

# Estero Development Report

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Edited by ECCL--the Estero Council of Community Leaders

## For More Information about Estero

...see [www.esterofl.org](http://www.esterofl.org)

This Report is available on the Estero Community website at: <http://esterofl.org/eccl/EDR/>

## January Opportunities for Citizen Participation In Protecting Estero's Quality of Life

Date	Time	Event	Location
Wednesday, January 7 <sup>th</sup>	1:30 p.m.	Joint Meeting of Estero Leadership and the Bonita Springs City Council	Bonita Springs City Hall
Tuesday, January 13 <sup>th</sup>	5 p.m.	Monthly Meeting of the Estero Fire Rescue District. For further information see <a href="http://esterofire.org/">http://esterofire.org/</a>	Estero Fire Rescue Headquarters... Three Oaks Parkway south of Corkscrew
Tuesday, January 13 <sup>th</sup>	6 p.m.	Public Hearing on the Fire District Merger Study	Estero Fire Rescue Headquarters... Three Oaks Parkway south of Corkscrew
Tuesday, January 14 <sup>th</sup>	9 a.m.	Mediators Hearing on the Estero Group Mine Zoning	County Community Development Building, 1500 Monroe Street, Room 1C
Wednesday, January 14 <sup>th</sup>	5 p.m.	Estero Design Review Committee review of the following projects: See the full agenda at <a href="http://esterofl.org/edrc/agenda.asp">http://esterofl.org/edrc/agenda.asp</a> .	Estero Community Park
Friday January 16 <sup>th</sup>	1 p.m.	Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) meeting. See the full agenda at: <a href="http://esterofl.org/eccl/minutes/index.htm">http://esterofl.org/eccl/minutes/index.htm</a>	Estero Community Park
Monday, January 19 <sup>th</sup>	6 p.m.	Estero Community Planning Panel meeting. See the full agenda at <a href="http://esterofl.org/ecpp/ecpp_meetings.htm">http://esterofl.org/ecpp/ecpp_meetings.htm</a>	Estero Community Park
Thursday, January 22 <sup>nd</sup>	10 a.m.	Southwest Florida Legislative Delegation Hearing In Anticipation of the 2009 Legislative Session	Edison Community College

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## **Estero Community Website**

From January through October about 81,200 persons visited this site to learn about Estero. During the same period in 2007 only about 66,400 persons visited the site, thus our website traffic has increased by 22% year to year.

The community groups sponsoring the site are:

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

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### **The Emerging Economy in Estero**

#### ***The Estero Housing Market Since 2000***

Throughout the past decade the Estero real estate market has been a shining example for Florida, both in terms of quantity and quality.

Just ten years ago Estero was a sleepy rural community located midway between Fort Myers and Naples. It consisted of some 2,400 homes in 13 residential communities plus a few stores and filling stations.

Since then about 13,500 new homes have been constructed in spite of the recent slowdown since 2006, of which 6,350, or 47%, are single-family homes. Today the average building value of newly constructed homes in Estero, (excluding the land beneath the structures), is \$338,000. That's more than double the 2000 value.

In these eight years, 23 new residential communities have been completed containing about \$2.6 billion of new homes, (again excluding the value of the underlying land.)

Some of the largest and best known residential communities in Estero are among those built during that period, including Pelican Sound, Grandezza, Rapallo, The Cascades, and the four communities of The Brooks -Shadow Wood, Copperleaf, Spring Run and Lighthouse Bay.

Between 2000 and 2004 the demand and supply of new housing in Estero seemed to be in equilibrium with an average of 1,800 new homes a year. The absorption rate was higher in 2000 and 2001, declined about 30% after 9-11, but recovered in 2004.

In late 2004, and the first three quarters of 2005, speculative fever struck the Estero housing market. The number of homes permitted in 2005 increased by nearly 1,200 over 2004. This speculation created an oversupply of more than 1,000 new but unoccupied units, (mostly condos), in Estero.

As a result of this overbuilding the number of new homes permitted declined dramatically during 2006, 2007 and 2008. However, this three year slowdown has provided the Estero housing market the time to absorb much of its unsold or vacant homes.

Today housing demand and supply in Estero are almost back in equilibrium.

An October 15, 2008, study of the Resale-Attached housing market in Estero and Bonita Springs identified 1,119 MLS listings for sale in Bonita Springs and only 316 in Estero.

