sup>th</sup>) and 100 seconds (Estero/Crescent) are longer than desirable for good walkability, encouraging crossing against the light. Transit lane may require reducing sidewalk width, reducing walkability.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Addition of transit lane will require additional ROW along Estero between Crescent and 5<sup>th</sup>, unless sidewalks are narrowed.</p>
<p><b>Option 10 – Reconstruction of Estero Blvd. with a pedestrian underpass</b></p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><u>Through Traffic:</u></p> <p><u>Local Traffic:</u></p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p>

Option	Traffic Performance	Walkability/Livability	ROW/Feasibility
<p><b>Existing Conditions – Existing streets with no changes</b></p>  <p>Existing</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p><u>Through Traffic:</u> Extensive peak-hour queuing on bridge.</p> <p><u>Local Traffic:</u> Limited left turns at intersection of 5<sup>th</sup> and Estero force local traffic to circulate under the San Carlos bridge. Local circulation pattern wastes vehicle miles of travel and provides limited opportunities for local business access.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Slow traffic speeds and buildings to back of sidewalk create a comfortable pedestrian environment despite the inadequate sidewalks. However, lack of extensive pedestrian-friendly development fails to capitalize on these “good bones” of design. Poor traffic circulation creates a “pedestrians versus cars” mentality that is detrimental to all sides. Additional pedestrian-oriented development requires better traffic circulation for greater livability.</p>	<p><b>1 2 3 4 5</b></p> <p>Existing conditions use existing ROW.</p>

SUMMARY OF OPTIONS:	Traffic Performance	Walkability/Livability	ROW/Feasibility
Option 1 – Roundabout with full circulation	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 2 – Roundabout with Estero closed between 5 <sup>th</sup> & Crescent; reopen Center St.	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 3 – Estero/New Street one-way pair; no roundabout	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 4 – Roundabout with northbound Estero reserved for transit and emergency	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 5 – Addition of New Street with unsignalized intersection (no RBT)	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 6 – Highway-geometry reconstruction of Estero Blvd.	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 7 – Highway-geometry reconstruction with pedestrian underpass	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 8 – Existing street geometry with transit lane on Estero	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 9 – Existing street geometry; move signals to 5 <sup>th</sup> & Crescent; add transit lane	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Option 10 – Reconstruction of Estero Blvd. with a pedestrian underpass	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
Existing Conditions – Existing streets with no changes	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>

None of the street alternatives just discussed affect conditions beyond Crescent Street. It is readily apparent during congested periods that the conditions causing the congestion continue beyond Crescent Street and even beyond the end of the “Pedestrian Commercial” district (which extends to Diamondhead Resort).

The town’s ongoing efforts to improve the blocks between Crescent Street and Old San Carlos Boulevard are critical both to the character of the downtown area and to traffic congestion. However, congestion on these blocks (and northward across the Sky Bridge) will still result from the inability of traffic to flow smoothly beyond Crescent Street. The level of this congestion is difficult to predict using traffic simulation software, but will undoubtedly still be very substantial.

Two larger congestion relief issues deserve attention. Additional congestion will continue to be caused by growth elsewhere in Lee County and the state because area residents enjoy visiting the beaches. The town has no regulatory authority over such growth, but comfortable and efficient public transit, whether on trolleys or trams, can provide mobility to island visitors (as well as residents) without adding more vehicles to the lines of traffic waiting to enter and leave the island. Public transit is discussed further on pages 48 and 52.

Another type of relief could be provided by building another bridge to Fort Myers Beach. Four “new bridge” alternatives as illustrated in Figure 10 were discussed in the Comprehensive Plan on pages 7-A-48 through 52. The Lee County Metropolitan Planning Agency (MPO) has recently evaluated two of these alternatives, a southerly bridge to Coconut Road and a northerly bridge to the end of Main Street on San Carlos Island. This evaluation was conducted to determine whether any of these improvements would provide enough relief for congestion on Estero Boulevard to justify inclusion on the MPO’s “2030 highway needs assessment,” which is a map and list of road improvements that are needed throughout Lee County by the year 2030 (without considering affordability). The least valuable road projects from this needs assessment are later eliminated until a final list includes only roads that could be built by the year 2030 with available funding sources; the final list is called the “2030 financially feasible plan,” which will be prepared in early 2006.

