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Hearing to deal with Pine Island land development

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The Lee County Board of County Commissioners plans a second public hearing on Pine Island land development codes Tuesday.

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There will be no vote. The vote is scheduled for the commissioner's 5 p.m. May 29 meeting at commission chambers in the old Lee County courthouse.

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If the commission adopts the codes, the regulations will establish development standards specifically applicable to the Greater Pine Island Planning Community.

Limiting the number of homes that are allowed to be built on the island remains the key point in a plan that was presented to the commissioners by Mary Gibbs, director of county development, May 9.

Not one of the about 25 Pine Islanders attending that meeting opposed the plan. Pine Island's population stood at 16,241 as of 2005, said Joan LaGuardia, communications manager for the county Department of Community Development.

The Pine Island Civic Association through its planner, Bill Spikowski and attorney Phil Buchanan, offered alternatives for the commissioners to consider on limiting house building.

The favored alternative allows one home on 2.7 acres if 70 percent of the property is preserved as a natural habitat. If developers have 100 acres then they can put up 31 homes on 30 acres while preserving 70 acres as native trees and bushes.

Having more homes built on the island is a safety issue. Pine Island only has one approach, Pine Island Road. If everyone attempted to evacuate during a hurricane it would bottle up and jeopardize lives as people tried to evacuate, Buchanan said.

Islanders can expect it to take 21 hours to evacuate Pine Island compared to 18 hours for neighboring Cape Coral.

"Our little road through the mangroves rather soon would be an F for failure and gridlock," Buchanan said.

In 1989, the original Pine Island Plan established the 910 rule. If 910 cars went off and on the island during rush hours in the morning and the evening then no homes could be built.

Although it continues, the 910 limit was surpassed and planners came up with the idea to have Greater Pine Island operate under its own codes in the county rule book to check growth.

Other issues:

The plan calls for uniform signs to point the way to businesses and tourist attractions off main roads.

It provides for homeowners associations to pay for maintaining any natives habitat set aside in a development.

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