

The Islands of
SANIBEL CAPTIVA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Via email to all Lee County Commissioners:

June 14, 2023

Commissioner Kevin Ruane

Commissioner Cecil L. Pendergrass

Commissioner Ray Sandelli

Commissioner Brian Hamman

Commissioner Mike Greenwell

Lee County Board of County Commissioners

2120 Main Street

Fort Myers, FL 33901

RE: LDC Amendments for Building Height, Resiliency

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing on behalf of the Sanibel and Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce in opposition to the proposed changes to the Land Development Code that will be assessed in the hearing on June 20 by Lee County's Board of County Commissioners. The Chamber of Commerce represents 447 business on Sanibel and Captiva islands and throughout Lee County and makes up a diverse body of local businessmen and women that care deeply for the unique nature of our barrier islands. Our economy on the island is tied deeply to the health of our environment. As a tourism-based economy and barrier island destination, we rely on the unique nature of our islands to draw people from all over the world who want to visit our beaches, hike our trails, bike on our paths and experience a slower pace of life than is available in other places in south Florida. As business owners and residents on these sanctuary islands we chose to move here and build our businesses because of the natural ethos and similarly minded community who also care about living and working in an environment that is in balance with its natural surroundings. The planned changes to the Land Development Code (LDC) would jeopardize our small-town feel, increase traffic and wear on our infrastructure, complicate hurricane evacuation, and have a negative impact on our water quality and wildlife.

Sanibel and Captiva are inextricably linked. Both islands are connected to the mainland by a narrow causeway, and anyone traveling to Captiva must pass along the entire length of Sanibel. Visitors come to our islands to recreate on our beaches, fish our waters, and enjoy the scenery and pace of life that our islands afford. If the County decides to unilaterally change the LDC against the wishes of the business owners and residents of Sanibel and Captiva they will be damaging our environment, our economy and our way of life.

I currently sit on the Economic Recovery branch of the Resilient Lee Hurricane Recovery Task Force. Rebuilding from Hurricane Ian has been a massive undertaking across both islands and our community, and as we rebuild as a county, we have been focusing on building back with resilience in mind. Removing height restrictions and paving the way to increase density at the South Seas Island Resort will make our islands less resilient, negatively impact our environment, and increase



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the danger to our citizens. Changing the height restrictions will change the nature of our islands and the protections afforded by our dunes, mangrove fringes, and native plants will be less effective at absorbing storm energy on the larger three-story buildings. By increasing height and density we will have more traffic passing through Sanibel on their way to Captiva, clogging our roads and erasing the slow pace of island life that people have come to expect on their visits. The added population could also put the planned connection of a Captiva and Sanibel sewer system at risk and when the next storm comes, having more people on Captiva needing to all exit on the one road through Sanibel will make a hurricane evacuation more complicated and dangerous.

An important part of living on an island is respecting your neighbors and working together as a community. These changes are being instigated by the County on behalf of an individual organization that stands to reap the benefits with their island neighbors shouldering the burden. Captiva has a Community Panel that was established to specifically answer questions like this, and they were not consulted with these changes. Policy 23.4.1 of the Lee Plan requires that the community of Captiva be consulted through a formal public information gathering session for any changes to the Captiva-specific provisions of the code.

The Sanibel Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests that you deny the proposed amendments to the Land Development Code relating to building height and resilience on Captiva.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Lai', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Lai
President and CEO
Sanibel and Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce