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Standards set to limit Pine Island growth

Call for 1 house on 2.7 acres, plus natural habitat

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Pine Island residents now have their own set of development regulations to limit housing growth on the island.

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Lee County commissioners voted 4-0, with Ray Judah absent, Tuesday to adopt the Greater Pine Island Planning Community development standards.

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The major point of the standards is the limit of one house on 2.7 acres with 70 percent of the land preserved as a natural habitat. The rules apply to Matlacha and Pine Island.

In a 100-acre tract, 70 acres ideally would be covered with native vegetation and trees. On the other 30 acres, 37 houses could be clustered in a neighborhood.

"We just wanted to fight to keep Pine Island in the condition it is in now," said Bokeelia resident Gary Shelton, 61. "We still have too much traffic for our narrow roads, but we'd like to keep it as natural as it is."

Some of the 40 people who attended Tuesday's meeting spoke out against the move, though.

"I'm an investor," said Naples resident John N. Brugger. "I'm tired of the people (on Pine Island) trying to tell me what to do with my property."

Phil Buchanan, representing the Greater Pine Island Civic Association, summed up the case for adopting the development standards.

"The island lacks infrastructure (water and sewers) to support extensive development and we have a very serious (hurricane) evacuation problem," Buchanan said.

With a population of 16,241, Pine Island has one road on and off, Pine Island Road. Residents can expect to take 21 hours to evacuate their 17-mile-long island.

The standards protect the environment and the island's rural way of life while giving landowners a reasonable return on their investment, Buchanan said.

Pine Island is home to what Bokeelia's Mary Baker called a rural lifestyle, where buildings don't reach for the sky and neighbors know each other. It has a lifestyle friendly to the arts.

"Writers, artists and musicians live there for inspiration," Baker said. "It is discouraging for me to see development."

The adoption of the standards also gave instructions to county staff to work with island business leaders in formulating sign ordinances that would inform visitors. Those signs must also be attractive and standardized.

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