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Island Conservation Partners Oppose Code Changes at South Seas on Captiva

Changes Would Make Lee County Less Resilient, Threaten Environment & Quality of Life

On June 6, the Lee County Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to hold a [public hearing to change the Land Development Code](#) (LDC) on Captiva in ways that would jeopardize its historic low-rise, low-density ambiance.

“Our communities on Captiva and Sanibel are very concerned about the county’s proposal to significantly increase the height of buildings on Captiva and to eliminate density limitations at South Seas Island Resort,” said SCCF CEO James Evans.



SCCF’s conservation partners, including the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society, the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, and CROW, are worried about environmental impacts.

We are closely watching this proposal that will have significant impacts within the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge complex and its surrounding waters.

— Birgie Miller
Executive Director
"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society

The islands' conservation partners are joined by a strong consortium of voices on Captiva, including the Captiva Community Panel, the Captiva Civic Association, as well as 12 condominium and homeowner associations located within South Seas Island Resort.

South Seas Island Resort has requested changes to the LDC and the county's comprehensive land use plan to facilitate the redevelopment of buildings damaged by Hurricane Ian.

Proposed changes to the LDC include the elimination of the three-units-per-acre density restrictions inside South Seas, with no restrictions cited to replace them.

Increasing building density on a barrier island recently devastated by Hurricane Ian is counterproductive and will make our communities in Lee County less resilient to future storm events.

— James Evans
CEO
SCCF

Currently, building height on Captiva is limited to 28 feet above base flood elevation, which includes two floors. The changes could result in building heights at South Seas as high as 45 feet to 75 feet above base flood elevation.

The LDC changes would also result in increased building heights on the rest of Captiva. According to the Captiva Community Panel, there has been no request from the community of Captiva to increase heights that would allow for another floor above base flood elevation.

The overall island community is questioning why the county is proposing changes that are not supported by the residents of Captiva.

Both Sanibel and Captiva have a long history of fervently maintaining a strong environmental ethic as "sanctuary islands" with very intentional limitations on development.

CROW encourages our elected officials to thoughtfully and thoroughly consider the potentially negative and cascading effects this proposed change would have on Captiva, Sanibel, and the surrounding area's native and migratory wildlife.

— Alison Charney Hussey
Executive Director
CROW

The way the proposed changes are being officially introduced is also of concern because it is limiting public input. As county-initiated changes rather than changes initiated by South Seas Island Resort, the county did not have a public informational meeting on Captiva as required for an amendment to the LDC.

However, the deputy county attorney and representatives of South Seas went on record at the board of commissioners meeting stating that South Seas requested the changes.

Now, as much as ever before, it is essential to protect the ecological balance and the character of the Islands and our region.

— Sam Ankerson
Executive Director
Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum

All island conservation partners encourage residents to attend the public hearing on June 20 and to email county commissioners to voice opposition based on the following points.

The changes to the Lee County LDC will:

- Negatively impact hurricane evacuation of residents, increasing the threat to public safety for future storm events
- Increase traffic to unsustainable levels and its impact on existing infrastructure
- Negatively impact the quality of life for residents of Sanibel and Captiva
- Change the unique character of Captiva Island by resulting in structures that are significantly higher than current building heights and the surrounding landscape
- Have a direct and negative impact on wildlife habitat on Captiva and water quality surrounding the islands of Sanibel and Captiva, as well as the region
- They may also jeopardize the current plan to improve water quality with the long sought-after installation of a central sewer on Captiva by hooking up to Sanibel's sewer system

Please call or email all five Lee County Commissioners to ask them to reject this unwelcome change in building heights and density.

**District 1: Kevin Ruane
239-533-2224, dist1@leegov.com**

**District 2: Cecil Pendergrass
239-533-2227, dist2@leegov.com**

**District 3: Ray Sandelli
239-533-2223, dist3@leegov.com**

**District 4: Brian Hamman, Chairman
239-533-2226, dist4@leegov.com**

**District 5: Mike Greenwell, Vice Chairman
239-533-2225, dist5@leegov.com**

You are strongly encouraged to join SCCF and community partners in voicing opposition at a **public hearing** on Tuesday, June 20, at 5-6 p.m. at the board chambers in the Old Lee County Courthouse, 2120 Main St., downtown Fort Myers.

Today, the county announced that there will also be a Lee County Comprehensive Plan amendment hearing that addresses the building height and resiliency **changes to the Captiva Community Plan**. The public is also encouraged to attend this hearing on Wednesday, June 21, at 9:30 am.

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