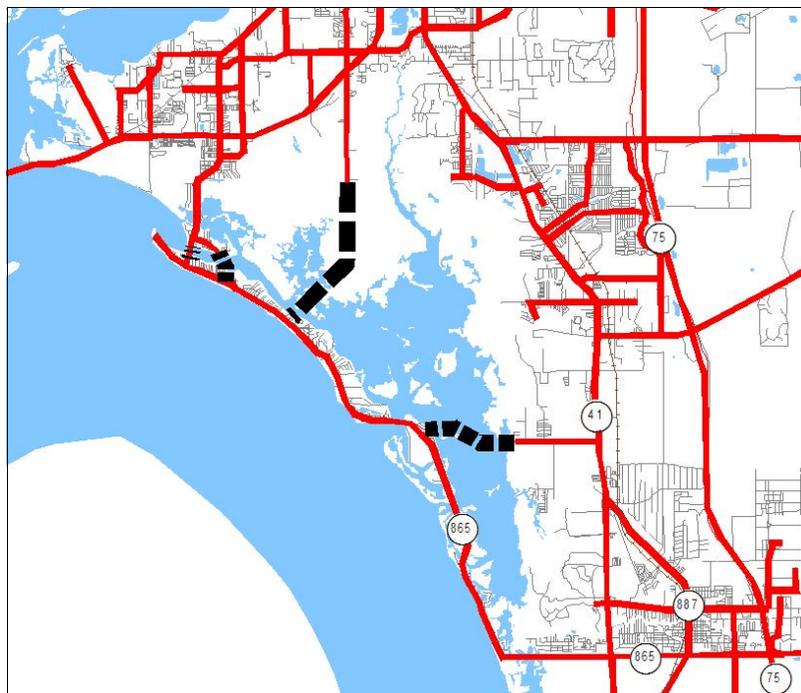


Figure 10

The final draft of the “2030 highway needs assessment” was completed in September 2005 and is scheduled for adoption by the MPO in November of 2005. Figure 11 shows the location of each of these road improvements on a map. Here is a summary of the MPO staff analysis of the two “new bridge” alternatives for Fort Myers Beach:

**Additional bridges to the beach communities** At the outset of the plan development process, staff submitted the three new bridge alternatives listed in the Fort Myers Beach comprehensive plan for environmental screening through FDOT’s ETDM process [*Efficient Transportation Decision Making, a preliminary impact review by state and federal agencies*]. For two of the alternatives, the Coconut Road extension to Lovers Key and the Winkler Road extension to mid-Estero Island, the reviewing agencies reported a total of seven issues on which they had such serious concerns that dispute resolution would be required if the project could ever be permitted. For the third alternative, connecting Main Street near the southeast end of San Carlos Island with Estero Boulevard in the general area of the town hall, such serious concerns were raised for only three issues.

The Coconut Road to Lovers Key alternative was tested in the first 2030 needs alternative network (combined with a Coconut Road interchange with I 75). The model predicted that it would reduce peak season daily traffic using the Bonita Beach Road bridge in 2030 by about 9,900, but relieve the Matanzas Pass Bridge of only 3,500 daily trips — not enough for a significant improvement in the level of service. The San Carlos Island to Fort Myers Beach alternative was tested in the second alternative needs network. The model predicted it that 11,200 daily trips would choose to use the new bridge, leaving only 17,500 daily trips using the existing Matanzas Pass Bridge, and improve levels of service to D or better throughout Fort Myers Beach and San Carlos Island and on the bridges and San Carlos Boulevard south of Summerlin Road. This alternative performed so well that the TAC and CAC decided to dispense with testing the Winkler extension alternative, and kept the San Carlos Island route for the remaining network alternative and recommended it be included in the 2030 highway needs assessment [*see improvement #111 on Figure 11*].

It is unfortunate that whatever kind of relief can be provided to traffic congestion will be continually eroded by additional growth in the surrounding area. It will also be eroded by motorists who may have avoided Fort Myers Beach in the past, or reached it with public transit, if they take advantage of reduced congestion and begin driving to Fort Myers Beach during peak periods.

