
RECREATION ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Recreation Element of this comprehensive plan sets the direction for the recreation, open space, and cultural issues at Fort Myers Beach. This element evaluates public and private recreational facilities that are now available and others that could be provided, with the goal of ensuring that these facilities are available to local residents and visitors.

Estero Island is part of a much larger natural system of barrier islands and bays. This system draws visitors from around the world, and then retains as residents those who prize these amenities. The beaches and related ecosystems are fragile and in need of conservation and preservation. The town's challenge is to strike a balance among the sometimes competing needs of people and the natural systems, and to develop strategies to ensure that these precious resources can sustain their ecological and recreational viability indefinitely.

The policies in this element reinforce those of the Conservation and Coastal Management Elements which promote a coordinated effort among the public sector, citizen interest groups, and the private sector to work toward that balance. This element integrates tourism with the town's recreational amenities and promotes responsible stewardship of those areas.

The vision for the future of the Town of Fort Myers Beach is a result of the beautiful natural surroundings of beaches and dunes, wildlife habitat, historic and archaeological sites, boating opportunities, and places for people to come together for recreation, visiting, dining, and shopping within the park-like setting of the entire island. The Community Design Element describes

how the town can ensure that the physical components of the community (natural areas, open spaces, buildings, streets, paths) can work together to achieve a coherent whole, reinforcing and enhancing its small-town character and as a place where permanent residents coexist comfortably with tourism. Policies emphasize walkability, promote streets as the neighborhood realm, plan for interconnected foot paths throughout the island, and improve linkages to the town's natural resources and active recreation areas. These linkages and "people-gathering places" become part of the town's system of recreation, open space, and cultural amenities.

An immediate challenge resulting from the town's incorporation is sorting out the responsibility (and cost) for operating and maintaining the county-owned recreational facilities within the town. Strategies for coordinating limited resources and identifying new funding sources are needed to address operational needs, as well as for acquiring and/or developing additional amenities.



Figure 1, Aerial view from the north end of Estero Island, with Bowditch Point Regional Park in the foreground (photo courtesy Mohsen Salehi)

THE VISION FOR RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND CULTURE

The overall vision for the future of Fort Myers Beach was provided in the introduction to this plan, describing how today's citizens would like Estero Island to look and function in the future. In this element, the vision, as it pertains to recreation and cultural aspects, is refined from input from the two community wide workshops: "Designing Our Town" held on January 31 and February 1, 1997 and "Enhancing our Resources" on March 22, 1997.

In the following section, the vision is expanded to create a picture of how Fort Myers Beach *could be* as a result of concerted efforts by all involved. Specific observations of places and activities are followed by an expansive view of the park-like qualities of living on a beautiful barrier island, where recreational resources are integrated with daily life:

"The natural features at Fort Myers Beach remain its primary yet most sensitive assets. The degradation of water quality in Estero Bay has finally been reversed. The mooring area is well-managed, clean, inviting to boating visitors, and now a welcome part of the community. Clear and well-maintained channels, passes, and private canals allow the movement of a wide range of recreational and commercial vessels, operating safely in relation to one another and respecting the fragile nature of the surrounding environment and marine life.

"The beaches are clean and regularly replenished with sand, and sand dunes have returned, all as a result of forward thinking programs which have established long term mechanisms for funding and maintenance. The remaining mangroves and wetlands are healthy, with disturbed areas now fully restored. Little Estero Island and the Matanzas Pass Preserve, through careful management and planning, contribute to the ecological integrity of the area, provide a rich experience for the visitor,

and are enjoyed by many residents on daily walks. The Preserve is accessible to children walking from their classrooms or neighborhoods, by bicycle through an island-wide network of bicycle paths, or by canoe or kayak.

"The Estero Island Historic Society continues to operate its Historic Cottage & Nature Center at the entrance to the Preserve. Guided interpretive walks and classroom and research experiences are offered along the trails and boardwalks to the fishing pier and observation deck. Guided tours using canoes and kayaks have overtaken the popularity of noisy jet-skis.

"Through a similar community effort, the town has refurbished the Long Estate, one of the first homesteads on Estero Island, built in 1906 on a significant site of the Calusa Indians. Now known as the "Mound House," it has become an anchor for tours of Estero Bay's ecological treasures and archaeological sites. Mound Key, considered the spiritual home of the Calusa empire, has proven to be a rich resource for archaeological research; town residents form a core of volunteers that allows for careful study and documentation for the international archaeological community.

"A carefully planned and interconnected system of pedestrian and bicycle paths, tram shuttles from off-site parking areas, trolley routes, and water taxi system, enables visitors, residents, and school children to reach all the recreational destinations on Estero Island and move easily from one to another. Beach-going residents and visitors select their preference of quiet beaches at Bowditch Point or lively beaches near Lynn Hall Memorial Park. The lively pedestrian scene at Times Square is fueled by those who have been swimming, strolling on the beach, or enjoying the pier, and is especially popular just before sunset. Just steps away, they enjoy the outdoor cafes, shops, and special entertainment events.

“The short blocks to the north along Old San Carlos Boulevard now have wide sidewalks, street trees, and mid-day shade provided by overhangs from the new shops and restaurants. At the north end, folks reach Marina Plaza, another “people-gathering place” that is the hub of activity for a fleet of excursion boats, dinner cruises, charter fishing and party boats, and water shuttles.

“At the south end of Estero Island, residents enjoy additional tennis courts, an oasis of green in the form of the Bay Beach golf course, and a new “Central Green” plaza area that is the focus of the renovated Villa Santini Plaza. Trolley transfers here link islanders to Carl Johnson Park and the Lover’s Key/Carl Johnson State Recreation Area.

“The Town of Fort Myers Beach, through the dedicated efforts of the community, has become a living park, existing for the comfort, safety, and quality of life of its residents and the peaceful enjoyment of its visitors:

- ▶ *“An ecologically sensitive park where visitors have learned to enjoy the unique natural amenities;*
- ▶ *“An archaeologically significant park where people come to learn about the prehistoric natives of this area;*
- ▶ *“An historic and livable park where residents are proud of the community’s heritage and place;*
- ▶ *“A family friendly park where parents and children are equally nurtured;*
- ▶ *“A semitropical island beach park where all ages enjoy the clean and safe waterfront;*
- ▶ *“A wildlife preserve park where recreation is educational;*
- ▶ *“A tranquil resort park where visitors relax in the warm island ambiance and atmosphere;*
- ▶ *“A vital community park where retired and working citizens share in a positive spirit of volunteerism;*

- ▶ *“A nature-awareness park which imparts a new consciousness about our responsibility for protecting the natural environment;*
- ▶ *“An economically sustainable park which protects and promotes its commercial interests;*
- ▶ *“A precious and uniquely diverse park where citizens work hard to assure that future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy its magic and tranquillity; and*
- ▶ *“A progressive town park where a partnership with the past provides the focus for the future.”*

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES NEAR FORT MYERS BEACH

The following sections provide a description of existing public and private recreation sites and facilities, open spaces, and cultural facilities available to the public. Described first are those areas immediately surrounding Estero Island which are not within the jurisdiction of the Town of Fort Myers Beach. These include the parks on Lovers Key; Bunche Beach (located north across San Carlos Bay); the San Carlos Island waterfront; Matanzas Harbor; Mound Key State Archaeological Site; and the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve and Buffer Preserve.

Lover’s Key/Carl Johnson State Recreation Area

Carl Johnson Park is located just south of Estero Island, across Big Carlos Pass. It is a regional park developed by Lee County on 278 acres of land, with 3,600 feet of Gulf beach. Current facilities include a two-lane boat ramp, parking spaces, restrooms, and a tram that connects the parking lot to the beach (see Figure 2). This park is easily accessible via by trolley, car, or boat.

Carl Johnson Park has been combined with the Lovers Key State Recreation Area, with 434 acres and 8,000 feet of beach, to form the Lover’s Key/Carl Johnson State Recreation Area. Lee County and the state are currently developing a 3-phase, \$4 million

