

Estero Development Report

Volume 8, Number 3

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Edited by ECCL--the Estero Council of Community Leaders

For More Information about Estero

...see www.esterofl.org

This Report is available on the Estero Fire Rescue website at www.esterofire.org
and the Estero Community website at www.esterofl.org

July/August Opportunities for Citizen Participation In Protecting Estero's Quality of Life

Date	Time	Event	Location
Wednesday, July 2 nd	9:30 a.m.	Hearings Examiner's Hearing on the Townhomes at Estero Park development	2 nd Floor Hearing Room, County Community Development Building, 1500 Monroe Street in downtown Ft Myers
Wednesday, July 2 nd	1 p.m.	DR/GR Advisory Committee Meeting with Facilitator	1 st Floor Hearing Room, County Community Development Building, 1500 Monroe Street in downtown Ft Myers
Tuesday, July 8 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, July 9 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
Wednesday, July 16 th	9 a.m.	DR/GR Steering Committee Meeting. Open to Public. All day workshop discussion of the consultant's recommendations. 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
Monday, July 21 st	6 p.m.	Estero Community Planning Panel. This meeting is open to the public.	Estero Community Park, located on the south side of Corkscrew Road midway between Sandy Lane and River Ranch
Wednesday, July 23 rd	9 a.m.	DR/GR Steering Committee Meeting. Open to Public. Half day workshop discussion of the consultant's recommendations. 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
Monday, July 28 th	8:30 a.m.	Lee Local Planning Agency review of the proposed DR/GR Land Development Code Changes	County Board Chambers, 2 nd Floor, 2120 Main Street in downtown Ft Myers
Monday, July 28 th	5 p.m.	Last day to register to vote in the August 26 th Primary Election	County Supervisor of Elections offices including 24951 Old 41, Suite 10 in Bonita Springs
Wednesday, July 30 th	1 p.m.	DR/GR Steering Committee Meeting. Open to Public. Half day workshop discussion of the consultant's recommendations. 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
Friday, August 1 st	10 a.m.	DR/GR Consultants Recommendation Presentation to the BOCC	County Board Chambers, 2 nd Floor, 2120 Main Street in

			downtown Ft Myers
Tuesday, August 12 th	5 p.m.	BOCC First Hearing on Proposed DR/GR Land Development Code Changes	County Board Chambers, 2 nd Floor, 2120 Main Street in downtown Ft Myers
Tuesday, August 12 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, August 13 th	1 p.m.	DR/GR Steering Committee Meeting. Open to Public. 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, August 13 th	1 p.m.	Southwest Florida Expressway Authority	Bonita Springs City Council Chambers, 9101 Bonita Beach Road
Friday, August 15 th	1p.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
Friday, August 22 nd	9 a.m.	Lee County MPO Meeting. For detailed information see http://www.mpo-swfl.org/agendas.shtml about one week before the meeting.	1926 Victoria Street in downtown Ft. Myers
Tuesday, August 26 th	7 a.m. to 7 p.m.	Primary Election	All Polling Places
Wednesday, August 27 th	1:30 p.m.	DR/GR Steering Committee Meeting. Open to public. 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

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Estero Community Website

From January through May about 39,800 persons visited this site to learn about Estero. During the same period in 2007 only about 29,200 visited the site, thus our website traffic increased by 36% 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)

www.esterofl.org

July 28th Voter Registration Deadline

Persons wishing to vote in the August 26th Primary Election must register by the close of business on Monday, July 28th. Voter registration in Florida is quite easy...for detailed information on registration see the following website: <http://esterofl.org/eccl/voter-participation.htm#How to Register to Vote in Florida>

Participation in the August 26th Primary Election is important to Estero because three of the five County Commissioners will likely be elected on that day...they are all Republicans and the winner of the Republican Primary is highly likely to be the elected on November 4th because of lack of opposition or weak opposition. If you are a resident of Florida and are not currently register to vote we urge you to do so prior to July 28th. Estero has a reputation for high voter participation and that counts with the County Commission...let's keep it that way.

Community Day at the Koreshan State Historic Site

The Estero Historic Society and the Koreshan State Historic Site are sponsoring a "Community Day" starting at 11 a.m. on Saturday, July 5th at the Koreshan State Historic Site on the northwest corner of US 41 and Corkscrew Road. The usual Park entrance fee will be waived for this event. You can bring your own picnic or buy hotdogs and burgers etc. at very reasonable prices. For more information on "Community Day" see the following flyer... <http://www.esterofl.org/new/july5.pdf> .

Estero High School Landscaping Underway

On June 23rd O'Donnell Landscaping began planting tree and shrubs around four entrances to Estero High School.

