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MEMORANDUM

TO: Fort Myers Beach Local Planning Agency
FROM: Bill Spikowski
DATE: May 2, 2005
SUBJECT: **EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The following is provided as backup for our May 10 discussion about the Comprehensive Plan:

- Printed copies of all the plans and drawings from the April 7 public presentation.
(These are also freely available on-line at www.spikowski.com/beach.htm.)
- A summary of the survey results of those attending the April 7 presentation.
- A summary of the survey results of those attending the March 8 charrette workshop, plus copies of the original comment sheets.
- My May 2 letter to the Florida Department of Community Affairs requesting their concurrence with our proposed scope for the evaluation and appraisal report.

Evaluation of Comprehensive Plan

COMMUNITY DESIGN WORKSHOP --- "REDESIGNING OUR TOWN"

The Town of Fort Myers Beach began a community design process [with a March 8 workshop](#) to begin evaluating and improving the Comprehensive Plan. A "work-in-progress" presentation led by Victor Dover of Dover, Kohl & Partners was held the evening of April 7; download a flyer for that event [here](#). This presentation was broadcast live on the town's cable TV channel and is being rebroadcast several times.

Many of the images shown during the April 7th presentation are now available here:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEW BEACH PARK (Idea "A") • NEW STREET PARALLEL TO ESTERO BLVD. (Idea "C") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RELOCATED ESTERO BLVD (Idea "B")
<p>PLAN (overhead) VIEW WITH ROUNDABOUT (Idea "D")</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">DRAFT</p> <p>CLICK FOR: larger image printable page</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">DRAFT</p> <p>CLICK FOR: larger image printable</p>
<p>PLAN (overhead) VIEW WITHOUT ROUNDABOUT</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">DRAFT</p> <p>CLICK FOR: larger image printable page</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">DRAFT</p> <p>CLICK FOR: larger image printable</p>

<p>AERIAL PERSPECTIVE</p>	 <p>VIEW OF BEACH PARK</p>	
<p>STREET-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE</p>	 <p>APPROACH TO ROUNDABOUT</p>	 <p>VIEW DOWN RELOCATED ESTERO BOULEVARD</p>
<p>STREET-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE</p>	 <p>VIEW FROM ROUNDABOUT TO PARK</p>	

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Other topics for discussion at these workshops has included:

- How can Estero Boulevard be improved for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and trolleys? [DETAILS](#)
- Are the town's "buildback" rules for older buildings too lenient or too strict? [DETAILS](#)
- Is it in the town's best interest for motels to be converted to condos? [DETAILS](#)

During February of 2005, the Local Planning Agency continued its discussion on the upcoming evaluation and appraisal report, particularly its list of major issues and plans for the March 8 charrette; background material is available [here](#). Previous discussions were held on January 25 and December 7. Background material for the October 19, 2004 discussion is available [here](#). Background material for the first discussion in June is available [here](#). The Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan was the result of an intensive 2½-year effort that began shortly after incorporation of the town and ended with the new plan taking effect in 1999. Florida's growth management

Fort Myers Beach Survey Results - Following 4/7/05 Presentation

Did you participate in the community design workshop on March 8th?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
32	40	1

PHYSICAL DESIGN IDEAS

Question # 1: Do you think the idea of the beachfront park should be pursued further?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
56	3	12	2

Question # 2: Do you think the idea of relocating Estero near Times Square should be pursued further?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
30	17	17	9

Question # 3: Do you prefer the beach park or relocate Estero approach?

<u>Beach Park</u>	<u>Relocate Estero</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>
44	17	4	8

Question # 4: Do you think enough drivers would use the new parallel street to provide relief on Estero Blvd?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
42	13	14	4

Question # 5: Do you think the pedestrian bridge over Estero Blvd should be pursued further?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Not Sure</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
48	13	10	2

Question # 6: What is your reaction to a roundabout at the intersection of Estero Blvd and Fifth Street?

<u>Love It</u>	<u>Hate It</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Want to Learn</u>
33	4	7	29

REGULATORY CHANGE IDEAS

Question # 1: How important to you are the following improvements to Estero Blvd?

