SIESTA KEY COMMUNITY PLAN

The Siesta Key Beach Pavilion, designed by Edward J. "Tim" Seibert, was constructed in 1962. Unique to this structure are the splayed columns and beams coupled with the staggered edges of the precast concrete "T" roof. At night time the pavilion was used for social events.

Sarasota County Growth Management, 1999

This bridge to Siesta, completed in 1927, was dedicated to the memory of Harry L. Higel and replaced one built only ten years earlier. The railings and bridge tender's house of the first bridge can be seen on the right side of the new bridge. A new bridge tender's house was built and the remains of the old bridge were removed. The original Bay Bridge, completed in 1917, was Sarasota's first roadway to Bay Island, Siesta, and the Gulf Beaches and it signaled the beginning of residential development on Siesta Key.

The keys which line the Sarasota County coast remained relatively isolated from the mainland and were only inhabited by fishermen who lived in palmetto shacks and sold salt-cured fish. A few homesteaders began settling on *Sarasota* Key in the 1880's but few remained long enough to prove up their claims. An exception was Capt. Louis Roberts and his wife, Ocean Hansen Roberts, for whom Ocean Boulevard and Roberts Bay are named. In 1906 Capt. Roberts enlarged his house and began calling it the Roberts Hotel. The following year he, along with Harry L. Higel and E.M. Arbogast, formed the Siesta Land Company. They platted the subdivision of Siesta on the northern end of Siesta Key. By 1946 the key was still labeled Sarasota Key on government maps, but was called Siesta Key by the County.

In late 1910 E.M. Arbogast began construction of the Bay Island Hotel on the north shore of the key. Two launches ferried guests and visitors the twenty minutes from Sarasota. Meanwhile Harry Higel's dredge was busy not only digging the canals and filling low land but also excavating shell deposits that could be used to surface the roads as they were built. The canal that leads from Hansen Bayou westward to the recently closed Siesta Fish Market was dug for its shell deposits.

Harry Higel was an ardent Progressive and supported bond issues that were passed by voters in 1915 and 1916. During his tenure as mayor of Sarasota, Higel oversaw the building of the first Siesta Bridge in 1917. Although the bridge was important to Higel's plans for Siesta, it was also popularly regarded as necessary and desirable. The Siesta Bridge was replaced by a larger bridge in 1927 and the County began construction of the Stickney Point Road Bridge in 1926.

DESIGN

You Should Say *WOW* !

Siesta Key is a special place, filled with treasures both natural and built. You can see it in the beach and bay, the subtropical plants, the variety of architectural styles, and the quality and variety of businesses. However, one place you *don't* get this sense of being in a unique and special place is at the roadway entrances.

This plan proposes to create a strong visual identity for Siesta Key by enhancing the entrances at Siesta Drive and Stickney Point Road with appropriate landscaping and identification signage.

Zoning That Reflects Siesta Key

Whether residential, commercial, or agricultural, every parcel of land in Sarasota County is zoned. Within each zone district, the code specifies which uses are permitted, how high buildings may be, what sort of landscaping and buffers are required, and so on. Although it is not intended as a design or appearance code, the zoning code does, in fact, affect the appearance of a community.

One concern about the present zoning on Siesta Key is that it is the same as the rest of Sarasota County. For example, most of the Village and the South Bridge area are zoned Commercial General (CG). This is the same zone district as most of the south Tamiami Trail, and would permit the same uses, the same buildings, and the same large signs—in either location, or anywhere else in the unincorporated County.

One of the most important recommendations of this Community Plan is to develop a zoning overlay district specifically for Siesta Key. It would be an *overlay* district, meaning that the existing zoning would still be in effect, but there would be additional standards that would apply to Siesta Key only.

