



David Loveland
Director, Community Development

July 9, 2021

Mikki Rozdolski,
Manager, Community Development Operations

1500 Monroe St.
Fort Myers, FL 33901

Dear Mr. Loveland and Ms. Rozdolski,

On Tuesday, June 29, 2021, the Greater Pine Island Civic Association partnered with Banks Engineering to host a public information session on zoning amendments being sought for two projects: Calusa Cay CPD (DOS2014-00027) and Orchid Cove at Pine Island (DOS2005-00354-A05).

- ***We are writing today to summarize the overwhelmingly negative community response to each of these zoning amendment requests.***

As you know, all developers of multifamily residential, commercial, industrial, institutional and infrastructure projects and subdivisions are required to hold public meetings in some unincorporated areas of Lee County — including Pine Island — to inform residents of their plans.

On Pine Island, the GPICA has historically been the designated forum for these public meetings. Per our meeting format, the GPICA allows the developer and/or their agent(s) to present their information and then we allow the community members in attendance to ask questions about the projects and changes being sought.

After the Q&A session, the GPICA then gauges support by asking residents to vote for or against each request.

- ***While we know that these votes are non-binding, we believe they provide Lee County with important information to consider, weigh and respond to before making any decision to approve zoning amendment requests or development orders — especially requests that will not come before a hearing examiner.***

Board of Directors

In the case of Calusa Cay and Orchid Cove, the presenting agent, Stacy Ellis Hewitt, AICP, Director of Planning for Banks Engineering, presented four (4) zoning change requests related to Calusa Cay and one (1) development order request related to Orchid Cove.

The in-person meeting was held at the Pine Island Methodist Church, 5701 Pine Island Rd. NW, Bokeelia, FL 33922. The meeting also included a virtual component held concurrently on the Microsoft Teams platform for those who could not attend in person. We advertised the meeting in advance via our newsletter mailing list of 761 subscribers, on our website (www.GPICA.org) and via our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/PineIslandCivicAssociation>). Additionally, Banks Engineering placed paid advertisements in the Pine Island Eagle.

- ***Ninety-nine (99) people attended the meeting in person. Forty-three (43) attended virtually.***

Below, we summarize response to each zoning change request, along with some of the public comments and the vote tally for each request. (We've also attached the Banks Engineering presentation outlining each request.)

- ***We've also enclosed all written comments received from Pine Island residents.***

Calusa Cay, CPD. This commercial planned development includes ±26.77 acres fronting Pine Island Road with an anchor Publix Supermarket and retail outparcels.

Request 1: Sign package deviations to increase the size and number of signs and to illuminate signs.

- 131 people opposed all of the deviations requested.

Among the reasons cited for their opposition:

- The Pine Island Plan covering signage rules and requirements was put in place to preserve the coastal-rural character and culture of Greater Pine Island, and all development should follow the current rules — as Dollar General had to when they built.
- The new CPD will be built in such a central location that there's absolutely no way anyone could miss it; therefore, no increase in signage is either needed or desired.

Request 2: Allow for the subdivision of the plat (without the necessary road frontage) so that the out-parcels may be sold.

- 136 people opposed this deviation

Among the reasons:

- Residents were concerned that if the plat is subdivided, new owners won't keep them up to code.

Request 3: Allow a package store closer than 500 feet from a school. (This request will be going before the hearing examiner.)

- 128 people opposed this deviation

Among the reasons cited:

- We don't want the liquor store closer to the school.
- The "walking distance" cited in the agent's presentation is disingenuous — kids won't necessarily follow the current roadway.
- Why request a deviation instead of just moving the liquor store to another location on the parcel?
- Why do we need a second liquor store on the Island, when one already exists a short distance away (9844 Stringfellow Road, St. James City, FL 33956).

Request 4: Reduce the size of two outparcel buildings.

- 129 opposed

No reasons cited.

Orchid Cove at Pine Island.

Request for a Development Order for a proposed residential community consisting of 94 townhomes, a clubhouse and associated infrastructure to be accessed via the Calusa Cay property.

- 140 people — out of 142 — opposed this development.

Among the reasons cited:

- While the opposition was vehement and varied, many of the objections had to do with increased traffic and the fear of what will happen when tropical storms and hurricanes necessitate evacuation. Furthermore, residents are concerned that the multifamily project site lacks two entrances and exits as required by the Lee Development Code and that the single exit will exacerbate the already-existing traffic congestion situation for drivers coming and going from Pine Island using Pine Island Road.
- Residents were opposed to the increased development so close to environmentally important wetlands and preserve areas.
- Residents also cited the fact that this development was originally approved more than a decade ago — and today's plans for density have not taken increased traffic and environmental concerns into account.

In sum, the Greater Pine Island Civic Association submits this information in the hope that residents' concerns and opposition will be taken into consideration as county staff reviews these administrative requests for zoning changes and development orders.

We also look forward to working more closely with County staff on all matters related to development and zoning on Pine Island.

