

Estero Development Report

Volume 10, Number 1, Issued September 2010
Produced by the Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL)

For More Information about Estero

...see www.esterofl.org

September Opportunities for Citizen Participation in Protecting Estero's Quality of Life

Date	Time	Event	Location
Wednesday, September 8 th	5 p.m.	Estero Design Review Committee	Estero Community Park
Tuesday, September 9 th	5:01 p.m.	Estero Fire Rescue First 2011 Budget Hearing	Estero Fire Rescue Headquarters... Three Oaks Parkway south of Corkscrew
Friday, September 10 th	10 a.m.	Estero Community Association Meeting	Estero Community Park
Friday, September 17 th	9 a.m.	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)	Regional Planning Commission Building, 1926 Victoria Street in downtown Ft. Myers
Friday, September 17 th	1 p.m.	Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL)	Estero Community Park
Monday, September 20 th	6 p.m.	Estero Community Planning Panel (ECP)	Estero Community Park
Thursday, September 23 rd	5:01 p.m.	Estero Fire Rescue Final 2011 Budget Hearing	Estero Fire Rescue Headquarters... Three Oaks Parkway south of Corkscrew

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Estero Community Website
The community groups sponsoring the site are:

Estero Community Planning Panel (ECP)
Estero Community Association (ECA)
Estero Design Review Committee (EDRC)
Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL)

The Coconut I-75 Interchange Is No More

On August 6th the staff of the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) reported to the MPO Board that:

“...the 2035 Plan does not include certain roadways that have already been removed for consideration due to environmental impacts or policy issues that have come up over the past few years and those projects include the following:

...I-75/Coconut Interchange and the connection of Coconut from Three Oaks over to the CR 951 Extension.”

The removal of these projects from the 2035 Plan, the County's Long Range Transportation Plan, will prevent them from being funded from any source unless the 2035 Plan is later amended to add them back into the Plan. The MPO will approve the 2035 Plan later this year.

This is a great victory for the Estero community after many years of battling many powerful special interests in order to keep the interchange and related east-west roads from being added to the 2030 Plan (the predecessor to the 2035 Plan) in response to \$10 million of Federal funds added unethically by the Congress several years ago. This result would not have been possible but for the efforts of the Brooks Concerned Citizens (BCC), The Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) and many environmental allies.

Four other projects were excluded from the 2035 Plan by the MPO staff including the Alico Road extension. The Extension is significant for the Estero community because it would have extended CR-951 from Alico Road to Lehigh. The BCC, the ECCL and 15 other civic and environmental groups have long opposed CR951 because the segment between Bonita Beach Road and Corkscrew Road would be routed through very sensitive wetlands in the Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource (DR/GR) just east of I-75 and south of Corkscrew Road. These groups will continue to press the MPO to remove CR-951 from the 2035 Plan prior to its adopting later this year.

Protecting Estero's Future by Acquiring and Preserving Edison Farms

A coalition of national, state and local environmental and civic groups have united in their support of the public acquisition and preservation of the 4,000-acre Edison Farms site just east of I-75 south of Corkscrew Road. The Estero Council of Community Leaders, the Brooks Concerned Citizens, Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Collier County Audubon Society, Audubon of Southwest Florida, CREW Land & Water Trust, Florida Wildlife Federation and The Trust for Public Land have formed a coalition in support of this effort.

On August 12th The Coalition testified in support of the purchase before Lee County's Conservation 20/20 Conservation Lands Acquisition and Stewardship Advisory Committee (CLASAC) that subsequently voted unanimously to nominate Edison Farms for acquisition.

CLASAC is a 15-member citizen's advisory committee appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. This committee, along with a sub-committee, recommends to the commissioners which properties should be purchased for permanent conservation. Only properties with a "willing seller" quality for the Conservation 20/20 program. If the commissioners agree, the Division of County Lands then will initiate the negotiation process.

Earlier this year the state's "Florida Forever" land acquisition program ranked the property and contiguous Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) area as #3 statewide in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives Projects category.

Representatives of Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW) Land & Water Trust and the Calusa Land Trust announced they will contribute \$100,000 and \$10,000 respectively towards the purchase of this land. Pledged donations from community and other organizations will help Edison Farms chances for approval by the Committee and the Board of Commissioners. We would urge all Estero community organizations to adopt resolutions in support of this acquisition and consider pledging some funds, no matter how small, for the acquisition.

Conservation 20/20 funds were committed in 2009 for the acquisition of a select group of properties using phased acquisition over the next several years. All Conservation 20/20 nominations received since January 1, 2009 have only undergone a preliminary evaluation that would add qualifying properties to a list held for future purchase when funds became available again. As a result of the preliminary evaluations, CLASAC has retained a total of 28 nominations, including Edison Farms. About \$20 million per year is raised for the Conservation 20/20 program by a special property tax levy approved by the voters of Lee County in 1996.