Underground Utilities:	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
	66	3	4
Better Drainage:	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
	65	1	7
Sidewalks:	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
	67	0	6
Street Trees:	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
	43	22	8
Bike Paths:	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
	64	5	4
Transit Facilities:	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
	49	14	10

Question # 2: Rebuilding of over-density buildings, should the Town:

- 19 Encourage rebuilding of over-density buildings (older buildings that exceed today's density limits) by allowing their replacements to be larger than the existing buildings
- 30 Allow rebuilding of over-density buildings but do not allow them to become larger
- 12 Discourage rebuilding of over-density buildings by requiring density and/or size to be reduced
- 11 Forbid rebuilding of over-density buildings; all new buildings would have to meet the town's current density rules.
- 1 No Answer

Question # 3: Tear-down of over-density motels, should the Town:

- 19 Encourage tear-down of over-density motels (older motels that exceed today's density limits) by allowing their replacement condo building to be to be larger than the current motel buildings
- 33 Allow tear-down of over-density motels, but do not allow replacement condo buildings to be any larger
- 16 Discourage tear-down of over-density motels by requiring density and/or size or new building to be reduced, or to meet the town's current density rules
- 5 No Answer

Fort Myers Beach – March 8, 2005 Hands-on Survey

Of the many ideas you heard tonight, which ones seem most exciting to you?

TRANSPORTATION

- Trams instead of trolleys; trams in peak season/peak days
- Trolley lane in center lane; extra trolley lane on bridge
- A multi-level garage in San Carlos Island
- The bypass seems to get large support for traffic mitigation on Estero
- Allow traffic to go off the Island with two lanes and on with one lane, reverse the process when needed by virtue of traffic flow with mechanical divides
- Parking garage with easy access to/from bridge (2)
- traffic impact fees from county - ok
- address traffic to/from island
- take the big noisy smelly polluting diesel trolleys off the Estero Blvd and substitute smaller trams – easier to accommodate on the roadway, a more pedestrian scale, easy on/off and adoptable to changing volumes of riders

ESTERO IMPROVEMENTS

- Establish a TIF district to raise monies for underground utilities
- Redevelopment of Estero Blvd streetscape; bury the utility lines (4)
- Bike path on beach side of Estero (5); paved bike path the length of the Island

RE-ROUTE ESTERO/ TIMES SQUARE AREA

- Move route from Estero Blvd to bridge to behind (or across) Helmerich; re-route Estero from bridge to Crescent (8)
- Extension of Times Square (2)
- Non-obtrusive (clear) pedestrian bridge
- Putting a new face on Ft Myers Beach by removing the buildings on the beach side of Estero opposite to Seafarers Area; replacing the motels with a park
- Extend the Times Square shops/restaurants with hotel/motel further back from the beach – maintain view of beach from bridge
- re-route new road behind times square – have a large pedestrian mall

REGULATIONS

- Relaxing the build-back codes and defining intensity; making it easier to build back without losing sq ft
- Implementing the vision in the current community design element and having the political will to do it

MISC

- town needs development; encourage developers
- Demolish Mound House and convert property to a neighborhood park
- Definition of intensity – be realistic; do all possible to develop more open beach access, or parks
- better view corridors

Which physical design features discussed tonight are most critical to future improvements in Fort Myers Beach?

TRANSPORTATION

- Access road to island
- Traffic vs. pedestrian at Times Square
- Traffic calming landscaping to help angry drivers
- Trolley pull-offs on new const. sites
- New Coconut Rd bridge
- get rid of the light at Times Square, use over- or under-pass for pedestrians
- 3-lane bridge for traffic movement
- One way off beach via crescent & one way onto bridge

ESTERO IMPROVEMENTS

- Estero Blvd Upgrading; under grounding electric to beautify Estero and make room for plantings (6)
- Tree lined streets – shade trees in addition to palm trees
- bike path, palms (no one likes gumbo limbo) maybe a tramway along the beach

RE-ROUTE ESTERO/ TIMES SQUARE AREA

- Rerouting Estero (8); rerouting must be good for community and not only the developers
- Provide adequate parking areas in such a way that traffic is not impeded
- allow Myer & Richard to use all the ideas to come up with a charming land use w/ retail and condo/hotels
- open up the beachfront south of Times Square, extend commercial area behind open area, moving traffic to the east

MISC

- Design an Amphitheater for the Lynn Hall Memorial Park area
- What we do with our beaches renourishment
- preserving beach views within the rebuilding and improvements on the table
- allow higher density in areas that are low density now
- keep commercial area casual and funky – no fancy condo hotels

Which regulatory ideas discussed tonight are most important to you?

DENSITY

- Limiting the density to 6 units/acre; the island needs to lose higher density
- Same size reconstruct (build back); no increase in density
- control of density
- Reducing density by requiring reconstruction to have fewer units
- be willing to trade height for reasonable benefits to residents
- Keep strict rules on density for build-back