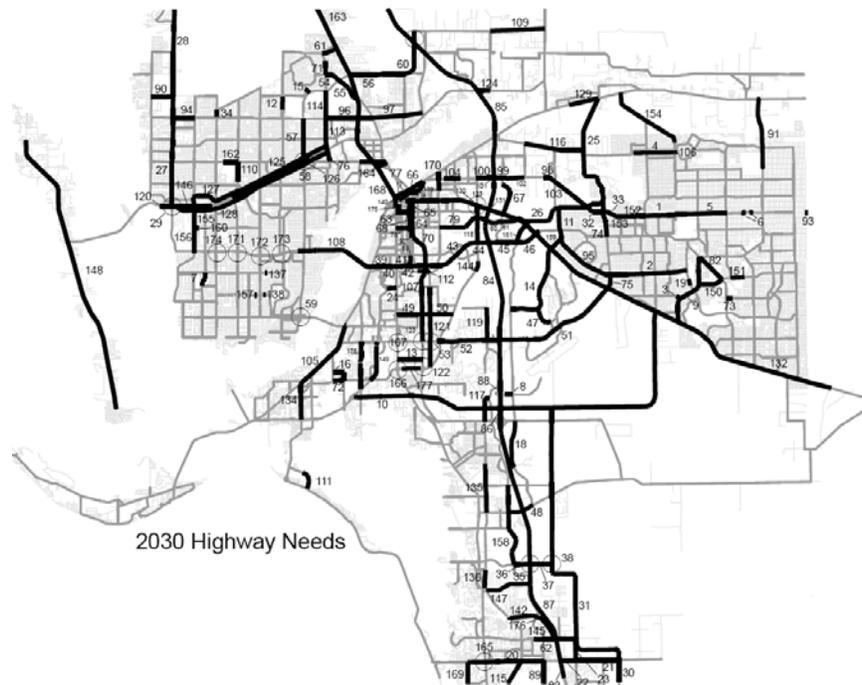


Figure 11 (new roads indicated by heavy black lines)

## **D. Recommendations on Times Square Area**

The recommendations described in the previous section of this report are now under evaluation by town officials. None of the alternatives described would require any amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, although there is considerable urgency facing the town due to the impending redevelopment described on page 24.

The only related changes to the Comprehensive Plan that have been identified are:

- Delete Policy 7-H-3 regarding left-turns on Estero Boulevard as northbound traffic passes Times Square, as discussed on page 24.
-

## SECTION 5. ESTERO BOULEVARD – Length of Island

**ISSUE STATEMENT:** The Comprehensive Plan established the following vision for the future: “Estero Boulevard has become the premier public space on the island, with a strong sense of place . . . pedestrians now cross safely and many people use the expanded fleet of trolleys to move around the island.” There continues to be a strong consensus to make Estero Boulevard more friendly to pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit and to make it more beautiful as well. Other high priorities are to bury overhead power lines to beautify the town and protect the wires from high winds, and to reduce the frequent “ponding” of rainfall that cannot flow off the pavement in many places. However, there is no consensus about how to pay for these improvements, or how they might be made in a logical sequence over ten or twenty years.

**BACKGROUND:** The 2000 Estero Boulevard Streetscape Master Plan projected a total cost of \$20–\$30 million to carry out all of its proposed improvements to Estero Boulevard (including up to \$7 million to move the rest of the power lines underground). This figure is well beyond the ability of the town to finance at current levels of taxation.

### A. Evaluation of Existing Policies

**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.*

**EVALUATION OF OBJECTIVE 1-A:** This objective remains valid today. Many positive steps have been taken in recent years, as described in the evaluations of Policies 1-A-2, 1-B-2, 7-B-3, and 7-E-1. However, Estero Boulevard is still far from being worthy of the designation of “premier public space” on Fort Myers Beach. Specific issues yet to be resolved are discussed beginning on page 51.

**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.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 1-A-2:** As a result of this policy, the town commissioned the WilsonMiller engineering firm to prepare a streetscape master plan. This plan, completed in June 2000, presented design alternatives for each segment of Estero Boulevard as it passes through six geographical areas of differing character: north end,

core area, civic complex, quiet center, high-rise resort, and south end. Cost estimates were provided for all alternatives.<sup>5</sup>

**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, 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 human scale and “beach cottage character” (such as the Huston Studio or Hussey tourist information center).*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 1-A-3:** By 2003 the new land development code had been completed to incorporate all of the redevelopment design goals listed in this policy.

**POLICY 1-B-2** *Improve the appearance of the town throughout by landscaping public property and rights-of-way with native vegetation.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 1-B-2:** This policy has been implemented, though with fewer physical results thus far than had been anticipated:

- The improvements to Old San Carlos Boulevard have been completed, with native coconut trees being the predominant landscape theme.
- The plant palette in the streetscape master plan is weighted heavily in favor of native trees, shrubs, and ground cover.
- Five native trees that typically survived Hurricane Charley were nominated for an election for the town’s “official tree”: coconut palm, silver buttonwood, southern live oak, wild tamarind, and gumbo limbo. The gumbo limbo tree was selected and is now being planted on town projects.
- Since 1998 the town has offered a neighborhood landscaping program. A tree booklet was prepared that offers twelve types of trees that are salt tolerant and are good choices for planting near the beach. The town offers to pay half the cost of purchasing and planting trees along neighborhood streets for participating neighborhoods; \$20,000 has been budgeted each year.
- Residents can also buy individual coconut palms and gumbo limbos from the town at half price to help replace trees lost to the hurricane.