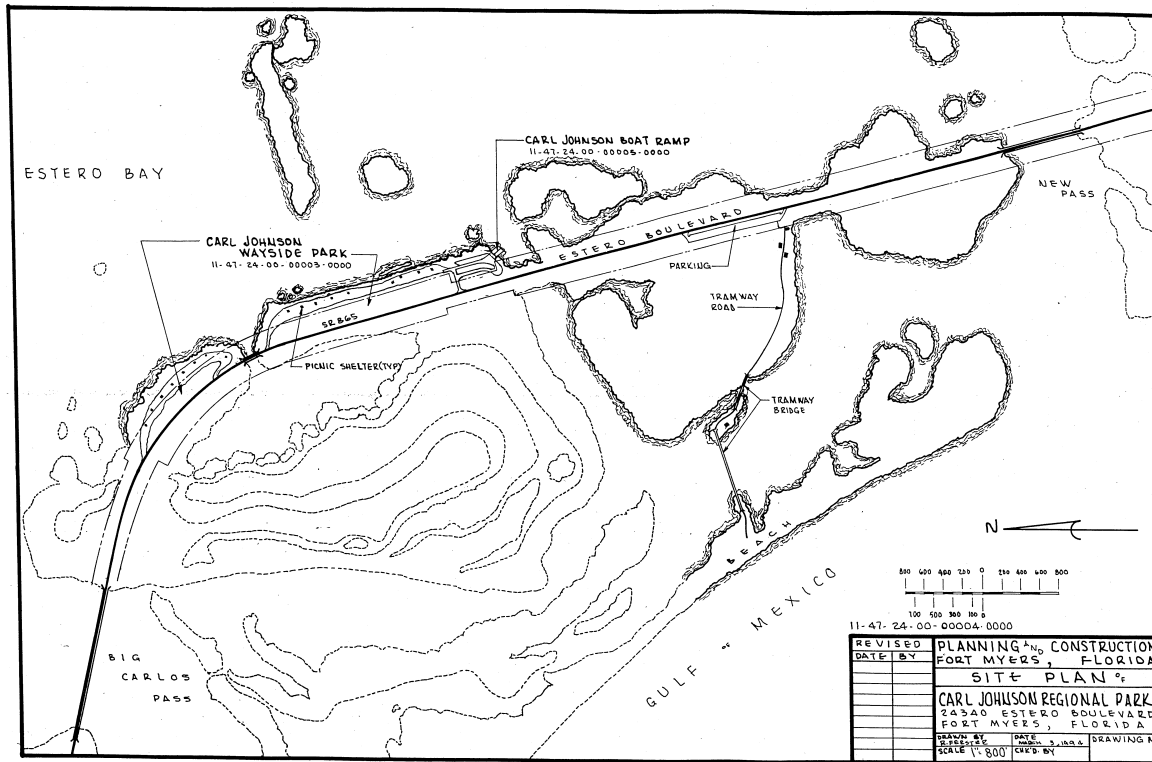


Figure 2, Carl Johnson Park

improvement program that links the two parks. Phase 1 has just been completed, providing a new entrance road, parking area, and park manager's residence. Phase 2 is under construction in 1998 and is adding more parking, a pedestrian bridge to link the park with the trolley stop, and an additional manager's residence. Phase 3 will provide the final parking improvements.

Bunche Beach

At Bunche Beach, on the north side of San Carlos Bay directly across from Bowditch Point, Lee County owns a small park site with 300 feet of beach. The surrounding land and beach is privately owned, and is currently under consideration for purchase by both Lee County and the state of Florida. The Town of

Fort Myers Beach has supported the purchase of additional beach and upland area there as an alternate choice for day-visitor beach goers when peak-season traffic renders Estero Island inaccessible.

San Carlos Island Waterfront

The San Carlos Island waterfront area, located across Matanzas Harbor from Fort Myers Beach, is a working waterfront with an active shrimp industry and related industrial uses. The waterfront is the third largest seafood landing in Florida and supports a \$55 million per year industry. The San Carlos Island CRA, a part of the Lee County CRA, has been working to keep the industry strong. A local non-profit organization, the Ostego Bay Foundation, conducts marine research and public educational efforts, including guided tours of the working waterfront. Another recreational and educational component of the San Carlos Island waterfront

is the county-owned Trico Property (formerly known as the Murphy Oil site) which is being developed as a waterfront park and sites for the Florida Marine Institute and a future facility for the Ostego Bay Foundation.

The recreational potential of the San Carlos Island waterfront can be realized through close coordination among the town, the San Carlos Island CRA, Lee County, and local businesses. An important component would be a water transportation link between San Carlos Island and related points of interest on Estero Island. These issues are discussed in the Transportation and Coastal Management elements of this plan.

Matanzas Harbor

Matanzas Harbor is located between Estero Island and San Carlos Island. It is popular with recreational boaters because it is safely protected from strong winds and has access to marinas, restaurants, and other businesses on Estero Island. The harbor provides one of the few well-protected anchorages between Key West and Tampa for overnight and live-aboard use; there are often 40 to 70 vessels anchored there at a time. Concerns associated with this anchorage are marine sanitation, derelict vessels, and navigational conflicts. Properly planned and managed, use of this anchorage could be an asset to the recreational system surrounding the town. (The town's municipal jurisdiction extends out 1,000 from Estero Island, encompassing this anchorage but not reaching San Carlos Island.)

Recreational users of Matanzas Harbor often compete with the industrial users based on San Carlos Island. The advantages of a coordinated master plan for Matanzas Harbor have been discussed in the Coastal Management Element of this plan. In cooperation with Lee County, the town has been pursuing grants to develop a master plan. Among the many issues to be addressed are the several recreational uses of the harbor including pleasure boats, personal watercraft, and cruise ships, and the untapped potential of the harbor for a water taxi system.

A Southwest Florida Regional Harbor Board has been formed to mediate some of the conflicts faced by those using public anchorages. The Town of Fort Myers Beach has signed a "memorandum of agreement" that pledges to use anchorage standards developed by the harbor board "while suspending contradictory standards for the life of th[e] agreement." While the harbor board's standards address several operational issues and some potential nuisances that may occur, they are not a substitute for a coordinated master plan for Matanzas Harbor.

There are several other harbor issues with recreational impacts on Fort Myers Beach. Small cruise ships have operated out of

Matanzas Harbor, creating some conflicts with other boat traffic using the channel and with the shrimp fleet which sometimes anchors 4 to 5 vessels deep on the north side of the federal channel. High-speed use of personal watercraft in the harbor is dangerous to users and other vessels. The addition of municipal docks could provide a land base for a water shuttle system that could relieve some parking and traffic problems on Estero Boulevard and supplement the trolley system.

Mound Key State Archeological Site

Mound Key State Archeological Site is a state-owned park on Mound Key, an island near the mouth of the Estero River. The park consists of 149 acres of Mound Key (not the entire island). Its most convenient access is by water from Fort Myers Beach. The indigenous people of southwest Florida, the Calusa Indians, has a ceremonial center here at the time of arrival by Europeans in the early 16th century. The Calusa lived a hunter-fisher-gatherer lifestyle and were skilled artisans and creators of highly developed religious and ceremonial objects. With further archaeological study, Mound Key will become better known to the international archaeological and historical community and also be a fascinating learning destination. It is open to the public but accessible only by boat, and should prove to be a valuable component of a eco/heritage tourism experience.

Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve

The Town of Fort Myers Beach adjoins the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve, which includes submerged land and associated water that consists of 9,834 acres from the Skybridge to Bonita Beach Road (see Figure 3). This preserve is "set aside forever... for the benefit of future generations" (Section 258.36, FS). The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has jurisdiction over the aquatic preserve and the adjoining buffer preserve. With the town's boundaries extending 1,000 feet into the preserve, there are opportunities to implement measures to meet the town's environmental and tourism objectives.

Visitor surveys verify that people come to this area because of the clean environment, beautiful beaches, and nature-based tourism opportunities. Within the Aquatic Preserve are several rookery islands that are of special interest for their environmental functions and for researchers and photographers, along with Mound Key and great fishing opportunities. The enduring challenge is providing opportunities for people to experience the area's treasures without damaging delicate natural systems.

Recreational use of the Aquatic Preserve (including the mooring area, recreational boating, personal watercraft, and tour boats) has the potential to damage these systems. The town's recently

vessel speed to slow or idle in all waters within 500 feet of the shoreline, 100 feet of the pier and bridges, and other locations with posted signs. However, there are many additional areas within the Aquatic Preserve where boats cause continuing problems, such as damaging seagrass beds with propellers or chasing birds from rookery islands.

Further education could advise boaters against these practices. Seminars and informational brochures could be provided to tour boats operators and individual boat owners and renters to help them understand and respect the regulations. In the community workshops held during the preparation of this plan, participants suggested forming a task force to coordinate and reconcile efforts of the numerous citizen/volunteer organizations, provide education, make recommendations to the town, and formulate needed legislation.

Estero Bay State Buffer Preserve

The Estero Bay State Buffer Preserve currently consists of 5,500 acres on the north side of Estero Bay, beginning at San Carlos Boulevard (south of Bayside Estates) and extending to the east of Hendry Creek (see Figure 3). The preserve is part of a larger area being considered for state purchase, through the conservation and Recreational Lands Project (CARL) for a total of 16,000 acres comprised of wetland and other natural communities that adjoin Estero Bay, including mangrove swamps and other saltwater marshes and salt flats.

Bear footprints and a small archaeological site have recently been discovered there. Public access to the preserve is from a cul-de-sac at the end of Winkler Road, with access for hiking and nature walks.

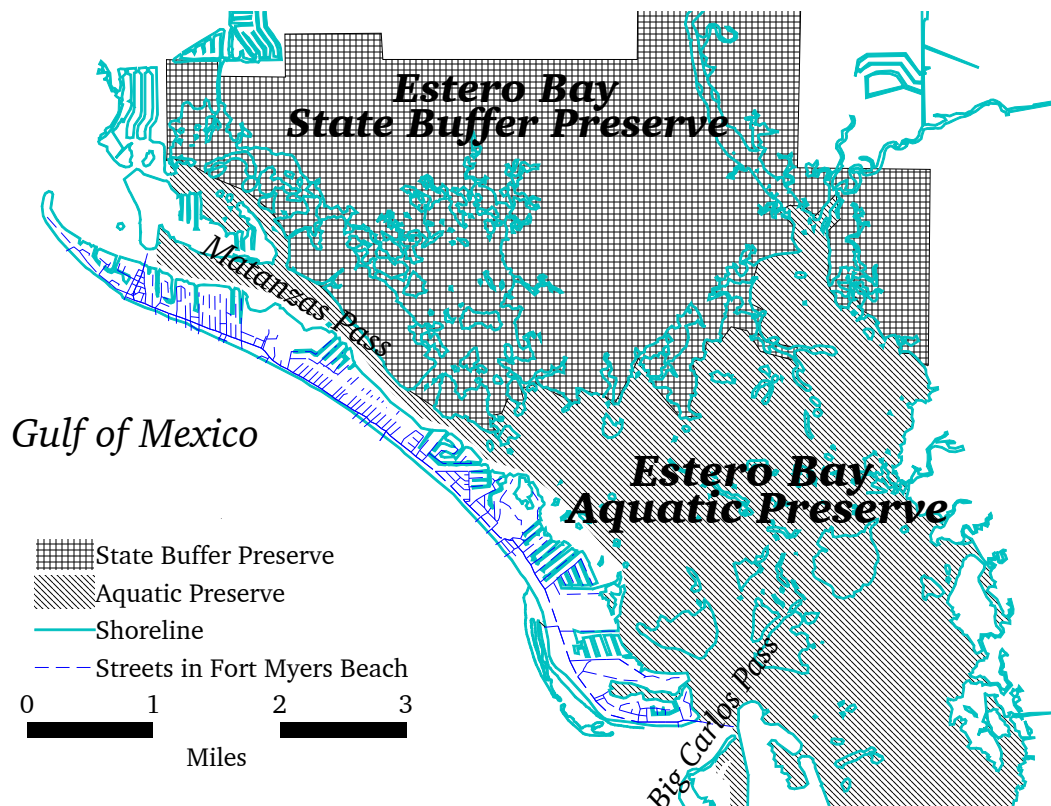


Figure 3, Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve and State Buffer Preserve

