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Pine Islanders demand a plan

Tell commissioners they want their peace and safety assured

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Pine Islanders urged county officials to limit growth, ensure their safety and preserve the island's character at a Lee County commissioners meeting Tuesday.

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Limiting the number of homes that are allowed to be built on the island remains the key point in a plan presented to the commissioners by Mary Gibbs, director of county development.

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More than 25 Pine Islanders, representing about 6,000 homes on the island attended the meeting held in commission chambers in the old Lee County courthouse.

After working on development regulations for the island since 2001 the Greater Pine Island Civic Association remained just two steps away from the Greater Pine Island plan for future development's adoption.

"I'm tired of them fooling around," said Pine Islander Sonny Koutsoutis, 66. "It is time for them to approve it."

The code faces some adjustments by county planning staff, another public hearing May 22 and then it will be scheduled for a vote by the commissioners.

The civic association through its planner, Bill Spikowski and attorney Phil Buchannan, offered alternatives for the commissioners to consider on limiting house building.

The favored alternative allows one home on 2.7 acres if 70 percent of the

property is preserved as a natural habitat. If developers have 100 acres then they can put up 81 homes on 30 acres while preserving 70 acres as native trees and bushes.

Having more homes built on the island is a safety issue. Pine Island only has one approach, Pine Island Road. If everyone attempted to evacuate during a hurricane it would bottle up and jeopardize lives as people tried to evacuate, Buchanan said.

Islanders can expect it to take 21 hours to evacuate Pine Island compared to 18 hours for neighboring Cape Coral.

"Our little road through the mangroves rather soon would be an F for failure and gridlock," Buchanan said.

In 1989, the original Pine Island Plan established the 910 rule. If 910 cars went off and on the island during rush hours in the morning and the evening then no homes could be built.

Although it continues, the 910 limit was surpassed and planners came up with the idea to have Greater Pine Island operate under its own codes in the county rulebook to check growth. Other issues at the meeting:

- The plan calls for uniform signs to point the way to businesses and tourist attractions off main roads.
- It provides for homeowners associations to pay for maintaining any natives habitat set aside in a development.

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