

Estero Development Report

Volume 7, Number 11

Edited by ECCL--the Estero Council of Community Leaders

**For More Information about Estero
...see www.esterofl.org**

This Report is available on Estero Community website at www.esterofl.org

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

Date	Time	Event	Location
Monday, March 3 rd	2 p.m.	Estero Historical Society "High Tea". For Tickets, call Eileen Galvin 947-4471	Embassy Suites, 10450 Corkscrew Road
Monday, March 10 th	6 p.m.	Estero Community Planning Panel meeting See the full agenda at: http://esterofl.org/ecpp/ecpp_meetings.htm	Estero Community Park, located on the south side of Corkscrew Road midway between Sandy Lane and River Ranch
Tuesday, March 11 th	5 p.m.	Monthly Meeting of the Estero Fire Rescue District. For further information see http://esterofire.org/	Estero Community Park, located on the south side of Corkscrew Road midway between Sandy Lane and River Ranch
Wednesday, March 12 th	1 p.m.	Southwest Florida Expressway Authority Meeting on Widening I-75 beyond six lanes in our area. For further information see http://swfea.net/Express_Toll_Lanes/downloads.html	Bonita Springs City Hall on the south side of Bonita Beach Road just east of US 41.
Wednesday, March 12 th	1:30 p.m.	DR/GR Steering Committee Meeting. This group is monitoring the DR/GR policy and planning process. For further information see http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/ComprehensivePlanning/SELeeCounty.htm	Lee County Community Development Building, 1500 Monroe St., Conference Room 1B, in downtown FT. Myers
Wednesday, March 12 th	5 p.m.	Estero Design Review Committee review of the following projects: See the full agenda at http://esterofl.org/edrc/agenda.asp .	Estero Community Park, located on the south side of Corkscrew Road midway between Sandy Lane and River Ranch
Friday, March 14 th	7 p.m.	"Spirit of the Gulf" Concert sponsored by the Estero Community Improvement Foundation. For tickets call Dan Dronkers at 949-0383.	Estero High School, corner of Williams Road and River Ranch Road
Saturday, March 15 th	8:30 a.m.	Conference on Mining Impacts to the Human and Natural Environments.	Edison College, Punta Gorda
Wednesday, March 19 th	3 p.m.	Estero Council of Community Leaders Monthly Meeting ...Open to the Public...for the full agenda see http://esterofl.org/eccl/minutes/	Estero Community Park, located on the south side of Corkscrew Road midway between Sandy Lane and River Ranch
Thursday, March 20 th	2 p.m.	Watershed Council roundtable discussion by ECCL and other groups concerned about Lee County water supply and quality issues. This meeting is open to the public.	Room 325 of the Lee VCB Office, 12800 University Drive (southeast corner of Summerlin and College Parkway).
Wednesday, March 26 th	1:30 p.m.	DR/GR Steering Committee Meeting. This group is monitoring the DR/GR policy and planning process. For further information: http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/ComprehensivePlanning/SELeeCounty.htm	Lee County Community Development Building, 1500 Monroe St., Conference Room 1B, in downtown FT. Myers
Friday,	9 a.m.	Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).	1926 Victoria Street in

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Estero Community Website

During January about 8,400 persons visited this site to learn about Estero. During the same period in 2007 only about 6,600 visited the site, thus our website traffic increased by nearly 27% year to year. The peak day in January saw 415 visited this site up from 275 in January, 2007.

The community groups sponsoring the site are:

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

www.esterofl.org

Historical Society "High Tea"

On Monday, March 3rd, the Estero Historical Society will hold its annual "High Tea" at the Embassy Suites, 10450 Corkscrew Road in Estero. The event will feature a raffle of a \$500 wardrobe from Dillard's at Coconut Point along with other gifts. Tickets are available for \$35 by calling Eileen Galvin at 947-4471.