adopted vessel control and water safety ordinance regulates

Even though the areas described in the previous section are not primarily within the jurisdiction of the town, they contribute to a comprehensive system of recreational opportunities. Planning for the long term sustainability and appropriate use of the town's resource areas necessarily includes close coordination and cooperation with the entities responsible for the management of these areas, particularly around issues of safety, accessibility, conservation, education, and enforcement. These include Lee County, the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, City of Sanibel, South Florida Water Management District, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (as pertains to the Charlotte Harbor Estuary which flows into Estero Bay), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, U.S. Coast Guard, and Lee County Port Authority.

One mechanism to achieve this coordination is through the new Agency on Bay Management, a non-regulatory advisory body consisting of representatives from a broad range of interest groups, local governments, regulatory agencies and the private sector. As a more local supplement to this effort, the town has established a Marine Resources Task Force consisting of community and agency representatives. This Task Force will coordinate information and make recommendations to the town on environmental and recreational matters.

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES WITHIN FORT MYERS BEACH

The following areas within the jurisdiction of the town provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and education. Future proposed improvements are also discussed where applicable.

Bowditch Point Regional Park

Bowditch Point Park is located on about 17 acres at the northernmost end of Estero Island (see Figure 4). It is owned by Lee County and operated as a regional park, with picnic facilities, walking trails, changing facilities, and a trolley turnaround area. The park extends between the Bay and the Gulf beach and includes 1,850 feet of sandy beach, plus dunes, coastal hammock, and some upland areas. The park offers a quieter, more remote beach experience than the active Lynn Hall Memorial Park near Times Square.

Bowditch Point serves as an important stopping resting point for migratory birds, a parallel location to Point Ybel on Sanibel

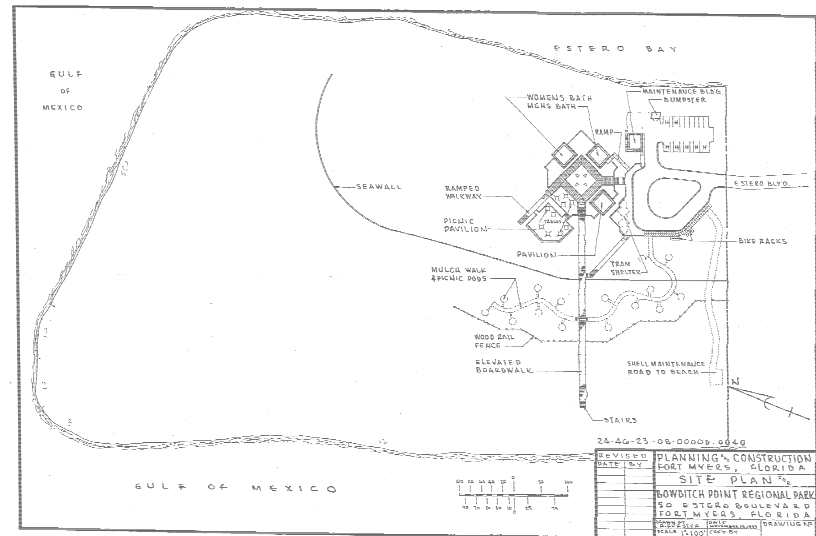


Figure 4, Bowditch Point Regional Park

which is one of the prime birding spots in southwest Florida. Removal of Australian pines at the north end of the park would improve the habitat for migratory birds and provide better opportunities for wildlife and environmental awareness.

Lee County is about to add 78 metered parking spaces at Bowditch Point. Until now, the few parking spaces there were reserved for maintenance staffers and handicapped visitors. This has resulted in relatively low usage, as the planned off-site parking lot was never constructed. While the addition of on-site parking will increase the accessibility of the park to visitors, it does not address the fundamental problem of traffic congestion during the peak season, which is the biggest barrier to peak-season accessibility. It is a priority of the town to encourage peak-season visitors to leave their cars on the mainland, or park once after arriving, and walk or use the trolley or other means to reach their various destinations. Improving the visitor experience not only improves the livability of the town but also provides tangible benefits to the county in terms of revenues from tourism and sales. In this context, the town and county should increase their cooperative efforts to provide more frequent and free trolley service and add water taxi or water shuttle service.

Providing public docks on the Bay side of Bowditch Point is a key element to making this facility more easily available to the public. (At present, it is actually illegal for boaters to land on the Bay side of this park.) At the request of the town, the county has prepared a preliminary design for a public dock on the Bay side.

In the future the county may want to turn over operational responsibility for the park to the town for internal budgetary reasons. The town needs to evaluate the costs and benefits of such a transfer. It is reasonable to assume that the county would retain some authority over park access policies, since it is a regional park that was purchased to serve visitors from the entire county and beyond.

Lynn Hall Memorial Park and Fort Myers Beach Pier

Lynn Hall Memorial Park is located adjacent to Times Square and the 584-foot fishing pier. It consists of 5 acres of land between Estero Boulevard and the Gulf, with 600 feet of beach. Lynn Hall Park is owned and operated by Lee County as a regional park, and provides restrooms, changing areas, picnic tables, and 120 metered parking spaces (see Figure 5). The park also houses a temporary sheriff's substation.

The CRA's Core Area Master Plan envisions the addition of beach volleyball courts and performance pavilion, although parking is so scarce that neither project has been implemented to date. Both would expand the town's recreation and entertainment resources and better link Lynn Hall Park with the newly revitalized Times Square pedestrian plaza. The county has informally agreed that if replacement parking were to be made available in the immediate area, the Lynn Hall parking area could be removed to create these recreation areas as well as to provide the opportunity to re-establish the dune line and native plantings.

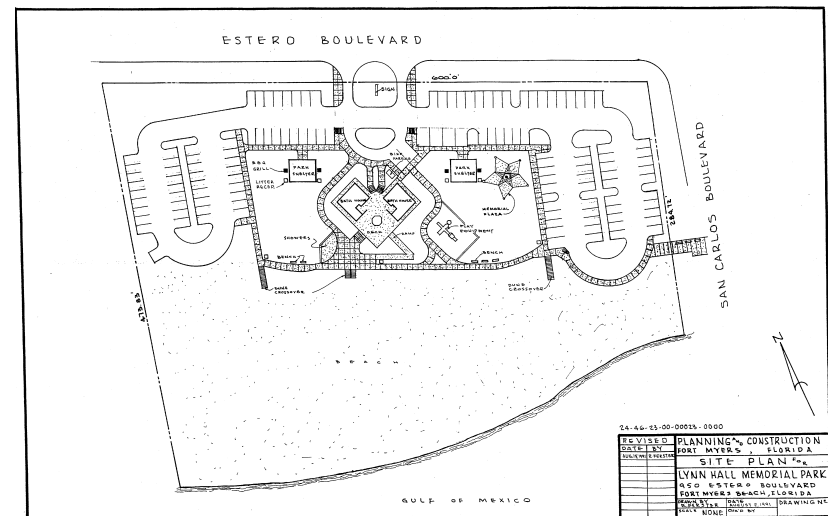


Figure 5, Lynn Hall Memorial Park

Under the CRA plan, Lynn Hall Park would serve as the “anchor” at the beach end of Old San Carlos Boulevard as a revitalized pedestrian-oriented street, with a new “Marina Plaza” as the anchor at the Bay side. This concept expands the public space from the bay to the beach and would physically link the town’s most active recreation areas and public spaces.

The Community Design Element promotes implementation of the Marina Plaza concept through a public/private partnership. Marina Plaza is proposed as a public gathering place near Snug Harbor where cruise ships anchor and boaters use a popular marina. It would provide an additional downtown gathering place and a close-by common area for downtown residents. Another opportunity for expanded public space is the town’s right-of-way under the Skybridge, where there is a pier and metered parking lot. Incorporated into the Marina Plaza, it would provide a key area for improvement including public docks for water transportation, all close to the activities near Times Square.