**POLICY 1-B-5** *Develop a program for placing utilities underground that addresses both public and private sector development.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 1-B-5:** Between 1996 and 2002, all overhead wires have been moved underground on all of Old San Carlos, throughout Times Square, and on Estero Boulevard from Times Square to the Lani Kai. Power lines were already underground from the public library to Donora Boulevard. It has long been a goal of the

---

<sup>5</sup> *Estero Boulevard Streetscape Master Plan, WilsonMiller, Fort Myers and Naples, Florida, June 5, 2000*

town to see overhead wires moved underground on the remainder of Estero Boulevard; see the evaluation of Policy 14-B-1 and a more thorough discussion on page 53.

**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.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 3-A-4:** The streetscape portion of this policy was carried out as part of the streetscape master plan. The regulatory changes in subsection (ii) have been included in the town’s new land development code. Architectural guidelines for cottage renovations have not been prepared.

**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.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 3-C-1:** The design criteria have been prepared and are now in the land development code in a new “SANTINI” zoning district. The current owners of Santini Plaza and the adjoining Fish-Tale Marina are very interested in pursuing the public/private partnership described in this policy and redeveloping the shopping center accordingly. The partnership will have to involve Lee County because the county still owns and operates Estero Boulevard; during the coming year the town will determine whether county officials are prepared to proceed.

**OBJECTIVE 4-A SMALL-TOWN CHARACTER** — *Maintain the small-town character of Fort Myers Beach and the pedestrian-oriented “public realm” that allows people to move around without their cars even in the midst of peak-season congestion.*

**EVALUATION OF OBJECTIVE 4-A:** Maintaining “small-town character” continues to be a focus of most activities of town government, including the evaluation and analysis contained in this report.

**POLICY 4-A-2** *The Town of Fort Myers Beach values its vibrant economy and walkable commercial areas. Through this plan, the town will ensure that new commercial activities, when allowed, will contribute to the pedestrian-oriented public realm.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 4-A-2:** The new land development code carries out this policy through its property development regulations and commercial design standards.

**POLICY 7-A-1 CONGESTION:** *Every winter, Estero Boulevard becomes so crowded that traffic backs up, sometimes for miles in both directions. Much of this congestion is caused by visitors, who will continue to frequent the beaches regardless of development levels on Estero Island. Despite the road congestion, the town welcomes visitors and intends to provide mobility alternatives as described in this plan.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-A-1:** Mobility alternatives such as sidewalks and bike paths have been pursued in great detail in the streetscape master plan, in the recent improvements to Old San Carlos Boulevard, and in the ongoing redesign for North Estero Boulevard. During the past year, the town's Traffic Mitigation Agency has championed and carried out important transit improvements to allow visitors to reach Fort Myers Beach without driving their own vehicles. These include greatly increased trolley service from Summerlin Square shopping center to Bowditch Point; temporarily eliminating trolley fares; adding a trolley-only lane on the Sky Bridge (using the existing southbound breakdown lane); and experimenting with electronic signs that advise waiting passengers exactly when the next trolley will arrive.

**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:** In addition to the streetscape master plan, the town has made progress on other improvements to Estero Boulevard. The town has acquired a 5-foot-wide sidewalk easement on the bay side of Estero from the owners of Seafarer's and Helmerich Plazas. The previous right-of-way at this point was only 50 feet wide which does not allow for proper sidewalks on both sides or for a median refuge island that would allow pedestrians to cross in two stages without stopping traffic with the pedestrian signal.

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.

**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;*
- v. *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.

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-D-2:** The town has not been able to convince county officials to use tourism funding sources to supplement transit service to Fort Myers Beach. However, the town itself subsidized increased service this past year and waived trolley fares, demonstrating how these service improvements increase ridership. In 1993 through 1995 fare were also waived and service was increased; ridership increased quickly then as well.

The streetscape master plan addressed improved trolley pull-offs and bus shelters. No progress has been made on replacing diesel trolleys with clean-fuel vehicles.

**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).*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-D-3:** In 2000 the town converted its road impact fee program into a transportation impact fee program as proposed in this policy. In the second half of 2005 the town began examining funding for improved transit service from new development occurring on the mainland that is oriented to regular beach users.

Historic ridership on the beach trolley system is summarized in the following table.

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Total Riders</i>	<i>Increase over 1996</i>	<i>Service Notes</i>
1992	268,306		
1993	424,643		free
1994	463,352		free; more frequent service
1995	466,018		free; continued frequent service
1996	238,754		fare reinstated
1997	251,871	5%	
1998	243,478	2%	
1999	260,845	9%	
2000	369,992	55%	
2001	372,112	56%	
2002	342,825	44%	
2003	355,272	49%	
2004	416,710	75%	
2005	524,870	120%	more frequent service; transit-only lane
	<i>(through July only)</i>	<i>(through July only)</i>	

During the first ten months of fiscal year 2005, trolley usage has finally exceeded the Policy 7-D-3 goal of a 100% increase over 1996 ridership levels.

