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Pine Island wins on development

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The people of Pine Island just west of Cape Coral won an epic victory last week. Let it inspire other communities trying to retain some rural character in the face of the development juggernaut.

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Lee County commissioners unanimously approved development restrictions for the island.

This does not stop development on the island. The new standard allows up to one house on 2.7 acres, with 70 percent of the land preserved as open space. That means, for example, that on a 100-acre tract, 37 housing units could be clustered on the least sensitive 30 acres, with 70 acres left in green space. The plan also aims at letting farmland be partially developed, with the remainder devoted permanently to agriculture.

The island lacks infrastructure, and has only one road connecting it to the mainland, with serious hurricane evacuation issues. But people move to Pine Island, as they have to many outlying communities, to escape intense development. It's a familiar Florida paradox: people trying to pull up the drawbridge to preserve things, once they've made it across. But any community has a right, within reason and according to a legal plan, to do precisely that.

As development spreads inland (Pine Island being a rare coastal area with some space left), the demands for community preservation will be heard more frequently. Let people get inspiration from the example of Pine Islanders, who fought hard for 20 years for their plan.