Beach and Bay Access Points

Lynn Hall Park is popular with day visitors because of its supply of parking and proximity to beach-oriented dining and shopping. But the real resource is the entire length of the Gulf beaches. Since most property on the island doesn’t have direct access to the Gulf, the series of beach access points are important for all other island residents and visitors. There are 46 water access points within the town, 36 of them leading directly to the beach. The other 10 provide access to the Bay side of the island. However, the south end of the island has no public access whatever, endangering the public’s enjoyment of Little Estero Island. One or more sites should be purchased to provide beach access and a few parking spaces to serve the south end. Figure 6 illustrates the location of the water access points; more information on their exact location is provided in the Coastal Management Element. Other than at the two parks, these access

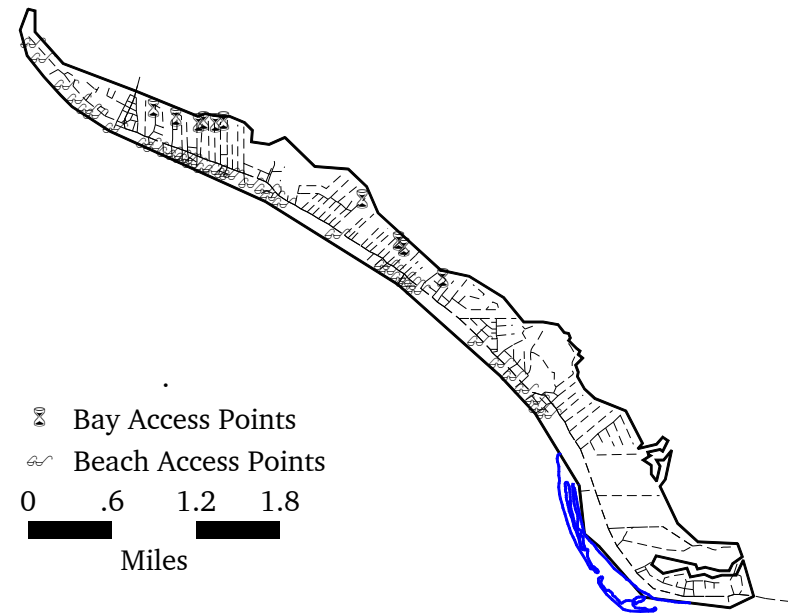


Figure 6, Water access points

points vary in size from 5 to 50 feet wide, making some suitable for parking and others only for pedestrian or bicycle use. A few accesses are still blocked by encroachments or false “private property” signs that the town needs to remove.

None of the Bay access points contain a fully equipped ramp for launching boats. However, public ramps are available at Lover’s Key/Carl Johnson State Recreation Area Park and at Punta Rassa. The Coastal Management Element addresses boat ramps more thoroughly.

Pending improvements to the Matanzas Pass Preserve will include a canoe/kayak landing area near the existing observation area overlooking Estero Bay. This would allow access by boat into areas too sensitive for motor craft use and be an important component of a nature trails system. Two of the Bay access points also have the potential for launching canoes or kayaks.

As noted throughout the previous discussion, access to *the island* from the water has significant potential but is now limited to those owning private boats and able to use private docks or the existing marinas. A water shuttle system or water taxis could provide another means for people without boats to visit the island and/or move from one destination to the other. This movement would be recreational in itself and would not add to the traffic congestion on Estero Boulevard. The Transportation Element discusses this topic and proposes public policy to make it possible.

Bay Oaks Recreation Center

Bay Oaks Recreation Center is at the heart of a complex of civic activities that includes a library, school, nature preserve, and soon a public swimming pool. Bay Oaks itself is a county-operated community park. It is located on 7 acres behind the Beach Elementary School and contains 2 baseball fields, 2 tennis courts, outdoor basketball courts, picnic tables, and play equipment (see Figure 7). It also has a large multipurpose gym with basketball courts, a large meeting room, and smaller rooms. Programs include a daily after-school program, a teen program, open adult basketball and volleyball hours, adult and children's classes, as well as league basketball, softball, and soccer. There are also a variety of special event programs such as summer camp, an annual Halloween party, and dances.

Bay Oaks Recreation Center is now 10 years old and houses one of Lee County's most successful recreational operations; it is heavily used year-around. Its staff and programs have created a center that is a major asset to Fort Myers Beach. Lee County, however, does not wish to continue operating this type of facility in an incorporated area, since its operational funds are now generated mainly from taxes on the unincorporated area. Responsibility for operation of the facility will be turned over to the town. However, because Bay Oaks serves more than just town

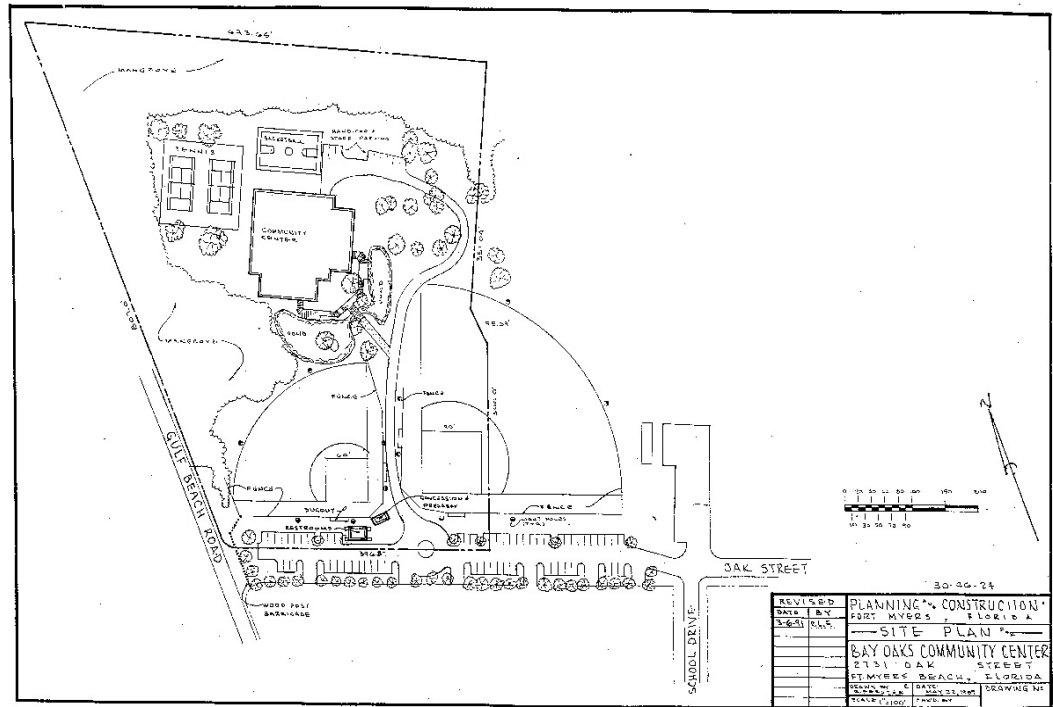


Figure 7, Bay Oaks Park

residents, the county and the town are negotiating an acceptable funding formula. For the 1997/98 fiscal year, they are each paying one-half the cost. A county-town citizens' committee will be evaluating who is using the facilities and recommending a funding split for future years.

Increased user fees are often mentioned as a source of additional revenue to help offset operational costs; however, this is more difficult than commonly assumed. In 1993 Lee County estimated their operations and maintenance costs for Bay Oaks at \$281,000; in that year, user fees amounted to less than 10% of the costs (\$10,000 from summer camp; \$5,150 from recreation classes; and \$12,350 from the after-school program). Even if income from user fees were doubled, they would remain a small portion of the total cost of operating a community park.

Playworks

Between Bay Oaks Park and the elementary schools sits the Playworks, a wood construction children's play system with forts, slides, climbing areas, and surrounding benches for adult supervision and visiting. It was constructed by a "hands-on" volunteer project of the entire community, sponsored by the PTA. Playworks provides an active play area for children that serves the school and the entire community and stands as an example of the energetic, cooperative spirit found at Fort Myers Beach.

Fort Myers Beach Public Library

The Fort Myers Beach Public Library is another treasured facility on the Island. It is supported by its own library district and operates independently from the county library system. The library is located in an attractive new facility in the "heart of the island" civic area and is actively used by all age groups. It has comprehensive collections and programs and is open to the public.

Matanzas Pass Preserve

The Matanzas Pass Preserve provides a significant wildlife habitat on its 56 acres, and has one of the few remaining mangrove fringes on Estero Island. The Preserve is located at the end of Bay Road in the area where the Fort Myers Beach Library, Bay Oaks Recreation Center, the future site of the town's new swimming pool, and Fort Myers Beach Elementary School cluster to create a "heart of the island" for community activities. The preserve contains boardwalks and paths for public access (see Figure 8) and areas for viewing Matanzas Pass and the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve.

The Matanzas Pass Preserve, originally a part of the Martha Redd Estate, was purchased by John Dunning, a nature photographer and Beach resident, to save it from development. Later acquired by the Nature Conservancy through donation and sale, the property was finally donated to Lee County in 1994. Subsequently, an additional acre was acquired from the school board to accommodate the location of the historic cottage, moved from its original beachfront location on Mango Street and renovated to become the town's historic museum and an interpretive center for the Matanzas Pass Preserve. In 1997 the county improved the end of Bay Road, adding a shell driveway, parking lot, and drainage for the cottage and entrance to the preserve.



Figure 8, Boardwalk at Matanzas Pass Preserve

Management and improvements to the site are being guided by the Matanzas Pass Preserve Restoration Plan and implemented as a partnership between the county and the non-profit support organization, Friends of the Matanzas Pass Preserve. Their first priority was to remove the exotic vegetation and replenish the site with native vegetation. The next priority is to repair the existing boardwalks, refurbish trails, build new boardwalks, and continue implementing the vegetation restoration plan. Future plans include providing a canoe/kayak access point and adding a fishing pier/observation deck.

The site is intended for passive recreation, education, research, and wildlife relocation. Programming is intended to educate visitors and promote an understanding of Florida's ecosystem. Recreational activities include walking, fishing, picnicking at the existing neighboring facilities at Bay Oaks Recreation Center, guided interpretive walks, and canoe/kayak "eco-tours" of the Pass and Estero Bay.