Bonita Community Health Sign

Recently the Bonita Community Health Center installed a large monument sign that is inconsistent with Estero's unique sign requirements contained in Chapter 33 of the Lee Land Development Code along US 41 in front of the facility. The Estero Community Planning Panel (ECP) and the Estero Design Review Committee (EDRC) have met with the new Manager of this facility. The Community Health Center is jointly owned by Lee Memorial Health Care System and Naples Community Health (NCH) system.

Joe McHarris of the EDRC has prepared a "pro-bono" redesign of the sign that would permit the Center owners to adapt the existing sign with a minimum of additional expense so that it complies with the County Code and is compatible with all the other signs in Estero that have been installed since our codes became effective.

The sign was installed pursuant to a permit issued by Lee County's signage staff. In our opinion this staff has never rigidly enforced the Estero signage standards even though they were intensively consulted in the development of those standards. We would urge Lee Memorial and NCH to quickly approve modification of the sign so that it is satisfactory to the Estero planning and appearance committees and the desires of the Estero community.

Via Coconut Point (formerly Sandy Lane) Roadway Landscaping

At the February 5th meeting of the County's Roadway Landscape Advisory Committee Pat Moore, staff for the Committee, raised the issue of landscaping Via Coconut Point between Corkscrew Road and Pelican Colony Road, a distance of about three miles. Moore indicated that the road was not landscaped because it is a "major collector" and not an "arterial" roadway. He asked the Committee if they want to add the road to its landscape ranking list.

Al O'Donnell, Committee Chairman and an Estero Landscape firm owner, indicated that the developers of Coconut Point want an enhanced level of landscaping on this roadway and that he had advised them to partner with the County to ensure at least "core" level landscaping. In the end the Committee agreed that this segment of Via Coconut Point should be added to the list so that it can be evaluated and ranked.

Preliminary 2007 County Traffic Crash Summary for Estero Roadways

According to information released in February by Lee County several areas of Estero are "hot spots" for vehicle crashes.

- Corkscrew Road from US 41 to Ben Hill Griffin had 172 "reported" vehicle crashes in 2007. This road segment is only about 4 miles long and also contains the I-75 north/south interchange. The interchange had a reported 44 crashes making it #18 on the Lee County list of the most frequent crash sites while Bonita Beach Road and I-75 was #33 on the list.
- A second major area of concern is Coconut Road and its intersections with US 41 and a short distance away, Health Care Way/Via Villagio. The combined intersections had 44 reported crashes in 2007. Via Villagio is a new road just opened in the past year. Combining these two crash sites would rank the area in a tie for #18 on the County's list.

US 41 Widening Strategies Negotiated

At a recent meeting the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Lee County and Wal-Mart informally agreed upon a strategy for six-laning the segment between Corkscrew Road and San Carlos Park. This segment is the only segment of US 41 between Ft. Myers and Naples that has not been six-laned. The strategy would permit the widening about 18 months prior to the present budgeted period 2010-2011, which begins on July 1, 2010.

The parties agreed to complete the project in one segment between San Carlos Park and Corkscrew Road, rather than two segments as has been suggested over the last year. FDOT is committed to completing all the pre-construction tasks by late this year or early 2009. In addition the County will investigate using its tax-exempt credit to advance the funding for the project to an early 2009 start. Wal-Mart would be responsible for paying the interest on the County financing.

Expressway Authority I-75 Widening Progress

On February 15th Amy Davies, a consultant to the Southwest Florida Expressway Authority (SWFEA) gave an update on the Authority's progress to the members of the Estero Council of Community Leaders (ECCL). At this time data gathering is taking place for an investment grade traffic and revenue study. Information is being compiled in order to evaluate the feasibility of many I-75 widening alternatives, including 8 or 10 lanes with four or six tolled lanes and a rail or bus rapid transit system in the center or moving it to one side of the road, bringing costs down 40 to 50%. The lower cost is the result of not having to re-adjust the interchanges if the expansion is in the middle. This would also mean expanding the interstate lanes in the median instead of on the outside.

