

TOP STORY

Lee County residents push back on fast-tracked growth plan changes

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LEE COUNTY, Fla. (WINK) — Lee County is moving forward with plans to make changes to the Lee Plan and Land Development Code, a decision many residents disagree with.

Dozens of residents spoke out at a hearing as county officials discussed the next steps. Neighbors from across Lee County filled the old county courthouse for one common goal: they want county leaders to vote against making changes to the Lee Plan and Land Development Code.

The county contends that updating the plan would improve efficiency and remove duplication. Changes could be coming quickly to the Lee Plan, a long-term growth plan for Lee County.

Many neighbors came to the hearing hoping to slow down these changes. They said residents haven't had enough time to review the proposals or provide feedback.

"We keep asking why so fast. Because they have 10 developer requests, I believe, on the table that they're trying to push through very quickly," said Cheryl Fischer, a Buckingham Community Association board member.

The Local Planning Agency voted 4-2 to recommend that the proposed amendments move forward. It is the first of several steps in a lengthy review process.

"It's a joke that this has anything to do with democratic input, and it has anything to do with community involvement," said Susan Dahod, a Pine Island resident.

The Lee Communities Coalition said the changes would remove community plans for 17 unincorporated areas, including Pine Island, Buckingham and Alva. They believe those plans help protect the unique character of their communities and guide future development.

The proposed changes would also eliminate public information session requirements for the land development code amendment process. Residents are concerned about losing opportunities for public engagement.

"Instead of giving the public more say and more opportunities for engagement on these issues, they're taking it away. We find this unacceptable," said Nadine Slimak, a Lee Communities Coalition member.



The county said the future land use element is being reconstructed for clarity, so the Lee Plan and land development code work together. The county also said the proposed amendments will not change the allowable densities or intensities for development.

Neighbors said they are not backing down. Fischer emphasized the commitment of residents who attended the hearing.

"They took time off work. They have lives. They have other things to do, and yet they still came, and they showed up, and we hope Lee County residents continue to show up on this issue," Fischer said.

The plan will be discussed next at an executive regulatory oversight meeting on Sept. 9. It will then head to the county commission for further review.

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