On Thursday, July 3rd Lee County Commissioner Ray Judah and Estero civic leaders will dedicate the citizen funded Estero High School roadside landscaping project.

The ceremony will be held at the school's main entrance on River Ranch Road ... one of

the four gates scheduled for the initial phase of the beautification project funded by the Estero Community Improvement Foundation (ECIF), a non-profit subsidiary of the Estero Council of Community Leaders.

A total of 120 trees will be installed at the four gates by O'Donnell Landscaping of Estero. The varieties include Royal Poinciana (6), Royal Palms (10), Thatch Palms (10), Sable Palms (46) and Silver Palmettos (45).

The ECIF's "Send a Tree to School" campaign was begun in 2006 in an effort to bring the roadside appearance of Estero High School up to that of its surrounding residential areas. No funding was available from Lee County or the school district for the project.

The Foundation has conducted events and concerts to raise funds for the project. Its next event is a fashion show and luncheon presented by Dillard's Coconut Point on November 12th.

Fire District Merger Consultant Selected

On June 17th the three Fire District Boards, Bonita Springs, Estero and San Carlos Park, met in a joint meeting to discuss the recommendations of their merger committee after reviewing the proposals of five consultants for assistance in evaluating the issues associated with a merger of the three departments. After considerable discussion the thirteen Commissioners present voted unanimously to select System Planning Corporation, Tridata Division to conduct this study for them.

The three fire district superintendents will present this recommendation to their Boards at their regular July meetings. At that time the three Boards will be asked to share the cost (cost to each district would be \$40,162)

If all three Boards approve the recommendation the merger committee will prepare a draft contract for discussion with System Planning Corporation, Tridata Division. Upon agreement with the firm the contract will be presented to the three Fire District Boards for their approval. If approved by the three District Boards the plan is for the consultant to 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.

Lee County Property Values Decline while Estero's Values Increase Slightly

On June 1st Lee County Property Appraiser Ken Wilkinson announced that the taxable value of property that will be used for our 2008 tax bills declined by 12.36% for all of Lee County. The total taxable value of property throughout the county declined by \$11.9 billion from the prior year value of \$84.5 billion, in spite of a \$4.3 billion increase from new construction. Thus, the value of existing property throughout Lee County declined by \$16.2 billion from the prior year. This is the first such decline since the Great Depression of the 1920's. The property values that will be used to determine your 2008 are based upon comparable sales completed during 2007.

The decline in property values was caused by two factors:

- The decline in the sale value of many residential properties due to the overbuilding that occurred here during 2005,
- The approval of an increase in the Homestead Exemption from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for all Florida residents in the referenda that was held in January.

In Estero the picture was somewhat different. The taxable value of property in the Estero Fire Rescue District increased by 2.54%, the largest increase of any governmental body in Lee County. Thus in Estero the value of property added to the roles during 2007 exceeded the decrease in property values due to the homestead exemption increase from \$25,000 to \$50,000 and the declining value of property due to the slowdown in the housing market

MPO Decisions Impacting Estero

On June 20th the Lee Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) met and decided two issues that could have an impact on Estero's future roadway improvements. On a motion by Commissioner Ray Judah the MPO voted unanimously to allocate the \$10 million formerly allocated by the Congress to the Coconut Road/I-75 Interchange to short or long term improvements to the Bonita Beach Road/I-75 Interchange. The ECCL spoke in support of this recommendation with an informal understanding with key representatives of the Bonita Springs that they would help us with the Corkscrew/I-75 Interchange when an opportunity for improving this interchange presents itself. This issue is not as urgent as the Bonita Beach Interchange because of the construction of the Estero Parkway Flyover that is expected to provide some relief for the Corkscrew/I-75 Interchange when it is completed about one year from now.

Over the opposition of some of the four Cape Coral MPO members the MPO voted to approve adding one new MPO member from the City of Bonita Springs. Bonita Springs presently has one vote on this 15 member Board. In order for Bonita Springs to gain the additional seat the County and the five municipalities in Lee County must separately vote to approve the addition and it must be approved by jurisdictions containing 75% of the county population.

The ECCL testified in support of this change in order to increase south Lee County's representation on the MPO. Estero and south Lee County is underrepresented on the MPO because, as part of unincorporated Lee County, Estero is represented on the MPO by the 5 County Commissioners. According to Florida law they are the only ones who can represent the county and the unincorporated area no matter how large that area may be. Today in Lee County 53% of the county's 2007 population lives in unincorporated Lee County but the five commissioners constitute only 33% of MPO membership. Thus Estero needs to work with the Commissioners and the City of Bonita Springs to obtain our fair share of state road funds.