Ms. Davies also reported about the Federal transportation finance picture as determined by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission which recently released their preliminary report. The Commission concluded that the country needs to invest at least \$225 billion per year to maintain and upgrade the existing surface transportation system. Right now only \$68 billion is being spent annually. One option they included in their recommendations is for a 40 cent per gallon increase in the gasoline tax phased in over several years.

Old ways of funding road building are not working as well as in the past. Some vehicles are becoming more fuel efficient and people are driving less because of the high prices of gasoline, thus gas taxes revenues are declining. In addition road impact fees the county receives from new construction are down because of the housing market slowdown. New ways need to be found to fund surface transportation and tolls is one likely way.

Airport Noise Survey

The skies over parts of Estero and Bonita Springs are a lot noisier thanks to the Southwest Florida International Airport (SWFIA) directing commercial airline traffic over our area. The primary approach path from the north is generally over Fort Myers Beach but the growth in flights during the tourist season is causing the airport to use additional corridors to space traffic arriving and departing from the airport.

SWFIA has a number of options but the northern most flight path of SW Corridor A10 (over The Brooks and several Estero communities north and northeast of it) is the most efficient for commercial aircraft to use during heavy traffic periods. As aircraft flights and noise have increased, so have complaints from the affected areas. Recently, the flurry of complaints appears to have brought a decrease in flights over our area but as complaints drop, past experience has proven that flights and noise return.

Wind and weather dictate which end of the runway will be used and from which direction aircraft will land and depart. However, the moderate weather patterns of Southwest Florida allow SWFIA considerable discretion to choose which of the flight paths are used in directing flights for landing and takeoff.

There are always tradeoffs. Quiet skies over Bonita and Estero residential neighborhoods may require commercial aircraft to fly further south to approach the runway over less populated areas. It's up to our airport authority to ensure that the whine of aircraft overhead does not wake us in the morning, stop our conversations at poolside, or drown out nature's sounds during a quiet walk.

Keep your eye on the sky. It's up to each of us to let SWFIA and the Board of Port Commissioners (the County Commissioners) know that with all the other distractions of urban life, airline noise is not another we want to add to our lives.

If this is an issue that concerns you please e-mail the airport at CONTACTUS@FLYLCPA.COM and the Brooks Concerned Citizens (BCC) at MRNBJR@AOL.COM.

Five Large Culverts under I-75 Must Be Studied Before Installation

On February 4th the BOCC heard presentations by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and The Conservancy and discussed what position the County should take regarding the District's desire to have FDOT install 5 sixty-inch culverts under I-75 when it six-lanes the road without studying if they are needed or would cause downstream flooding.

On the following day the BOCC voted to support the Estero Community and The Conservancy and direct the County attorney to try to negotiate these terms (see the list below) with the SFWMD prior to their February 14th meeting.

On February 14th a group of residents from The Brooks and other Estero communities took a bus to West Palm Beach to attend and testify at the Governing Board meeting of the South Florida Water Management District concerning the proposed new culverts under I-75.

After months of negotiating the Brooks Concerned Citizens, with the help of the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and the Lee County Commissions, finally got the water district to agree not to build any culverts until a new study proves that they are needed and can be installed safely without :

1. Dewatering the DR/GR wetlands to our East
2. Degrading the quality of water coming into the Brooks (monitoring our water coming West from the East of I-75) and traveling on to Estero Bay

3. Endangering the adjacent Lee County well fields (Our source of drinking water)
4. Endangering the lives and property of any of the downstream residents from floods

The water district has agreed to undertake a comprehensive study, with Lee County as an equal partner that will update the 1998 South Lee County Watershed Plan. This will allow all interested parties, including the City of Bonita Springs, to determine the best way to handle flood waters in our area, and where and how the waters should be directed to reduce flood dangers throughout South Lee County.