Respectfully,

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CC
Richard Wesch, County Attorney
Roger Desjarlais, County Manager

Response from Pine Islanders regarding Calusa Cay and Orchid Cove received via email by the GPICA:

LETTER 1: Melissa and Rich Simonelli

Good morning,

I wanted to add some additional input from last night's meeting on June 29th, 2021 concerning this development that should be shared when comments are sent from the meeting last night.

To begin according to: The Lee Plan 2021 Codification under the vision statement part 16. And goal 24-16. Pine Island - This community includes Greater Pine Island as described under Goal 24 along with surrounding smaller islands and some unincorporated enclaves near Cape Coral. Its future, as seen by Pine Islanders, will be a matter of maintaining an equilibrium between modest growth, a fragile ecology, and a viable and productive agricultural community. Pine Island will continue to be a haven between urban sprawl approaching from the mainland and the wealth of the outer islands; a quiet place of family businesses, school children, farmers, and retirees enjoying the bounties of nature; a place devoid of high-rises, strip malls, and gated communities. Traffic constraints caused by the narrow road link to the mainland will limit future development, allowing the islands to evacuate from storms and protecting natural lands from unsustainable development. Wildlife and native vegetation will be protected; loss of wildlife habitat will be reversed; sidewalks and bike paths will connect neighborhoods for young and old alike. Architectural standards for commercial buildings will encourage "Old Florida" styles, and historic buildings will be treasured. Pine Island will continue to be a place where people, nature and agriculture exist in harmony, a place not very different from what it is today, an island as state-of-mind as much as a physical entity, its best features preserved and enhanced. Pine Islanders are historically vigilant about protecting their community and will work to ensure that their plans are carried out.

GOAL 24: GREATER PINE ISLAND COMMUNITY PLAN. Manage future growth on and around Greater Pine Island so as to: maintain the island's unique natural resources, rural character, and coastal environment; support the viable and productive agricultural community and other local businesses; and to protect the public health, safety and welfare of island residents and visitors when a hurricane strike is imminent. (Ordinance No. 94-30, 05-21, 16-07, 18-18)

First, the developer appeared to be intentionally ambiguous about the details of what was being proposed. Because of this, the meeting went longer than it should have. When residents had questions they spoke in circles instead of being candid as if we are uneducated residents that live here.

Second, this is a proposed strip mall of sorts. Please, advise if I misunderstood the Banks engineering representative, but this proposal would allow for 20 plus stores to be added to this small plot of land. I also understand the landowners intend to divide each of these parcels for individual sale to each business looking to move in. Also, on the main road, two large retail buildings would be built in front of the Publix building not preserving the beauty and character of our island.

Third, the townhomes and or condos they are proposing would constrain our water and sewer capabilities. They would cause traffic gridlocks and increase the wear and tear on our only road on and off the island. They would stress the limited resources we have on the island and increase the population within the only school we have and this is the tip of the soon-to-be tipping point. These homes 50ft from the wetlands would not protect our wildlife and native vegetation.

Fourth, this land was zoned in 1980 and then rubber-stamped all the way through to 2008-2013 until this development decided to come in. Why was this land not revisited, inspected, and investigated before getting this through zoning? Since these dates, there has been an increase in residents and issues. Why were no traffic studies done during the peak season to see if the only road in and off the island could handle having entrances and exits onto the main road? We DO NOT WANT TRAFFIC LIGHTS on our island.

Fifth, light pollution, noise pollution, and land pollution.

Lastly, except for tourists-us islanders moved here to get away from the urban sprawl and developments happening all over Lee County. Development and progress should happen in small steps, not drown the

residents who moved away from this in the first place. Our island cannot support a mega-development such as this, and yes for our island this is a mega-development. It infringes on our way of life, our safety, and our environment.

Be well and thank you.

Best,

Melissa and Rich Simonelli

Nadine,

One other thing that I found that was not disclosed to the public last night is these parcels are already listed for sale. This is deceiving and it should have been announced.
What is parcel 3? Is this the townhomes or another separate parcel?

Please see attached link.

<https://www.crex.com/properties/FL/Bokeelia/Commercial-Land>

Best,

Melissa Simonelli

LETTER 2: Cheryl King

After attending the meeting concerning the Publix/townhome development, we came home very frustrated that the increase in population since 2013 has not been addressed by the county & its impact on our wetlands/preserves, traffic, evacuation plans, and mostly winter months traffic. Before anymore antiquated plans move forward, a new environmental impact study needs to be conducted. Thank you.
Cheryl King

LETTER 3: Charles Petras

Dear Sirs

I oppose the building of so many dwellings along this road. The traffic will be incredible ,and dangers for everyone who travels it. Just simply too many people in such a small area. It will create chaos and harm to the area !! Terrible idea !!
Charles Petras

LETTER 4: Laura Staley

Laura Staley

I am writing to oppose the proposed building of the 94 townhomes behind the Publix under construction on

Pine Island Road. I am not happy about the Publix being built, but that is now unstoppable. A Publix already exists right off the island. After listening to the proposals at Tuesday's meeting, I am astounded that this project is even going further. The people of Pine Island do not want it for a variety of reasons. My main concerns are thus:

1. Traffic. The traffic getting on and off the island is already horrendous, especially in the winter months. Pine Island Road cannot accommodate more traffic, especially turning on and off Pine Island Road. In the winter months, the traffic frequently is backed up beyond the four way stop. It is unfair to the current residents of Pine Island to take on more traffic.
2. Environment. I feel the proposed building will hamper the environment on Pine Island. Residents moved to the island to get away from development. Now it is being forced upon them. Not only will it hurt the esthetics of the island, no environmental impact study has been done on the area in the development plans.

