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**Growth on Pine Island curbed**  
*Karen Feldman*  
 Staff

New developments limited in number of housing units  
 By **KAREN FELDMAN**

[kfeldman@news-press.com](mailto:kfeldman@news-press.com)

Citing concerns about hurricane evacuation times and the need to preserve the quality of life on Pine Island, the Lee County Commission voted unanimously Tuesday night to reduce the number of homes permitted in future developments.

After more than two hours of public comment, during which 43 people addressed the board, commissioners voted to require future residential developments to reduce by two-thirds the number of housing units that would have been allowed previously.

The ruling exempts the 6,675 platted lots that have been sold but not developed. Individual property owners will still be permitted to build on those lots.

The reduction also does not apply to the 12 proposed developments that were already going through the approval process when the commissioners placed a moratorium on all Pine Island projects two months ago while a committee determined how the county should regulate growth on the island.

While that concession to growth may satisfy some landowners already in the process of developing their properties, County Attorney David

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Owen and at least two representatives of those developers warned the commission it could face lawsuits.

Commissioner Doug St. Cerny said he favored limiting growth even if developers sue the county over it.

"I don't think people have to sacrifice quality-of-life issues because of the threat of a lawsuit," he said.

Commissioner John Albion observed that "there were going to be lawsuits no matter what the board did tonight."

After the marathon session in the sweltering meeting room, Bryan Crane, president of the Greater Pine Island Civic Association, said he was somewhat surprised that the vote was unanimous but was "very pleased with the outcome. I think the commission made a very good decision."

James Ink, a consultant for a number of developers on Pine Island, said he was glad that the commission grandfathered in the 12 developments that were already in the planning stages.

"I think it's the right thing to do," he said.

Ink added that while he agreed with most of the commission's ruling, he was concerned about what the reduction in density would mean to the island's future.

"Suddenly agriculture becomes the highest and best use of the land," he said. "I'd hate to see all the natural areas turned into farmland."

At issue was a segment of the Pine Island Land Use Plan, adopted by the county in 1990, that calls for the county to 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 periods, the plan calls for the county to cut the density of future developments by two-thirds.

Traffic on Pine Island Road reached 910 in 2004, but the county continued to approve developments.

Members of the Greater Pine Island Civic

developments.

Members of the Greater Pine Island Civic Association protested, calling on the commission to rein in growth as called for in the plan.

Bill Spikowski, a planning consultant for the civic association said, "Land that's developable elsewhere in the county is not developable on Pine Island unless we build a new bridge," which county officials say won't happen.

Commissioner Bob Janes agreed.

"Pine Island is truly a unique community," he said. "The situation there depends on us looking at it a little differently."

Commissioner Ray Judah called on Dan Trescott, a principal planner for the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, to give his opinion on how development will affect hurricane evacuation on the

island.

Although some of those who addressed the board commented that they had no problem getting off the island prior to hurricanes, Trescott said that only 25 percent of island residents left before Hurricane Charley, and it's difficult to predict what would happen if larger numbers of people tried to get off the island via Pine Island Road.

However, he said, "You reduce the level of damage and suffering that occurs when you reduce density."

The commission's decision Tuesday night should help accomplish that, Trescott said.

It will also have another effect, according to retired attorney and island activist Phil Buchanan:

"It probably means an end of the incorporation effort" that civic association members had been considering in order to control growth on the island.

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