The Preserve is owned and operated by Lee County as a part of the community park system. As in the case of Bay Oaks Recreation Center, responsibility for its operation and maintenance may become the shared responsibility of the town, the county, and the all-volunteer Friends of the Matanzas Pass Preserve.

Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area

The Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area, located further south on the Island across from the Villa Santini Plaza, is a system of tidal passes and emerging islands. This beautiful and dynamic area extends for about a mile south of the Holiday Inn and includes about 150 acres of dunes and lagoons that have formed over time from the tidal accretion of sand. It contains rare coastal dune scrub habitat and is home to nesting and overwintering birds and a variety of flora.

Because it originated as an island rather than accretion to upland property, Little Estero Island is owned by the state and managed

by the Department of Environmental Protection. The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (FGFWFC) has designated Little Estero Island as a Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) for the purpose of protecting wildlife from human disturbance during critical periods. Little Estero Island is becoming nationally known for its pristine beauty and abundant wildlife and is enjoyed by residents and visitors and attracts many nature photographers.

The Conservation Element of this plan promotes the town's stewardship role for this area and proposes measures to enhance the public enjoyment of this resource, including designation of pedestrian trails and dune walkovers, adding information and interpretive signage, producing brochures, and conducting seminars to encourage proper use. Key to these recommendations is the formation of a volunteer task force to promote and oversee stewardship of the area. Funding for implementation of educational programs such as interpretive signage is available from the FGFWFC. Maintenance of the area has been shared between Lee County and the FGFWFC.

Bay Beach Golf Course and Tennis Club

The Bay Beach Golf Course, located at the south end of the Island and a part of the Bay Beach development, is private but open to the public. Its exact configuration will be adjusted through the years as certain portions are developed in accordance with a master plan over which the town has little control. The portions that will never be developed will be shown on the future land use map as a permanent recreation area.

The Bay Beach Tennis Club, another part of the Bay Beach development, is also private but has been open to the public. Its future is uncertain, however, as its location is also approved for future development. Whether this facility would be relocated onto undevelopable land within Bay Beach is not known. Many users of this facility have encouraged the town to acquire this property to preserve the tennis club for public use. Unfortu-

nately the cost to purchase the site may reflect its vested development rights rather than the land's normal market value.

Other Private Recreational Facilities

There are other private recreational facilities that are open to the public. There are three public marinas on the Island: Moss Marine, Mid Island Marina, and Fish Tale Marina located toward the south end of the Island. A fourth, Island Bay Marina at the end of Delmar Avenue, provides very limited services. See Figure 9 for their locations.

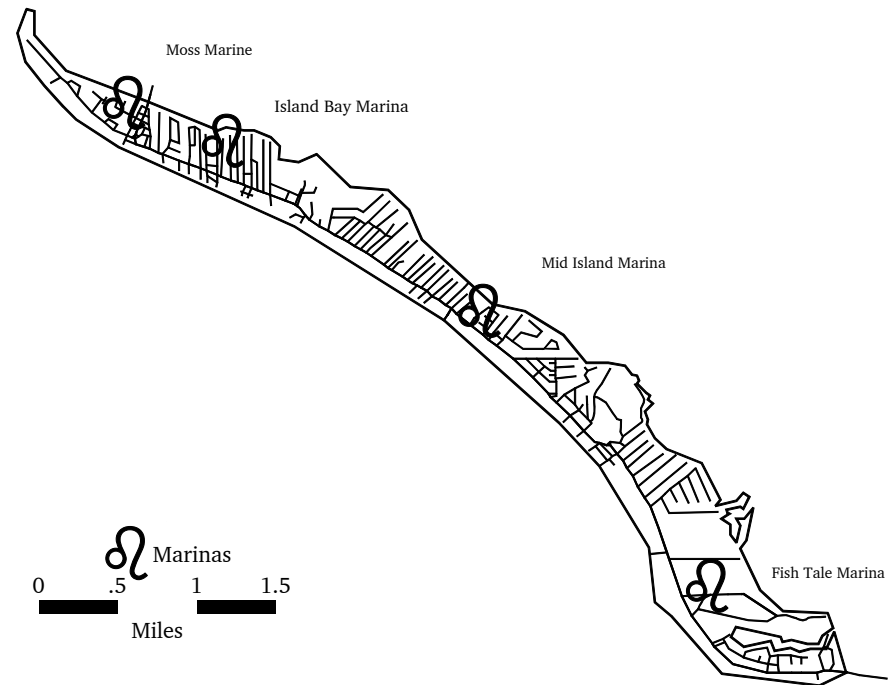
The beaches above the mean high tide line that are not in designated parks are actually private property, although almost no development is allowed there and public use is a longstanding practice. Recreational vehicle camping is available on the beach and Bay side at the Red Coconut RV Resort. Considerable open space, protected by law from future development, exists on the island in the form of wetlands, dunes, and common open space provided in private development. Many private developments provide recreational facilities for their residents and guests only, such as swimming pools and tennis courts.

Recreational Boating

Every part of Fort Myers Beach is near the water. The perimeter of the island is 15 miles around, and there are 10 additional miles of saltwater canals. The Matanzas Pass channel is a major recreational amenity that connects Bay side residents and the canals to Estero Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. The southerly part of this channel is in the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve; most of it is not.

Boating is a major recreational activity for residents and visitors, with great opportunities for off-shore and Bay fishing, diving, water skiing, and nature watching. The current manatee idle-speed zones in Matanzas Pass are somewhat of an impediment to boaters, but Fort Myers Beach residents still have much quicker access to the most highly prized boating locations than the

Figure 9, Existing marinas



majority of Lee County residents. Boating issues are discussed more thoroughly in the Coastal Management Element.

SUMMARY OF EXISTING RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Table 10-1 summarizes the town's existing public recreation sites, followed by Table 10-2 with a similar listing of private recreation sites and open spaces that are available to the public. Each table lists the major usage and facilities that are available.

Table 10-1 — Major Public Recreational Facilities

<i>Name and Classification</i>	<i>Type of Use</i>	<i>Facilities</i>	<i>Size</i>
Bowditch Point Park (Lee County Regional Park)	Resource-based (beach, hiking, picnicking)	limited parking, changing, restrooms, picnic tables (metered parking lot to be added '98/99)	17 acres 1,850 feet of beach
Lynn Hall Memorial Park and Pier (Lee County Regional Park)	Resource- and activity-based (beach, swimming, picnicking, fishing on pier, volleyball)	metered parking lot, changing and restroom facilities, picnic tables	5 acres 600 feet of beach 584-foot pier
Bay Oaks Community Center and Park (Lee County Community Park being transferred to the Town of Fort Myers Beach)	Activity-based	Recreation Center with multipurpose gym, 2 ballfields, 2 tennis courts, outdoor basketball, picnic, play equipment	7 acres 17,600 s.f. building
Playworks	Active children's play area	wood construction children's play equipment complex	less than 1 acre
Matanzas Pass Preserve (Lee County Preserve)	Resource-based	wildlife preserve with boardwalks; observation deck; historic museum; interpretive center	56 acres
Little Estero Island Critical Wildlife Area (Florida Department of Environmental Protection)	Resource-based	beach, dune, and lagoon area — no facilities	about 150 acres
Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve (portions) (Florida Department of Environmental Protection)	Resource-based	submerged land and associated waters — no facilities	The town's boundaries extend 1,000 feet from the shoreline into the aquatic preserve.
Times Square Pedestrian Plaza (Town of Fort Myers Beach)	Activity-based	Landscaped pedestrian plaza with decorative pavers, street furniture — accommodates outdoor dining	n/a
Beach Accesses (Lee County facilities)	Access to bay and beaches	improved for pedestrian use and for parking at the wider beach access points; signage and banners provided	varies from 5 to 50 feet in width

Table 10-2 — Major Private Recreational Facilities That Are Open to the Public

<i>Name of Facility</i>	<i>Description</i>
Bay Beach Golf Course	18-hole golf course located in the Bay Beach development at the south end of the Island, private but open to the public.
Bay Beach Tennis Club	4 tennis courts located in the Bay Beach development at the south end of the Island, private but open to the public.
Moss Marine	Active marina with 39 wet slips, 150 dry slips, located on the Bay side at the end of Old San Carlos in the downtown area.
Mid Island Marina	Active marina with 63 wet slips, 100 dry slips, located mid-island on the Bay side.
Fish Tale Marina	Active marina with 48 wet slips, 240 dry slips, located on the Bay side at the south end of the Island, immediately behind Villa Santini Plaza.
Beaches	Private property beach extends the 7-mile length of the Island above mean high tide line (except for that portion noted above that is in a public park).
above mean high tide line (privately owned but commonly used by the public)	

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

From the previous discussion it is clear that Fort Myers Beach is well endowed with recreational facilities. However, many desirable facilities are lacking. The following sections discuss some of the additional facilities that are frequently discussed or proposed here to stimulate community discussion.

Public Swimming Pool

After many years of effort, local residents have obtained a commitment by Lee County to build a community swimming pool. A 25-meter pool will be built on about 2 acres of land across Oak Lane from Bay Oaks (between Gulf Beach Road and School Street). The county is in the process of acquiring the land from multiple owners, at an estimated cost of \$760,000. Funds for design and permitting of the pool (\$200,000) are budgeted in Fiscal Year 97/98, with construction valued at \$1,295,000 expected the following year. Some construction funds will be borrowed against future impact fee collections (see later discussion).

The county's decision to build the pool was contingent on the town's agreement to operate and maintain it. An interlocal agreement to that effect was signed in late 1996 by both parties. The town's volunteer "Build-a-Pool" Committee has committed to the Town Council to be responsible for raising the funds for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the pool. Sources of funds will be concessions, special events and fund raisers, and user fees.