The only portion of the final compromise that was not what we wanted is a clause that requires the study to be completed within 15 months or the District has the right to install the 5 culverts and operate 3 of them. The County feels that the study will be completed and approved by that time thus removing any threat of an ill-conceived installation.

The Estero Community groups and the Conservancy will be monitoring the progress of the study so that it is completed on time. We want to thank all Estero residents who sent nearly 1,000 e-mails to the County Commissioners and the SFWMD Board, the 125 Brooks residents who attended the meeting of the Lee County Commissioners and the 30 or more who attended the SFWMD Governing Board meeting in Palm Beach.

For further information on this issue see the article in last month's edition at http://esterofl.org/eccl/EDR/estero_development_report_january_2008.htm#Does_Estero_Really_Need .

County DR/GR Planning Progress Report

In late January the County completed its study of Mining Regulations in Florida Counties. This valuable report can be viewed at http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/DRGR_Mining_Regs_Summary.pdf . Twenty seven counties provided information to County staff for inclusion in the report. They are broadly summarized as follows:

"TRENDS and THEMES

Several important trends emerge from a statewide review of mining regulations.

- General regulations applying to all types of mining are being replaced by regulations and fees that recognize specific classes and types of mining operations.
- Excavation by unit or cell is being required, as opposed to one large lake, as a means to regulate the pace and expansion of mining activity while allowing phased-in reclamation.
- Phased-in or "rolling" reclamation plans are required to allow completed phases to be reclaimed while mining continues in other areas.
- Deadlines for completion of reclamation activity are being imposed and enforced.
- Specific fees and policies are being approved to ensure that damage to roads and natural features are addressed."

A tour of the mining area by the Ad Hoc Committee was postponed to February 27, a rain date. County staff planned the tour with great detail including a tour of a mine. The following website contains the background information provided the committee prior to the tour... <http://www.lee-county.com/dcd3/maps/sedrgtour.htm> .

The February meeting of the DR/GR Ad Hoc Advisory Committee was held on February 20th. Victor Dover, Principal, and Jason King, Project Manager, of Dover Kohn and Partners laid out the plans of the consultants for the overall DR/GR study. Their power point presentation can be viewed at http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/Dover_Kohl_PP_presentation02-20-08.pdf and their presentation to the Committee can be viewed at http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/ReportsRelatedDocs.htm .

Dover Kohl will be assisted in this effort by:

- Hall Planning and Analysis will do the Traffic Analysis
- Samuel E. Poole III, Berger Singerman will do the Legal Analysis
- Spikowski Planning Associates will do the comprehensive planning
- Kevin L. Erwin Consulting Ecologist is the principal ecologist
- DHI Water & Environment will do the integrated surface & groundwater model, and
- David Douglas Associates will do the truck traffic impact analysis.

The Schedule for the Dr/GR planning effort presented to the Ad Hoc Committee is as follows:

timeline

- now - mid April • technical analysis
 - April 15 - 25 • collaborative scenario planning
 - Late May • scenario report
 - July • scenario selection
-
- plan implementation
 - comp plan amendments,
(as needed)
 - LDC amendments,
(as needed)

Two recent statewide studies... "Florida 2060" and "An Alternative Future" ... were recommended to the Committee as valuable background reading. They may be found on the County's website for the Committee at http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/ReportsRelatedDocs.htm .

The Dover Kohl & Partners website provides more background on the consultants at www.doverkohl.cofn/. The Ad Hoc Committee meetings are held in the 1st floor conference room of the Community Development building, 1500 Monroe Street in downtown Fort Myers from 1:30-3:30 on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. These meetings are open to the public.

Managing Mining in the DR/GR

On February 1st the Strategic Aggregates Review Task Force Final Report was released to the public. The full report can be viewed at the following website... <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/statematerialsoffice/administration/resources/library/issues-trends/aggtaskforce/meetingfour/finalreport.pdf> .

