



AGENDA MEMORANDUM

Planning Department

Park and Recreation Advisory Committee Meeting Date July 16, 2026

To: Park and Recreation Advisory Committee
From: Paula N. C. McMichael, AICP, Planning Director
Date: July 1, 2026

SUBJECT: POTENTIAL OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES – DEFINE AMENITY & ATTRACTION

BACKGROUND:

Date	Meeting Type	Summary
4/17/2026	City Council	Direction to PRAC to discuss potential “outdoor recreational amenities” by unanimous vote
6/18/2026	PRAC	Discussion
7/16/2026	PRAC	Discussion

At the City Council meeting on April 17, 2026, the council voted to 1 - “to direct the City Manager to engage the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee to identify other opportunities for outdoor recreational amenities” and 2- “to develop language distinguishing amenities from attractions.”

1 – The Planning Department has developed a list of potential recreational amenities (including some that are indoor) that have been recently discussed. The table (attached) lists the use and whether it is a permitted or conditional use. A conditional use requires review and approval by the Planning Commission at a public hearing.

2 – The Sanibel Plan contains the following language related to an “attraction” (underlining added for emphasis):

From the background of the Sanibel Vision Statement:

The specter of rampant development has diminished as the community has matured. Nevertheless, unwanted changes are occurring; visitation increases as new “attractions” are developed; beaches and refuge areas are becoming stressed by overuse; traffic congestion is turning to gridlock; and formerly “green” scenic corridors are becoming urbanized and commercialized. These and other

Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary

conditions and trends cause residents to realize that, unless protected, their island's historic and cherished way of life is in jeopardy.

From the Vision Statement:

Attraction

The Sanibel community recognizes that its attractiveness to visitors is due to the Island's quality as sanctuary and as community. The City of Sanibel will welcome visitors who are drawn by, and are respectful of, these qualities; it will resist pressures to accommodate visitor attractions and activities that compromise these qualities.

Hierarchy of Values

This three-part statement of the community's vision of its future is a hierarchy, one in which the dominant principle is Sanibel's sanctuary quality. Sanibel shall be developed as a community only to the extent to which it retains and embraces this quality of sanctuary. Sanibel will serve as attraction only to the extent to which it retains its desired qualities as sanctuary and community.

** The Sanibel Vision Statement (Ordinance #96-06) was adopted by City Council on Sept. 3, 1996*

From the background discussion in the Transportation Element:

Another factor compounding the challenge of operating an effective mass transit system is the fact that nearly all persons arrive in Sanibel with a private auto at their disposal. Because of the resort nature of Sanibel, the City can expect to be besieged with requests to operate trolley or tram tourist attractions masquerading as mass transit. These offers need to be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Generally, these attractions are more likely to add vehicle trips to Sanibel's roads, than to reduce private auto use.

From the Goals, Objectives, and Policies of the Transportation Element:

Policy 2.11. Limit the number, size and location of private attractions that, by their nature, contribute to an overuse of limited capacity roadways. Within the context of this policy, an attraction is a land use that generates a significant number of its daily and overall automobile trips from off-Island locations.

As you can see from these excerpts, the Sanibel Plan seeks to discourage "attractions" to protect both the sanctuary nature of Sanibel and the Sanibel community and its quality of life. An overabundance of "attractions" catering to tourists comes at a cost both to natural systems and to the small town charm and the sense of community found on Sanibel. This idea also underlines the Economic Assumptions (section 1.3) of the plan:

In order for Sanibel to be economically and environmentally sustainable, means must be sought to reduce the demand on the natural infrastructure. Perhaps no other component of demand is more critical than automobile traffic. Although difficult to do, some say impossible, means need to be pursued to reduce automobile traffic. Such a reduction will go far to retain and, where needed, to restore the Sanibel ambiance, while also reducing the demand on the systems.

Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary

Demand, preferably internal demand, needs to be found for surplus retail space. It would be counterproductive to attempt to fill these spaces by stimulation of additional activity from off-Island. Rather, filling these spaces with activities that are presently based at off-Island locations, but already providing services on-Island, would be the better policy. Such a policy may require reconsideration of certain of the development regulations relating to permissible uses in such buildings. Supply reduction is another option available to address surplus retail space. This option could be undertaken by the public acquisition of commercially zoned sites.

The economic assumptions of the plan provide guidance on how an “attraction” can be differentiated from an “amenity,” in that an “attraction” seeks to induce traffic and visitation from off-island visitors, and an “amenity” serves existing on-island needs.

Planning staff recommend the following language for consideration of the distinction between the two:

An attraction is a land use that generates a significant number of its daily and overall automobile trips from off-Island locations and visitors. An amenity is a land use that serves on-island demand from residents and is not anticipated to substantially increase traffic volumes.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Discussion of the list of recreational uses and whether any changes are recommended; discussion of language distinguishing “amenities” from “attractions.”