I am totally opposed to the development of more land on Pine Island. It is unnecessary and is not being done for the benefit of the current residents of Pine Island.

Sincerely, Laura Staley

LETTER 5: Sara R McAuley

Dear Lee County Commissioners,

We are taxpayers on three properties in Lee County (total value approximately \$1.7m).

Your attention to Pine Island issues is particularly important at this time.

First of all, a development of townhomes near the new Publix on Pine Island Road is dangerous and unnecessary. This is not water front property and serves no purpose to the county in this location. These townhomes could be built in a lovely area that is more accessible to shopping and schools. The increase in traffic through Matlacha on Pine Island road is dangerous at all times, and so much worse during season and hurricane season. Our barrier islands are simply not stable for further mulit-family developments.

Secondly, water quality issues should be at the forefront of every minute of your time. Without clean, healthy water, our allure as a premier tourist destination disappears....very quickly. Townhomes and shopping centers will become white elephants.

These issues are not new, but you need to hear that we are paying attention to your actions. Thank you,

Sara R McAuley,

LETTER 6: Kevin L. McAuley

Commissioner Ruane,

Last week I attended the June 29 public hearing hosted by the Greater Pine Island Civic Association, concerning variance requests for the Publix Plaza shopping center currently under construction, as well as variance requests for the proposed Orchid Cove condominium project, to be located directly behind the new Publix on Pine Island.

For a 'low season' meeting, the public hearing was very well attended (I estimate over 200 people attended in person, not counting the online meeting participants). The proposed variance changes to the Orchid Cove project met with nearly 100% disapproval by the meeting participants. I would like to add my comments for your consideration.

The Orchid Cove project was approved in 2008 as a residential project composed of 156 condominiums, to be accessed through the adjoining Publix Plaza parcel. Construction on the

Publix Plaza parcel began just this year (2021).

Variances proposed during the hearing included reconfiguring the Orchid Cove project into a 94 townhome community. The property is bordered by sensitive wetlands to the east and elementary school property to the west.

The engineering firm presenting on behalf of Orchid Cove seemed unaware that Pine Island does not have county water (it has its own water plant) or that much of Pine Island does not receive county sewer service. They just assumed they would be able to 'tap in' to existing county utility services with little impact to current infrastructure.

While they appeared to be knowledgeable about Lee County building requirements in general, they seemed to have little awareness of the Pine Island Plan, which, as you know, has been our blueprint for managing the responsible growth and development of Pine Island (including hurricane evacuation considerations).

Nor did they appear to have considered the traffic implications a 94 townhome community will bring to the island. A few hundred more residents trying to get in and out of their townhomes (or evacuating the island) via two shopping center access roads (with no left turn lanes or traffic lights) within a quarter mile of the busiest intersection on the island (the 4-way stop at Pine Island Road and Stringfellow Road), will undoubtedly create more congestion as well as traffic accidents and potential loss of property and life (this situation will be exacerbated during the tourist season). They basically shrugged it off by saying a traffic study would be conducted separately and then submitted to the BOCC for consideration, putting the BOCC (in my opinion) in the position of the bad guys no matter the outcome of the traffic study ruling.

As you know, commercial trucks, RV and boat traffic on and off the island, especially in season, is particularly heavy, and traffic backups are common. It is unfeasible to add more traffic controls to allow Orchid Cove residents better access into and out of the Publix property. The length of many commercial vehicles alone would make a mess out of any potential traffic light solutions. FYI, traffic lights are something against which the residents of Pine Island have always been adamantly opposed.

I feel the Orchid Cove project, given that it was approved 13 years ago, should be re-reviewed in its entirety. Variances of such a scale as requested should not just be rubber-stamped. Things that might have been acceptable 13 years ago may not be acceptable today.

Given the recent Champlain Towers tragedy in Sunrise FL, I'm sure that statewide reviews and construction guideline changes for all multi-unit housing facilities will be forthcoming. As I'm sure you can understand Commissioner Ruane, given the nature of Pine Island (a barrier island composed primarily of sand), the environmental tourism issues facing Lee County from the worsening water quality, seasonal congestion already facing residents and visitors to the barrier islands, and the proximity of sensitive wetlands to the proposed Orchid Cove site, it would be wise not to automatically approve these variance requests.

Having spent a 30+ year career working for Time Magazine, a common political tenet during my career was that "even the appearance of impropriety must be investigated". Approvals without careful consideration will do nothing to dissuade Lee County residents that improprieties exist.

It is my feeling that both the state and the country will be watching the Lee County Board of County Commissioners regarding the decisions they make concerning the development orders and variance requests submitted on behalf of the Orchid Cove project. I hope and pray you take the time to thoroughly vet all the issues before making your decisions.

Respectfully,

Kevin L. McAuley