Because of the size of this property, funding will be necessary from a number of public and private sources, local, state and national. Because of the slow economy most of these projects will be paid off over several years, not all at the time of purchase.

Estero Fire District Finances

On August 9th Estero Fire Chief Scott Vanderbrook widely distributed a letter to Estero residents summarizing the District's financial condition and plans for its 2011 Budget. The following are some key statements from that letter:

- Estero Fire Rescue has seen a reduction of property values over the past two years in the excess of 25.15% resulting in \$2,524,546.00 less revenue over the same period.
- In an effort to reduce costs, we have not filled eight open positions, reduced our operating budget, held wages, changed our health insurance carrier, joined other agencies on bulk purchasing of supplies and continue to work on functional consolidation items with surrounding departments.
- On July 21, 2010, Estero Fire Rescue held its budget workshop to set the tentative millage rate for the upcoming year. The Estero Fire Board of Commissioners agreed to set the tentative millage rate at 2.0, which is our current millage rate. By setting the millage rate of 2.0, it will produce roughly one million dollars less than the current budget year. This means that Estero Fire Rescue will need to use approximately \$1,000,000.00 out of its reserves for the upcoming 2010-2011 budget year.

In July and again on August 20th Chief Vanderbrook made a presentation to the Estero Council of Community Leaders concerning the District's 2011 Budget. All in attendance appreciate the efforts that the Chief and the Fire Board have made to keep District taxes low while maintaining their historic high level of service.

Estero Fire Rescue will hold its first public hearing for the 2010-2011 budget on September 9th at 5:01 P.M. at the District's Administrative Complex located at 21500 Three Oaks Parkway. At this meeting the Fire District Board will vote on the budget and the tax levy necessary to support it. All Estero residents and taxpayers are invited to attend.

Cleaning Up Coconut Crossing

On August 2nd a Lee County Hearing Examiner ordered a clean-up of five parcels located within the Coconut Crossing development on the northwest corner of US 41 and Coconut Road. In all five cases, the Hearing Examiner found that the developers had left trash, debris, large concrete pipes and piles and mounds and fill dirt on the property. In each case, the Hearing Examiner ordered the owner to remove all of the material, except the large concrete pipes, by September 15 of this year, subject to \$100 per day penalty.

In two cases, the Hearing Examiner ordered the owners to remove the large concrete pipes by Jan 19, 2011 or face an additional fine of \$150 per day. In each case, if the owners do not comply with the hearing examiner order a lean will imposed on the property and all real and personal property of the owner and a lien foreclosure action could result.

We urge all residents of the area to monitor the site closely and to report their findings to the Estero Council of Community Leaders website.

Planning Underway for the November 13th Workshop on Renewing the Estero Community Plan and the Estero Land Development Code (LDC)

It has been ten years since the Estero Community launched its community planning effort, eight years since it was adopted by the County Board and five years since we last updated the Estero- specific Land Development Code.

Since then the Estero Community Planning Panel (ECP) has been intensively involved with the approval of zoning for developments covering most all the land along the US 41 and Corkscrew Road commercial corridors. In addition the Estero Design Review Committee (EDRC) has participated in the architectural, site plan, landscape and general appearance review of literally scores of projects located in these developments.

Meanwhile Estero" population has tripled and its commercial space has increased fourfold from less than 1,000,000 square feet to 4.5 million square feet in spite of the sluggish market that has persisted since 2007.

This economic slowdown presents the ECP and the community with an outstanding opportunity to reevaluate and update the Community Plan and the associated Land Development Code language specific to Estero.

Thus the ECP is sponsoring a Community Planning Workshop on Saturday, November 13th in one of the Ballrooms at the Hyatt Regency Resort and Spa from 9 a.m. to noon.

Purpose... To identify and prioritize:

- the Community's current concerns, new elements and policies
- improvements in the community involvement provisions
- fine tuning of the community vision statement
- "Taking the Plan to the next Level"

Process...the plan renewal process (still under development) will be community driven with professional guidance and leadership and County Staff support. It will consist of the following elements:

- Community surveys, workshops and photography
- Consolidation of all inputs, research and information
- Preparation of a draft plan, LDC text and graphics
- Use of our website and news media for community communication
- Conducting public reviews
- Obtaining County and State approvals

Schedule and Funding...

- Initial meeting with County staff (completed)
- Estimated need about \$100,000 including County funds and local match

- Letter requesting County funds from funds to be budgeted for FY2011

All residents and landowners in Estero are invited to attend and participate.