What would the overlay district do? Based on the views of the core group and the answers to the community planning questionnaire, the overlay district will address the following:

- **promote pedestrian life**
  - encourage new commercial buildings to build to the sidewalk, instead of requiring a front yard setback which is typically used for parking
  - canopies and awnings for sun / rain protection
  - require screening of refuse containers
  - encourage good quality street furniture
- **reduce the size and height of signs**
- **establish standards for parking lots**
  - consider alternatives to asphalt paving
- **establish standards for walls**
  - maximum height
  - setback from street
  - paint
  - landscaping
- **limit height & bulk of new residential structures**
- **establish standards for short- term rentals**
  - parking & drive aisles accommodated on-site
  - landcaped buffers adjacent to single-family houses
- **protect landmark trees**

Several of these proposals are illustrated inside. It should be noted that the process of developing and adopting a zoning overlay district will require extensive public hearings. Thus, the final form of the overlay will depend upon the input of Siesta's residents and property owners.

FACTS AT A GLANCE

- In the 1940-60s, Sarasota was on the cutting edge of architectural design with work called the Sarasota School. Many of these buildings were built on Siesta Key.
- Siesta is a unique and special place—and this should be reflected in landscaped entrances at the north and south bridges.
- Siesta Key looks—and functions—like a very distinct part of Sarasota, but it is governed by the same zoning rules as the rest of Sarasota County.
- A special zoning overlay district is proposed for Siesta Key, to add standards that reflect and enhance the character and functions of the Key.

THE PEOPLE AND THE PLAN

The Siesta Key Community

Early maps of the west coast of Florida identify Siesta Key as Sarasota Key. In those days, this barrier island was accessible only by boat and sparsely populated, mostly by fishermen. The name Siesta, and the beginning of development, came in 1907 when three pioneers platted the subdivision of Siesta on the northern tip of the Key. By 1917 a bridge had been built, and soon both Siesta Key and Sarasota were caught up in the frenzy that was the Florida land boom of the 1920s. Prosperity came to a grinding halt with the Great Depression of 1929, although Florida's slowdown came a few years earlier than the rest of the nation, after two devastating hurricanes raged through south Florida. Development on Siesta Key, as in the rest of Sarasota, picked up in the post-war 1940s. The 50s and 60s saw the flowering of the Sarasota School of Architecture, a modern style whose extensive use of glass brought the outdoors in. The 70s and 80s were a boom time for construction, especially the multistory condominiums along Midnight Pass Road. There is very little vacant land left on Siesta Key today, and most development takes the form of redevelopment.

Community Input

During 1998 and 1999 residents of Siesta Key took part in an intensive community planning process. A very active and experienced group of community leaders met with County staff in dozens of small workshop sessions. Citizens helped craft a questionnaire which was first tested in two community-wide workshops, then fine-tuned and sent to each household and business—over 12,500 in all. Planners met with community leaders to discuss the results and focus on key concerns. Various County agencies contributed ideas and expertise. From this rich pool of resources comes the Siesta Key Community Plan.

Continuing a Tradition

Siesta Key joins Woodmere, Bee Ridge and Laurel/Nokomis to become the fourth community to participate in the community planning process. Although the process remains much the same, each community brings new insights, innovations and improvements. For example, a special zoning overlay district will be created for Siesta Key because design and aesthetics were primary concerns of residents. This, like the other recommendations, will be adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in the form of a resolution.

Projects for People

This plan includes the following specific recommendataions for Siesta Key. Look inside for details.

Design
- Adopt a zoning overlay district
- Enhance entrances to Siesta Key

Transportation
- Complete a bike facility the entire length of Siesta Key
- Enhance safety and appearance of the South Bridge area

Natural Resources
- Protect landmark trees
- Dredge canals for navigation
- Encourage mangrove planting
- Midnight Pass—questionnaire results say: Open it

Recreation
- Siesta Beach
- Boat ramp at Turtle Beach
- Glebe Park
- Maintain beaches & beach facilities

