

BOCA GRANDE COMMUNITY PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



JUNE 2007

With the passage of the Gasparilla Island Conservation District Act in 1980 (Ch 80-473) (the Act), the Florida legislature recognized the importance of conserving the natural qualities and unique character of Gasparilla Island as a fragile barrier island with limited infrastructure.

The purpose of this Boca Grande *Community Plan* is to reinforce the Act by establishing the basis for undertaking other measures to preserve and protect the physical integrity and residential viability of the Island, as well as its unique character and natural beauty. The community considers that these measures, which are to be developed in collaboration with Charlotte County, are necessary to address issues that have arisen since the Act was passed or are projected to arise in the future.

This *Community Plan* was developed in tandem with a similar plan for the Lee County portion of Gasparilla Island, which was adopted as part of the Lee County Comprehensive Plan in December 2005. Both Plans were developed over the period since early 2004 with the active participation of many residents of Gasparilla Island and with extensive input from the two Counties' staffs and from consultants engaged for the purpose.

Gasparilla Island is a small barrier island located to the south of Placida on the Cape Haze peninsula. Its core is the unincorporated village of Boca Grande, which is designated as a Historic District. The population of Gasparilla Island is highly seasonal with peak population residency occurring during the winter months. The Island is almost built out and has virtually no capacity for additional new development. The Island, however, is surrounded by, and can only be accessed through, extremely high growth areas. A key concern reflected in this *Community Plan* is that population growth in the adjacent areas of Charlotte County and associated growth in traffic volumes and use of scarce resources could lead to serious restrictions on emergency vehicle access, hurricane evacuation potential and water availability as well as a major increase in the number of day visitors creating concomitant stress on the community infrastructure and the fragile natural resources of the Island.

Some of the main goals of the Boca Grande *Community Plan* are:

- The protection of the Island's water sources from encroachment or contamination by neighboring developments;
- The assurance of safe and efficient emergency vehicle access and hurricane evacuation potential;
- The preservation of the traditional character and scale of the historic village and residential areas of Gasparilla Island;
- The encouragement of residential and commercial land use that recognizes the fragile environment and limited infrastructure of the community;
- The preservation and protection of the physical integrity, unique character, ecological values and natural beauty of the Island;
- The preservation of the unique elements of the Island's economy that contribute to the quality of life for residents and stakeholders.

In addition, the *Community Plan* seeks a greater role for the local community in reviewing developments that could have an adverse impact on the character or quality of life on the Island.

Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of the Boca Grande *Community Plan* comprises the Charlotte County portion of Gasparilla Island as well as Cole Island, the Gasparilla Island Bridge lands and causeway islands, and includes all submerged lands, tidal lands, overflow lands and tidal ponds as described in the Gasparilla Island Conservation District Act.

Boca Grande Community Profile

The unique character of the Gasparilla Island community is derived principally from the historic village of Boca Grande, which is the economic, cultural and social heart of the community.

Boca Grande is one of the last vestiges of a “small town” environment and economy left in Florida. It is the type of village community that “New Urbanism” and “Smart Growth” advocates are seeking to create in more developed areas. The protection and preservation of this unique place is important not only for what it is, but also for the example it can be for other communities.

The village of Boca Grande has the unique architectural heritage of a “Railroad Town” with an historic inn of both architectural and economic significance. The character and scale of the village are remarkable because much of it was developed when the only links to the mainland were by rail or boat. Consequently, Boca Grande is a walkable community, small in scale, with a compact commercial district centered around the historic railroad station.

Island businesses are locally owned and fulfill many vital community needs. It is the community’s desire to preserve their diversity and to support and enhance the vitality of Island’s economic base, so as to help prevent high intensity, large-scale commercial enterprises from displacing local businesses.

Our local fishing guides are also a vital part of Gasparilla Island’s history and economy. The protection of the tarpon fishery and our game fishing industry is a high priority for the community.

For generations, because Gasparilla Island was so isolated, its residents from all walks of life have worked together in creating a wide variety of volunteer organizations that contribute significantly to the enhancement of community life and the preservation of our environment and traditions.

Boca Grande Community Planning Panel

The work of drawing up draft Community Plans for both the Charlotte County and Lee County portions of Gasparilla Island was carried out by volunteers from the community, working under the supervision of a nine-member Community Planning Panel, and with the assistance of consultants approved by the respective County.

The Community Planning Panel was formed on January 5, 2004 and held its first public meeting on January 8, 2004. The initial members of the Panel were appointed by the Boca Grande Community Planning Association, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation created to receive grant money funding for the effort.

The Panel adopted a Mission Statement on January 20, 2004 and created eight subcommittees to draft the Vision Statement and the Goals, Objectives and Policies for each of seven areas of interest to be covered by the draft *Community Plans*.

A Panel member chaired each subcommittee and issues arising from subcommittee deliberations were referred to, and resolved by, the full Panel. Forty-six residents volunteered to serve on the subcommittees, twelve of whom volunteered to serve on more than one subcommittee, resulting in a total subcommittee membership of over sixty (excluding the presiding Panel members).

Meetings of the Panel and its subcommittees were publicly noticed and were held in accordance with the Florida Government in the Sunshine Law. Notices were published in advance of each meeting in the Friday weekly edition of the "Boca Beacon".

Funding for the *Community Plan*

The Panel received \$70,000 in grants as the initial funding to prepare the Community Plans. The Gasparilla Island Conservation and Improvement Association (GICIA) contributed \$25,000 under a grant agreement; Lee County contributed \$25,000 under a Community Planning Agreement; and Charlotte County approved a grant of \$20,000 for the Community Planning effort in June 2005.

Subsequently, further funding totaling \$60,000 has been obtained to complete the work on the Community Plans. In December 2005, GICIA approved a further grant of \$5,000 and the Boca Grande Women's Club provided a grant of \$15,000. In February 2006 and April 2007, the Boca Grande Women's Club approved two additional grants of \$20,000 each.

Public Information Resources

The Panel has established a website www.bocagrandeplanning.org as a readily accessible source for public access to its records, including those concerning the establishment, funding, and proceedings of the Panel, the members of the Panel and its subcommittees, as well as successive drafts of the various sections of the two Community Plans and other related documents.

Section X of the website contains details of a survey, conducted between April and June, 2004, in which the views of all persons with post office boxes on the Island were solicited on 35 issues that had been identified in the process of drafting the different sections of the Community Plans. A remarkable response rate of 63% was achieved and the results of the survey have proved to be a valuable guide and resource for the Planning Panel as it progressed its work on the *Community Plans*.