



# Pine Island Community Issues Update

## Meeting with Lee County Commissioner Kevin Ruane, March 2022

### Background

In late 2020, the Greater Pine Island Civic Association surveyed our community about the issues that most concerned them. Residents identified their top issues as:

- Water Quality
- Overdevelopment
- Traffic

The GPICA has used these community concerns to develop a roadmap to guide us as we continue to work to protect the Island's unique coastal-rural way of life. During 2021, we focused in on several areas where we thought we could have a positive impact on the community, and added a new issue that cropped up related to the use and management of Conservation 20/20 lands on the Island.

### Traffic Concerns

The main issue of concern is the traffic congestion in Matlacha; additional issues identified were congestion at Pine Island Center. Representatives of the GPICA met with Randy Cerchie, Director of Lee DOT, and staff in June 2021 and discussed our concerns; we also invited him to present options and possibilities for dealing with these issues to our members and he did so during our October 2021 meeting.

### Septic-to-Sewer Conversion

We created a Septic-to-Sewer Conversion task force to look into the possibilities of expanding sewer service to more Island residences. Members of the committee met with members of Lee County Utilities, gathered information about water quality impairments, etc. We provided a summary of these efforts Lee Utilities Director Pam Keyes and County Commissioners in September 2021 and invited Ms. Keyes to address our members in December 2021.

### Conservation 20/20 Lands Management

In the summer of 2021, Lee County allowed the harvesting of saw palmetto berries on the Pine Island Flatwoods preserve. We raised several concerns about this action with Director of Lee County Parks and Recreation Jesse Lavender and with members of the Conservation Land Acquisition and Stewardship Advisory Committee (CLASAC).

### Island Development

Many residents were surprised to learn in 2021 that a developer was ready to obtain an order to begin construction of a 94 townhome community known as Orchid Cove to be located near Pine Island Center. They were even more surprised to learn that the development had originally been approved 16 years earlier and that they had very little say today in whether and how the build-out would move forward. The GPICA has since been working to understand what development orders have been approved on the Island and what the status of each is — a task complicated by numerous factors.

Board of Directors

Helen Fox, President | Nadine Slimak, Vice President | Michael Sweeney, Treasurer |  
Deborah Swisher-Hicks | Cindy Bear | Connie D'Alessio | Tim Heitz | Shari Perkins

## What We're Seeking Your Help With Today

### Traffic

Lee DOT seems to have taken a position that they are waiting for a Florida DOT study of a mixed-use path through Matlacha before addressing the issue, and while they have put forth several alternatives for dealing with the congestion in Pine Island Center, we all the know the issue there is caused in no small part by the Matlacha congestion.

That said, we feel there are several actions that can be taken today, that — while they may not solve the difficult problem in Matlacha — could help ease the problems.

1. Traffic Cams in Matlacha tied into an easy-to use app; we feel this will allow residents to see how traffic looks before setting out, and could save wasted/canceled trips. We've addressed this with Mr. Cerchie and he stated that he would look into it, but we aren't sure what action needs to take place next to make this a reality.
2. Extension of the right-hand turn lane from eastbound Pine Island Road to Veterans Parkway. We believe that a new, longer lane will allow the right-turn traffic to exit Pine Island Road and somewhat ease traffic movement through Matlacha.

### Septic-to-Sewer Conversion

When Ms. Keyes addressed our members, she stated that one of the main priorities for the Countywide Wastewater Management Plan is addressing the issues related to the Caloosahatchee River and Estuary Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP). Unfortunately, the estuaries surrounding Pine Island are not included in the BMAP and so we are greatly concerned that water quality issues here will not be a high priority. It's important to note that *95% of the watershed impaired for at least one parameter category.*

1. We ask what can we do to help encourage Lee County to move us up the list for action?
2. How can we encourage a feasibility study to be undertaken to see what it would take to hook Pine Island properties with septic into the existing treatment plant without causing a need to expand capacity, but while keeping that in mind as an ultimate goal.
3. We would also encourage Lee County to take action on some kind of septic inspection process that would encourage residents to inspect/pump their systems, while also supporting those who would need financial support to make that happen.

### Conservation 20/20 Lands Management

We're glad to see that a meeting of the Conservation Land Acquisition and Stewardship Advisory Committee (CLASAC) has been scheduled for March 16 after several meeting cancellations. We're hopeful that county staff will continue to re-engage with CLASAC.

Specifically related to the Pine Island preserves, we request that:

1. Pine Islanders are provided with updates and information related to the management of the eight 20/20 preserves located on the Island. **Please note** that the GPICA is happy to help facilitate information sharing with our residents and will continue to welcome county staff updates during our meetings and will also be willing to share information via our email mailing list.
2. Islanders be provided with advance opportunities to comment on significant changes to the management practices related to Island land parcels.
3. The County provide the promised evaluation made related to saw palmetto berry picking on the Pine Island Flatwoods Preserve.
4. That an accounting be provided of any income garnered from that harvest and that any future income provided related to the preserves on the Island be used to support the Island preserves.

Greater Pine Island Civic Association • Protecting Pine Island Since 1957

P.O. Box 3044, Pineland, FL 33945  
GPICA.org

## Island Development

The GPICA created a development task force in 2021 to investigate outstanding development orders on the Island, so that we are aware of what development has been approved and where they are in the process of coming to fruition, with the hopes of informing our citizenry. The County's database is not easily searched and we also found information lacking. For instance, we found that:

- 21% of all development orders issued were approved **23-39 YEARS** ago!
- The status of 28% of these orders is unknown — we cannot determine the status of 154 development orders.

Specifically, we're asking that:

1. Lee County work to develop a process that would allow for the "aging out" of old development orders — especially those that were approved under land-use rules that have since been changed. This would require new public hearings (NOT public information sessions, which in our experience carry little to no weight when it comes to development order approvals) to inform the public about pending development and allow their input to truly be taken into consideration.
2. Lee County work to develop new guidelines for the "active pursuit of construction" that would take into consideration a reasonable timeframe for development, with continued input from residents when projects move from years to decades.
3. Lee County add or increase a development order renewal fee to encourage orders to be vacated or projects completed within a reasonable period.