Miscellaneous
- Tourist Tax—questionnaire results say: Return pro-rated share to Siesta Key

zoning overlay district

Although Siesta Key has developed as a unique place with a special identity, its zoning is the same as the rest of Sarasota County. In order to preserve and enhance the character of Siesta Key, it needs changes in zoning. This is best accomplished by creating a zoning overlay district. *Growth Managment should develop and the Board of County Commissioners adopt a zoning overlay district that is pedestrian-friendly; requires smaller signs; limits height of new residential structures; and establishes standards for walls, parking lots, and short-term rentals.*

dredge canals

Siesta Key is full of canals. But in many areas, siltation has made navigation difficult. A recent countywide study identified Grand Canal, Siesta Key Marina, and Turtle Beach among the waterways needing dredging for navigational purposes. *The Board of County Commissioners should ensure representation for Siesta Key as it develops a Countywide dredging program.*

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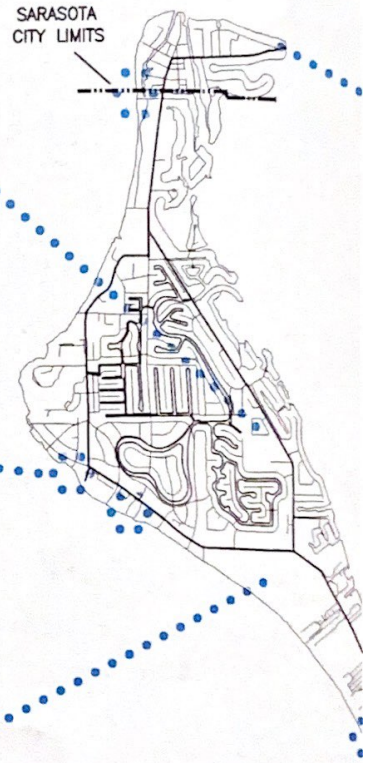

improve Glebe Park

Glebe Park is a 10-acre park adjacent to the Siesta Isles subdivision.Currently there are two youth softball fields there, but the park gets little use—many Siesta residents don't even know it's there. *Parks and Recreation should work with residents to develop a plan for Glebe Park. Development should accomodate young and old, and be compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood.*

maintain beaches & facilities

Not only are Siesta's beaches a treat for residents, they are the way many visitors experience Sarasota. Although they receive heavy use, the beaches—including beach accesses, picnic areas, concessions areas, and restrooms—should always be kept in tip-top shape. *Parks and Recreation should ensure that beaches, accesses, picnic areas, concession areas, and especially restrooms are regularly maintained and kept in excellent condition at all times.*

Siesta Public Beach

Siesta Public Beach is a tremendous asset, used by many people for many kinds of recreation. Maintaining this jewel requires changing a few things, such as limiting the amplified sounds and advertising at public events, but mostly not changing things, like preserving the ball fields and nature trail as green areas, and continuing free parking. *Parks and Recreation should preserve the green space (ballfields and nature trail) and continue to allow free parking at Siesta Public Beach, but limit the amplified sound and advertising associated with special events.*

boat ramp at Turtle Beach

In addition to its beach, Turtle Beach offers a boat launch. However, the two ramps, at different angles, can be confusing to boaters. And beachgoers compete with boaters for parking spaces. *Parks and Recreation should make the existing Turtle Beach boat ramps more effective by posting signs that indicate the angle of the ramps, providing a reserved parking area for boat trailers and lights for night-time safety.*