At the same time the 2008 Resale-Attached closings are expected to be 499 homes in Bonita Springs and 223 in Estero - so the *Listing vs. Closing* ratio is 224% in Bonita Springs and only 142% in Estero.

In addition the number of 2008 closings in Estero increased 72% over 2007.

This all bodes well for the Estero condo real estate market in 2009.

While both the Bonita Springs and Estero real estate markets are far better off than most Lee County communities, it is clear from this study Estero has a much smaller housing surplus than Bonita Springs.

In fact, Estero may be the best real estate market in Lee County. If this trend continues, in spite of stricter mortgage lending, the surplus of Estero homes should soon be depleted.

Residential property values have declined in Estero since 2005 - as they have throughout Florida and the entire country. Much of this decline has been caused by homeowner short sales to avoid foreclosure and developers discounting their asking prices to meet loan commitments and to generate the cash flow necessary to survive the economic down-cycle.

The October 15<sup>th</sup> *Resale-Attached Housing Study* also indicates Estero's "sales price to asking price" ratio actually *improved* from 92.1% in 2007 to 93% in 2008.

That 93% ratio is equal to the 20 year average for the area and confirms the current demand/supply equilibrium in Estero.

Meanwhile, the Bonita Spring's "sales price to asking price" ratio in the Resale-Attached market declined from 91.3% in 2007 to 88.6% in 2008. This confirms the current oversupply in Bonita Springs.

In addition, the average price of Resale-Attached housing declined 13% in Bonita Springs last year but only 4% in Estero.

In conclusion, *Attached-Residential*, the weakest segment of the Estero housing market, appears to be at or near the point of Demand/Supply equilibrium in this housing down-cycle. And based on these recent numbers and previous real estate cycles, Estero's residential values and absorption rates should start to increase in the near future.

### ***The Community's Commercial Real Estate Market***

Since 2000, over \$700 million has been invested in Estero's numerous commercial developments, both large and small.

The first major Estero commercial development during this period was the Hyatt Coconut Point Resort which had the misfortune of opening shortly after 9/11 but recovered quickly. The Miromar Outlets Mall expanded throughout this period and is now in its sixth phase with a total of over 600,000 square feet of shopping and 140 stores.

Estero's commercial development peaked in 2006 when \$185 million was permitted by Lee County. Much of this investment was for the construction of the 1.1 million square foot, 130 store Coconut Point Town Center which was completed in late 2007.

At present the Estero community contains about 3.6 million square feet of commercial space with over 2.1 million located along US 41 and 1.5 million along Corkscrew Road.

In addition four hotels containing 825 rooms were built in Estero in these eight years.

While much has been developed since 2000 Estero's current zoning would permit an additional 6.5 million square feet of commercial development and 1,670 more hotel rooms so there is lots of room for growth. It's expected the addition of the Boston Red Sox training facility in South Lee County will accelerate some of this development.

### ***Early Community Input and High Standards of Planning and Design Underlie the Quality of Estero's Development***

The high quality and consistent, outstanding architecture and landscaping of Estero's commercial corridors is the result of the development and adoption of the *Estero Community Plan* in 2001. The framers of the plan, all community volunteers, foresaw the future commercial development of Estero and wanted the US 41 and Corkscrew Road commercial corridors to be as beautiful as the adjacent residential communities then under development.

The *Estero Community Plan* established the community's vision as follows:

"Estero's growth will be planned as a village, establishing defined areas for tasteful shopping, service and entertainment, while protecting and encouraging residential neighborhoods that encourage a sense of belonging. Weaving the community together will be carefully crafted limitations on strip commercial uses, inappropriate signage and certain undesired commercial uses, while additional design guidelines will be established to ensure attractive landscaping, streetscaping, architectural standards, and unified access points."

Shortly thereafter Estero's community leaders obtained Lee County Board of County Commissioners' approval of three major changes in the County's Land Development Code establishing higher standards of development regulations for Estero.

These regulations create "overlay districts" along US 41 and Corkscrew governing the appearance and location of buildings and, most importantly, their compatibility and connectivity with one another. Other regulations govern the location and treatment of "big box" stores and the types, size and architectural standards of signage and lighting as well as road and building setbacks.

In addition to these high design standards, new mandatory opportunities were created for community input on all new Estero projects prior to the developer's application to the County for zoning or development order.