On February 21st the Chairman of the Task Force, Harkley Thornton, presented a summary of the Task Force's findings and recommendations to the House Committee on Infrastructure. His power point presentation can be found at ... <http://www.dot.state.fl.us/statematerialsoffice/administration/resources/library/issues-trends/aggtaskforce/legislature/022108housepresentation.pdf> .

One of the major findings of the Task Force was:

“Florida lacks a short or long-term comprehensive vision which addresses demand and supply (i.e. where are the deposit reserves? And where will these materials be needed as the state continues to grow?):

A consensus recommendation addressing this concern is as follows:

- “Development of the Strategic Aggregate Resource Assessment funded jointly by the FDOT and the industry
- Encourage the use of recycled and reused construction aggregate materials
- Investigate and encourage the use of alternative material substitutions for construction aggregate materials”

Other consensus recommendations are:

“State and local government should protect existing mines from the encroachment of incompatible land uses and, in consideration of the infrastructure investment associated with these, plan for their expansion.

Future procedures for siting and permitting of mines should be based on earlier/more interagency coordination.

- Provide FDOT statutory authority to enter into P3 partnerships for development of rail and port infrastructure
- Identify/prioritize funding sources for improvement of rail and port facilities
- Aggregate resource counties should be offered incentives and given priority as to transportation funding.”

Many of the non-consensus recommendations would greatly reduce local control over mining approvals and regulations and reduce the environmental protections afforded these areas by the Counties.

Recently Senator Bennett introduced SB 2406. This bill would prohibit local governments from enacting or enforcing any ordinance, resolution, regulation, rule, policy, or other action that prohibits or prevents the construction or operation of a limestone mine on lands where mining is a permissible use or on lands zoned or classified as mining lands on or after March 1, 2007. It also provides an expedited permitting process for environmental resource permits that are issued by the Department of Environmental Protection.”

Kevin Hill will be monitoring the legislative response to the Strategic Aggregates Review Task Force throughout the 2008 legislative session which starts on March 4th and continues until early May. The Brooks Concerned Citizens web site will monitor this issue and make it easy for Estero residents to communicate with the legislators and Governor Crist on this and other important issues affecting Estero this year. Register on this website and review its information on this and other issues so you can participate in this program during the legislative session...see the site at <http://www.brooksconcernedcitizens.com/default.aspx?p=MembersDefault> .

Estero's Housing Permits Continue Very Slow Growth

During January only 9 housing units with a value of \$2.1 million were permitted in Estero. This slowdown in construction of new homes should help reduce the inventory of unsold new homes constructed in Estero during 2005 when 2,833 units were permitted.

[Housing units permitted](#) during the last year are by far the lowest in the 9 years that the County's system has tracked Estero's permits. This result reflects the declining trend that began in early 2006, nearly two years ago. 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 2008 compares with the prior eight 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

Not only are the 2008 total housing units far below all prior years, they equal only 10% of the quantity during 2002, the season immediately following the tragedy of 9/11/2001.

On the other hand the average building value, excluding the land beneath it, continues to increase, up 25% from the prior high set last year and almost double (up 95%) the average in 2000, in spite of a slight decline in the share of more expensive single family homes.

Permitted Commercial Building Values Continue Slow Increase in January

January building permits of all types continued at a very slow pace. The value of [commercial buildings](#) permitted in Estero during January totaled \$3 million.

Year	Year to Date	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	18,391,724	157,614,045
2008	3,028,264	?

As the above table indicates Estero commercial development started to expand rapidly in 2004 and peaked during 2006 with a total of \$184.7 million. (All figures are exclusive of the underlying land). Nonetheless, 2007 was still Estero's second highest commercial development year, far ahead of the third place year, 2005, with \$111 million.

During January the major projects that contributed to the year to date total are:

\$1.08 million in the [Coconut Point Town Center](#);

\$1.39 million for [Miromar Outlets](#) expansion

\$155,000 for the [Brooks Town Center](#) (retail) at Coconut Road and Three Oaks
Parkway

\$90,000 at 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.