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We need balance in growth studies

Once Hurricane Charley is history, the island's future development will come into focus again.

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Florida law allows property owners to recover damages if government action causes a drop in their property's value, or at least that's what it appears to do. The real significance of the law remains to be fully worked out in court.

Meanwhile, such legal clubs are useful bugaboos for intimidating local governments into giving landowners and developers what they want. They can also give local elected officials a handy excuse for not fighting for smarter growth controls.

Once Pine Island has dug its way out from under the battering it suffered from Hurricane Charley, it will turn again to its future. The battle over that is important and bitter.

Some see the big island's potential as the site of major new developments. Others want to preserve as much of its rural character and open space as possible.

An amendment to the island land-use plan would require larger land owners who develop their property to cluster homes on 30 percent of the land, restoring the remainder to something like natural conditions.

That can be expensive. County commissioners approved the amendment, but delayed its implementation when landowners challenged it legally.

Now a Fort Myers real estate expert paid by the county to study the issue estimates that the county could be exposed to the tune of \$60 million in lawsuits.

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