The following are indicative of the types of changes that will be considered at the November 13th Community Workshop:

- Amending the current Big Box provisions
- Adding Commercial Redevelopment provisions
- Amending the Affordable Housing provisions
- Addressing older residential housing areas including mobile home parks
- Consideration of down-zoning provisions
- Adding one or more “Old Florida” overlays
- Amending the signage provisions
- Controls on and appearance standards for cleared sites on commercial corridors
- Incentives for implementing high quality commercial zoning
- Creating some incentives for designated mixed use developments
- Adding some incentives for commercial developments with arts facilities
- Consideration of energy conservation building standards and incentive for such conservation
- Incentives for high speed communication infrastructure and facilities

Please mark your calendars now for the morning of Saturday, November 13th.

South Lee County Hospital Committee Update

On July 15th the Freestanding Emergency Department Steering Committee met to discuss the five year financial projections from the operation of a 24/7 Free-standing Emergency Department to serve the population of south Lee County. In addition the Steering Committee discussed cost estimates for the construction of such a facility assuming that the existing Bonita Community Health Center would continue to operate as a walk-in clinic in the present building. After some minor changes were identified the Committee decided it was time for this information to be shared with the senior leadership of the two hospital systems before scheduling another meeting of the Committee. That meeting has now been scheduled for September 16th.

Earlier in 2010

On June 17th the [Freestanding Emergency Department Steering Committee](#) met once again to analyze the feasibility of a 24/7 Free-standing Emergency Department on or adjacent to the Bonita Community Health Center (BCHC), located on the east side of US 41 just south of Coconut Road. The Committee reviewed customer volume projections for the next 5 years based upon historical emergency visit information provided by both hospital systems. After extensive discussion the staff analysts agreed to modify the projections to take into account many of the suggestions made by members of the committee.

Next the Committee discussed possible configurations and locations of the Emergency Department of the facility on the three properties controlled by the various hospital systems. The parcel of property where the BCHC is located is jointly owned by NCH and Lee Memorial. In addition there is are three parcels owned by Lee Memorial, totaling nearly 30 acres, immediately adjacent to this property that might be used for a 24/7 Free-standing ED. None of these properties, including the BCHC property, is

presently zoned for a Free-standing ED. Since all of this property is located within the Coconut Point Development of Regional Impact (DRI) the rezoning process is more complicated than a non-DRI zoning. It will involve approvals by the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Commission as well as the Lee County Board. Such a rezoning typically takes a year or more to complete.

The Bonita Community Health Center is presently utilizing all of its available land. Thus adding a 24/7 Free-standing ED to this building would necessarily require the use of some land from one of the adjacent parcels inasmuch as the Committee and the two hospital systems plan to continue the operations now located in the existing BCHC.

In May 19th the [Freestanding Emergency Department Steering Committee](#) met to discuss how the Committee should proceed to forecast demand for services for a 24/7 Freestanding Emergency Department (FED) at the Bonita Community Healthcare site over the next 5 years. The Committee extensively discussed all sources of available data and how that data should be adjusted in order to produce the most accurate forecast. The balance of the meeting focused upon analyzing the alternative configurations of the FED and the cost of each of them consistent with the applicable State and Federal regulations. Subcommittees will continue to work on both of these projects during the period prior to the June meeting of the Steering Committee.

On April 9th several members of the Freestanding Emergency Department Steering Committee traveled to Largo to visit another 24/7 Freestanding Emergency Department. Once again the managers of that facility provided the Committee with an abundance of information on their operations to date, both service wise and financial. This facility, although only two years old, is already profitable and experiencing business well beyond projections.

On April 15th the Steering Committee met again to discuss the market service area for a 24/7 Freestanding ER located on the site of the Bonita Community Health Center; the services to be provided by the facility; service to the facility by Lee County EMS (ambulance and helicopter service); procedures for estimating the future demand for service from the facility by transported and walk-in clients.

On March 18th the [Freestanding Emergency Department Steering Committee](#) met for the second time to discuss the antitrust, licensure and other legal aspects of establishing a 24/7 Freestanding Emergency Department (FED); the services that should be provided by this facility and those that should continue to be provided by the participating hospitals and what needs to be researched in order to estimate the present and future market for these services in its expected service area.

The meeting identified many of the challenges that must be overcome before a FED can be constructed in our community and the steps that we need to take to be successful in this effort.

On March 26th most of the Steering Committee traveled to North Port to tour Sarasota Memorial's North Port Medical Plaza 24/7 Freestanding ER that opened for business last October. The facility is a combination Freestanding ER and a Walk-in Clinic with comprehensive laboratory and diagnostic/testing facilities. It is located in a bedroom community with a population of 50,000 at the far south end of Sarasota County. The area was considered an "underserved" community.

