

Development Intensity

The constraints imposed by the need for natural resources protection, hurricane safety and adequate delivery of services, clearly demonstrate that unlimited future population growth and unregulated use of land would be hazardous to health, safety and welfare of the public. To minimize these hazards and to maintain the character of the community, it is essential to limit the total number of dwelling units, including hotel and motel units, trailer spaces, condominiums, time share units, duplexes and single family houses to a total of 9,000 units. The plan for residential development intensity adopted in 1976 contemplated approximately 7,800 dwelling units if the City built out in conformance with all the regulations in effect with adoption of the 1976 Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

If dwelling units are kept within a range of approximately 9,000 units, the water consumption and sewage generation can be handled in a manner consistent with the public health, safety and welfare, based on present knowledge.

Moreover by keeping the number of persons using the Island to these levels, it should be possible with careful planning to safeguard the lives of the people on Sanibel and Captiva in case of all but the most extreme hurricanes.

The formula used to allocate densities throughout the City in the 1976 Comprehensive Land Use Plan is described in the appendix to the March 1976 draft of the Plan. That formula took into account the municipal economy, physical land capability and the adequacy of human support systems including the proximity of land to them. Policies were developed that directed future growth to areas where services are available. Environmentally valuable or hazardous areas were proportionately allocated less growth in development intensity.

The formula also took into account capital investments already made to prepare land for development and the degree to which a project or subdivision was improved and built-out. The result of this process allocated 2,000 dwellings across the island in densities ranging from one dwelling unit per 33 acres to five dwelling units per acre, depending upon the location, ecological zone and the extent of improvement to the land. Once the units were allocated under the formula, the Planning Commission made adjustments taking into account consideration of existing development patterns and the extent to which existing subdivisions and projects are consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. In some cases adjustments were made to ensure that the density allocation would not permit higher densities than would be consistent with the character of existing residential areas.

No development is permitted in the Gulf Beach and Bay Beach Preservation zones but these areas were allocated a residential density, all of which must be built landward of these Preservation Zones.

Because of increases granted in residential development intensity between 1976 and 1988, which increased the potential number of dwelling units from approximately 7,800 to approximately 9,000, further Island-wide increases in density are not readily supportable. However, some modest adjustments in density, either increases or decreases, may need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to achieve other objectives of the comprehensive land use plan. The following factors indicate why Island-wide increases in density are not generally supportable in the upcoming planning period:

- Changes have already been made by City Council, where warranted, to residential densities during 1976-1988. Examples include relief granted to

owners of pairs of contiguous lots meeting certain standards, increased residential densities along Periwinkle Way to provide alternatives to commercial development, and adjustments made as a result of re-mapping the City's ecological zones in 1979, and where unique circumstances relating to a parcel were found to exist that had not been fully considered at the time the land use plan was adopted

- During peak season, Periwinkle Way, the Island's main artery, is used by more vehicles than many residents and property owners find acceptable
- The capability of the City to achieve the objectives outlined in the Safety Element of the Plan, particularly to provide the opportunity for everyone to evacuate safely
- The goals of the Comprehensive Plan are aimed at the conservation of natural resources. An inventory of vacant land in 2005 indicated that almost two-thirds of the vacant land on the Island is located in either the Mangrove, Lowland-Wetland or Upland-Wetland Ecological Zones, which are not readily developable unless the environmental precepts of the Plan are set aside
- Hurricanes pose a significant threat to lives and property on the Island most vulnerable to storm damage from sustained high winds, scouring due to wave action, battering from floating debris and flooding due to storm surge
- The electors have amended the City Charter to require that a majority of the electors voting in the

election is necessary to approve increases in residential density

There are circumstances, however, under which residential density could be increased for a specific site if mitigating considerations are found to exist that would outweigh potential drawbacks and work toward achieving other objectives of the *Sanibel Plan*. These are:

- Where opportunities are provided for below market rate housing
- To implement the Plan for Commercial Development by providing alternatives to commercial development through increased residential densities
- To promote further conservation of environmentally sensitive lands by creating incentives to set aside sensitive land from development, such as the transfer of development rights
- Where unique circumstances are found to exist on a parcel, which had not been fully considered at the time of the initial adoption of the Development Intensity Map in 1976
- Where there is a resultant, overall Citywide decrease in the number of permitted dwelling units, provided that the density decrease does not originate on lands in the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Conservation District

Intensity of non-residential uses are measured in a number of ways, including number of vehicular trips generated, number and type of uses located on a parcel, floor area, size and number of structures, hours of operation, water consumption, wastewater generation, and the like. Regulating intensity of

use in commercial districts and for all non-residential land uses is important:

- To assure that adverse impacts on adjacent lands and developments are minimized
- To assure that sufficient land area is available to accommodate the parking, drainage, wastewater disposal and service needs of the commercial development
- To assure that enough native vegetation for the development is preserved or planted to have a pleasing appearance to both passersby and customers
- To assure that the level of activity is in keeping with the maintenance of the character of the community

Plan for Development Intensity

The distribution of residential development intensity shall be in accordance with the density allocation on the Development Intensity Map of this Plan. The implementation of the Development Intensity Map is incorporated in the Land Development Code. Modern Platted Subdivisions were identified in the initial *Sanibel Plan* and that designation is applied in the method of calculating permitted density. A listing of Modern Platted Subdivisions established in the initial *Sanibel Plan* is provided in the following chart.

