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MEMORANDUM

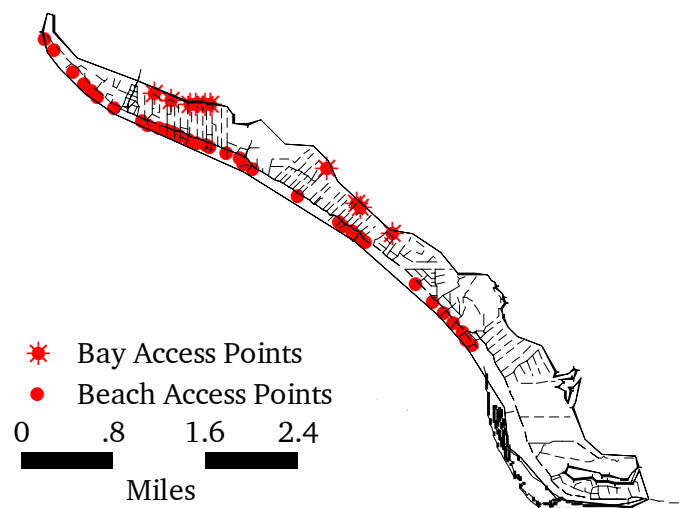
TO: Fort Myers Beach Town Council
FROM: Bill Spikowski
DATE: June 7, 2002
SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS
Application 2002-3-TEXT: Revise the Recreation Element to establish policies regarding public acquisition of beachfront land.

This amendment, which was initiated by the Town of Fort Myers Beach, will establish town policies regarding public acquisition of beachfront land.

RECOMMENDATION: Amend the Recreation Element to add narrative text and to revise Policies 10-D-3, 10-F-1, 10-F-3, 10-G-2, 10-G-3, and 10-H-3 as described below. At its public hearing on April 16, the Local Planning Agency unanimously endorsed this recommendation.

DISCUSSION: The Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan, which became effective in 1999, analyzed the town's abundant beach and bay access points and its wealth of public recreational facilities (see Figure 6 from the Recreation Element, reprinted here).

Despite this abundance of resources, the plan noted that these facilities serve not just local residents and tourists, but also residents and visitors of the entire region. Policies were then adopted into the plan to



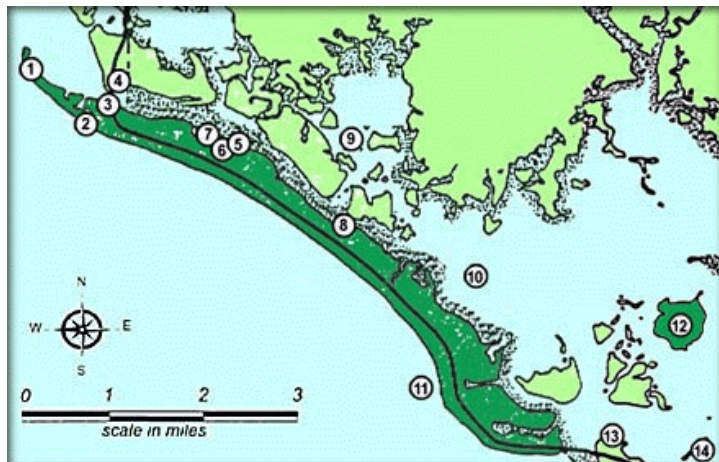
maintain and improve recreational and cultural facilities at Fort Myers Beach.

The plan also specifically identified two major waterfront acquisitions: the Long Estate (now usually known as the Mound House, see Policy 10-F-1) and one or more additional beach access points at the southern end of the island (see Policy 10-G-2).

Since that time the Mound House has been successfully acquired. Acquisition of a gulf-front site for a town park has been on the town's capital improvements program for the past several years, but the town has been unable to find an appropriate site to purchase.

About a year ago the town learned it could purchase the gulf-front compound of James and Eleanor Newton, located just southeast of Strandview Avenue. This site is ideal because of its beautiful beachfront site, the presence of historic buildings, its proximity to public transit, and its potential addition to the growing network of environmental, cultural, and historical points of interest (see map).

The town has embraced the potential for this acquisition and applied last year for a land acquisition grant from the Florida Communities Trust (FCT), the same agency that provided funds to purchase the Mound House. FCT helps local governments implement their comprehensive plans through the acquisition of land, using funds from the state's Florida Forever Act. FCT differs from other acquisition programs by focusing exclusively on locally selected acquisition projects. Each year, FCT makes grants to local governments to help them buy coastal, recreation, greenways, and open space land.