However, this will be a major undertaking. Costs for operation, maintenance, and staffing were estimated by the county several years ago to be about \$80,000 per year, not including repairs and upkeep. That figure assumed the use of entry-level staff or contract employees who would not receive benefits typical of regular municipal employees. By contrast, the county now reports an average annual cost of \$125,000 for its five existing

public swimming pools (including operation, maintenance, and staff).

In a 1993 analysis, the county reported is average annual cost for the five pools at \$165,000 each. At that time only 6.5% of expenses were being recovered by user fees; a staff analysis suggested the maximum additional potential from user fees to be only 3% more. If the pool committee is unable to raise the necessary funds each year, the town will have to subsidize its operation.

The Long Estate

The town wishes to purchase the Long Estate or “Mound House,” one of the first homesteads on Estero Island. The home was built in 1906 on a significant Calusa Indian site; it now sits on a three-acre property at the end of Connecticut Street. A \$1,030,000 grant has been obtained from the Florida Communities Trust for this purchase. The Estero Island Historic Society is working with the town to plan for this facility. In its role as the “Fort Myers Beach Cultural and Environmental Learning Center,” the Mound House would be a center for the promotion of “eco/heritage tourism” and could anchor a proposed “eco/archo trail” linking important sites such as Mound Key and Matanzas Pass Preserve with other cultural sites in the region such as Demere Key in Pine Island Sound and the Koreshan State Historic Site on the Estero River. A key element in this linkage would be docks for a water shuttle and tour boats.

This facility would be managed by an independent foundation, which would provide a museum, gardens, ecological tours, and archaeological research. It would also provide a historical teaching facility and provide cultural events such as a Calusa Festival.

Live Theater/Local Playhouse

Often noted as missing in the cultural life of the town is a live theater or local playhouse. Although in the past there was a little theater group, one does not exist now. Live theater is often a well-loved community amenity and popular with visitors as well. Should such an effort be undertaken in the community, it could be initiated at Bay Oaks or one of the churches with stages. This would allow a local theater company to grow without a major expenditure for an auditorium. Another alternative would be for another amateur or professional company now performing in Lee County to offer some productions at Fort Myers Beach.

“Postage Stamp” Neighborhood Spaces

Since most neighborhoods at Fort Myers Beach are fully developed, one way to create small neighborhood visiting spaces or children’s play areas is through the “hidden paths” concept. This concept emerged from public workshops and is described in the Community Design Element. It would create a system of pedestrian and bicycle pathways throughout the island, parallel to but on the Bay side of Estero Boulevard. A local foundation or land trust could identify and acquire existing vacant lots or easements to gradually build the network. These parcels could be transferred back to the town for long-term maintenance.

As a part of this concept, occasional “postage stamp” size areas could be created to function as resting areas for bicyclists or walkers. They may be no larger than a typical residential lot of 50' by 100', and as small as a wide place in the path network, perhaps 20' by 20'. This could be a project of an immediate neighborhood, since some neighborhoods may find a small park to be intrusive. In the same manner as described in Objective 3-B of the Community Design Element, neighborhoods wishing to improve their public spaces as civic projects could, upon their request to the town, receive technical assistance and guidelines for creating leisure or play spaces as well as for tree planting, lighting, and maintenance. The neighborhood, town, and local

foundation could work together to identify and acquire an appropriate site consistent with the hidden path network in that area. The town would provide technical assistance to the neighborhood to plan and raise funds for appropriate improvements and neighborhood stewardship of the leisure or play space. The town may be willing to assume long-term maintenance responsibility for the space as a part of the hidden path network.

“Oasis” Parks

Members of the community have also suggested creating “oasis” areas at strategic points along Estero Boulevard — at trolley stops, selected beach access points, or other logical points of intersection for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Policy 1-A-3 of the Community Design Element provides for the development of a sidewalk and streetscape plan for all of Estero Boulevard, scaled to people rather than high speed traffic and which, among other things, is intended to build upon the park-like ambiance of the Island and particularly to improve the pedestrian experience. Some of the “oasis” parks could be as simple as a shaded trolley stop with benches, landscaping, bike racks, water fountain; others could be located in areas where it is appropriate to have a mix of public improvements and small commercial facilities such as a coffee shop or news stand. The sidewalk and streetscape plan proposed in the Community Design Element could identify specific locations, size, design/use criteria, and provide estimated costs and recommend phasing for the creation of “oasis” parks.

Newton Estate

The town has an opportunity to purchase the homestead of James and Eleanor Newton, located immediately southeast of Strandview Avenue with 200 feet of frontage on Estero Boulevard and on the Gulf of Mexico. This site has tremendous potential as an “oasis park” while also serving many complementary functions at a single location:

- Public ownership would allow this property to serve as a rest stop and interpretive facility accessible to those

walking on the beach. Although there are numerous beach access points, at this part of the island none of them provide more than the most minimal public facilities (usually just physical access, and in some case parking spaces).

- This property would also serve as a stopping point on the “Great Calusa Blueway,” a paddling trail being developed by Lee County. This trail will ultimately run 50 miles from the Imperial River to Boca Grande and is expected to become part of the statewide Florida Greenways and Trails System. The Great Calusa Blueway runs along the bay side of Fort Myers Beach through Matanzas Pass, which is only 1/4-mile from this site with easy access via Mid-Island Marina. This paddling trail provides another link among the environmental, cultural, and historical points of interest that can be experienced by residents and visitors.
- As the Estero Boulevard streetscape plan is implemented through the coming decade, more people will be walking and bicycling the length of Estero Boulevard. This property would serve as a rest stop and point of interest for those traveling along the boulevard.
- This site would provide an additional beach park for the town with simple facilities such as restrooms, picnic areas, trails, and meeting rooms.
- Public ownership can guarantee the preservation of a historic cottage on this site, avoid redevelopment of the site for higher-intensity purposes, and provide a beachfront habitat that will reduce the unacceptably high number of failed sea turtle nesting attempts that have occurred in recent years at this location.

Dog Walk Area

Most beach and preserve areas are off-limits to dogs (either on or off-leash) to keep these areas clean and to avoid disturbing beachgoers and wildlife. Many residents, while supporting these protective measures, have expressed a desire for the town to take a positive approach to the current “no dogs allowed” policy by designating safe places, away from traffic, where dogs are al-

lowed on leash or under voice control. Such areas would support enforcement of current restrictions against dogs by providing an appropriate alternative, while also providing a place for pets and their owners to socialize.

Other Potential Facilities

Additional facilities or programs that have been suggested by community members as being needed in the community include:

- More emphasis on inter-generational activities;
- Facilities for in-line skating and skateboarding;
- More community meeting rooms;
- Shuffleboard facilities; and
- Additional tennis courts.

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS

Current and Projected Future Recreation Needs

This section evaluates the adequacy of existing recreational facilities, expected demand for enlargement, and the community’s vision for additional facilities. The resulting recreation standards are tailored for Fort Myers Beach, with an emphasis on improving recreational and cultural experiences of residents and visitors. Potential improvements to existing facilities have been discussed in previous sections and are summarized in Table 10-3, with recreational facilities classified by type.

In 1990, only 9% of the permanent residents were under 18 years of age, and 34% were over 65 years of age (see Figure 10). The permanent population of Fort Myers Beach is relatively stable and is expected to grow by less than 15% at build-out, adding only 805 more permanent residents (see forecasts in the Future Land use Element). With the strong array of recreational facilities in place, the town has determined that the current level of recreational facilities is adequate to serve the projected population of 6,844 permanent residents.

AGE PROFILE FOR TOWN OF FORT MYERS BEACH, 1990

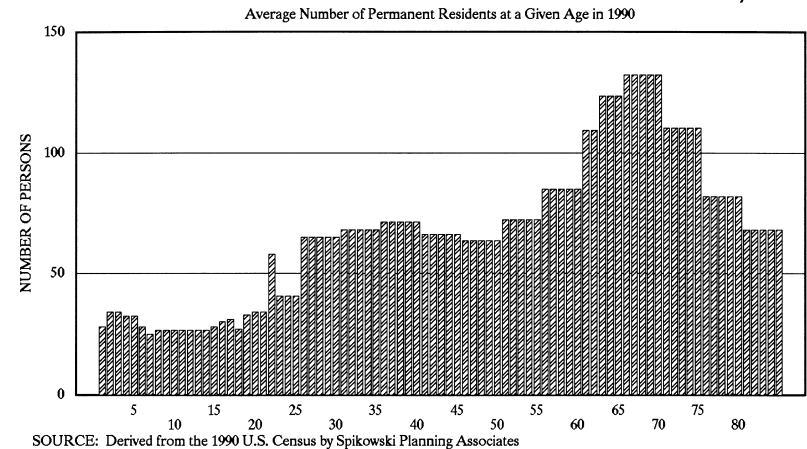


Figure 10, Age data on Fort Myers Beach permanent residents in 1990

By contrast, the number of visitors may increase. Hotel and motel construction is on the increase at Fort Myers Beach; they will strain the overloaded transportation system, but can be accommodated by the recreational system. Efforts of the Tourist Development Council are spurring summer tourism, allowing more visitors to use the same number of motel rooms. Likewise, summer visitors can use the existing recreational facilities without requiring any expansions. The town is fortunate to have two regional parks, two preserves, extensive beaches, plus a major state park (just to the south). While it is the responsibility of the county to provide regional parks to serve this broader population, the town is committed to stewardship of the regional parks and ensuring that all the pieces form an integrated park system that serves the permanent, seasonal, and tourist populations.