**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 shall consider taking on maintenance responsibility for Estero Boulevard.)*

**EVALUATION OF OBJECTIVE 7-E:** The initial steps toward this objective were taken with the streetscape master plan. The lack of funding to make major improvements has stalled this effort since that time.

**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).*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-E-1:** The town was able to obtain about \$2,000,000 of unspent funds from Lee County's former Estero Island CRA. Most of this money has been spent to improve Old San Carlos Boulevard. No physical progress has been made on improvements to Estero Boulevard; the problems have included indecision as to the best design and lack of funding to complete such a large project.

**POLICY 7-E-2 TRAFFIC CALMING:** *The town shall support two types of traffic calming to reduce speeding, which endangers lives and diminishes the quality of the pedestrian environment of Fort Myers Beach:*

- i. *The first is "active" or traditional traffic calming along residential streets, using physical techniques such as speed humps, narrowed lanes, landscaping, traffic diverters, jogs, or traffic circles at intersections.*
- ii. *The second is "passive" traffic calming along Estero Boulevard, to control speeding without reducing the number of vehicles that can use the road. Techniques include full curbs and sidewalks separated by street trees; buildings nearer the road; interesting vistas for drivers; and avoidance of overly wide travel lanes or intersections.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-E-2:** The town has funds budgeted in this fiscal year to study "active" traffic calming on Connecticut Street and adjoining streets in the upcoming fiscal year.

"Passive" traffic calming has been implemented for Old San Carlos Boulevard. It is also planned for Estero Boulevard but not yet installed. The new land development code ensures that new buildings will be placed closer to Estero Boulevard than under previous rules.

**POLICY 7-E-3 BUILDINGS CLOSE TO THE STREET:** *Where pedestrian levels are high, buildings should adjoin the sidewalk rather than be separated by parking spaces. Front walls of stores, offices, and restaurants should have large windows rather than blank walls, preferably shaded by awnings or canopies. Access to parking areas shall be off side streets wherever possible. The town's Land Development Code shall implement these concepts beginning in 1999.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-E-3:** The land development code now includes all of these principles.

**POLICY 7-E-4 SIDEWALKS AND BIKEWAYS:** *The town shall work toward major expansion of sidewalks and bikeways. In addition to the next phase of Estero Boulevard sidewalks (see Policy 7-E-1 above), the town shall support the following projects:*

- i. *Support Lee County's imminent plans to fill the gaps from Buccaneer to Estrellita Drive and from the Villa Santini Plaza to Bay Beach Lane using federal funds;*
- ii. *Initiate extensive improvements by 1999 to Old San Carlos and Crescent Street in conjunction with parking improvements (see Policy 7-F-2);*
- iii. *Initiate engineering studies by 1999 for bikeways and additional sidewalks on the second side of Estero Boulevard and improved pedestrian crossings, including consideration of a pedestrian overpass at Times Square.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-E-4:** The sidewalk from Santini Plaza to Bay Beach Lane has been completed as planned, as have the wide new sidewalks on Old San Carlos. On Estero near Times Square, a sidewalk easement has been obtained and improved pedestrian crossings have been studied, but physical improvements have not begun.

**POLICY 7-H-10 CONNECTIONS TO ESTERO BOULEVARD:** *An excessive number of streets and driveways have direct access to Estero Boulevard, reducing its ability to handle peak-season traffic. The town shall take advantage of any suitable opportunities to consolidate street connections into fewer access points onto Estero Boulevard.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-H-10:** This policy has been embedded into the land development code in section 34-676(d)(1) and 34-706(c-d).

**POLICY 10-H-3** *Provide occasional "oasis" areas (resting places for pedestrians and bicyclists) at selected trolley stops and other strategic locations along Estero Boulevard as a part of the Estero Boulevard Streetscape Plan described in Community Design Policy 1-A-3(iv). The first oasis area shall be the Newton estate at Strandview Avenue (see Policy 10-F-3) which shall be closely linked to the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail, the public trolleys and sidewalks/bike paths along Estero Boulevard, and to the public beachfront.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 10-H-3:** The second sentence of this policy was added in 2002 when the town had an opportunity to acquire the Newton estate. Despite serious damage from Hurricane Charley, Newton Park is expected to open as a public park in late 2005.

**POLICY 14-B-1** *The town would like to see major power lines placed underground to protect the lines, to avoid interruptions to evacuation due to fallen lines, and to improve the visual experience for tourists and residents.*

**EVALUATION OF POLICY 14-B-1:** Overhead wires are unsightly and are vulnerable to tropical storm and hurricane-force winds. However, undergrounding power lines is very expensive, up to \$1,000,000 per mile, and Florida Power & Light has not been willing to bear any of the costs. The undergrounding process is very disruptive unless the lines are buried while the road is being rebuilt for other purposes; as a practical matter, if undergrounding is to take place, it must be an integral part of other streetscape improvements to Estero Boulevard. See a discussion of this subject beginning on page 53.