As a result, the Estero community has had a valuable extended period of time to constructively work with developers to meet or exceed the community's needs and, if unsuccessful, to appeal for changes to Lee County staff or the County Board of Commissioners.

### ***Meeting the Infrastructure Needs of Rapid Growth***

Over the past ten years Estero's infrastructure has kept pace with its exceptional residential and commercial growth. Lee County and the State of Florida have invested approximately \$500 million in new or widened roads in South Lee County since 2000.

Estero's north-south corridors have been greatly expanded: the widening of US 41 to six lanes, the new four-lane Livingston/Imperial/Three Oaks corridor and the four-lane Via Coconut Point from Corkscrew Road to Bonita Springs.

What were four north-south lanes through Estero ten years ago are now 14 lanes.

Other major projects currently underway in Estero will improve traffic flow even more. They include the widening of Three Oaks Parkway from Corkscrew Road to Alico Road; the Estero Parkway Extension and I-75 Overpass from Three Oaks Boulevard to Ben Hill Griffin Road and the six-laning of I-75.

Estero's recreational amenities have also been greatly expanded. The 65 acre Estero Community Park opened to the public in 2006. It features a 42,000 square foot recreation center and an attached amphitheater stage for concerts and other public events with lawn seating for over 5,000. In addition 100 acres was acquired by the State and County to permit the Koreshan State Historic Site to be doubled in size.

The Estero community is also working cooperatively with the City of Bonita Springs to obtain a 24/7 Freestanding Emergency center for the area, probably on land now owned by Lee Memorial Health Systems in the South Village of Coconut Point.

### ***Convenience of Major Regional Anchors***

No other southwest Florida community can boast so many convenient major facilities as Estero.

The newly expanded Southwest Florida International Airport is only a 15 minute drive from Corkscrew Road in Estero.

Florida Gulf Coast University, with 10,000 students and growing fast, is located on Estero's northeast border.

The region's largest sports and attraction arena, 7,000 seat Germaine Arena, home of the minor league Florida Everblades hockey team, is a short walking distance from Estero's 140-store Miromar Outlets Mall and International Design Center on Corkscrew Road.

The 130-store Coconut Point Town Center and Hyatt Regency Resort and Spa are both located on Coconut Road in Estero.

In addition, Lee County is under contract to provide the Boston Red Sox with a new spring training complex in south Lee County no later than December 2012. The Red Sox currently train in Ft. Myers and the Minnesota Twins have their spring training facilities at Hammond Stadium in south Lee County, only ten miles from Estero.

## Red Sox Spring Training Site

On December 9<sup>th</sup> Lee County signed a 30 year lease with the Boston Red Sox for a Spring Training facility in south Lee County.

On December 23<sup>rd</sup> 14 landowners or their representatives filed site proposals with the County, four of them in Estero. The proposed Estero sites are:

Edison Farms...the owners of this site has been trying hard for many years to gain development approval for his 4,000, mostly wetland, acres east of I-75 adjacent to The Brooks. Their initiatives include the Coconut I-75 Interchange earmark; Water District approval of a four mile ditch along the western and southern boundaries of the property and Water District pressure to install five large culverts under I-75 without proof that they were needed. Edison Farms is offering free land to the County for the Red Sox site and also is offering land on the site to FGCU, reportedly for a football field, and is working with the National Swimming Center Corporation for a Swim USA facility for training of Olympic and other swimmers on the site. This landowner is offering the County 412 acres free of charge but the land is only accessible if the County builds a road from Corkscrew Road south to the property about 2 miles to the south at an estimated cost of about \$30 million. The County owns some of the right-of-way for this road inasmuch as it is the planned route for the controversial and expensive CR 951, a road that has not been found fiscally feasible and has been included in the County's long-range 2030 plan with tolling as the likely funding source.

Midtowne Estero and Midtowne Estero Village...these two properties across Three Oaks Parkway from each other just south of Corkscrew Road total 88 acres, about the size required by the Red Sox. The property on the east side is zoned for housing and the parcel on the southwest corner of Three Oaks and Corkscrew is zoned for 90,000 square feet of commercial and over 230 housing units. The developers were recently turned down by the County Board for a "big box" on the western property. The eastern site is bordered by Shadow Wood at the Brooks on the south and the western site is bordered by residential on the south as well. Questions may arise about the compatibility of this use, especially for night games or concerts, if the neighboring homes are impacted by noise and light. The community may also be concerned about the traffic impact of this use of this site as it has been of other commercial uses on it. The proposal calls for the County to purchase the land.

