



AGENDA MEMORANDUM

*Natural Resources
Department*

City Council Regular Meeting Date: December 5, 2023

To: City Council
From: Dana Dettmar, Environmental Biologist
Holly Milbrandt, Natural Resources Director
Date: November 22, 2023

SUBJECT: PROPOSED LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE AMENDMENT TO EXEMPT COCONUT PALMS FROM CLASSIFICATION AS INVASIVE EXOTIC VEGETATION

BACKGROUND

On October 24, 2023, staff proposed adding a new definition for “coconut palm” to Chapter 122-101-Definitions to provide an exemption for coconut palms from classification as invasive exotic vegetation, and instead designating the coconut palm as a noncompeting exotic species:

Coconut palm means *Cocos nucifera*. For the purposes of applying the standards and requirements of this Code, coconut palm is treated as a noncompeting exotic species.

This new definition was proposed to address an existing conflict in the Sanibel land development code related to the classification of the coconut palm as an invasive exotic plant by the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) in 2011. Recognizing the coconut palm as a desirable species by many citizens of Sanibel, the proposed definition allows for new coconut palms to be planted and existing coconut palms to remain in accordance with the standards for other non-competing (i.e., non-invasive) exotic vegetation on Sanibel.

Staff finds the recommended exemption for coconut palms from classification as an invasive exotic species to be less restrictive and consistent with SB250. Additional concepts discussed by the Planning Commission in December 2022, specifically the inclusion of required best management practices for planting of coconut palms and eliminating the existing exemption allowing for coconut palms to be planted in the Gulf Beach Zone are not included in the proposed amendment as they would be more restrictive and contrary to SB250.

At their meeting on October 24, 2023, the Planning Commission supported the new proposed definition. Per the Planning Commission’s recommendation, the proposed amendments to

Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary

Chapter 122 were presented to the Vegetation Committee at their November 2, 2023 meeting. The Committee did not take issue with the redesignation of the coconut palm as a noncompeting exotic species. However, the Committee still believes it is important to prohibit coconut palms from the Gulf Beach Zone and include standards for best management practices to prevent the spread of coconut palms (as was initially recommended by staff in December 2022) following the expiration of SB250.

At the November 14, 2023, meeting, in support of the proposed definition inclusive of an amendment proposed by Commissioner Welch to replace the word “is” with “shall”, the Planning Commission voted unanimously, 7-0, recommending City Council approval of a draft ordinance to amend the vegetation standards of the Land Development Code by adding a new definition for coconut palm. A draft ordinance is included in the agenda materials.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was no public comment provided at the October 24 or November 14, 2023, Planning Commission meetings.

RECOMMENDATION

A motion to schedule First Reading of a draft ordinance amending Land Development Code standards related to vegetation by adding a new definition for “coconut palm” on January 16, 2023.