1. *Bowditch Point*
2. *Lynn Hall Park*
3. *Matanzas Pass Fishing Pier*
4. *Ostego Bay Marine Science Center*
5. *Matanzas Pass Wilderness Preserve*
6. *The Historic Cottage*
7. *Bay Oaks Recreational Center and Playworks*
8. *Cultural and Environmental Learning Center*
9. *Hell Peckney Bay Canoe and Kayak Trail*
10. *Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve*
11. *Critical Wildlife Area*
12. *Mound Key*
13. *Lover's Key / Carl Johnson State Recreation Areas*
14. *Koreshan State Historical Site*

The town's initial application to FCT, while not successful, scored high enough that the town will resubmit the application for the next grant cycle. Although acquiring the Newton property is already fully consistent with the town's comprehensive plan, it became clear while analyzing FCT's scoring of the Newton application that minor amendments to the plan, along with certain other actions such as historic designation of the property and endorsement of Lee County's new paddling trail through Matanzas Pass (see map in Attachment A), could provide the margin needed to obtain FCT funding next year. The following amendments to the Recreation Element of the plan are recommended:

ADD TEXT ON PAGE 10-17, as shown by underlining:

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 *[no change to this section]*

The Long Estate *[no change to this section]*

Live Theater/Local Playhouse *[no change to this section]*

“Postage Stamp” Neighborhood Spaces *[no change to this section]*

“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 *[no change to this section]*

Other Potential Facilities *[no change to this section]*

REVISE/ADD RECREATION ELEMENT POLICIES as follows:

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.

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. Continue to pursue acquisition of the Long Estate and assist the foundation that will provide long-term management with funding for start-up costs (with the amount needed to be evaluated annually). 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 and 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-2~~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.

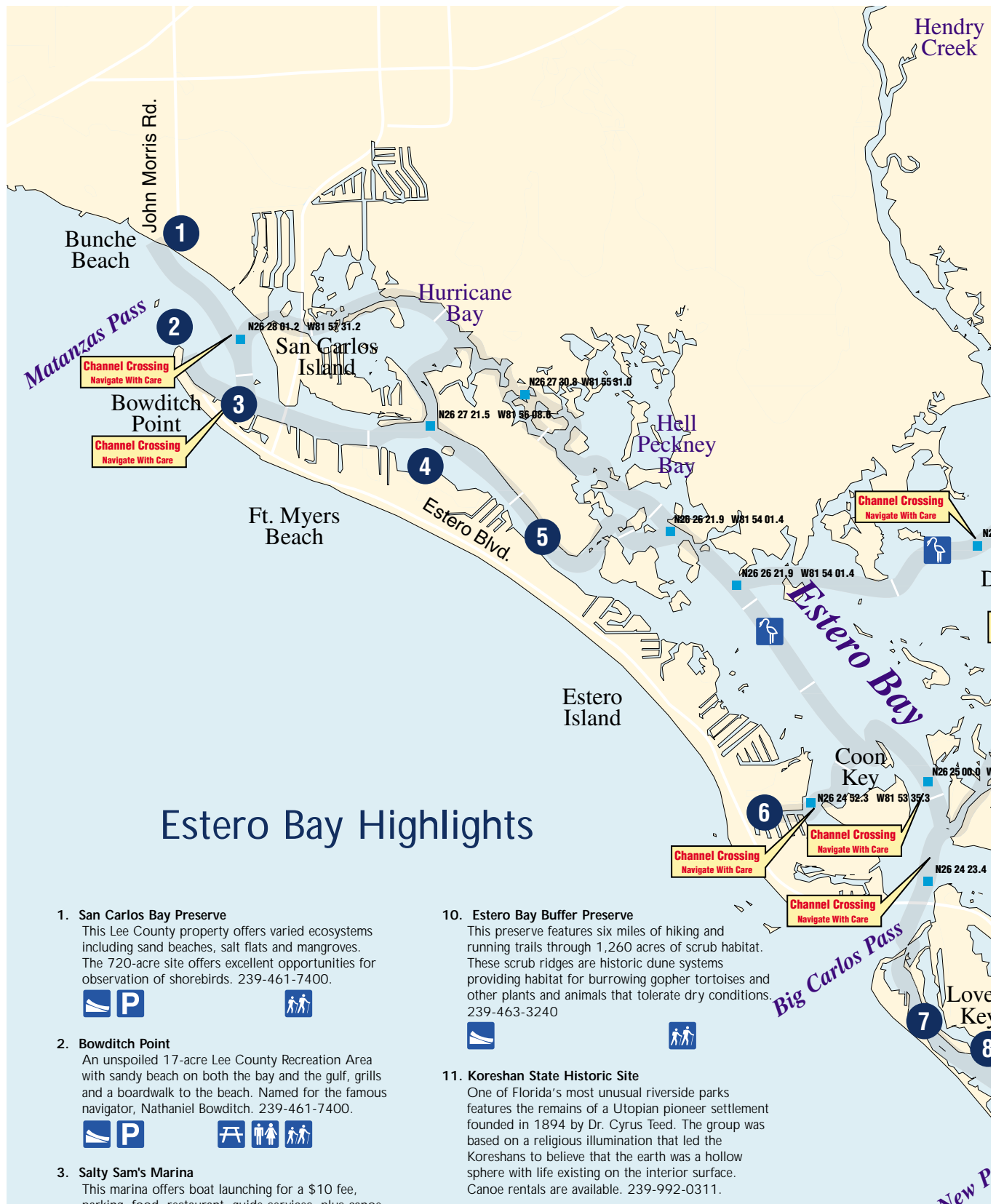
POLICY 10-H-1 Provide a mechanism for requesting neighborhoods to create and manage a small children's play area or "visiting" area, as a part of the "hidden paths" and/or "residential streets" programs described in the Community Design Policies 2-A-1 and 2-B-2. Develop a program of guidelines and technical 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.

