

Section 3.2.5.

Scenic Preservation Element

Pursuant to Section 163.3177(7)(1), Florida Statutes.

Background Discussion

The development of a Vision Statement for the Sanibel Plan emphasizes the importance of scenic resources in the preservation of the character of the community.

Sanibel is renowned for the natural beauty of its Gulf beaches and subtropical landscape. These are important economic and aesthetic resources for residents, businesses and visitors. Sanibel's reputation as a unique retreat of unspoiled beauty continues to attract more residents and tourists annually. The resources of the Island experienced by most residents and visitors are subject to degradation and therefore require some measure of protection and regulation. These resources are the beaches, wetlands, waterways and water bodies, the wildlife refuge and the major roadways that provide access to them.

The beaches in the east and east central sectors of the Island are to some degree impacted by large condominiums that are constructed close to the beach with no visual screen. As a result, to some extent these are no longer the "unspoiled" beaches that have long attracted visitors to Sanibel. However, at the western end of the Island and some areas of single-family homes on the eastern end, single-family houses are set back sufficiently from the beach and surrounded by dense vegetation so that they do not impair the scenic values of the beach. In this way the "natural" character of the shoreline is preserved for all to enjoy, resident and visitor alike.

A beach setback and buffer of dense vegetation have been employed in new developments near the beach, whatever the density or land use. In addition to the scenic impact, storm protection is enhanced by such a strategy. It also benefits marine and wildlife that use the beach for nesting and feeding.

A limitation on building heights of approximately 45 feet above mean sea level is also important with respect to scenic preservation of the beach zones. Other regulations designed to conserve the coastal environment are also important to scenic preservation. A lower building height limitation is appropriate for single-family residential areas in order to retain the character of the community.

The height of all new buildings is not to exceed three stories above the base flood elevation. However, Section 3.10.4 of the City Charter, as amended on March 1, 2005, addresses building back condominium buildings that are substantially damaged by a natural disaster. Where a condominium building, which is a nonconforming structure, is destroyed or substantially damaged in a natural disaster, reconstruction of which is in all other respects permitted by the Land Development Code, such reconstructed building may exceed the height of the building immediately prior to the disaster by up to one story (1) if, and to the extent, the building must be elevated above the ground level to comply with applicable flood abatement laws or regulations and (2) reconstruction without allowing for such additional height would result in the loss of a dwelling unit by its owner.

Scenic preservation of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge is within the aegis of the U.S. Federal government. To date this has been accomplished with a beneficial impact on the Island. It is most important that the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation exercise maximum control of scenic

resources in its several land holdings in mangrove and wetland areas so that these are enjoyed in their natural state by residents and visitors.

Another major advantage for the Island's scenic resources is that of the major roadways that give access to all environments and land uses. These scenic roads generally follow the Island's two natural ridges and are connected by several roads that cross the interior. Periwinkle Way, Gulf Drive and Sanibel-Captiva Road are the City's main streets and commercial arteries with fairly high traffic volumes. These two-lane roadways, which are rural in character, contribute significantly to the scenic resources of Sanibel.

Most Island businesses are located along Periwinkle Way and many of the Island's tourist accommodations are on Gulf Drive. Land along Sanibel-Captiva Road is relatively less developed except for the Blind Pass commercial area and scattered residential subdivisions. The variety of visual experience along these roads today is due to the alteration of human-made environment and the natural landscape. This pattern of intermittent commercial development separated by dense trees and shrubs close to the road gives a casual atmosphere to even busy roads.

In order to preserve the casual scenic quality, future commercial and other non-residential uses should be concentrated in nodes along the road, separated by open spaces, recreational and residential uses in much the same manner as they are today.

In 2004, exotic species of trees along Periwinkle Way were destroyed and removed as a result of the destructive forces of Hurricane Charley. Existing native species of trees or plants in the road right-of-way should be preserved, except where they

are a traffic or storm hazard, a nuisance or where necessitated by limited street improvements. If removal of native trees becomes necessary, a provision should be established to preserve scenic quality even as further development or road improvements occur. Such buffers can also accommodate bicycle and pedestrian paths. In commercial areas, curb cuts should be kept to a minimum and shell should be used in parking lots instead of impervious paving such as asphalt. These standards will contribute to the preservation of the "casual" retreat atmosphere and serve safety and storm drainage purposes simultaneously. Signs for commercial establishments should be clearly legible and integrated with the vegetation buffer.

Major cross-Island routes, Casa Ybel Road, Tarpon Bay Road and Rabbit Road, provide a totally different experience of the Island's various natural landscapes. These roads cross through the heavily treed upland wetlands, to the grass lowland and the Sanibel River, to the Gulf Beach Ridge and Gulf Drive. Vegetation buffers should be established and residential uses should be concentrated in upland areas where houses can be screened by trees.

The City of Sanibel abounds with open spaces and preserved lands. Although the scenic value of these natural resources was affected by Hurricane Charley, the most significant damage to the City's scenic resources was along scenic roadways, particularly Periwinkle Way. The City has adopted a Master Plan for the restoration of this important artery which is the main street of the City of Sanibel. Implementation of that plan began in 2006.

Plan for Scenic Preservation

These guidelines for maintaining scenic quality are consistent with other objectives of the plan, and are, in many cases, also recommended for other reasons such as storm protection, traffic safety and water quality maintenance. Guidelines for scenic preservation allow the City of Sanibel to accommodate growth while preserving the beauty of its natural areas and roadways.

The following are the general provisions of the Plan for Scenic Preservation:

1. Consideration should be given to the historical and scenic benefits of mature Australian pines in some open space and recreational areas and these trees should be retained for their historical and scenic attributes.
2. Concentrate future commercial uses on Periwinkle Way and Sanibel-Captiva Road in nodes, rather than spreading them out in a continuous strip.
3. Encourage the use of shell surfacing, or alternatively, other suitable pervious surfacing for parking areas in order to maintain a casual retreat atmosphere. Concrete and asphalt paving of parking areas should be minimized.
4. Integrate signs with the roadway buffers.
5. Prohibit neon and flashing signs.
6. Require vegetation buffers between commercial developments and roadways and along property

lines to enhance compatibility of buildings with community as a whole.

7. Encourage architectural compatibility of buildings within established neighborhoods and the community as a whole.
8. In order to maintain the dark sky of this non-urban community, require outdoor lighting to be directed downward to minimize sky glow.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

Goal Statement

Protect or enhance scenic resources to ensure their preservation as the development anticipated in the Future Land Use Element occurs.

Objective 1

Ensure the preservation of scenic resources by continued implementation of the development regulations and performance standards of the Land Development Code and other City programs.

Policy 1.1. The height of buildings will not exceed three stories above the base flood elevation. However, that where a condominium building, which is a nonconforming structure, is destroyed or substantially damaged in a natural disaster, reconstruction of which is in all other respects permitted by the Land Development Code, such reconstructed building may exceed the height of the building immediately prior to the disaster

by up to one story (1) if, and to the extent, the building must be elevated above the ground level to comply with applicable flood abatement laws or regulations and (2) reconstruction without allowing for such additional height would result in the loss of a dwelling unit by its owner.

Policy 1.2. Encourage beachfront property owners to maintain native vegetation between upland structures and the Gulf and Bay beaches so that the view of Sanibel from its beaches is not dominated by human-made structures.

Policy 1.3. Implement measures leading to maintenance of the Gulf beach dune system with hardy native plant species.

Policy 1.4. Vegetated buffer strips will be established along major roadways. Within the right-of-way, these buffers will provide space for the ornamental plantings and for bicycle and pedestrian circulation.