

Estero Development Report
Volume 10, Number 7, Issued February 2011
 Produced by the Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL)
For More Information about Estero
 ...see www.esterofl.org

March Opportunities for Citizen Participation
That will Protect Estero's Quality of Life

Date	Time	Event	Location
Tuesday, March 1st	3:00 p.m.	Conservation 20/20 Meeting including Edison Farms Acquisition Ranking	County Transportation Building, 1500 Monroe Street in downtown Ft. Myers
Wednesday, March 2 nd	5 p.m.	Joint Fire District Meeting on Consolidation	Estero High School Auditorium
Thursday, March 3 rd	9 a.m.	Technical Advisory Committee to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)	Estero Community Park
Thursday, March 3 rd	1:30 p.m.	Citizen Advisory Committee to the MPO	Estero Community Park
Tuesday, March 8 th	5 p.m.	Estero Fire Rescue Monthly Meeting	District Headquarters on Three Oaks just south of Corkscrew
Wednesday, March 9 th	5 p.m.	Estero Design Review Committee (EDRC)	Estero Community Park
Thursday, March 10 th	5:30 p.m.	Conservation 20/20 Meeting to finalize ranking the Edison Farms property for conservation	County Transportation Building, 1500 Monroe Street in downtown Ft. Myers
Friday, March 11 th	10 a.m.	Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) meeting with Comm. Ray Judah	Estero Community Park
Sunday, March 13 th	2 p.m.	Annual All Play No Work Party	Angelina's Restaurant
Friday, March 18 th	9:30 a.m.	Joint Lee/Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting	North Collier Regional Park 15000 Livingston Road
Monday, March 21 st	6 p.m.	Estero Community Planning Panel (ECPP)	Estero Community Park

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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)

Small Signs of Life in Estero's Economy

After many months of stagnation, two of Estero's planned developments, one residential and the other commercial, showed signs of getting started this month. Cayo de Estero Shoppes started construction on north US 41 and The Preserve at Corkscrew, out east on Corkscrew Road, told the Estero Community Planning Panel that they planned to start site preparation on their large housing development within the next four months. Hopefully these developments getting underway are signs that the real estate finance market is beginning to function normally once again.

Cayo de Estero Shoppes under Construction

In early February the developers of Cayo de Estero Shoppes started construction of their three building retail facility located on the west side of US 41 just north of Estero Parkway and abutting the Breckenridge community. When completed the three buildings in the development will total about 27,000 square feet of commercial space. The zoning for the property was reviewed by the Estero Community Planning Panel and the site plan; design and landscaping were reviewed by the Estero Design Review Committee several years ago.

During February the developers began construction of Buildings 1 and 2 each of which will contain about 10,000 square feet. The construction of these two buildings is expected to be complete by September, 2011. At present the developer has not signed up any tenants. Once these two buildings are 50% leased they will begin constructing the third building.

ECP Consider Change in The Preserve at Corkscrew Zoning

On February 21st the developer of the Preserve at Corkscrew proposed that the previously approved multi-family tracts be revised to allow a single family option. In 2009 the Preserve at Corkscrew was zoned to include up to 520 housing units and 40,000 square feet of commercial space. The pending request would allow the developer to substitute single family homes in lieu of the multi-family units previously approved. If this option is selected by the developer fewer units will be constructed on the site.

The Preserve at Corkscrew Road is located on the south side of Corkscrew Road just west of Bella Terra about two miles east of I-75.

Minor site plan changes are also proposed including an innovative design for two of the cul-de-sacs to allow for a joint driveway off the cul-de-sacs which requires 3 additional deviation requests. The first deviation would eliminate the requirement for dead end streets to end with a turnaround. The second deviation would revise the requirement on utility easement on each side of the right-of-way by providing for a utility easement on only one side. The third deviation would revise the requirement for a minimum width of 40 feet for two-way private local streets to allow a 30-foot width. The panel discussed several minor concerns regarding the new Master Concept Plan, but each was answered to its satisfaction. The panel supports this amendment.

The developer would like to start moving forward within a four months. The timing of the start-up of The Preserve at Corkscrew makes good market sense inasmuch as Bella Terra, its larger neighbor to the east, will soon be reaching build-out.

February Progress on the Renewal of The Estero Community Plan

The Existing Plan

It has been ten years since the Estero Community launched its community planning effort, eight years since the existing Plan was adopted by the County Board and five years since the Board last updated the Estero Chapter of the County Land Development Code.