## B. Additional Data and Analysis

The term “streetscape” refers to all the natural and man-made elements in a street right-of-way, including travel lanes, bike paths, sidewalks, street trees, signs, street lights, utility lines, drainage swales and inlets, and transit benches and shelters.

Two major problems have interfered with implementation of the Estero Boulevard Streetscape Master Plan that was completed in 2000. By far the largest problem has been financial, given the enormous cost of carrying out the entire plan. Another problem has been local resistance to a roundabout that was proposed in the master plan as a gateway feature near Times Square.

One financing option had been to place tolls on the bridges and use a large portion of the toll revenues for pedestrian and transit improvements within the town, many of which are detailed in the streetscape plan. However, there has been strong community reaction against tolling the bridges. Unless the community’s resistance to tolling abates, other revenue sources will have to be found or the streetscape improvements will have to be dramatically scaled back.

To gauge continued public support for major improvements to Estero Boulevard, members of the public who attended the April 7, 2005, workshop were asked their opinions on six potential improvements to Estero Boulevard. The written responses that evening were as follows:

<i>How important to you are the following improvements to Estero Boulevard?</i>			
<i>Underground Utilities:</i>	<u>Important</u> 66	<u>Not Important</u> 3	<i>[no answer]</i> 4
<i>Better Drainage:</i>	<u>Important</u> 65	<u>Not Important</u> 1	<i>[no answer]</i> 7
<i>Sidewalks:</i>	<u>Important</u> 67	<u>Not Important</u> 0	<i>[no answer]</i> 6
<i>Street Trees:</i>	<u>Important</u> 43	<u>Not Important</u> 22	<i>[no answer]</i> 8
<i>Bike Paths:</i>	<u>Important</u> 64	<u>Not Important</u> 5	<i>[no answer]</i> 4
<i>Transit Facilities:</i>	<u>Important</u> 49	<u>Not Important</u> 14	<i>[no answer]</i> 10

These results indicate outstanding support for streetscape improvements. However, the cost problems that have thus far derailed physical improvements have not been resolved.

A potential funding source for some improvements is Lee County, which currently owns and maintains Estero Boulevard from Times Square to Big Carlos Pass. However, the county’s priorities may be different than those of local residents. Before engineers are hired to design actual improvements, the town needs to decide on the basic form they should take so that the town’s livability and transportation goals will be carried out, even if the improvements are built in phases or by different entities. Several issues that need to be resolved are discussed below.

## **i. Exclusive transit lane**

A necessary first step in the design of future improvements is to determine whether Estero Boulevard can be configured to give priority to trolleys, trams, or other public transit vehicles. The streetscape master plan included many features to make public transit more convenient, such as comfortable trolley stops with adjoining crosswalks. Although exclusive lanes for transit vehicles had also been considered, they were not included in the final master plan.

The enormous increase in public transit usage during the winter of 2005 season was partly a result of the experimental use of an exclusive transit lane on the Sky Bridge (see page 48). That success has warranted a new look at the potential for exclusive transit lanes to be part of the long-range traffic solutions for Fort Myers Beach. The town and the county are in the midst of a feasibility study of exclusive transit lanes on Estero Boulevard.

Across the country, most public transit vehicles use the same travel lanes as other vehicles. On downtown streets in larger cities, transit vehicles are sometimes given priority through special turn lanes or traffic signal timing. In a small number of cases, entire travel lanes are restricted to transit vehicles only. Exclusive transit lanes are rare because the number of transit vehicles per hour must be quite high, typically 30 or more per hour, before there is enough benefit for the transit passengers to offset the loss to other potential uses of the same space (for wider sidewalks, on-street parking, or keeping the travel lane open to other vehicles).

The success of the exclusive transit lane on the Sky Bridge had two major factors. First, southbound traffic on the Sky Bridge is often at a standstill due to congestion on Estero Boulevard; reports of trolleys bypassing this line of cars were the best advertising that public transit could ever get. Second, this transit lane was provided without eliminating existing travel lanes or sidewalks – this lane functions as an exclusive transit lane but is actually a second use of the existing breakdown lane on the Sky Bridge.

Where there is space in the right-of-way to construct an entirely new lane, it can be used as an exclusive transit lane without eliminating existing uses. However, the constraint to this approach at Fort Myers Beach is the narrow right-of-way of Estero Boulevard in the very locations where traffic congestion originates: for instance, from Times Square to the public library. In that area, adding a travel lane would come at the expense of adequate sidewalks, which is a counter-productive strategy because every transit rider becomes a pedestrian after stepping off the vehicle. A comfortable pedestrian experience at each end of the trip is at least as important to encouraging transit usage as reducing the time spent sitting on the vehicle.