BOCC Rejects Estero Group Mine Rezoning

On June 16th the Board of County Commissioner's (BOCC) unanimously denied the rezoning application of the Estero Group for a 318 acre parcel along the north side of Corkscrew Road about 7 miles east of I-75 for development as a fill dirt mine operation. The Commissioner's accepted the Hearing Examiner's recommendation to "deny without prejudice" which allows the applicant to reapply within the first year after the decision, whereas a regular denial would have prevented a reapplication for at least one year.

About 20 Estero and east Corkscrew Road residents testified in opposition to the development while the applicant was represented by 5 or 6 professionals. A few representatives of other landowners in the DR/GR testified in support of the application. It was apparent from the Commissioner's discussion that they want to complete the DR/GR planning process before approving any more mines in the DR/GR.

Currently there are five mine applications that are being held up by the one year mining moratorium that expires in about two months, on September 10, 2008. In addition to these applications, County staff has received letters from three more large DR/GR landowners indicating that they will be filing applications for new mines as soon as the moratorium expires.

Background

On April 4th Lee County's Chief Hearing Examiner recommended that the Board of County Commissioners deny the Estero Group [mine zoning application](#), without prejudice.

The Summary of the Hearing Examiner Recommendation states that after careful review the Hearing Examiner concluded that (underlines added for emphasis):

"1) Lee County's and Applicant's expert witnesses could not state - with certainty that the conditions proposed throughout the hearing would adequately protect the County's water quantity or quality, wildlife, or other natural resources in the DR/GR area, as intended by Policy 1.4.5. and Goals 10, 107, 114, 115 and 117; and

2) The residents of the DR/GR area will be adversely affected by the mining operation - even as conditioned by Staff and Applicant, particularly by the increased amount of mining related truck traffic on Corkscrew Road, a narrow rural arterial, which provides the only access to their homes.

The Hearing Examiner's greatest concerns in this case stems from the uncertainty of Staff's and Applicant's experts that the conditions were adequate to protect the DR/GR lands and functions. First, she is concerned that any approval of this request may "lock" Lee County into a development pattern that may prove to be inconsistent and incompatible with the intent of the DR/GR - i.e., zoning by the "domino effect."

Second, she is concerned that, with all the unknowns about this area and this request, the approval of this mining operation could have unpredictable and irrevocable long-term or future impacts on the DR/GR functions, which could jeopardize the County's future water supply.

Lastly, the Lee Plan and the Land Development Code require all these issues to be reviewed and addressed during the zoning stage, so that Staff can determine and ensure consistency with the Lee Plan and compatibility with other uses. Once the request has been approved and moves forward for development orders/permits, changes in the existing circumstances or changes in the proposed conditions of approval will not be reviewed again for consistency with the intent of the Lee Plan nor for compatibility with the other uses in this area. In addition, in that instance, neither the

BOCC nor the public will have a chance to review the new conditions or changed circumstances to determine if the project should still be approved.”

DR/GR Planning and Mining Regulation Approaching Decision Time

During July and August the County will make many major decisions about the future use to the 83,000 acre area just east of I-75 in Estero called the DR/GR, Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource area. All Estero residents are encouraged to follow these developments closely and participate early and often.

June Activities

On June 11th the DR/GR Advisory Committee heard a presentation from Kirk Martin, a committee member, geologist and consultant to many land-owners and mining companies. Mr. Martin provided some useful information from the US Geological Service and elsewhere regarding the geology and hydrology of the DR/GR area. To view his power point presentation and the US Geological Service map of the area see http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/MartinPP_06-10-08.pdf .

On June 25th the Committee heard presentations from Dr. Richard Weisskoff, a regional economist from the University of Miami, and Jim Beever of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Commission. Dr. Weisskoff talked about the use of economic modeling for forecasting the demand for aggregate rock in the Southwest Florida marketplace. Dr. Weisskoff used these tools in developing his book entitled “the Economics of Everglades Restoration”. More recently he has been studying the south Florida aggregate mining industry in preparation for testimony in the ongoing Lakes Belt Federal court case.

Jim Beever’s presentation was on the science of lake and mine pit restoration. A copy of his power point presentation can be found at http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/MartinPP_06-10-08.pdf .

July Schedule

On July 1st the Dover Kohl Report and another report on south Lee County Mining Truck Traffic will become available to the BOCC, the Committee and the public through the DR/GR section of the County’s website. Persons interested in this important information should check the following webpage... http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/subcommittee.htm.