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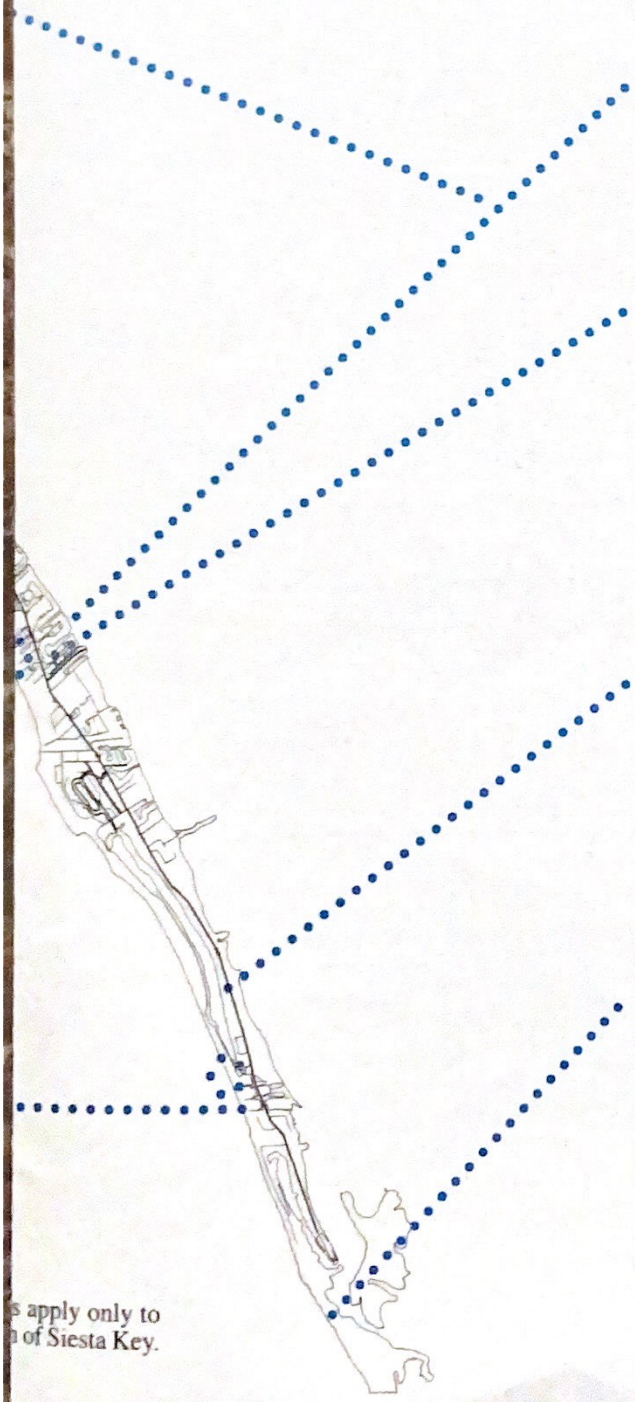
encourage mangroves

Mangroves are good for many thing, including stabilizing the shoreline and providing habitat for fish and other aquatic life. Homeowners like them, too, but they're afraid to plant them because of complex rules governing future trimming. *County Environmental Services should promote the planting of mangroves by partnering with entities such as the Flortida Marine Extension Service and the Florida Yards Program to educate residents about mangroves.*

FYI: tourist tax

Sarasota County collects a "tourist development tax" of 3% on short term rentals, many of which are located on Siesta Key. And while Siesta Key receives benefits from this tax, there are state and local laws limiting how the revenues may be spent. However, Siesta residents would like to feel that they are getting a fair share of these dollars. *As decisions are made about the use of Tourist Development Tax revenues, the Board of County Commissioners should take into account that 98% of questionnaire respondents favored Siesta Key receiving a pro-rated share of dollars collected on Siesta Key.*



enhance entrances

Siesta Key is a very special place, but you wouldn't know it from the two roads that most people use to enter the Key. *Public Works should create gateway entrances to Siesta Key, at the north and south bridges, through the use of landscaping and signage.*

enhance "South Bridge" area

The area south of the Stickney Point Bridge has become a busy center for shopping, entertainment, and tourist accommodations. However, the success of these businesses creates traffic problems that compromise safety for people on foot as well as in cars. Also, the area lacks visual identity. *Public Works and Growth Management should work with citizens to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for the commercial area of Midnight Pass Road south of Stickney Point Road, including Old Stickney Point Road. This plan should address appearance, parking, and pedestrian and bicycle safety.*

bicycle facility

Many people ride bikes on Siesta Key, for many reasons—from residents who depend on bikes for transportation, to tourists and mainlanders who bike for recreation. Some bike facilities exist, and others will soon be added. But what residents want is a continuous bike facility, from the north to the south end. *Public Works should fill in the gaps to complete—and maintain—a continuous bicycle facility from the north end to the south end of Siesta Key.*