The best opportunities for encouraging transit usage by shortening the trip will be similar to the Sky Bridge experience: finding opportunities that don't involve unacceptable tradeoffs. For instance, San Carlos Boulevard is excessively wide north of the Sky Bridge, thus providing some opportunities for underused segments to better serve transit vehicles. Likewise, it may be possible for parts of the center turn lane on Estero Boulevard to be opened to transit vehicles if boarding islands could be provided for passengers at each stop.

It is unlikely that an exclusive transit lane would be justifiable along the entire length of Estero Boulevard. In those segments with adequate right-of-way for a new lane, transit vehicles can operate in mixed traffic with little or no problem. In segments with inadequate right-of-way, the tradeoffs with other potential users of the same space will limit the opportunities for exclusive transit lanes.

However, there are many other design features that can be included on Estero Boulevard to encourage transit ridership. The most obvious is providing shaded and comfortable trolley stops, where the number of minutes until the next trolley arrives is posted and complete schedules are available. These can be considered during the design phase for each segment of Estero Boulevard.

Beyond design features, there are many other factors that can increase transit ridership over time:

- Uncertainly over whether parking for private vehicles will be available or affordable;
- The use of comfortable and/or interesting transit vehicles;
- Frequency and predictability of service (e.g., will the trolley run late enough to get riders back home?)
- Fare levels — public transit is already heavily subsidized; requiring cash payment of fares raises little money but adds uncertainty that discourages ridership (e.g., Do potential riders have enough coins? Will the trolley drive provide change?)

Increased usage of public transit is essential to the future of Fort Myers Beach. There are many opportunities for design and operational features that will make transit attractive. The feasibility and usefulness of exclusive transit lanes will be evaluated in the current study which will be completed late in 2005 or early in 2006. After completion of that study, there should no further need to delay making improvements to Estero Boulevard because of uncertainties over the future of public transportation.

## **ii. Underground power lines**

For many years there has been an active debate across the country and internationally over the costs and benefits of burying power lines and other wires such as cable television and telephone wires. In the past ten years, about half the national expenditures for new power lines have gone to underground wires. However, about 80% of the nation's electric grid still uses overhead lines.<sup>6</sup>

Underground power lines cost significantly more to install. They tend to have fewer blackouts, but blackouts that do occur take longer to repair.

It is commonplace in new subdivisions for all wiring to be placed underground on aesthetic grounds alone. Overhead lines can be inoffensive where they are placed in alleys or they are visually screened by street trees, but in a new subdivision, they are usually visually intrusive.

However, converting existing overhead lines is a more difficult proposition, for several reasons:

- Unless the existing lines are due for replacement anyway, undergrounding is an additional expense that can be avoided or deferred.
- While blackouts are more likely to occur when high winds break overhead power lines, blackouts can also occur when storm surges damage electrical equipment placed at ground to serve underground power lines.
- In a new subdivision, the costs of undergrounding can be evenly spread to all benefitting property owners; but in a retrofit situation, an intuitively fair way to apportion the cost is often not available.

---

<sup>6</sup> "Out of Sight, Out of Mind?: A Study on the Costs and Benefits of Undergrounding Overhead Power Lines," Edison Electric Institute, January 2004, page 4.

- In the absence of a fair funding formula, power companies are often unwilling to move utilities underground in one area out of concern that customers in other areas will demand similar treatment or will object to paying for the improvements from which they do not personally benefit.

There are several additional factors that affect the final decision on whether to place power lines underground at Fort Myers Beach. The first is the obvious damage to overhead power lines that result from tropical storms and hurricanes. The second is the salinity and high levels of groundwater, and the potential damage that floodwaters might cause to transformers and other ground-mounted equipment; these factors are avoided with overhead power lines. The third is the narrow rights-of-way at Fort Myers Beach, which makes it important that power lines that are being moved underground avoid other underground utilities such as water and sewer lines (this problem is minimized when all utilities are being replaced at the same time).

The decision as to whether power lines should be placed underground does not have to be made for the entire island. It may be possible on some wider segments of Estero Boulevard to combine tall utility poles with shade trees planted in the right-of-way that will hide the overhead power lines from below, yet can be regularly trimmed to avoid interfering with the wires. Even if it is deemed desirable to place all major power lines underground, some segments of streetscape improvements may become unaffordable with underground lines, requiring those segments to be reconstructed with overhead lines or causing the improvements to be delayed. One segment of Estero Boulevard, from the Lani Kai to the public library, still has overhead power lines even though the lines extending in each direction are already underground; this may be the most important segment to underground in the near future.

