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Pine Island plan gets go-ahead Plan will eventually help regulate growth

By CHARLES RUNNELLS, crunnells@news-press.com

County commissioners gave an initial nod to the Pine Island area's community plan Thursday and sent it on its way to Tallahassee bureaucrats for further fine-tuning.

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If all goes smoothly, the plan to help regulate Pine Island's growth could be passed by commissioners within six months, said chief planner Bill Spikowski, hired by the Greater Pine Island Civic Association for the project.

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Commissioners looked at the plan for the first time Thursday and bantered on several issues before passing it with no major changes.

"We've been working on this for 2€ years," Spikowski said later, "and we're pleased that they recognized that."

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One of the main issues involves allowing small directional signs on Stringfellow Road. The signs would point consumers to businesses not visible from the road.

Commissioners worried that allowing such signs could lead to other communities asking for the same. In Lee County, such signs are usually allowed only for subdivisions and nonprofit groups, Spikowski said.

In the end, commissioners amended the plan, stating that they'd consider allowing the signs based on the island's unique needs.

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Another issue involved how to regulate growth on the island based on the number of cars passing through Matlacha — a number that directly affects how fast residents can escape the island in the event of a hurricane.

The plan submitted to the commission Thursday stuck to the threshold set by the county in 1989 — 810 trips counted during peak-hour driving time (counting traffic in both directions). Anything more than that would bring about more restrictions on growth and traffic.

That threshold was surpassed in 1998, Spikowski said.

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The county Department of Transportation suggested changing the threshold to 768 trips (counting traffic going in just one direction). That would put it in line with other parts of Lee County.

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Phil Buchanan, a Pine Island resident, urged commissioners to stick to the original threshold. "A plan that resets the threshold every time it needs to is not a plan at all," he said.

Gannett Co.

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Before deciding to send the plan to the Florida Department of Community Affairs, the commission heard more than an hour's worth of public comment.

Barbara Dubin of Pine Island told commissioners the plan met the unique needs of the Pine Island area. "The proverbial 'one size fits all' approach doesn't work."

Spikowski and the Greater Pine Island Civic Association developed the community plan. It will eventually be incorporated into the Lee County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the county's primary land use document.

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