North Point...this property consists of 102 acres located just north of Coconut Point on the northeast corner of Williams Road and US 41. The property is now owned by the Lutgert Company. It was zoned for 670,000 square feet of commercial, 150 residential units and a 150 room hotel prior to Lutgert acquiring the property several years ago. This area will be intensively developed, both commercially and residentially. The property will ultimately be surrounded by residential development within a short distance. Thus it may also have some noise and lighting compatibility issues.

University Highlands Ltd. Partnership...this 210 acre site, owned by Nassif Development of Naples, is located immediately north of Germaine Arena between I-75 and Ben Hill Griffin Parkway. It will soon be bordered on the north by the Estero Parkway Flyover. The Grandezza community is located immediately across Ben Hill Griffin from this site.

Most of the applicants have not provided the public with any information about their proposal. The County's contract requires that the proposals be made public no later than January 12, 2009. The County screening committee will meet on January 22<sup>nd</sup> to select the sites to be forwarded to the BOCC for their approval. The BOCC must make the final site selection by June 1, 2009.

## **Background**

On November 1<sup>st</sup> Lee County and the Boston Red Sox signed a 29 page agreement committing the County to provide the Red Sox a new spring training ballpark and training facility (Project Site) in south Lee County by a "target date" of December 1, 2011 "but in no event later than December 1, 2012 (Outside Date). "The agreement specifies a 30 year lease commitment, an 80 acre site for the Red Sox and contains a detailed description of the 9,999 seat facility plus capacity for another 2,000 fans.

Early in November the BOCC voted to allocate one cent (out of 5 cents) of the proceeds of the Tourist Development Tax Revenues to help finance the Project

The Project Site must be south of Daniels Parkway; east of US 41; north of Bonita Beach Road and west of the proposed alignment of CR 951. These boundaries include several possibilities in Estero but only two likely prospects. They are the 220 acre site just north of Germaine Arena and the western sections of the Edison Farms site located just east of I-75 adjacent to The Brooks.

Owners of large properties located within the "Project Boundaries" have until December 23<sup>rd</sup> to submit proposals to Lee County. At its meeting on November 21<sup>st</sup> the ECCL decided to wait until after all the proposals have been filed and reviewed by the ECCL before deciding if they what to make a recommendation to the BOCC.

The Red Sox contract contains a very aggressive schedule. It calls for the two parties to approve a 30 year lease and for the County to prepare a preliminary cost estimate for the project by the end of the year. A detailed financing plan is required by January 15, 2009; the project architect, engineer and construction firm must be hired by February 1, 2009; the County must make "all reasonable efforts" to select and obtain control of a site by June 1, 2009.

The site selection criteria in the contact states that "the cost of land acquisition will not be the sole determining factor...but will serve as one of many factors considered..." Other factors to be considered include: existing and/or needed infrastructure improvements; environmental impacts; timing and availability; proximity to full service hotels; proximity to other complementary and accessory uses such as number and size of retail, commercial, restaurant, sports and entertainment venues; prospects for complimentary development on nearby property; acquisition cost and the economic impact generated by the project.

The location of the Red Sox site and the development that it will stimulate will have a great impact on south Lee County and the Estero community. It is a testament to the quality of the south Lee County communities that the Red Sox management insisted on locating in our area. Consequently the ECCL and the Estero Community Planning Panel will be following this process very closely in the months to come.

## **Fire District Merger Study Gets Underway**

On January 13<sup>th</sup> from 6 to 8 p.m. the Estero Fire District will hold a Town Hall Meeting at the District's Administrative Complex on Three Oaks Parkway to discuss the Fire District Consolidation Study of the merger prospects of the Bonita Springs, Estero and San Carlos Park Fire Districts. The meeting will open with a presentation by Fire Chief Scott Vanderbrook outlining the procedures that the Districts' consultant will follow and the opportunities for public input throughout the course of the study. This presentation will be followed by a question and

answer period for the Estero community residents in attendance. All are invited to attend this important Town Hall Meeting.

