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## Group ponders growth on Pine Island Panel looks at county's handling of restrictions

By [Karen Feldman](#)

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It will be mid-March before Lee County commissioners again grapple with the issue of how to regulate growth on Pine Island.

The board voted Jan. 17 to temporarily halt the approval process on island developments until a committee could determine whether the way county staff has been interpreting the regulations correctly.

The committee — composed of county attorney David Owen, planning director Paul O'Connor and community development director Mary Gibbs — conducted its second meeting Thursday and split 2-1 on that question.

Owen and O'Connor believe the county has acted appropriately; Gibbs disagrees.

The question centers on a rule that says the county must consider the number of cars a proposed development will generate and add that to the total already traveling Pine Island Road.

When the number reaches 910 an hour through Matlacha at peak traffic hours, restrictions kick in that reduce the density of future developments.

Traffic on Pine Island Road reached that number in 2004, but the county has continued to approve developments.

Because there is just the one road and a two-lane drawbridge leading on and off the island, residents have been concerned by the unbridled growth and the added traffic it will generate.

The Greater Pine Island Civic Association recently commissioned a study to determine whether it makes sense for the island to incorporate so that residents could take control of the community's future.

The study concluded there would be sufficient money for the island to run itself, but the association is holding off on further actions until the commission settles this development question.

Owen said he and O'Connor believe county staffers have correctly interpreted the island land use plan and Owen will write an opinion to that effect.

Gibbs said that it's difficult to interpret what lawmakers intended when

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they approved the standards in 1989, but she thinks the best strategy is to apply common sense.

She uses this example: If the road has the capacity for 200 more trips during the busiest times, the county's system would deny a development order for a subdivision that would produce 201 trips, but there would be no limit on developments that would add 199 trips.

"There are some gaps in the logic," she said.

Owen and Gibb will complete their written opinions this week and turn them over to the Lee County Local Planning Agency by Feb. 20.

The group, an advisory board for the county commission, is expected to discuss the matter at its Feb. 27 meeting, Owen said.

The board members could do a number of things: They "can accept it, deny it, comment on it, provide their thoughts," Owen said.

Then it goes to the county commission, which is expected to discuss it at its March 14 meeting.

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