Since then the Estero Community Planning Panel (ECPP) has been intensively involved with the zoning of a large number of developments that include most of the land along the US 41 and Corkscrew Road commercial corridors. In addition the Estero Design Review Committee (EDRC) has influenced the architecture, site plan, landscape and appearance of scores of projects located in these developments.

Meanwhile Estero has tripled in population and property used for commercial purposes has increased fourfold from less than 1,000,000 square feet to 4,500,000 square feet in spite of the sluggish market that has persisted for the last four years.

This economic slowdown presents the ECPP and the community with an outstanding opportunity to reevaluate and update our Community Plan and the Land Development Code provisions specific to Estero.

County Funding Availability

Lee County has budgeted \$150,000 for community planning grants during the present fiscal year which began on October 1, 2010. County Planner Ebaugh has suggested that the ECPP convert the agreed outline of changes into a Work Plan to be submitted to the County in order to obtain a community planning grant of up to \$50,000. That grant and an equal amount of local matching funds will be needed in order for the ECPP to employ the professional assistance necessary to prepare amendments to the Community Plan and Land Development Code that incorporate the changes that the community decides it wants the County Board to approve.

February Community Planning Progress

Several ECPP members met with the County in early February to discuss how the Statement of Work necessary for County funding should be developed. The ECPP members presented County staff with a three part outline with projected funding requirements:

- Design Style and Overlays,
- Redevelopment/Vision Refinement, and
- Signage.

County staff responded as follows:

- The Statement needs more detail:
 - Each item needs to identify what will be accomplished, what deliverables will be produced,
 - An estimate as to when each item will be completed.
- We need to prioritize -- if we cannot fund all of the items, which items does Estero want to do first, second, etc.?
- The County did not understand if the community was requesting funding for all the items (\$100K) or would Estero be responsible for half?
- If the final time for completion is to coincide with the next County Plan submission, that time would be spring 2013.
- Adoption should be the final task -- the last of the sequence – to ensure completion.

The ECPP representatives also asked the County to provide copies of other submissions to be used to gauge their level of detail in order to improve the next draft.

At its February 21st meeting the ECPP asked County staff to forward the Work Plan of other community planning groups to help them in their further development efforts. The ECPP plans to circulate the Work Plan revisions to all ECPP members for input as the document is further developed prior to next month's meeting.

Starting the Plan Renewal Process

On December 20th the members of the ECPP and EDRC met to discuss the Dicken's Report on the Community Planning Workshop along with members of the public and County Planning staff. Under the leadership of Kathy Ebaugh of the Lee County Community Development Department, the group and the public discussed the 13 major community planning areas that the participants at the Community Workshop identified the priority areas in need of change. The discussion resulted in five areas being designated as High Priority areas, three as Medium Priority and five as Low Priority.

The Joint Committee further identified the key elements and features within each area that needed to be addressed; how difficult it would be to make the necessary changes; how long it would be to implement those changes; what organization(s) should be responsible for addressing the needs of the area.

These factors often had an influence on the priority assigned to an area by the Joint Committee. If an area is very difficult, will take a long time or is very expensive it may be assigned a lower priority even though it would greatly benefit the community.

The five High Priority areas identified by the Joint Committee are as follows:

- What architectural style or styles should be required in the community? How should those styles be defined and where should they be permitted within the Estero Community Planning area?
- What changes in the existing sign standards are needed? How should administration of the Estero sign ordinance be changed?
- How can Estero be made more pedestrian and biker friendly? Where are the existing bike/ped deficiencies and what needs to be done to remedy these deficiencies? How can Estero's attractions be made more pedestrian and bicycle accessible?
- How can the Estero River and Estero Bay be made more accessible by the public no matter their mode of transportation...on foot, biking and by boat? How can golf course ponds and retention ponds be made more accessible?
- How can Estero's relationship with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) be improved and broadened to the benefit of both the community and the University? How can the Estero community reach out to the University? How can a continuing liaison between Estero and FGCU be established?

The Medium Priority areas identified by the Joint Committee are as follows:

- How can the Community Plan be amended to encourage the development of a historical district east of US41 between Corkscrew Road and Broadway, especially including the Highlands Avenue area? How can the older commercial developments that were built before the Community Plan was adopted be improved so that they are compatible with their surrounding areas as they develop in conformance with the plan? What incentives can be developed to help achieve these objectives?
- How can the connectivity for all modes of transportation be improved within each development and between adjacent developments along our major roadways?
- How can Estero's parks and preserve areas be made more accessible and connected to one another and to the River and Bay? Are there additional properties that need to be developed as park and recreation areas in order to better link the system of parks and open space?