MODERN PLATTED SUBDIVISIONS

(Residential Subdivisions Developed Prior to July 8, 1976)

1. Sanibel Estates	25. Sanibel Bayous
2. Anchors Aweigh	26. Dinkins Bayou
3. Shell Harbor	27. Del Segá
4. Shell Basket	28. Castaways Estates
5. Sanibel Shores	29. Caloosa Shores
6. Beachview Country Club	30. Leisure Acres
7. Sanibel Center	31. Belle Meade
8. Lagoon Estates	32. Windrow
9. Sanibel Lake Estates	33. Sanibel River Estates
10. Southwinds	34. Sanibel Pines
11. Periwinkle Properties	35. Sanibel Isles
12. Kearns	36. Water Shadows
13. Palm Lake	37. Gumbo Limbo
14a. Lake Murex	38. Sanibel Harbours
14b. Little Lake Murex	39. O. L. Richardson
15. Bright Water	40a. Dunes - Phase 1
16. Ranchos Way	40b. Dunes - Phase 2
17. Seaside	41. Briant Michigan
18. Sea Oats	42. Sedgemoor
19a. East Rocks	43. Sanibel Woodlands
19b. West Rocks	44. Cardinal Ridge
20. Terrill Ridge	45. Poinciana Circle
21. Gulf Pines	46. Sawyers
22. Gulf Shores (f/k/a Tahiti Shores)	47. Los Conchas
23. Chateau Sur Mer	48. S. B. Woodring's
24. Tradewinds	49. Betts

Source: 1976 Plan, as amended.

Provisions of the Plan

1. Residential density computations are based on the assumption that dwelling units will have an average occupancy of 2.2 persons per unit. To the extent that dwelling units are of a type or size that will increase the average occupancy rate, the permissible number of units may vary from the number shown on the Development Intensity Map in a manner to be determined by implementing development regulations in the Land Development Code.

2. By such implementing development regulations, the City Council may also permit residential densities in excess of those shown on the Development Intensity Map as incentives to the provision of below market rate housing.
3. Through implementing ordinances, to be incorporated into the Land Development Code, the City Council may also permit development of lands in excess of the residential densities shown on the Development Intensity Map in order to recognize vested rights and constitutional limitations with respect to lands individually owned prior to adoption of the initial Sanibel Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
4. To maintain the stock of short-term occupancy units in the City, existing hotels, motels and resort condominiums that are rehabilitated or redeveloped in accordance with the *Sanibel Plan* and Land Development Code are allowed to maintain up to their existing density, provided that redeveloped resort accommodations continue the short-term occupancy use of that prior development.
5. Existing dwelling units that are substantially damaged by a natural disaster are allowed to build-back.
6. During this planning period, the City will continue to pursue its Redevelopment Planning Work Program. The Redevelopment Work Program has addressed, on an Island-wide basis, build-back following substantial damage by a natural disaster. The Redevelopment Work Program has also addressed redevelopment in the Resort Housing District. The

Redevelopment Work Program includes review of nonconforming resort housing uses located outside the Resort Housing District, review of redevelopment in Commercial Districts and the review of redevelopment in Residential Districts. The Redevelopment Work Program will continue to evaluate how redevelopment or modernization of existing nonconforming properties can balance property rights with environmental, public safety and community welfare considerations within the framework of the *Sanibel Plan*.

7. The plan for controlling the intensity of commercial uses has several components. The first is to measure intensity of use as a floor area ratio, defined as the ratio of floor area to parcel size. In order to provide incentives in the development regulations for achieving planning objectives, the floor area ratios (FAR) reflect the need to:
 - Differentiate development intensity between Periwinkle Way and the Town Center District and Palm Ridge Road area so as to reduce the impact of commercial development on turning movements and traffic flow on Periwinkle Way and to preserve the ambience of Periwinkle Way
 - Limit creation of additional commercially zoned lands which can lead to commercial overbuilding
 - Limit the intensity of conditional uses to the extent that these uses generate traffic impact to a significantly greater extent than permitted uses

Opportunities have been provided for the provision of limited amounts of residential development in commercial zones, under controlled conditions, to provide opportunities for affordable housing and offer additional alternatives to commercial development.