New facilities proposed in this element would fill gaps in the current system, either by park type or location, and are not needed to maintain the numeric “level of service” defined in Policy 10-D-3.

**Table 10-3 — Proposed Recreation Standards
With Analysis of Future Needs**

<i>Type</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Future Need</i>
“Postage-stamp” Neighborhood Park	Rest and visiting area along the “hidden path” network or small children’s play area to serve immediate neighborhood.	Criteria and guidelines to be developed as a part of the “hidden path” and residential streets program which provides guidelines and technical assistance to neighborhoods.	Need would be based upon specific requests from individual neighborhoods.
Oasis Park	Resting places for pedestrians and bicyclists at trolley stops and other strategic locations along Estero Boulevard	Specifications and locations to be determined through a Estero Boulevard streetscape plan.	To be assessed in Estero Blvd. streetscape plan, and implemented as feasible.
Dog Walk	Area set aside specifically for dog walking.	To be geographically distributed; size and regulations to be determined.	Need to be confirmed by community survey.
Public Pedestrian Plazas	Integration of public and private commercial space, designed to encourage pedestrian activity and community interaction.	Standards as described in the Community Design Element: Times Square, Marina Plaza, and “Central Green” at Santini Plaza.	Marina Plaza and Central Green to be developed as public/private partnerships.
Community Recreation Complex	Centrally located recreation complex primarily used for active indoor and outdoor recreation and for educational and social purposes.	One centrally located complex with 2 ballfields, 2 tennis courts, basketball courts, play equipment; area for soccer, indoor multipurpose gym and community meeting room; 25-meter swimming pool.	Existing facility is adequate for anticipated needs, except for addition of swimming pool.
Preserve	Natural resource area for conservation and passive recreation, with emphasis on resource oriented activities.	One wildlife preserve on beach side - beach and coastal dune scrub habitat. One wildlife preserve on Bay side -- mangrove fringe and related upland.	Little Estero Island CWA (150 ac) and Matanzas Pass Preserve (56 ac) already exist on the only two remaining natural sites.
Regional Park	Draw users from entire region because of special amenities or use (such as beaches).	n/a (Lee County sets standards for regional parks)	Fort Myers Beach is fortunate to have two regional parks, Bowditch Point Park and Lynn Hall Park
Water Access	Provide walkways to the beach or bay (sometimes with parking spaces).	Continue to provide well-maintained access to beaches, bays, and navigable waters, and are geographically distributed throughout the island.	Attempt to acquire one or more beach access points at the southern end of the island.

FUNDING ISSUES

Specific costs of recreational facilities have been provided previously when reliable figures were available. The following sections address potential sources of funds.

Impact Fees

Even after incorporation, the Town of Fort Myers Beach remains a part of Lee County's park impact fee program. In order to obtain a building permit for a new home or motel room (but not most other commercial uses), property owners must pay a share of the cost of building parks to keep up with growth. The current rate for a single-family home is \$619 for community parks plus \$253 for regional parks.

Proceeds from these impact fees may be used for capital improvements to parks, but can never be used to operate and maintain parks. (Additional funds for parks in tourist areas are provided by the 3% tax on tourist lodgings; unlike impact fees, those funds may be used for operations and maintenance as well. However, at present they are not being used to purchase land for parks.)

Regional park impact fees are collected and spent without regard to the location of the new home being permitted. Regional parks are by definition designed to serve the entire county, and their sites are chosen based on the natural resources they possess. For this reason Fort Myers Beach, despite its small population, has two regional parks (with a third just to the south on Black Island).

Community park impacts fees, however, are spent within the same district where they are collected. Fort Myers Beach is part of Lee County's community park district #4, which extends eastward to Interstate 75 between Fort Myers and Bonita Springs. The new swimming pool is being built with impact fees from all of district #4, which effectively reduces that fund to zero through the year 2001. Clearly, no additional impact fee

funds will be available to the town for many years, given the competition for these funds by all other communities in the impact fee district.

Tourist Taxes

Lee County currently maintains the Gulf and Bay access points in the same manner as Lynn Hall Park and Bowditch Point Park. Much of the maintenance is funded by tourist tax revenues, which are distributed by the Tourist Development Council. The tourist tax is 3% of the rental fee for lodgings rented for period of less than six months (charged in addition to the 6% state sales tax). One-third of the 3% fee is dedicated to a fund that is used for beach and shoreline improvements and maintenance.

Revenue from metered parking is considered by the county and the TDC as a user fee that is used entirely for maintenance of that facility. The tourist tax is then used to pay any remaining costs, based on the logic that tourists aren't the only beach users and shouldn't pay for all maintenance. This concept governs the maintenance of Lynn Hall Park, Bowman's Beach on Sanibel, and potentially the new parking lot at Bowditch Point.

If the town were to accept responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the beach parks and accesses, it may wish to pursue a somewhat different approach to the user fee concept, enabling meter revenues to be used for broader (but still related) purposes, such as community recreation facilities or mass transit that would act to relieve some of the peak season traffic congestion caused by beach users.

Operations and Maintenance

Although the operating budget of the Lee County Division of Parks and Recreation is supplemented by tourist taxes and user fees, it is mainly funded through a special taxing district (MSTU) that is paid only in the unincorporated area. Consequently the county does not wish to operate or maintain community parks in

incorporated areas. The county is currently negotiating the transfer of operational responsibility for community recreational facilities to Fort Myers Beach, consistent with its policy for other incorporated areas. To date this includes operation and maintenance of Bay Oaks Recreation Center and the Fort Myers Beach Swimming Pool (when completed).

There is also the potential for transferring responsibility for the Matanzas Pass Preserve and the beach access points. Although it has not been formally proposed, it is conceivable that the county would approach the town regarding management of Bowditch Point and Lynn Hall Park.

Given this potential, as well as the park enhancements that have been proposed by local residents, the town must actively explore ways to pay to operate these facilities. These include:

- User fees;
- Ad valorem taxes;
- Metered parking revenues;
- Concessions revenue;
- Additional tourist tax funds;
- Volunteer fund raising; and
- Management partnerships with non-profit corporations or private businesses;

These methods can be used for land acquisition and site development as well. However, impact fees are generally preferred to pay for the impacts of growth (although they cannot be used to provide a higher level of service than is currently being provided). Given the tourism benefits that Fort Myers Beach provides for all Lee County, additional revenues from the 3% tourist tax should definitely be sought for park improvements. Other potential methods for acquisition and development include:

- Community-sponsored nonprofit land trusts
- 3% utility tax as a dedicated revenue source for land acquisition
- Grants from federal, state, and private entities

While the natural resources and recreational areas of the town are a treasured amenity for local residents, these resources and the visitor-friendly ambiance the town is working to maintain reinforces the county's tourism program, one of its primary economic development tools. The county and the town should approach the impacts and cultivation of tourism as a cost-sharing endeavor.

Provision of Open Space During the Development Process

The Lee County Land Development Code, under which the town is currently regulating development, requires new developments to provide open space (except for single-family detached or two-family dwelling units on individual lots in smaller subdivisions). The Parks Impact Fee Ordinance encourages residential developments to provide community and regional recreational amenities for their residents by granting up to a 50% credit on their impact fees. Given the small amount of undeveloped land at Fort Myers Beach, this is unlikely to have a major effect. However, major redevelopment activities should be required to include adequate private recreational facilities for their residents.

GOALS - OBJECTIVES - POLICIES

Based on the analysis of recreation issues in this element, the following goals, objectives, and policies are adopted into the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan:

GOAL 10: To provide residents and visitors of all ages a comprehensive, accessible system of parks, active recreation areas, open spaces, beach accesses, natural preserves, private recreational facilities, and cultural activities that provide a variety of recreational opportunities and promote an understanding of our community's environmental and cultural heritage.

OBJECTIVE 10-A NATURAL RESOURCES — Assume a leadership role with other agencies to improve the viability of the natural areas around the town as an integral part of a comprehensive recreational system. Measures of success may include public acquisition of additional beachfront land; designation of canoe trails or water shuttle service linking Fort Myers Beach to surrounding natural resources; or the successful implementation of a plan for the coordinated use and protection of Matanzas Pass.

POLICY 10-A-1 Expand the purview of the town's Marine Resources Task Force to include the sustainability of recreational use of marine resources along with the activities described in Conservation Policy 6-A-4.

POLICY 10-A-2 Implement Coastal Management Policy 5-F-1 initiating a cooperative planning process for Matanzas Pass and surrounding waterways by 1998.

POLICY 10-A-3 Actively participate in the Agency on Bay Management and the Southwest Florida Regional Harbor Board.

POLICY 10-A-4 Promote the use of a water shuttle to link the components of the town's recreational system without adding traffic on the roads.

POLICY 10-A-5 Support the following priorities for public land acquisition outside the town's boundaries:

- i. Land that will contribute to the sustainability and enhancement of the comprehensive recreation system;
- ii. Land that can provide opportunities for public appreciation of environmental and archaeological resources;
- iii. Land that will provide additional beach access (such as Bunche Beach) for visitors who cannot reach Fort Myers Beach due to congested roads.

OBJECTIVE 10-B BOWDITCH POINT PARK — Enhance the natural resources at Bowditch Point Park while increasing its accessibility for recreational purposes.

POLICY 10-B-1 Encourage Lee County to plant native shade trees at Bowditch Point and control the spread of invasive exotic vegetation such as Australian pines to improve wildlife habitat and enhance opportunities for bird watching. If the Australian pines are destroyed by high winds, the town encourages their replacement with native shade trees. This encouragement may be expressed by resolu-

tion of the town council if requested by Lee County.