Attachment A: Map of Great Calusa Blueway as it passes by Fort Myers Beach (1 page)

Attachment B: Narrative of grant request for Newton Estate (3 pages)



Estero Bay Highlights

- 1. San Carlos Bay Preserve**
 This Lee County property offers varied ecosystems including sand beaches, salt flats and mangroves. The 720-acre site offers excellent opportunities for observation of shorebirds. 239-461-7400.

  
- 2. Bowditch Point**
 An unspoiled 17-acre Lee County Recreation Area with sandy beach on both the bay and the gulf, grills and a boardwalk to the beach. Named for the famous navigator, Nathaniel Bowditch. 239-461-7400.

    
- 3. Salty Sam's Marina**
 This marina offers boat launching for a \$10 fee, parking, food, restaurant, guide services, plus canoe

- 10. Estero Bay Buffer Preserve**
 This preserve features six miles of hiking and running trails through 1,260 acres of scrub habitat. These scrub ridges are historic dune systems providing habitat for burrowing gopher tortoises and other plants and animals that tolerate dry conditions. 239-463-3240

 
- 11. Koreshan State Historic Site**
 One of Florida's most unusual riverside parks features the remains of a Utopian pioneer settlement founded in 1894 by Dr. Cyrus Teed. The group was based on a religious illumination that led the Koreshans to believe that the earth was a hollow sphere with life existing on the interior surface. Canoe rentals are available. 239-992-0311.

Attachment B — Narrative of grant request for Newton Estate

Town of Fort Myers Beach
Beach & Shoreline Project Request Form FY 02-03
Request Narrative

I. Project Summary

The request seeks funding to acquire the James and Eleanor Newton Estate and associated real property, for its conversion and use as a regionally significant cultural, recreational and ecological destination. Located on the Gulf of Mexico at the mid-section of Estero Island, the almost one acre beachfront site provides an ideal mid-island location for a public passive recreation park with beach access, historical significance and natural habitat. The park will preserve its locally significant historical features, enhance its natural coastal strand habitat and provide various regionally linked educational and recreational opportunities, creating an eco-tourism attraction for the visitors of Lee County.

II. Project Abstract

A. Project Description

Creation of a Beach Park

Acquisition of the property will enable the creation of a beachfront park. The Town will provide access and facilities including a parking area, picnic areas with trash receptacles and grills. Public use of the beach will be encouraged by creating a beach volleyball court. One of the existing residential structures will be converted into a bathhouse with showers, dressing rooms and bathrooms. Moreover, the park is flanked by two public beach access points, each will complement one another to increase the public access and enjoyment of the park.