The leadership and staff at North Port were very generous with their information and time. Being such a new facility they shared with the Committee many of the obstacles they had to overcome in order to gain all the necessary approvals and prepare for an uncertain community response. They stressed the

importance of community support throughout the approval and implementation phases. In the 6 months since the FED facility opened client use of the facility has far exceeded expectations.

On February 18th the fourteen member Freestanding Emergency Department Steering Committee met for the first time. The Steering Committee approved the following mission statement:

“Develop a plan and recommendations for a freestanding emergency department in the Bonita/Estero community”.

In pursuit of this outcome the Steering Committee will

- Identify gaps in emergency services provided to the community,
- Complete a five year projection of patient visits, revenues and expenses,
- Complete a capital budget and identify funding requirements, and
- Develop recommendations for next steps towards the development of a Freestanding ED.

On January 29th representatives of the Committee met with the Bonita Community Health Center (BCHC) Board to discuss how the owners of this facility would begin to implement a Freestanding ER on the BCHC property. About a week prior to the meeting Suzanne Bradach, Acting Executive Director of the Center, provided the Committee with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two hospital systems, NCH and Lee Memorial, that contains their “plan that provides the framework for the development of a freestanding ER” to serve the area.

The plan provides our Committee with three members on a broad based Committee, called the “Freestanding Emergency Department Steering Committee”, that would, over a period of about 6 months, do the research needed to address all the questions that must be answered prior to obtaining the approval of the project by the Boards of the two hospital systems.

Estero’s Housing Permits Continue Slow Pace

During July 11 single family homes and 4 duplex units with a building value of \$3.3 million were permitted in Estero. This slowdown in construction of new homes should continue to help reduce the inventory of unsold new homes constructed in Estero during 2005 when 2,833 units were permitted.

Housing units permitted during the first seven months of 2010 totaled 138 up from 86 in 2009 and 107 in 2008. While this increase is not sizeable it reflect a steadier demand for new housing in Estero, especially less expensive single family homes. During the last couple of years the major active developments have been the two Toll Brothers developments along Estero Parkway, Belle Lago and The Reserve of Estero and Lennar’s Bella Terra, out east on Corkscrew Road.

The County permit information used in this report may be found at <http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/Reports/EsteroReports.htm>

The following table shows how the first seven months of 2010 compares with the same period of the prior nine years:

Year	Annual Total Housing Units	Building Value of Units	Average Building Value Per Unit	Percentage of Single Family Units
2000	1122	\$154,418,848	\$137,628	41%
2001	1399	213,746,261	152,785	45
2002	905	153,144,578	169,221	57
2003	1033	155,939,745	150,958	37
2004	1049	226,031,691	215,473	65
2005	1645	340,070,708	206,730	51
2006	969	236,835,506	244,412	31
2007	384	108,303,686	282,041	38
2008	107	36,466,055	340,804	83
2009	86	31,457,481	365,785	77
2010	139	27,170,158	195,469	77

The 2010 total housing units are still far below all prior years except for 2008 and 2009. They equal only 15.4% of the quantity permitted during 2002, the season immediately following the tragedy of 9/11/2001.

It should also be noted that the average building value has fallen greatly from our recent performance. The current average building value is back to the values experienced during 2003 and 2004.

Permitted Commercial Building Values Continue Decline

The first seven months of Estero building permits of all types continued at a very slow pace. The value of [commercial buildings](#) permitted in Estero during these seven months totaled \$4.9 million.

Year	Year to Date	Annual Total
2000	\$71,541,520	\$77,250,835
2001	22,496,652	44,116,526
2002	15,288,582	23,135,139
2003	11,842,650	23,234,725
2004	13,548,400	60,859,820
2005	44,789,557	111,037,977
2006	150,602,944	184,709,240
2007	138,368,161	157,614,045
2008	35,018,481	39,261,677
2009	7,781,212	9,752,556
2010	4,925,558	?

As the above table indicates Estero's commercial development started to expand rapidly in 2004 and peaked in 2006 with a total of \$184.7 million. (All figures are exclusive of the underlying land). Total commercial investment in Estero has fallen precipitously since 2007 and continues to fall below the very low level of 2009.

From January through July the major projects that contributed to the 2009 year to date total are:

- \$3,639,000 in the [Coconut Point Town Center](#);
- \$1,200,000 for improvements to the Lee County Corkscrew Road Wellfield
- \$1,374,000 for [Miramar Outlets](#) expansion
- \$800,000 for a new bank in the Coconut Trace Center
- \$619,000 for Villages of Country Creek Water Storage System
- \$400,000 Wildcat Run Country Club
- \$202,000 The Brooks Town Center
- \$128,000 Corkscrew Palms
- \$104,800 for Estero Park Commons
- \$48,000 for Hyatt Equities improvements

REMINDER: The building values understate the cost of each residence or commercial building because it excludes the value of the underlying land.