

/LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Guest Commentary | Coalition forms to fight Lee County Comp Plan changes

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Nadine Slimak

Do you like your neighborhood? Do you want to continue to have a say in how it changes and grows?

If you're in unincorporated Lee County and the answer to those questions is yes, then I urge you to speak up about the proposed revisions to the Lee County Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code.

On Tuesday, Aug. 25, Lee County staff hosted a public information session on changes that are being proposed for the Lee County Comprehensive Plan (Lee Plan) — which guides development in Lee County — and the Lee County Land Development Code (LDC), which provides the detailed regulations that enact the Lee Plan.

Despite the fact that the proposed changes are extensive and specific and amount to

hundreds of pages, this was the first time many of our communities were made aware of revisions that will impact thousands of Lee County residents.

From Buckingham to Bayshore to Captiva, we've all been caught off guard and have been left scrambling to understand how these changes impact our communities — and we have just days to evaluate changes before the matter is put to County Commissioners for a vote.

Community groups have united under The Lee Communities Coalition (TLCC) to work together on this issue. Members of the Coalition, which is being spearheaded by the Greater Pine Island Civic Association (GPICA), also include:

- Matlacha Civic Association
- Buckingham Community Association, Inc.
- Alva, Inc.
- Captiva Civic Association
- Captiva Community Panel
- Concerned Citizens of Bayshore Community, Inc.
- Greater Pine Island Water Association

County staff maintains that building densities, hurricane evacuation planning, and building heights won't change, but we remain skeptical. Even a limited review of the documents show that not all provisions are being carried through. The biggest two changes of all?

- Community Plans — the special development rules that govern development in 17 Lee County communities — are being eliminated wholesale.
- Public Information Sessions — meetings that developers are required to hold in these communities before building/adding development — are also scheduled for the chopping block.

Once these disappear from the Lee Plan, they are as good as gone. That means what makes Alva, Buckingham, Captiva, Pine Island and the other communities special is more at risk than ever before. Our communities may be very different from one another, but in this we agree:

- Policies in place for 40 years that were developed through careful planning and the input of hundreds of thousands of Lee County residents should not be deleted with the simple strike of a red pen. This major change in community planning philosophy requires — in fact, demands — a careful and measured review by the residents that Lee County serves.

We're not taking this lying down. The Lee Communities Coalition is saying in one voice that we will not go quietly into the night, that we will not go down without a fight.

Bokeelia resident Nadine Slimak, wrote the preceding commentary on behalf of The Lee Communities Coalition. Slimak has been a Southwest Florida resident for nearly 30 years. She has been vice president of the Greater Pine Island Civic Association since 2016 — the last time Lee County proposed a major change to the Pine Island Plan.

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