The Low Priority areas identified by the Joint Committee are as follows:

- How should the Community Plan be amended to provide for gateway features at the entrances to Estero on major roadways? How many and where should these gateway features be located? What should the theme of these features and what elements should be included within them?

- What kind of mass transit facilities does Estero need, rail, bus rapid transit, local transit connection various shopping venues, water ferries etc? Where should they be located? How can they be made accessible for pedestrians, bikers and drivers?
- How can Estero attract more businesses to occupy its undeveloped commercially zoned land? How can Estero diversify its economy so that it is less reliant on tourism and retail?
- Should the Community Plan be amended in order to provide for a town center? If so, where should it be located and what should it include?
- Should the Estero Community Planning boundaries be changed? If so where should they be changed?

The Dicken's Report on the Community Planning Workshop may be viewed on the ECPP website at http://esterofl.org/EsteroLife/estero_community_plan.htm

On January 24th the ECPP met to discuss the development of the Work Plan requested by Lee County Planning in order for them to consider the ECPP's funding request. Chairman Lienesch asked the Panel members to accept assignments for the development of the priority areas needing change. Dan DeLisi agreed to develop new signage provisions and Neal Noethlich agreed to supervise development of the new architectural design provisions.

County Planner Kathie Ebaugh suggested that the Panel meet with the County Planning Director, Paul O'Connor, to discuss development of the Work Plan. It was agreed that Lienesch, Noethlich, and DeLisi will meet with O'Connor and Ebaugh on February 10th.

Mrs. Ebaugh told the Panel that some members of the Hillsboro County planning staff will be visiting Lee County on January 31st and February 1st to learn more about Lee County planning procedures. Among other things, the Hillsboro staff expressed an interest in seeing how Estero, as an unincorporated community, manages its planning, zoning and design review responsibilities. A short tour of the community was also requested. The Panel agreed to meet with the Hillsboro County staff on Tuesday morning, February 1st.

Fire Districts Meet to Consider Consolidation

The commissioners representing three Lee County fire districts, Bonita Springs, Estero and San Carlos will meet to consider a possible merger. The public meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 2 at 5:00 pm at the Estero High School. The moderator will be Terry Eberle, the Executive Editor/Vice President of The News-Press. Each commissioner will have the opportunity to express their views on a merger. *We urge you to attend and tell the 15 Fire Commissioners what you think about consolidation of the three districts.*

In 2007, the three districts commissioned an independent study to evaluate the feasibility of a merger. The consultant's report, issued in December, 2009 included a number of recommendations, the most significant of which was that the districts should merge by July, 2011. The consultants estimated potential merger savings of about \$4 million by not replacing about 30 positions as workers retire or leave voluntarily. Since that time, the districts have reduced staffing by about that number without a merger.

In addition the three Fire Chiefs have been working together to implement a number of other cost savings that have been achieved by sharing staff resources and combining their purchasing power, while implementing “closest unit response” to improve response times.

In spite of all these efforts the three districts have operating deficits totaling \$6 million for the present fiscal year, which are financed by drawing down surpluses built up over the years but have declined greatly during the current economic and real estate recession.

While full and immediate consolidation may appear at first to be a most cost-effective way to deliver EMS and Fire Service within the three districts, the three districts are significantly different in several important ways that cause such a solution to be less feasible than some of the other alternatives. Some of the major differences are with respect to the following: differences in union representation, pay, pension and health benefits, bond covenants, and property tax millage rates.

For example the property tax millage rates vary from San Carlos at \$3.00, to Estero’s \$2.00 and Bonita Springs’ \$1.99. Without very substantial cost savings prior to or as a result of full consolidation the property tax millage rates would likely increase for taxpayers in Bonita Springs and Estero.

Some of the alternative actions that the Commissioners should consider include:

- More interdistrict cooperative agreements (functional consolidation),
- Agreements that would narrow some of the differences in some of the economic factors cited above,
- Consolidation of some or all of the administrative functions while retaining three operating units, and
- An agreement to implement some type of phased consolidation.

The ECCL and the Brooks Concerned Citizens have encouraged the Fire Chiefs of the three districts to work with Bob Lienesch, a retired financial professional with extensive experience in analyzing business combinations, to develop information that the Commissioners and the public can use to make informed decisions about these alternatives. All three departments have cooperated fully with Mr. Lienesch. This information will be made available to everyone attending this meeting and will be posted on the ECCL website for all to see and use.