POLICY 10-B-2 Actively promote alternate means of access to Bowditch Point Park such as electric trams and more frequent and free trolley service, and especially the construction of public docks on the Bay side for private boats and a water taxis stop. Actions to support these activities shall include appropriate changes to the Land Development Code, any required rezonings, and formal requests for funding to Lee County, and may also include further public transit subsidies or financial support for dock construction.

POLICY 10-B-3 If requested by Lee County, consider the costs and benefits of assuming management responsibility for Bowditch Point Park while ensuring its continued accessibility to visitors from throughout the county and beyond.

POLICY 10-B-4 Encourage Lee County to provide on-site parking for the general public at Bowditch Point (in addition to the existing spaces for the handicapped) by adopting an appropriate resolution of support by the town council and by granting the required zoning changes.

**OBJECTIVE 10-C DOWNTOWN AS A RECREATION HUB
— Make the Times Square area the nucleus of the town’s comprehensive recreational system.**

POLICY 10-C-1 **LYNN HALL MEMORIAL PARK:**

- i. Enhance Lynn Hall Park as recommended in Community Design Policy 3-D-12, including continuing beach renourishment and the addition of beach volleyball areas.

- ii. In cooperation with the town’s Main Street Program, encourage entertainment that appeals to residents and visitors while reinforcing the downtown as a recreation and entertainment destination. These could include musical or art-in-the-park events, community festivals, and other family-oriented special events.
- iii. After at least one year of experience with such events, consider the feasibility of including a performance pavilion in the southeast corner of Lynn Hall Park.
- iv. In cooperation with local environmental and business interests, consider the feasibility of constructing a boardwalk along the beachfront to connect the beach access near the Lani Kai to Lynn Hall Park on the landward side of the dune line (see Community Design Policy 3-D-4(iii)).

POLICY 10-C-2 **PUBLIC PEDESTRIAN PLAZAS**

- i. **TIMES SQUARE** — Maintain Times Square as a pedestrian mall and civic plaza consistent with Community Design Policy 3-D-5(ii). Integrate the park with the plaza by creating pedestrian friendly pass-through areas in place of the current fence.
- ii. **MARINA PLAZA** — Work with the private sector to establish a site for a new public pedestrian plaza at the north end of Old San Carlos to increase public activity to the marina and cruise ship docks, consistent with Community Design Policy 3-D-4(v). Investigate the feasibility of improving the existing pier within the town’s right-of-way under the

Skybridge for public docking, and incorporating the pier and parking area into the Marina Plaza concept. This will provide a second focus for a “walking path” around the core area and a close-by neighborhood common area for local residents; and will link the Times Square area to the water taxi system and dinghy dock. The town can assist in locating grant funding to develop this amenity.

- iii. **CENTRAL GREEN** — Promote the establishment of a third public pedestrian plaza to serve the south end of the island by implementing Community Design Policies 3-C-1 and 3-C-2 regarding the redevelopment of Villa Santini Plaza.

OBJECTIVE 10-D COMMUNITY RECREATION — Increase the already high level of access to recreation facilities, and maintain the required level of service for community parks.

POLICY 10-D-1 Negotiate with Lee County to determine an appropriate balance for operating Bay Oaks Recreation Center without excluding non-town residents, and establish an equitable system of user fees to help fund its operation and enhancements.

POLICY 10-D-2 Support the efforts of the “Build-a-Pool Committee” which has committed to the Town Council to be responsible for raising the funds for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the new public swimming pool. Sources of funds will include user fees, concessions, special events, business sponsorships, and community fund raisers.

POLICY 10-D-3 The town adopts the following level-of-service standard for community parks: for each 7,500 permanent residents, 1 centrally located recreation complex that includes 2 ballfields, 2 tennis courts, outdoor basketball courts, play equipment, an indoor gymnasium, and community meeting spaces. Programming shall address all age groups and encompass active recreation, physical improvement, and social, educational, and cultural activities. The town also will maintain a cultural and environmental learning center at the historic Mound House, and contingent on obtaining grant funding for property acquisition, will purchase the Newton estate to serve as an oasis park with interpretive and rest facilities for those traversing Lee County’s “Great Calusa Blueway,” Estero Boulevard, and the walking trail provided by the public beachfront.

POLICY 10-D-4 To identify important gaps in the recreation system, the town shall conduct a community-wide survey to evaluate the adequacy of facilities and programming and measure willingness to pay fees or raise taxes to provide additional services. These services may include the following items that have been suggested in previous community workshops:

- i. more emphasis on inter-generational programs
- ii. in-line skating and skateboarding facilities
- iii. dog walk areas
- iv. little theater group
- v. shuffleboard courts
- vi. more tennis courts

POLICY 10-D-5 If the survey indicates sufficient demand, the town should investigate acquiring the privately owned Bay Beach Tennis Club which may be replaced by future phases of development of Bay Beach. A tennis club could be the nucleus of a “satellite” recreation center at the south end of the Island.

OBJECTIVE 10-E NATURAL PRESERVES — Enhance public access to the town’s nature preserve areas, while ensuring their ecological sustainability and providing for their long term maintenance.

POLICY 10-E-1 **MATANZAS PASS PRESERVE** — Prepare for the transition of the long-term maintenance responsibility of the Matanzas Pass Preserve from Lee County in accordance with Conservation Policy 6-B-3.

POLICY 10-E-2 **LITTLE ESTERO ISLAND CRITICAL WILDLIFE AREA** — Enhance the public enjoyment and protection of the area in accordance with Conservation Policy 6-B-2.

POLICY 10-E-3 **OTHER NATURAL PRESERVES** — Establish a citizen task force to evaluate opportunities to designate additional open spaces and natural preserves, and to identify potential funding sources including grants and a 3% utility tax.

OBJECTIVE 10-F CULTURAL FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS — Achieve a heightened appreciation of the town’s recent and ancient history and cultural life.

POLICY 10-F-1 Manage the Cultural and Environmental Learning Center in the historic “Mound House” (formerly known as the Long Estate). Thoroughly analyze the archaeological remains on this site. Link this facility to

other cultural and recreational points of interest by providing appropriate dockage to serve the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail and water taxis as well as links to bike and pedestrian paths.

POLICY 10-F-2 Establish a task force on eco/heritage tourism to develop and implement the town’s “eco/heritage” program. The task force would work closely with the Marine Resources Task Force to advise the town on appropriate components of the statewide plan of the Governor’s Advisory Committee on Eco-Heritage Tourism when adopted.

POLICY 10-F-3 Acquire the beachfront estate of James and Eleanor Newton and operate it as a small community park with close links to the paddling trail in Matanzas Pass, the pedestrian and bicycle facilities on Estero Boulevard, and the adjoining public beach.

OBJECTIVE 10-G PUBLIC ACCESS — Increase the number and quality of public access points to the Gulf beaches and Estero Bay.

POLICY 10-G-1 Maintain or improve existing levels of beach and bay access pursuant to Coastal Management Policies 5-E-1, 5-E-2, and 5-E-3 which provide for the continued maintenance of existing beach access points, and evaluate the need for more parking.

POLICY 10-G-2 Support and participate in Lee County’s “Great Calusa Blueway” paddling trail by making convenient links between the trail and the town’s environmental, cultural, and historical points of interest.

POLICY 10-G-3 Acquire one or more beach access points at the southern end of the island in addition to acquiring the Newton estate (see Policy 10-

F-3) for additional public access to the beach and as a mid-island interpretative facility and rest area for the “Great Calusa Blueway” and the natural walking trail that is provided by the continuous beachfront along Estero Island.

OBJECTIVE 10-H NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS — Within five years, begin providing small-scale parks to serve individual neighborhoods and pedestrians.

- POLICY 10-H-1 Provide a mechanism for requesting neighborhoods to create and manage a small children’s play area or “visiting” area, as a part of the “hidden paths” and/or “residential streets” programs described in the Community Design Policies 2-A-1 and 2-B-2. Develop a program of guidelines and technical assistance available to requesting neighborhoods. Evaluate the program within two years of initiation and, based on actual demand, and set standards if necessary to regulate the pace and equity of implementation.
- POLICY 10-H-2 As provided for in Community Design Policy 2-A-1, facilitate the establishment of a local foundation or community land trust which among other responsibilities, would be responsible for planning and acquiring vacant parcels or easements for the hidden path and “postage stamp” park concept.
- POLICY 10-H-3 Provide occasional “oasis” areas (resting places for pedestrians and bicyclists) at selected trolley stops and other strategic locations along Estero Boulevard as a part of the Estero Boulevard Streetscape Plan described in Community Design Policy 1-A-3(iv). The first oasis area shall be the Newton estate at

Strandview Avenue (see Policy 10-F-3) which shall be closely linked to the Great Calusa Blueway paddling trail, the public trolleys and sidewalks/bike paths along Estero Boulevard, and to the public beachfront.

OBJECTIVE 10-I IMPLEMENTATION — Provide a comprehensive and cost-effective recreational system that meets the future needs of Fort Myers Beach.

- POLICY 10-I-1 Demonstrate through the annual budget and five-year Capital Improvements Program that the park and recreation standards of this plan are being met.
- POLICY 10-I-2 The town shall work with the county, surrounding jurisdictions, state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, national, state and local land trusts, private organizations and corporations, and other groups to identify funding sources and mechanisms and to structure partnerships to implement the policies of this Recreation Element.
- POLICY 10-I-3 Promote a cooperative effort among the town, Lee County, city of Sanibel, and other counties and regional agencies to develop cost-sharing mechanisms for improvements needed to improve the experience of visitors.
- POLICY 10-I-4 The town shall require through its development regulations that major redevelopment activities include adequate private recreational facilities for their residents.

RECREATION ELEMENT

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