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# ***INTRODUCTION***

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

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### ***WHY A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?***

In 1995, residents of Estero Island launched an era of municipal governance 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 the normal day-to-day activities, a two-year effort was begun to bring into focus the long-range goals for the town. That effort has created this Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan. To move toward those long-range goals, this plan establishes formal policies for the town government and lays the foundation for a new Land Development Code to guide further development and redevelopment.

### ***SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF FORT MYERS BEACH***

Fort Myers Beach faces a complex set of problems in addition to those usually faced by small towns. The town has already reached 85% of its maximum population. Nearly all of the remaining 15% is beyond the control of the new government, since development rights have previously vested to individual property owners.

Despite this lack of control, the town has responsibility for managing the peak-season congestion that results from overly

generous land-use approvals of the past. This congestion is compounded by extreme tourism impacts from southwest Florida residents and visitors who flock to the welcoming atmosphere at Fort Myers Beach. These visitors feel none of the hostility caused at other beach communities by high bridge tolls, or by “residents-only” beach parking restrictions.

Fort Myers Beach residents suffer from peak-season congestion more than vacationers because the residents need to travel to school and jobs on a daily basis. Yet most residents tolerate this congestion because it is the obvious result of so many people trying to enjoy the same assets that attracted them. Fortunately, the peak period lasts less than three months of each year.

The shortness of this period could change. This plan contains many efforts to improve the beauty, vibrancy, and livability of Fort Myers Beach. These changes might attract so many more visitors that the period of extreme congestion lengthens to an intolerable portion of each year. That result would be the ultimate irony for a community that has welcomed generations of visitors to share its many charms.



## **HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED**

This document is organized into fifteen chapters. Following this introduction is “Envisioning Tomorrow’s Fort Myers Beach,” an optimistic look at the community that the town hopes will evolve. The next twelve chapters contain the twelve main “elements” of this plan, organized by subject area. The Community Design Element is placed first because its concepts have inspired many other parts of this plan. The final chapter contains procedures for interpreting and monitoring this plan.

Each element contains at least two parts:

- A narrative description of current conditions and possible courses of action for the town; and
- Formal goals, objectives, and policies selected by the town as its legally binding comprehensive plan.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach has decided to publish the full narrative portion of each element in this document. This provides its residents with a wealth of interesting information and an understanding of courses of action that were studied but perhaps not included in the formal plan.

The town legally “adopted” only certain portions of this document as its formal comprehensive plan. Formally adopted by Ordinance 98-14, effective January 1, 1999, are:

- All goals, objectives, and policies for each of the twelve elements;
- A “Future Land Use Map” (Figures 16 and 17 in the Future Land Use Element) and a “Future Transportation Map” (Figure 18 in the Transportation Element);
- A five-year schedule of capital improvements (Table 11-7); and
- All of Chapters 1, 2, and 15.

To help readers identify those portions of each element that are being formally adopted, the goals, objectives, and policies of each element are printed on gray paper. The “adopted” portions of this plan become a law of the Town of Fort Myers Beach. Once comprehensive plans are adopted, “...no public or private development shall be permitted except in conformity with comprehensive plans...” (Section 163.3161(5), *Florida Statutes*).