Your participation in the meeting on March 2 at 5:00 at Estero High School is encouraged.

Council of Community Leaders (ECCL) Role In the Community Plan Renewal Process

Many of the high priority ideas that came out of the Community Planning Workshop on November 13th do not require changes in the Community Plan or Land Development Code. Instead they require development and, sometimes, approval of various governmental and/or

private institutions. A group of ECCL members have reviewed these ideas and have begun to organize to implement them.

These suggestions have been organized into four major categories:

- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Parks, Open Space and Recreation, and
- Miscellaneous.

The ECCL's Transportation Committee will work with Lee County Department of Transportation (DOT), Florida DOT, the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), BikeWalkLee and the owners of the railroad that lies just east of US 41 to improve the availability of transit in Estero; to remedy the deficiencies and disconnections in Estero's sidewalks and bike paths; to add attractively landscaped gateway signage on all the major roadway entrances to Estero and to improve the deficient and unsafe intersections scattered throughout the community.

The Economic Development Committee will work with the Lee County Economic Development Department and its public private partner, the Horizon Council; FGCU; the Lee County Port Authority; Lee County Community Development Department; the City of Bonita Springs; the Bonita Springs Chamber of Commerce and the major owners of vacant commercial parcels in Estero to strengthen Estero's connection with FGCU through economic development cooperation; development and implementation of a business attraction plan; installation of infrastructure improvements conducive to the location of major national firms and preparation of a public relations program for the community and area.

The Parks, Open Space and Recreation Committee will work with the following County departments: Community Development, Natural Resources, Transportation, Parks and Recreation, Conservation 20/20 and the Board of County Commissioners; the following State Departments: Transportation, Parks Management and Florida Forever and the South Florida Water Management District, key property owners, communities fronting on the Estero River and BikeWalkLee to improve access to the Estero River, linking Estero's existing park, recreation and open space properties and completing the development of Estero Community Park.

These three committees are still in formation and all residents of Estero are invited to volunteer to serve on any that interest them. Please contact Don Eslick by email at doneslick@comcast.net or by phone at 273-9493.

Estero's Housing Permits Begin 2011 with a Slow Start

During January, twelve single family homes and two duplexes with a building value of \$2.0 million were permitted in Estero. This number of [Housing units permitted](#) is roughly equivalent to the monthly average last year, but well below 2000-2006 periods.

January's permits were exclusively for Lennar's Bella Terra and Toll Brothers' Reserve of Estero. Some of the Bella Terra permits were for homes with a building value, exclusive of land, of less than \$100,000.

The following table compares January with those of the prior eleven years:

Year	Annual Total Housing Units	Building Value of Units	Average Building Value Per Unit	Percentage of Single Family Units
2000	77	\$11,813,625	\$153,424	61%
2001	146	25,310,064	173,257	51
2002	83	15,451,353	186,161	52
2003	109	20,384,062	187,010	63
2004	153	25,552,428	167,009	80
2005	176	41,429,210	235,393	51
2006	75	16,961,195	223,949	27
2007	59	14,077,487	238,601	24
2008	9	2,688,186	298,687	56
2009	8	3,563,005	445,376	50
2010	19	3,325,793	175,042	79
2011	16	2,283,545	142,722	75

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

Estero's Permitted Commercial Building Values Increase

During January, permits totaling \$3.2 million were issued for Estero commercial buildings. This is the largest one month total since 2008 and the largest total for January since 2007. The total includes over \$2 million for multi-tenant retail shops on the west side of US 41, across from the Vines entrance, to be called Cayo de Estero.

As shown below, Estero's commercial development started to expand rapidly in 2004 and peaked in 2006 with a total of \$185 million. Since then, total commercial investment in Estero has fallen precipitously. While last month's figure is encouraging, the increase is due almost exclusively to a single project.

Year	January	Annual Total
2000	\$5,015,801	\$77,250,835
2001	2,295,968	44,116,526
2002	818,116	23,135,139
2003	804,159	23,234,725
2004	128,760	60,859,820
2005	2,523,640	111,037,977
2006	13,414,883	184,709,240
2007	18,391,794	157,614,045
2008	3,028,264	39,261,677
2009	1,122,922	9,752,556
2010	331,365	9,322,546
2011	3,179,495	?

The major projects permitted in January were:

\$2,052,000 for Cayo de Estero

\$ 656,000 for [Meadows of Estero](#)

Reminder: The building values understate the cost of each residence or commercial building because they exclude the value of the underlying land.

