

Why Incorporate?

The case for bringing together Matlacha, Matlacha Isles, Pine Island Center, St. James City, Pineland and Bokeelia as an incorporated community charting its own destiny.

To Preserve Our Quality of Life

Residents and visitors to the Greater Pine Island Community appreciate our secluded “Old Florida” environment. We live surrounded by mangrove forests, three federally designated aquatic preserves, and acres of palms, tropical plants and fruit groves. We enjoy a small number of locally owned restaurants, shops and art galleries. We support local fishermen and a productive agricultural community, and we care deeply about preserving the quality of our beautiful aquatic environment. So far, we have escaped the cement and skyscraper development so predominant in other Florida waterfront communities. Through the Pine Island Community Plan and the Matlacha Overlay approved by the Lee County Board of Commissioners, Greater Pine Island and Matlacha residents have successfully limited building heights, avoided strip malls, ensured our only hurricane evacuation route, halted the construction of canals that degrade water and wetland resources, and set aside lands for native vegetation and wildlife. Yet without local control — or “home rule” — the Lee County Commission could allow re-zonings that roll back these gains and destroy our Island lifestyle.

The Pine Island Plan, which provides information about our zoning categories, can be found on pages II-41 to II-48 of the Lee County Plan. Find an excerpt on the GPICA website at gpica.org/pineislandplan.

To Protect the Environment

Despite our efforts to preserve our environment, the Greater Pine Island Community continues to face ecological threats to our fragile hydrology and ecosystem. For example, our islands are fringed by mangrove forests, which provide critical habitat and clean water for hundreds of species. Their dense root systems help stabilize the coastline and prevent erosion from waves and storms. But over the last 80 years, as the sea level has risen 4 inches, our mangrove buffers have receded between 19 and 26 feet. That’s a lot of shoreline to lose. As the sea level rises, mangroves need to move inland. But overdevelopment — sea walls, shoreline condos, high-density housing, lawns and beaches — does not allow enough space for mangroves to thrive. Incorporation would allow residents to control the amount and types of development and manage water and wildlife issues from an Island perspective. If we incorporate, we would be able to continue to preserve our fragile ecosystem and minimize city pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, pathogens and heavy metals that harm plants, animals, and human health.

See page 6 in the Matlacha-Pine Island Incorporation Feasibility Study at gpica.org/feasibilitystudy2017.

To allow residents to control the destiny of their own community

Currently, Pine Island and Matlacha are governed by Lee County. But the Board of County Commissioners cannot always be counted on to act in our best interests. In fact, as things stand now, we are not allowed to use all of our financial resources for our own benefit — residents pay nearly \$1 million more to Lee County in taxes than we receive in services. Inadequate oversight and decisions that favor overdevelopment threaten our quality of life. Incorporation would allow voters to elect officials who would act on the priorities of the Greater Pine Island Community. Incorporation would allow residents to gain control over rezoning decisions and future land use, which would promote the kind of development and environmental protection that is compatible with our unique character. In addition, incorporation would affirm the values of representative democracy, citizen participation, strong community leadership, professional management and regional cooperation.

To prevent further annexations by the City of Cape Coral

Over the decades, the Greater Pine Island Civic Association has worked to preserve and maintain a community that promotes smart growth and preserves sensitive natural areas by working with Island residents to develop a future land-use plan governing growth rules. Under the Pine Island Plan and Matlacha Overlay, building height is limited. New development and agriculture that adjoin aquatic preserves and wetlands must preserve or build a buffer of native vegetation. Ample lot sizes of 2.7 acres per home in coastal/rural land use zones effectively limit the density of housing and the size of the population. These elements are crucial for safe hurricane evacuation when a hurricane strike is imminent.

But over the last several years, these protections have been put at risk. The Greater Pine Island Community has approximately 8,000 registered voters. That's less than 2% of the voters in all of Lee County. Cape Coral has about 90,000 voters. This disparity makes Lee County far more beholden to the Cape than to our community. The Lee County Commission revised the Pine Island Plan in 2016 to allow greater building densities than the earlier Plan allowed. And on Dec. 12, 2016, the City of Cape Coral annexed six parcels covering 5.47 acres in Matlacha. Members of the Greater Pine Island Community had no say in that action. Under Cape Coral zoning rules, the city could add additional boat ramps, a marina and buildings up to eight stories tall. Similar threats by development interests to coastline neighborhoods throughout the Greater Pine Island Community are of great concern to many residents. Incorporation would allow residents to protect the Pine Island Plan and Matlacha Overlay and guard against land loss through annexation.

For a comprehensive look at the current regulations, see the Lee County Land Development Code at <https://bit.ly/2C8y072>.

