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LPA proposes big changes unincorporated Lee County

Residents urge Lee County to reject elimination of community plans

SEP 2, 2026 BY CHUCK BALLARO *4 MIN READ*

Over the course of decades, communities throughout unincorporated Lee County have been able to formulate community planning.

However, if Lee County has its way, it will eliminate 17 community plans and put them all under the Lee County umbrella.

Monday, at the Local Planning Agency meeting in Lee County Chambers, dozens of residents came to express their frustration over this proposal.

Despite that, after nearly three hours of input and debate, the LPA approved transmittal of the comprehensive plan by a 4-2 vote, to the frustration of the full house at the meeting.

The plan will now go to the Board of County Commissioners for final consideration.

Many residents in unincorporated communities throughout Lee County will be impacted, including those in Pine Island, and North Fort Myers who expressed concern that this change

in response to changes proposed for the Lee County Development Plan (Lee Plan) and the Lee County Land Development Code (LDC), including the Matlacha Civic Association and the Greater Pine Island Water Association.

The coalition was out in full force Monday.

Nadine Slimak, vice president of the Greater Pine Island Civic Association, said many plans that were drafted and used for decades are scheduled for deletion.

“These changes, made under the guidance of streamlined language… go far beyond that. These gut the entire zoning and development we have worked so hard for,” Slimak said.

Another, Bobbie Jo Gordon, who works in disaster management, wanted Pine Island’s plan to stand alone because of the unique characteristics of the community, as well as crisis management.

“Our plan is part of our disaster risk management. Pine Island is a hurricane vulnerable community with limited infrastructure, environmentally sensitive land and serious evacuation restrictions. Pine Island has just one evacuation route,” she said.

Residents of North Fort Myers expressed similar concerns.

Bob Hill, of the North Fort Myers Civic Association, said the community is involved in how fast these changes are coming and how it will impact everyone.

“If planning is so far behind, why did the county let it get like that? Why hasn’t it been updated?” Hill asked. “People are pretty involved in this and we’re concerned about the hurry in this. We need our participation in every move you make.

Christy-Lee Iwanow, vice president of the North Fort Myers Civic Association, objected to the

elimination of the decisions made by the local planning panels.

“Eliminating these panels decreases transparency and silences local input that keeps our community safe and unique,” Iwanow said. “This threatens the rural, agricultural and equestrian character of Lee County and my hometown. They say it isn’t changing, but it’s opening the door.”

Steven Brodkin, of Bayshore, said many of the community plans have been on the books for decades and many are not as outdated as county staff contends they are. He wanted the community plans kept in place.

“There’s no reason why different communities can’t have different development codes. Residents of Bayshore hired a planner and worked with the commissioners to create the Bayshore Community Plan,” Brodkin said of the plan the BOCC approved in 2003. “More than 400 people came to meetings at the civic center to support the plan.”

The speakers, along with many others, asked for the planning panel to vote the plan down, continue it to another day or at least hold more public hearings in places affected.

According to the proposal, the purpose is to increase efficiency, reduce unnecessary regulations, while maintaining the protection of public health, safety, and welfare of its residents.

The bill states it would remove duplicative goals, objectives, and policies; remove unnecessary regulations and relocate necessary standards to broadly applicable policies; remove obsolete procedures, references, programs, and terminology; and retain provisions required for consistency with state and federal law.

During discussion, LPA member Dustin Gardner said he only saw the proposal 10 days ago and worried that it did seem rushed. Those sentiments were also voiced by Jennifer Sapen.

LPA chair Stan Stouder said he would like an “A-B” on what impact the proposal would have before and after in each community. In the meantime, he would vote to approve the transmittal, conditioned by Sapen on the increase in public participation.

Gardner and Henry Zuba voted to not transmit.

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