BUILD BACK POLICY

- Need some flexibility in development as the regulatory rules are so strict that you are encouraging slums
- Make it easier for developers to rebuild, but not let build much larger than what existed before
- The building setback policy
- exchange of hotel units for dwelling units – 3 hotel units for 1 dwelling units
- The buildback process is too stringent, there is not incentive to improve your property on the beach, square footage should not be tied to density and intensity
- OK to go motel to condo as long as there are fewer units and no increase in total sq ft
- The current build back rules provide a disincentive to rebuild older rundown buildings; the size of the units is not as important as the number of units
- keep motels for visitors as many only want “room-type” accommodations – we already have rental condos for those who want a larger unit
- exchange of hotel units for dwelling units – 3 hotel units for 1 dwelling unit (2)
- need to clarify regulations and be more lenient; we need to upgrade our island – it’s started already, but lets not wait for another hurricane to get it really rolling
- the condo hotels are too big and fancy and way too expensive for most visitors – let’s have smaller low-rise hotels like the lighthouse

TRANSPORTATION

- a bridge to the south end of the island needn’t go only to Coconut; and if it did, why not an overpass such as the one proposed on Sumerlin over San Carlos Blvd; direct the bridge toward Alico or to Bass Rd for medical emergencies

Additional Comments

- developers need clear cut guide lines density, setbacks, etc.
- no one in presentations talked about merging traffic on all of Estero Blvd.; this is as big a cause of traffic as is Times Square area
- the realignment of Estero @ Seafarers was proposed by the original developers; this was at the time the bridge was originally being built; for whatever reason the powers that be at the times prior to construction didn't embrace the idea; so this is not a new idea
- There should be a trolley stop on the north end of the island in close proximity to the Lynn Hall Park with a crosswalk
- Beach renourishment – no berms or plantings
- incorporate water taxis and floating docks, tram cars to enhance public transit options – could incorporate entertainment – performers on the trolleys
- lack of discussion on reducing the traffic on/off island; many drivers do not drive the speed limit and cause back-ups
- excellent presentation by Victor Dover – he (and his staff) have a real feel for our beach community
- need smaller quieter trolleys perhaps electric like Palm Beach to take traffic from Times Square to Bowditch and the south. The existing large trolleys need only to go back and forth to Times Square. Make it more fun to use.
- a very well-conducted charrette; good facilitators;
- never even heard of an airport bus before, how do I find out more? And how do we improve service?
- also found out about a traffic camera; how is it accessed? And where are the bus arrival clocks? We need better communication of information

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May 2, 2005

Bernard O. Piawah, Planning Manager
Florida Department of Community Affairs
2555 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100

RE: EVALUATION AND APPRAISAL OF THE FORT MYERS BEACH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Dear Mr. Piawah:

Thank you for attending the scoping meeting on March 31 for the Town of Fort Myers Beach evaluation and appraisal report.

We are requesting that your office formally acknowledge our proposed scope for this report. The first three items below are major issues that we have already begun discussing with the public during our March charrette and follow-up presentations and workshops. In addition to the substantive issues within each, the evaluation and appraisal report will identify the extent to which existing plan objectives and policies have been met thus far.

Following the discussion of the three major issues, this letter identifies four special topics that the town will also be addressing, in addition to the basic statutory requirements for evaluation and appraisal reports.

MAJOR ISSUES

- 1. FUTURE LAND USE:** After five years' experience, are the Comprehensive Plan's "buildback" provision working properly, or should they be modified or repealed? Should the plan allow conversions from over-density hotel/motels guest units into over-density residential units? If so, would this policy cause a fundamental change in the economy of Fort Myers Beach, displacing the tourist economy and its locally-owned motels, restaurants, and shops in favor of condominiums? Would such a change be good or bad for Fort Myers Beach?

- **Background:** The plan established a new concept for “pre-disaster” buildback of existing buildings that exceed the post-1984 density limits. Many questions have arisen from the town’s initial experience implementing this policy. For instance, should over-density buildings be allowed to expand further during the rebuilding process? What happens when motels are proposed for conversion into dwelling units – should the new dwelling units be required to meet current density limits (which have been in place since 1984) or should they be allowed to disregard those limits? Also, federal and state coastal regulations apparently require new beachfront buildings to be elevated so high that the ambience of the pedestrian environment will be degraded by the new buildings; creative ideas are needed for the town to ensure that new beachfront buildings can improve the look and feel of Estero Boulevard while still meeting coastal regulations.
2. **ESTERO BOULEVARD – entire length:** The Comprehensive Plan established the following vision for the future: “Estero Boulevard has become the premier public space on the island, with a strong sense of place . . . pedestrians now cross safely and many people use the expanded fleet of trolleys to move around the island.” There continues to be a strong consensus to make Estero Boulevard more friendly to pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit and to make it more beautiful as well. Equally important would be burying utility lines to protect them from high winds and stopping the frequent “ponding” of rainfall that has nowhere to flow. However, there is still no consensus about how to pay for these improvements, or how they might be made in a logical sequence over ten or twenty years.
- **Background:** The 2000 Estero Boulevard Streetscape Master Plan projected a total cost of \$20–\$30 million to carry out all of its proposed improvements to Estero Boulevard (including placing power lines underground). This figure is well beyond the ability of the town to finance at current levels of taxation. One option had been to place tolls on the bridges and use a large portion of the toll revenues for pedestrian and transit improvements within the town, many of which are detailed in the streetscape plan. Unless the community’s resistance to tolling abates, another revenue source will have to be found or the streetscape improvements will have to be dramatically scaled back. One potential funding source is Lee County, which currently owns and maintains Estero Boulevard, but the county’s priorities may be different than those of local residents. Before Lee County hires engineers to design actual improvements, the town needs to decide on the basic form they will take so that the town’s livability and transportation goals will be carried out rather than being ignored.
3. **ESTERO BOULEVARD – Sky Bridge area:** The most congested segment of Estero Boulevard is near Times Square, and there is never a shortage of ideas on what to do about it. Many were described in the transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan, but this year there are two entirely new ideas. The town is studying reopening Center Street, which is now a public parking lot between Old San Carlos and Estero. The town is also analyzing the potential realignment of Estero from Crescent to the bridge through Seafarers and Helmerich Plaza. Would these alternatives noticeably reduce traffic congestion? How would they affect the surrounding area? Would they be more successful than ideas previously identified? What other alternatives might be possible to