### C. Potential Funding Sources

Only one phase of improvements to Estero Boulevard is currently funded: the northern mile from Lynn Hall Park to Bowditch Point. Because this road segment belongs to the town, approval is not needed from the county or state. Funding is from accumulated gas tax revenues and previously collected transportation impact fees.

Because funding is not in place for additional segments of Estero Boulevard, new funding sources will be required. Several potential funding sources are discussed here.

- **Transportation impact fees.** The town now collects transportation impact fees from new development. These fees are collected when building permits are issued and are used for capacity-enhancing transportation improvements.

Under the current fee schedule, replacing an existing building does not trigger the payment of a new fee. Once the remaining vacant property at Fort Myers Beach has been built upon, the current transportation impact fee program will cease to be a viable funding source for further transportation improvements even though it is apparent that the current transportation system is highly inadequate.

The proposed streetscape improvements would effectively add some capacity to Estero Boulevard, which makes them eligible for transportation impact fees. If a program were devised to charge impacts fees for *redevelopment* of property, not just for new development, this could become a viable funding source for the streetscape program.

Capacity is enhanced by streetscape improvements in many ways: sidewalks and bike paths get pedestrians out of the roadway and encourage alternate travel modes; drainage improvements increase capacity during storm events; transit pullouts and/or a dedicated transit lane would reduce vehicle traffic by promoting an alternative mode; and underground utilities are necessary to provide the space in a limited right-of-way for the other improvements.

Because these capacity enhancements are difficult to quantify using normal engineering methods, the existing methodology would have to be updated. The model would use an “improvements-driven” impact fee. Cost estimates for capacity-enhancing elements of the streetscape program would be divided by projected redevelopment activities to determine the gross impact fee cost per unit of development.

For instance, if the town expects to get 50 new residential units each year and another 50 older homes are replaced with much larger units, that combined might be the equivalent of 100 new residential units if the impact fees were based on dwelling size. At an average per unit fee of \$5,000, that would amount to \$500,000 annually. Add another \$450,000 for nonresidential redevelopment, and transportation impact fees might bring in \$950,000. (The current transportation impact fee of \$2,971 per single-family unit and \$2,059 per multifamily unit was projected to bring in \$50,000 this past year, but actually brought in \$323,000 due to several large condominium projects obtaining permits.)

- **Surcharge on the sale of electricity.** As discussed on page 53, one of the greatest difficulties in moving existing power lines underground is the difficulty in finding an equitable way to pay for the substantial one-time cost. One method not previously considered would be to establish a temporary surcharge on the sale of electricity within town limits and then dedicate these funds to moving the power lines on Estero Boulevard underground.

Florida law allows the town to establish a “public service tax” which would require FPL to collect up to a 10% surcharge on the cost of electricity from all of their customers and then remit those funds to the town. This is a logical funding source because of the direct link between electricity usage and improvements to the local electrical distribution system.

An FPL surcharge might bring in \$600,000 annually. Residents of unincorporated Lee County already pay such a surcharge. The town could formally agree to sunset this surcharge after 10 to 12 years when sufficient funds have been collected to place all of the Estero Boulevard power lines underground.

- **County transportation funds.** Lee County still maintains Estero Boulevard and is very aware of its overcrowding and general poor condition. The drainage portion of the streetscape program is very considerable. A partnership with Lee County is possible whereby Lee County would pay the costs of drainage retrofits, road surfacing, and sidewalks/bike paths while the town pays for other costs. Negotiations with Lee County are underway at this time.
- **Ad valorem taxes.** Since incorporation, the town has decreased its annual property tax levels from 1.47 mills to 0.85 mills. Rising property values and fiscal prudence have made these decreases possible. By not continuing to lower the tax rate as property values rise, additional funds could be generated and dedicated to improving Estero Boulevard. For instance, if the town had not decreased its millage from 0.85 to 0.75 for the new fiscal

year, an additional \$250,000 would have been generated this year alone. A similar alternative would be to dedicate a fixed portion of the ad valorem tax receipts to a specific project such as improvements to Estero Boulevard. In this manner, that portion of the millage would have no reason to exist once the specific improvements have been completed.

- **Stormwater utility.** Many communities create a “stormwater utility,” a branch of government whose sole purpose is stormwater management. Its funds usually come from a separate fee that is charged to owners of developed property, based on a share of the benefit each will receive from the utility; these fees cannot be used for any other purposes than improving drainage and stormwater management. A stormwater utility could provide funding for the drainage portion of the Estero Boulevard streetscape. See Section 7 for more details.

## **D. Recommendations on Estero Boulevard**