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Editorial: Pine Island Growth

Don't let traffic take over

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Lee County commissioners have the chance Tuesday to demonstrate two virtues: that they care about growth control and that they respect a community's desire to preserve its character.

The debate is about traffic and development on Pine Island, where a rural atmosphere still survives. It should concern any community under county jurisdiction facing the growth juggernaut.

At issue is a provision in Pine Island's pioneering community plan. It restricts new development once traffic reaches 910 peak hour trips on the island's sole road link to the mainland.

The restriction doesn't prevent development of the 6,600-plus lots already platted. Even new developments are allowed after the traffic threshold is reached, provided they use only one-third of their potential density.

The 910 limit was reached in September 2004, but county staff interpreted the rule to allow 1,130 trips, wiggling around the plain language of the plan. Commissioners have put 12 new developments on hold. What to do with them is crucial, too.

The majority of a committee set up to study the issue backed the county staff's interpretation. The Local Planning Agency wisely embraced the minority opinion, which backs enforcement of the 910 threshold. Also, a hurricane specialist with the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council just Tuesday urged islanders to demand growth control or face a potential catastrophe.

Pine Islanders and anyone who cares about the character of communities should turn out Tuesday.

If commissioners can't back this very reasonable plan, Pine Islanders better push ahead with municipal incorporation.

IF YOU GO

- What: Lee County commission hearing on Pine Island development restrictions
- Where: Old courthouse, Main and Monroe streets, downtown Fort Myers
- When: 5 p.m. Tuesday

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