### Background

On June 17<sup>th</sup> the three Fire District Boards, Bonita Springs, Estero and San Carlos Park, voted to approve a contract with System Planning Corporation, Tridata Division to evaluate the merger of the three districts. During July each of the three Fire District Boards voted to approve funding their share of the cost of this consulting contract. Each district will pay \$40,162.

During August each of the Board's approved the contract with System Planning Corporation, Tridata Division. The consultant will begin work on the study early in 2009 so that widespread public input can be obtained prior to their analysis of the issues involved in such a merger. The study is expected to be completed in about six months, or about mid-2009.

### **The Widening of US 41 and the Federal Economic Recovery Program**

On December 19<sup>th</sup> the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) approved a list of transportation projects to be forwarded by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to the Federal government for possible inclusion in the infrastructure component of the Economic Recovery program proposed by the Obama transition committee. The ECCL urged the MPO to add the widening of US 41 between Corkscrew Road and San Carlos Park to this list. FDOT opposed this recommendation because all of the right-of-way for the road is not in hand due to their inability to acquire the necessary detention pond in the vicinity of US 41 and Broadway. They indicated that this project may be added later in 2009 when a pond site has been acquired. County Commissioner Frank Mann spoke in favor of the project being added as soon as possible.

### **South Lee County Hospital Committee Update**

Members of the Needs Assessment Sub-committee of the South Lee County Hospital Committee met on December 4 and December 11 at Bonita Springs City Hall. On December 19<sup>th</sup> the committee held a meeting at "Estero Urgent Care" (Corkscrew & Three Oaks Parkway). The meeting was attended by Ed Houck, Executive Director of the District 8 Health Planning Council. In addition Houck was involved in the early stages of planning the Bonita Community Health Center. Also in attendance was Larry A. Hobbs, M.D. of the Estero Urgent Care Center. The mission of the Hospital Committee was discussed in detail. Afterward a summary of the meeting was prepared and has been given to Dr. Hobbs for comment before it is published.

The Committee Co-chairs and the Needs Assessment Sub-committee will be meeting with members of the "Executive Staff" of Lee Memorial Health System in late January to discuss the Committee's concerns and to gain knowledge of what Lee Memorial's present plans are as it relates to the healthcare needs of South Lee County. In February the same group plans to have a similar meeting with Naples Community Hospital and their "Executive Staff".

### **Arts Estero 2009 Update**

Estero Community Park will host an all-day Celebration of the Arts on Saturday March 28, 2009. The celebration, sponsored by the Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL), will include continuous live entertainment on and off stage, art exhibits, food booths, information booths, art for sale, demonstrations and other displays of interest starting at 11 a.m. and going throughout



the day until the Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra brings the day's event to a close on stage starting at 4:00 PM when it will present a full program of music. The "Breckenridge Singers" and Mud Bone from New Orleans will also be presenting on stage. From the "Brooks" will be the "Brooks Brothers" to entertain at the smaller pavilion between acts. "We are in the stages of bringing commercial restaurant vendors to this event. A small "Taste of Estero"!

A core group of Estero leaders of non-profit and civic organizations are in the process of setting the agenda of the day's events. Appointed by the ECCL, Bev MacNellis will be the chairperson of this celebration. "Pulling in several community organizations to take the lead in organizing this event is in progress at this time. The committee will be contacting cultural organizations, artists in all media and performers in music, song, dance and theater to consider being a part of this celebration of the arts," said Ms. MacNellis.

"We are also looking for an outstanding creative young writer. We hope to receive entries from children in the 6th to 12th grade to participate in "Florida Stories" sponsored by the Gulfshore Playhouse".

Participation will include on-stage or walk-about performances by local talent, an exhibit table to showcase an organization's offerings, or marketing goods and services to the arts community to raise money for their not-for-profit organization. The park's outside amphitheater-style stage provides attendees with a true lawn setting experience.

Vendors of arts and crafts may sell their wares for a nominal donation of only \$35. Applications are available on line at <http://esterofl.org/new/arts-estero-2009.htm> . We are looking for artists and crafters at this time. A GREAT opportunity to sell to the thousands we are expecting.

Anyone interested in participating should contact Bev MacNellis at 498-0678 or by email at [Beverlyann@comcast.net](mailto:Beverlyann@comcast.net).

