

TOWN OF FORT MYERS BEACH — 2008 PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS

Application #: 2008-09-TEXT

Description: Modify Policy 7-J-2 to set a new date for modifying the land development code to require a useful traffic impact analysis for new developments

Pages to be changed: Comprehensive Plan Pages 7-15 and 7-33 (proposed changes are attached)

Discussion in E/A Report (adopted on Jan 16 '07): From Page 50: "EVALUATION OF POLICY 7-J-2: This is the only policy in the plan that specifies a change to the LDC that has not yet been carried out. This task is more complex than had been anticipated and the 1999 date should be changed. The town may need to hire a specialized transportation consultant to create the specifications that developers would be required to follow in preparing traffic impact analyses for their proposed developments."

Action by LPA: During a public hearing on May 20, 2008, the LPA recommended that the Town Council approve changes to the narrative and to Policy 7-J-2 of the Transportation Element. The LPA's suggested revised wording has been incorporated into this report. ~~The minutes of the public hearing are attached.~~

Action by Town Council: During a public hearing on November 17, 2008, the Town Council voted unanimously to transmit this amendment for state review.

DCA Objection: None

DCA Recommendation: None

Response to DCA: N/A

Proposed Final Action: The Town Council should adopt the transmitted amendment, as described above, as part of Ordinance 09-03.

Final Action: The Town Council adopted this amendment on August 17, 2009, as part of Ordinance 09-03. (Text shown in red is new or has changed since the initial transmittal of this amendment in January 2009.)

Improve sidewalks and bikeways

Fort Myers Beach has outstanding opportunities to increase pedestrian and bicycle activity. The physical layout of the community encourages walking and biking, with all homes within just a short distance from the beach and active commercial areas. Currently there are sidewalks on one side of most of Estero Boulevard, and Lee County has imminent plans to fill one gap from Buccaneer to Estrellita Drive using federal funds. The town should make every effort to have this project expanded to fill the other gap from the Villa Santini Plaza to Bay Beach Lane.

Future sidewalk projects would include sidewalks on the opposite side of Estero Boulevard, which would also improve safety and congestion by reducing the number of pedestrian crossings. In some areas, wide rights-of-way allow many design choices; in others, deep drainage ditches could be put underground and covered with new sidewalks.

Bicycles and pedestrians often share sidewalks, but that situation is not ideal, especially where the number of pedestrians is high and the sidewalks are narrow. Where the right-of-way is wide, separate bike paths and sidewalks can be built. In areas with limited right-of-way, bicyclists could be provided with extra-wide travel lanes (14 feet wide); bicyclists would then be able to ride with the flow of traffic, leaving the sidewalk to pedestrians. The ultimate result would be a resort environment that truly supports walking, bicycling, and public transportation.

There are several funding sources for sidewalks and bikeways, including federal “transportation enhancement” funds, gasoline tax proceeds, and (potentially) road impact fees. Another option would be the establishment of a special taxing or assessment districts (MST/BUs), which could be used in conjunction with lighting or other special districts.

Require traffic impact analyses for new development

Under current regulations, the traffic impacts of new development play almost no role in the approval or denial of development orders. The Diamondhead convention center, for instance, is being built between two of the most important nodes of activity on Fort Myers Beach, and will have great impacts on both. Under current rules, however, no traffic circulation analysis was required except for a determination of whether to build a single turn lane. (Further analysis wasn’t required because no rezoning was needed and the number of trips generated in the peak hour fell below a fixed county-wide threshold.)

The town needs to ensure that its development regulations do not allow this situation to continue, and which consider the cumulative impacts of existing and potential development. The Land Development Code needs to be amended to lower the thresholds for requiring traffic impact analyses and to establish the type of analysis that will aid the town’s decision-making process. Proper technical analyses must be required, with the results used to determine whether impacts are acceptable and whether an improved design could offset some of the impacts (as in the previous example in Figure 13 where stores separated from the sidewalk will reduce usage by pedestrians and increase traffic impacts). Another example might be parking limitation criteria whereby new trips generated as a result of new or expanded land uses could not trigger a demand for additional parking. The town will need to hire a specialized transportation consultant to create the specifications that developers would be required to follow in preparing traffic impact analyses for their proposed developments.

OBJECTIVE 7-I LEVEL-OF-SERVICE STANDARD — Maintain minimum acceptable levels of service for the transportation system.

- POLICY 7-I- 1 Traffic congestion is a serious problem at Fort Myers Beach, caused by a combination of high tourism demand for its beaches and past over-building relative to road capacity. Neither factor is within the control of the Town of Fort Myers Beach, although its residents must tolerate congestion every winter. This comprehensive plan seeks to manage congestion levels and encourage alternate means of mobility including walking, bicycling, and trolleys.
- POLICY 7-I- 2 The peak capacity of Estero Boulevard's congested segments is 1,300 vehicles per hour. The minimum acceptable level-of-service standard for Estero Boulevard shall be that average monthly traffic flows from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. during each month do not exceed that level for more than four calendar months in any continuous twelve-month period. Measurements from the permanent count station at Donora Boulevard shall be used for this standard.
- POLICY 7-I- 3 Figure 18 of this element is hereby adopted as the future transportation map of the Town of Fort Myers Beach.

OBJECTIVE 7-J PROTECTING PUBLIC ACCESS — Although no future right-of-way needs have been identified, some existing town and county rights-of-way are substandard and few are wider than needed. The town shall not vacate or acquiesce in the vacation of existing rights-of-way except where no public purpose would be served by retaining the right-of-way.

- POLICY 7-J-1 **RIGHTS-OF-WAY:** Town and county rights-of-way are needed for the undergrounding of utilities; for the expansion of sidewalks and bike paths; for water accesses; for on-street parking; for public transit and road improvements; and for other public purposes. The town shall strictly limit vacations of rights-of-way and easements to preserve future access for these purposes.
- POLICY 7-J-2 **TRAFFIC IMPACT ANALYSES:** A thorough traffic impact analysis is currently required only for major rezonings and very large development orders. The town shall amend its Land Development Code during 2010 ~~1999~~ to:
- i. decrease the thresholds for requiring traffic impact analyses;
 - ii. require them to study the cumulative impacts of potential development; and
 - iii. use the results in assessing whether impacts are acceptable, and whether an improved design could offset some of the impacts.