Preservation and Restoration

Acquisition of the property will ensure the preservation of the remnant imperiled coastal strand habitat, which is currently utilized by species of special concern such as the Brown Pelican and Snowy Egret. This habitat will be enhanced through the removal of the existing exotic vegetation and the planting of native species. To educate the public of the importance and meaning of the coastal strand habitat, the Town will place a winding, on-site mulched nature trail. To reestablish the dunes on the adjacent beach, where documented Loggerhead Turtles nesting occurs, the Town will remove the existing concrete sea wall, plant native dune vegetation and construct beach access walkovers to preserve the reestablished dunes. These improvements will complement the scheduled beach renourishment for this area of beach.

Acquisition of the property will enable the preservation of the historic Newton Cottage, a classic example of the architecture in the 1930s and 1940s, which has been recognized as a locally significant historic structure.

Public Education

There will be many opportunities for visitors to learn about both the history and natural resources of the park. The nature trail will have several small and unobtrusive signs identifying the native plant and animal species associated with the coastal strand habitat. In addition, a kiosk will be placed on the site to describe the historical significance of the park and the Newton family. The structure at 4650 Estero Boulevard will be converted into a public meeting space to benefit various ecological and historic programs and events, including the “Treasures of the Sea” guided environmental walking tour sponsored by the Town. This professionally led tour of the beach teaches participants about the meaning of the coastal environment including the beach and dune system. This guided tour is provided no less than twice a week and the park meeting space will serve as an excellent stopping point for this popular attraction.

In addition, the park will enable the conversion of the historic Newton beach cottage into a local museum to contain exhibits displaying historic artifacts teaching the public about the historical significance of the site, the Newton family legacy and their association with nationally significant friends.

B. Overall Context

The Town recognizes the importance of linking its natural, recreational and open spaces when opportunities arise. This park will be linked in a couple of ways with surrounding and nearby recreational and open spaces, as well as natural and wildlife preserves. First, the park will be adjacent to the beach, which has been designated on the Town’s Future Land Use Map as a public recreation area. Being on a small barrier island, most of the existing public parks are also accessible from the beach. The beach provides a natural link to all the visitors on the island. In addition, the park will be designated as a stopping point for canoeists and kayakers using The Great Calusa Blueway and Lee Island Coast Paddling Trails. The Newton Beach stop will provide a destination and embarkment point on the trail. Campers from Lovers Key will be able to stop and re-provision at the Publix located across the street. This trail will link the site to such other significant recreation and natural areas such as Little Estero Island, Bowditch Regional Park and the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve.

C. Impact on Tourism

There is little question Lee County’s beaches are the most valuable attraction we have. Newton Beach is a rare opportunity to convert valuable private property into a beautiful one-acre park, with 200 feet of beachfront. During peak season, the Town of Fort Myers Beach population swells from approximately 6,700 to almost 50,000. Current public beach facilities are located on the northern end of Estero Island at Bowditch Point and Lynn Hall Memorial Parks. The Newton Beach Park will create new public beach facilities to the mid-island and south end visitors. By combining the beach with our wonderful history, Newton Beach will provide a historic, environmental and recreational site that will preserve the natural and cultural resources all of which make Lee County an uncommon attraction.

D. Estimate Project Timeline

The Town has a contract with the Newton Estate to purchase the property. Once the funding for the acquisition is secured, the Town will close on the property. The contract specifies that the Town will take possession of the property only after Ellie Newton passes away. However, it is crucial that the Town secures funding during 2002 because there is no guarantee the estate will extend the contract to purchase.

Once the purchase is finalized, the Town will begin the planning process for the proposed park facilities. It is anticipated that the park facilities will be completed and open to the public within one year of final acquisition.

Budget Information

■ Project Budget:

a. Land Purchase Price	\$2,000,000
b. Acquisition Costs	
Certified Survey	\$20,000
Appraisals & Review	\$1,800
Title Report & Insurance	\$6,500
Environmental Audits	\$2,000
Agent Fees or Commissions	\$100,000
Total Project Cost	\$2,130,300

■ Facility Maintenance Budget: The Town of Fort Myers Beach will operate and maintain Newton Beach Park. Because the effort has been focused on acquisition of the property, the cost of the proposed improvements, operational and maintenance costs have not been evaluated. However, it is anticipated that the Town will fund the improvements and ongoing operational expenses.