Since the County Board does not meet during July, the public will have the full month of July to study this information and to prepare to provide public input to the County Commission when they return to act on this issue in early August. As part of that process the DR/GR Advisory Committee will meet on July 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd and 30th to review and react to the recommendations of the consultants and county staff. For further information on these deliberations you should monitor the following website ... http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/subcommittee.htm .

In addition County Community Development staff is developing some Land Development Code provisions regarding mining. Earlier this year Lee County staff studied the mining provisions of the Land Development Codes of all other Florida counties with mining activities in order to identify what kinds of regulations are used by other counties to manage the public impact of mining on their communities. These provisions will be available to the public about July 14th and will be reviewed by the County's Local Planning Agency on July 28th and by the BOCC at their meetings on August 13th and August 27th.

August and Early September Schedule

During August and early September the BOCC will review the Consultant's Report, the Advisory Committee recommendations and the Lee Plan and Land Development Code amendments. The next 70 day, running up to the end of the one year moratorium on mining applications on September 10th, the County wants to adopt as many provisions as possible regarding the planning of the DR/GR and the approval and regulation of mining in this area. The public is encouraged to participate extensively during this period inasmuch as the decisions that are made during this period will greatly impact our area for decades to come.

Background

In September 2007, Lee County Commissioners adopted an Action Plan to study land use alternatives in the southeast Lee County Density Reduction/Groundwater Resource (DR/GR) area. As part of that plan, Dover, Kohl & Partners has been hired to gather input from property owners, local citizens and others; to use this input to develop land use scenarios for the Southeast Lee DR/GR; and to recommend Lee County Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code changes to the Board of County Commissioners for their approval.

In addition the BOCC Appointed an Advisory Committee to provide a forum for all groups with an interest in the DR/GR to provide a local perspective and interact with the consultant and staff and make recommendations to the BOCC.

Several informative presentations about resources in the DR/GR and the water system of which it is a part can be found at the following website: http://www.lee-county.com/dcd/CommunityPlans/SELC_DRGR/ReportsRelatedDocs.htm .

The April edition of the Estero Development Report provided detailed information on the work of Dover Kohl, the County's DR/GR planners, while they were here doing their local research in April...to view this report see [http://esterofl.org/eccl/EDR/estero_development_report_april_2008.htm#Public Participation in DR/GR Planning Sessions](http://esterofl.org/eccl/EDR/estero_development_report_april_2008.htm#Public_Participation_in_DR/GR_Planning_Sessions) .

Estero's Housing Permits Continue Stall

During May only 9 housing units, seven single family homes and one duplex, with a value of \$2.4 million were permitted in Estero. The first five months of 2008 continue the downward trend in new housing construction in Estero that began over two years ago, in the spring of 2006.

[Housing units 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 be only a small fraction of that 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 five months of 2008 compare 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	858	\$116,877,412	\$136,221	38%
2001	1035	155,925,738	150,653	40
2002	599	99,942,722	166,849	52
2003	872	127,480,453	146,193	34
2004	631	126737869	200,852	72
2005	1275	253,271,426	198,644	45
2006	702	164,942,772	234,961	24
2007	286	78,418,241	274,190	36
2008	56	19,730,130	352,324	86

Not only are this year's total housing units far below all prior years, they equal only 9% of the comparable number in 2002, the season immediately following the tragedy of 9/11/2001 and is only 20% of last year's total for the period.

On the other hand the average building value, excluding the land beneath it, continues to increase, up 29% from the prior high set last year and over two and one-half times the average in 2000.

Permitted Commercial Building Values Continue Slow Growth

First five months building permits of all types continued at a very slow pace. The value of [commercial buildings](#) permitted in Estero during the five months totaled \$22 million.

Year	Year to Date	Annual Total
2000	\$68,297,657	\$77,250,835
2001	16,911,976	44,116,526
2002	5,968,501	23,135,139
2003	8,176,174	23,234,725
2004	8,661,787	60,859,820
2005	34,119,981	111,037,977
2006	74,470,848	184,709,240
2007	70,938,231	157,614,045
2008	21,989,153	?

As the right hand column of the above table indicates Estero 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 fifth ranked commercial development year. 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 five months the major projects that contributed to the year to date totals are:

- \$10.19 million for the Hyatt Garden Hotel at Coconut Point
- \$6.14 million in the [Coconut Point Town Center](#);
- \$4.11 million for [Miromar Outlets](#) expansion
- \$1.06 million for Lee County Utilities
- \$300,000 for West Bay commercial development
- \$240,000 in the Estero Ridge Shopping Center
- \$241,600 in Estero Town Commons
- \$160,000 in the [Brooks Town Center](#) (retail) at Coconut Road and Three Oaks Parkway
- \$129,000 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.