### **ECCL to Testify at the Legislative Delegation Hearing For the 2009 Legislative Session**

On December 12<sup>th</sup> the members of the Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) voted unanimously to authorize the leaders of ECCL to present the following testimony at the January 22<sup>nd</sup> Public Hearing of the Southwest Florida Legislative Delegation in Fort Myers. Such a public hearing is conducted each year in order to provide an opportunity for all local organizations and citizens to present their needs and concerns to the region's Representatives and Senators.

The ECCL presentation is as follows:

#### **"Oppose Local Government Pre-emption**

"Mining Permitting and Regulation: We urge you to discourage and oppose efforts by the mining industry to reduce the authority of local governments to permit and regulate mining within their jurisdictions. For the last 25 years the Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource (DR/GR) area within Lee County has provided all seven counties from Sarasota to Collier with 80% of all the aggregate they have consumed during that period. The Lee County Board of County Commissioners has directed staff to develop a plan that would permit the DR/GR area to continue this supply capacity for the next 30 years. In addition, new aggregate mines have recently been approved in Collier County and in Palm Beach County just south of Lake Okeechobee and the capacity of the Ports of Tampa and Manatee are in the process of greatly expanding their ability to handle imports of aggregate from foreign sources.

Local Fertilizer Ordinances: We urge you to reject any legislation that would preempt the authority of local governments to adopt strong fertilizer ordinances in order to protect the quality of the water supply within their boundaries. Any statewide standards adopted by the Florida legislature should permit local ordinances that are more restrictive than the State standard. To date, Lee and Charlotte Counties and the cities of Naples, Sanibel and Bonita Springs have adopted reasonable fertilizer ordinances and have allocated significant resources to implement those laws. In addition the City of Ft. Myers Beach is in the process of approving a fertilizer ordinance.

In principle the larger cities and counties of Florida have the ability to permit and regulate the most sensitive projects and industries within their boundaries with full knowledge of the unique conditions that these issues pose. It is the smaller, rural counties that may require state involvement in these matters.

### **Support Land Conservation**

The current economic slowdown offers you a unique opportunity to support and expand Florida's existing land conservation programs (like Florida Forever) and to institute others that will ensure that Florida's quality of life is preserved for decades to come. The recent approval of Amendment 4 enhances your opportunity to provide incentives for land to be placed in permanent or temporary conservation easements. 68% of the electorate voted for Amendment 4 and 66 of 67 counties approved. Voters in Southwest Florida and across Florida want incentives that reward private landowners who protect and conserve their lands. These incentives result in long-term public good without spending taxpayer dollars to purchase and maintain conservation lands. Community paybacks include improved water quality, aquifer recharge, natural open space, and wildlife habitat. We urge you to initiate and support such legislation and appropriations.

As you know Florida has lost half of its wetlands over the last few decades and projections through 2060 indicate that unless Florida's adopts better growth management provisions the state will continue to lose a large share of its existing farmland an open space. Lee County has been a leader in land conservation over the last decade or more with its Conservation 2020 Program. We urge you to support valuable state land conservation efforts particularly during this period of lower land prices.

### **Support Comprehensive Planning and Growth Management**

During periods of economic distress like the present, persistent efforts to water down Florida's comprehensive planning and growth management system explode in the name of economic development. These efforts must be resisted if the reasons why so many residents have relocated to Florida are to be maintained when the economy recovers. We believe that the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA) must continue to play an important role in this process and urge you to support them in their efforts to improve this process.

The undersigned organizations oppose any Legislative changes that would weaken the authority of the DCA to act as the oversight agency for local growth management planning. Good growth management policy and planning requires a system of checks and balances through a tiered approach of local, regional and state oversight. DCA fulfills the important role of ensuring that amendments to comprehensive plans are internally consistent and appropriate through their review and with their authority to determine compliance. We will support Legislation that reinforces such oversight authority for safeguarding our planning process.

### **Funding for the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan**

Finally, we want to underscore the prime importance of advocating funding for the Northern Everglades projects, which include the Caloosahatchee River Watershed Protection Plan projects. These are vital to turning the tide on estuary pollution and Lake Okeechobee management disasters.

### **Traffic Signals for Public Safety and School Facilities**

During the last three years four new fire stations have been constructed in Estero, two on US 41 and two on County roads. At present none of them have emergency traffic signals. As a result the response time of fire equipment responding to calls from all of these stations is delayed trying to enter the major roadways adjacent to the stations. Since 80% of the fire district's calls are medical emergencies, this situation poses a major threat to the health and life of many of our citizens. No doubt all of Florida's growth areas experience similar problems.