The City desires to maintain a balance between the residential and resort (tourist) segments of the community so that Sanibel remains an attractive and desirable residential community. It is apparent that the commercial developer views Sanibel as primarily a non-resident commercial market. And, left unregulated, this trend can be expected to continue to the point that Sanibel could become a destination shopping area, contrary to public desires.

The suitability of the Periwinkle Way corridor for residential development has been recognized, but the pressure for additional commercial zoning and development can be expected to continue. Undertaken as part of the City's Redevelopment Planning Work Program, an updated analysis of Sanibel's environmentally based market and economy supports the implementation of the Plan for Commercial Development.

The benefits that accrue to the community's public health, safety and welfare, through implementation of the Plan for Commercial Development, are:

- The development of an attractive residential environment that maintains the ambience and aesthetic charm of Sanibel
- The reduction of the likelihood of retail overbuilding
- The improvement of traffic flow by reducing the potential for curb cuts and turning movements on

Periwinkle Way likely to result from unchecked commercial development

The City has addressed the compatibility of commercial and non-residential structures with the character of the community.

Resort Housing

Another type of income producing use in the City of Sanibel is resort housing. Prior to the construction of the Causeway, such housing took the form of small motels and cottages and beach resorts. The construction of the Causeway brought more and bigger beach resorts.

The late 1960s saw a State-wide boom in the construction of condominiums extending into the early 1970s. Lee County permitted the construction of numerous condominium complexes some of which were constructed at locations dangerously close to the water and built at densities that detracted from the character of the Island as a desirable residential environment. Meanwhile, other condominium projects moved more and more into the resort hotel business with widely advertised short-term rentals.

These dramatic and rapid changes in the nature of the tourism business on Sanibel have had numerous impacts on the environment. The entire character of the community as a low-density settlement compatible with the natural environment was threatened. The unique environmental character of the Island that provided the primary attraction for both tourists and permanent residents was then in danger.

The protection of the character and long-range base of the tourism industry demanded a significant reduction in the potential density of resort housing accommodations. The City

had no desire and little capacity to cater to tourists who preferred to vacation in a high-density, urbanized type of environment. Many other areas in this State willingly provide for and eagerly solicit the trade of such visitors. Sanibel offers unique charms, for which some people will pay a premium while they exist. However, if these unique charms are destroyed by overuse, the City will have little to offer.

Many of the finer beach resorts in Florida and throughout the world have been developed at low densities of five or six units per acre. Such densities permit the provision of amenities and services that will attract more selective tourists willing to pay a premium for Sanibel's special character. Higher densities typically contribute to reductions in the carrying capacity of the beach for use by wildlife.

With few exceptions, resort housing uses are permitted only in the Resort Housing District.

In order to maintain the residential character of the resort housing area and to preserve to the maximum extent possible the natural features of this area, commercial development should be permitted only to the extent that it complements and primarily serves the needs of the residents of resort housing on-site without disrupting the preservation of the scenic beauty of the natural beach.

Resort housing developments, particularly the larger ones, depend in large part on non-guests to help support their accessory commercial uses, especially restaurants. Had resort housing developments been permitted to continue supporting their commercial developments by providing service to non-guests, a further expansion of Sanibel's commercial districts could have resulted. The City has modified its regulations for future commercial development in the Resort Housing District to

assure that the type and size of commercial uses permitted are supportable by the resort's guests.

Existing and new commercial developments located in the Resort Housing District need to be compatible with the *Sanibel Plan's* objectives for scenic preservation and maintenance of the character of the community.

Only 12 resort units have been built since the mid-1980s. The City has had success in limiting resort housing to the Resort Housing District and thereby protecting non-resort residential areas. With the attainment of an appropriate balance between resort housing uses and non-resort housing uses, the City has provided means to retain and redevelop existing resort housing uses.

Although additional resort development is not anticipated, the City analyzed existing conditions and trends associated with the maintenance, improvement and redevelopment of resort properties and took steps to retain existing dwelling units in motels, hotels and inns so that when build-back or redevelopment occurs on these properties, the properties are redeveloped as motels, hotels and inns. It is in the interest of both residents and the business community to maintain a block of accommodations available for short-term occupancy. Visitors using these accommodations provide customers or businesses and potential buyers for realtors and home sellers. A motel, hotel or resort complex can build-back the existing number of units if the buildings are substantially damaged by a natural disaster. A motel, hotel or resort complex is allowed, with appropriate restrictions, to redevelop up to the existing number of units, if the number of units exceeds the number allowed by the Development Intensity Map.