

## News-Press

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### Citizens land big victory

*Staff*

EDITORIAL

PINE ISLAND GROWTH

It was a sweet moment for citizens who want to put at least some control concerning Lee County's growth tsunami into the hands of the people.

After wobbling for months, county commissioners unanimously voted this week to uphold development restrictions in the community plan that Pine Islanders crafted in the late 1980s. Hurricane evacuation and quality of life were issues along with the right of a community to devise a plan under county auspices -- and have that plan enforced by county officials.

Pine Islanders and their civic association fought hard for this day, and they deserve great credit.

We hope this is a turning point, that the county will start trying harder to protect areas not yet consumed and homogenized by look-alike housing tracts and strip malls. There still are areas where something local and distinct persists, such as the agricultural and fishing heritage of Pine Island and its small-town feel.

Sadly, the reality is that Pine Island is unique. Public safety demands special attention on an island that is huge and has room for new development, but is linked to the mainland by a single two-lane bottleneck road that already is congested. The restrictions at issue were triggered by traffic counts on the evacuation route.

The past couple of years have driven home the need for good hurricane evacuation routes. Hurricane catastrophes do happen, and crowding too many people on Pine Island invites one.

The restrictions hardly mean an end to development on the island, one of the last frontiers for growth in coastal Lee County.

There are more than 6,500 vacant lots already approved for development but not yet built on. The restrictions do not apply to 12 proposed developments already in the bureaucratic pipeline when commissioners halted all new projects to allow a committee to study the issue. And new projects still are possible under the restrictions, although they can build only a third of the units that would have been allowed. Some argue the restrictions are too weak.

But the decision is reasonable and legally defensible. And it was clear from the testimony at the marathon session Tuesday that the people of Pine Island want growth restraints.

So do lots of people in Lee County.

MAP NOT AVAILABLE

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