At present emergency traffic signals at Police and Fire stations and Schools must be financed by those institutions, mostly from property tax revenues. We urge the Southwest Florida Legislative Delegation to take the lead in sponsoring legislation requiring that these signals be installed and financed as part of the contract for construction or widening of the roadway on which these facilities are located. Thus FDOT, County and Municipal governments throughout Florida would need to include such improvements in their road improvement plans. Only in this way can the citizens of Florida be assured that their public facilities have the necessary public safety traffic signals as soon as they are needed.

### **Estero's Housing Permits Continue Slow Pace**

During November one housing unit, a single family home, with a value of \$431,680 was permitted in Estero. The first eleven months of 2008 continue the downward trend in new housing construction in Estero that began nearly three years ago, in the spring of 2006.

Until now housing unites permitted during 2007 were by far the lowest in the 9 years that the County's system has tracked Estero's permits. It would appear that 2008 will reach only about one-third of that prior minimum performance. The County permitting 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 eleven months of 2008 compare with the prior eight years:

<b>Month</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Jan	77	146	83	109	153	176	75	59	9
Feb	252	143	108	267	95	315	90	80	28
Mar	177	295	101	156	123	392	404	79	3
Apr	227	159	161	162	135	178	79	40	7
May	125	292	146	178	125	214	54	28	9
June	116	155	191	98	165	190	139	90	18
July	148	209	115	63	253	180	128	8	33
Aug	202	221	90	97	106	279	117	21	9
Sept	386	128	129	125	98	349	105	2	4
October	151	115	231	49	140	288	44	9	23
November	95	207	63	61	92	138	33	12	1
December	132	34	82	60	161	134	42	4	
Annual Total	2088	2104	1500	1425	1646	2833	1310	432	144

Not only are this year's total housing units far below all prior years, they equal only 10% of the comparable number in 2002, the season immediately following the tragedy of 9/11/2001 and is only 34% of last year's total for the period.

### **Permitted Commercial Building Values Continue Slow Growth**

Building permits of all types issued during the first eleven months of 2008 continued at a very slow pace. The value of [commercial buildings](#) permitted in Estero during the eleven months totaled \$38.8 million.

Year	Year to Date	Annual Total
2000	\$75,191,144	\$77,250,835
2001	36,770,251	44,116,526
2002	21,575,789	23,135,139
2003	17,809,178	23,234,725
2004	40,832,565	60,859,820
2005	71,014,931	111,037,977
2006	177,322,397	184,709,240
2007	152,471,225	157,614,045
2008	38,765,644	?

As the right hand column of the above table indicates Estero's commercial development started to expand rapidly in 2004, peaking in 2006 with a total of \$184.7 million (All figures are exclusive of the underlying land). The 2000 calendar year was exceptional because it was the year that the Hyatt Coconut Point Hotel and Resort was permitted.

2007 was Estero's second highest commercial development year, far ahead of the third place year, 2005. Thus far 2008 is Estero's sixth ranked commercial development year out of nine years. While Estero's commercial development has slowed considerably since last year, many commercially zoned properties along US 41 and Corkscrew Road have been cleared, the sites prepared and the designs approved by the Estero Design Review Committee. Estero's commercial growth is poised for expansion once the current slowdown is over.

During the first eleven months the major projects that contributed to the year to date totals are:

- \$10.19 million for the Hyatt Garden Hotel at Coconut Point
- \$8.0 million for Extra Space Storage in Coconut Point
- \$7.07 million in the [Coconut Point Town Center](#);
- \$5.17 million for [Miromar Outlets](#) expansion
- \$1.7 million for Finemark National Bank at the Brooks Town Center
- \$1.06 million for Lee County Utilities
- \$950,000 for Wachovia Bank at Coconut Point
- \$549,510 for Chick-Fil-A in Paradise Shoppes
- \$450,382 for 24231 Walden Center remodeling
- \$376,000 for Estero Chevrolet
- \$300,000 for West Bay commercial development
- \$245,000 in the Estero Ridge Shopping Center
- \$241,600 in Estero Town Commons
- \$648,000 in the [Brooks Town Center](#) (retail) at Coconut Road and Three Oaks Parkway
- \$209,000 in the [International Design Center](#)

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