reduce traffic congestion while making Fort Myers Beach a better place to live and visit?

- **Background:** The town's Traffic Mitigation Agency is investigating and experimenting with many promising transportation improvements. The TMA and its consulting engineers understand their mission is to find better ways to move traffic. In addition, the town needs to understand how potential transportation improvements would affect the beauty, convenience, and walkability of the town's major streets before it can be decided whether they would be good, bad, or neutral for Fort Myers Beach.
 - (1) **Center Street:** Consulting engineers for the town are working on plans to reopen Center Street to carry out a recommendation from the town's Transportation Mitigation Agency. The purpose is to allow a second route from the Sky Bridge for drivers who are traveling to the north end of the island or to Old San Carlos.
 - (2) **Realignment:** Due to common property ownership, the realignment of Estero Boulevard is a possibility for the first time. Rather than waiting to see if the landowners propose a realignment plan of their own, the town should take this opportunity to evaluate various alternatives, perhaps identifying one or more potential designs that respond to the varied public and private interests that would be affected.

SPECIAL TOPICS

4. **TRANSPORTATION:** Does the Transportation Element need to be amended or revised? Should some of the transportation alternatives that were analyzed in that element but not selected be reconsidered at this time? Should other alternatives be added?

- **Background:** Since the completion of the Transportation Element in late 1998, the town has moved forward on several transportation initiatives, including an intensive Congestion Mitigation Study that began in 2002. Although that study is not yet complete, it became controversial in part due to the serious consideration that was given to placing tolls on the bridges. Also, its advocacy of new traffic signals and other roadway improvements near Times Square differs in several respects from the principles set forth in several other studies: the Transportation Element itself, the Old San Carlos/Crescent Master Plan, and the Estero Boulevard Streetscape Master Plan.

5. **STORMWATER MANAGEMENT:** The Stormwater Management element called for the town to prepare a Stormwater Master Plan. Is this plan still a priority for the town?

- **Background:** Objective 9-F of this element called for a town-wide Stormwater Master Plan to be conducted by the year 2000. This plan would determine the nature of potential improvements to the existing stormwater drainage system, to improve drainage and also to reduce the level of contaminants running off into tidal waters. It would also evaluate permanent funding sources to carry out such improvements. Instead of conducting this plan, the town has begun to construct specific improvements to fix some of the worst drainage problems while experimenting with various methods of reducing contaminants. This alternate program has been successful and provides a reasonable alternative to the Stormwater Master Plan as originally proposed. However, without a Stormwater Master Plan, certain funding mechanisms would not be available, such as a stormwater utility.

Mr. Bernard Piawah

May 2, 2005

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- RELATED SUB-ISSUE: How could permeable paving be incorporated more fully into public and private improvements to reduce flooding and improve water quality?
6. **UTILITIES:** The water supply portion of the Utilities Element needs to be updated to reflect the town's purchase of its potable water system from Lee County and to incorporate the ten-year work plan for improvements to the potable water supply system.
 7. **HOUSING:** The original Housing Element for the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan was based on 1990 census data. Now that 2000 census data is available, Lee County is conducting a new affordable housing needs assessment for all municipalities and for the unincorporated county. Relevant findings from this assessment will be included in the evaluation and appraisal report.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Very truly yours,

William M. Spikowski, AICP

cc: Marsha Segal-George, Town Manager
Jerry Murphy, Community Development Director
Anita Cereceda, Chair of Local Planning Agency