FYI: Midnight Pass

Since the closure of Midnight Pass in 1983, a debate has raged about whether to reopen an inlet between Little Sarasota Bay and the Gulf of Mexico at the south end of Siesta Key. While Sarasota County searches out the best in scientific opinion, residents are clear—79% who answered the questionnaire would like it reopened. *As decisions are made about Midnight Pass,the County Commision should take into account that 79% of questionnaire respondents favored a re-opening of Midnight Pass, provided that environmental and fiscal concerns were addressed.*

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n of Siesta Key.

Barrier Islands Are Different

While Sarasota County as a whole has grown rapidly in the last 50 years, the hot spots for development have moved around, starting in the historic towns, then spreading to coastal areas, and finally to the eastern half of the county. Siesta Key's growth took off in the 1950s, when subdivisions such as Siesta Isles were first platted, and continued strong into the1960s and 70s, when many of the highrise condominiums were built. By now, Siesta's population may have doubled again: the 1970 census counted 5911 residents; by 1990 it had reached 10,541. It is hard to assess what the full, winter season population of Siesta Key might be, but it certainly exceeds the census figures, which count only those living here in April.

Zoning on Siesta Key

In 1955 Siesta Key became the first place in unincorporated Sarasota County to adopt a zoning code. When a countywide zoning code was adopted in 1960, the density of many areas of the Key was reduced. A further reduction took place in 1975 when the County adopted a new code.

As Florida has gained an appreciation for the fragility of barrier island ecosystems and an awareness of the hazards posed by hurricanes, development on barrier islands has become increasingly restricted. Sarasota County downzoned most of Siesta Key in 1982. That means land developed after 1982 is generally less densely developed. But of course the development that took place before 1982 did not simply disappear. These parcels may be considered "nonconforming" today, but are legally permitted to remain, as long as they do not increase the non-confirmity—that is, add living units or add to the building in a way that decreases the setback.

In addition to controlling use, height, density, and buffers between uses, zoning can affect design. As a result of this community planning effort, Sarasota County will propose a zoning overlay district, designed specially for Siesta Key. For details, refer to the *Design* section of this plan.

FEMA

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, exerts a strong influence on Siesta Key. Because FEMA underwrites insurance protecting property owners from flood damage, it requires those property owners to take steps to decrease their risk of damage and loss. One of these steps is raising the first (habitable) floor over flood elevation. FEMA elevations on Siesta Key range from 10 to 19 feet above sea level. One effect of this is that new houses are usually significantly bigger than older ones. Not only are today's houses usually bigger in terms of square footage than the older ones, but they might include two stories over a garage, whereas traditional Siesta houses were one story, beginning at ground level.

Comprehensive Plan Limits Growth

Florida is one of very few states in the United States that requires comprehensive planning. Every city and county in Florida must adopt a comprehensive plan, which must also be updated regularly. Sarasota County's plan defines all the keys—Siesta, Manasota, and Casey—as "barrier island." The plan limits growth on the barrier islands for safety and environmental reasons.

Barrier Islands are designated on the Future Land Use Map to recognize existing land use patterns and to provide a basis for hurricane evacuation planning and disaster mitigation efforts. The intensity of future development on the Barrier Islands of Sarasota shall not exceed that allowed by existing zoning. *Future Land Use 1.1.2.*

The rezoning of additional lands on the Barrier Islands for commercial or office uses shall be prohibited. *Future Land Use 3.2.7.*

A third policy seeks to reduce densities and in the Coastal High Hazard Area by encouraging transfer of development rights to safer areas of the county. However, a strong preference for coastal living makes this a policy that is not often exercised.