

# **White Paper: Ad Hoc Business Development and Redevelopment Committee**

**Councilman Rich Blonna 2/23/21**

## **Purpose**

One of the joys of living in a beach resort community is the abundance of different restaurants, bars, shops, tours, water-based recreational activities and many other diverse businesses. These supplement the essential businesses such as grocery stores, pharmacies, contractors, plumbers, electricians, banks, marinas etc. that serve the needs of full-time residents.

Taken together, these businesses are the lifeblood of Marco Island and contribute to the character of the island, our economy, and the quality of our lives.

Many local business owners are also full-time residents who understand how important it is to maintain a balance between the needs of the business community and those of residents. Because of this, these business owners/residents are in a unique position to aid the City as it moves forward to update the Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Code, and Future Land Use Map.

The proposed Ad Hoc Business Development and Redevelopment Committee will help fill that vital planning need now, and in the years to come.

## **Business and the Comprehensive Plan Update**

The Comprehensive Plan Update is moving forward and focusing on three “Critical Community Issues: *Community Character, Resiliency, and Transportation/Accessibility*” (Bannon & Crespo, 2020). Each of these critical community issues has ramifications for both the residential and business communities. These three areas will not disappear. Marco Island cannot ignore them, they are required by the State of Florida as part of our Comprehensive Plan. We must address them.

## **Community Character**

Marco Island is a beautiful quilt that is sewn together by friendly people, a deep sense of patriotism, a love of the outdoors, and a small-town feel where folks will make eye contact and say hello and stop to exchange a few pleasant words.

Our business and residential communities combine to contribute to our unique character. Marco Island has a certain look and feel that is upscale but relaxed, wealthy, but unpretentious, aging but vibrant and healthy. Although it is a world class destination, it isn't Miami, or Ft. Lauderdale, or even Naples. Its charm lies in the fact that it is both a residential community with small town charm *and* a world class beach resort supported by the aforementioned myriad of

different businesses. Besides our homes and businesses, our traditions and institutions help define our character. Most of these traditions and ceremonies rely on the generous support of our business community.

For example, our Veterans and Memorial Day celebrations where we proudly stand and pledge allegiance to our flag and honor our veterans are second to none. These are supported by our clubs, organizations, and businesses that help provide the tents, chairs, sound systems, water, and other amenities that make these celebrations so special.

The same thing can be said for our Seafood Festival, Island Rocks, Concert Series, Farmer's Market, Christmas Island Style, Chili Cook Off, etc., etc. These events and many more are supported by our business community and contribute to the unique character of our island.

The proposed Ad Hoc Business Development and Redevelopment Committee can play an important, ongoing role in helping define our island's character by reminding planners of the role they've played up to this point and how they plan on contributing in the future.

### **Transportation & Accessibility**

The business community is greatly affected by transportation and accessibility issues. Currently Marco Island's transportation revolves around automobiles. Traffic lights, speed limits, and signage control the flow of traffic as drivers seek their destinations. Parking is designed to get drivers as close as possible to their intended destinations. The ability to move residents and visitors around the island smoothly and safely is not only influenced by the volume of people living on and visiting the island, but also their reliance on automobiles to travel.

If recent signs become trends, this is going to change in the future. In the past two years Marco Island has seen more and more people choosing to travel around the island using golf carts, scooters, and motorized and traditional bicycles. The increasing popularity of ride-sharing services such as Lyft and Uber have also arrived as many residents and visitors from urban areas don't even own cars. Lastly, Collier Area Transit (CAT) has increased their bus routes and is planning a Trolley service that will further diminish the need to rely on personal automobiles to travel around the island.

All of these transportation changes impact the business community. For example, if you want to open a new restaurant or redevelop a current establishment, you must submit plans that incorporate a parking formula based on automobiles and the supposition that most people travelling to your restaurant will get there by car. Is that a valid supposition moving forward into the next decade?

Even the most conservative estimates for growth for Collier County show a build-up of thousands of new housing units on the Route 41 and 951 corridors. Many of these new residents

will inevitably visit Marco Island to go to the beach, dine out, or shop. To simply ignore this reality or turn our backs on it will force us to react to the situation rather than plan for it.

There is a second dimension to transportation and accessibility that deals with our workforce. Every employer, from the largest like the Marriott and the City of Marco Island, to the smallest mom and pop convenience store, depends upon a reliable, competent workforce to survive.

While Marco Islanders are blessed with beautiful homes and high property values, many of us are here because we have parlayed a lifetime of work and investments into our homes. Young workers are in a different situation. Teachers, fire/rescue workers, police officers, electricians, mechanics, cooks, servers, and other younger workers either need to be able to afford to live on Marco Island or need convenient access to get to work on time from off-island residences. Many of the workers that residents and visitors take for granted work second and third shifts. If they live off of the island, they must either drive or have public transportation that is available beyond normal working hours.

The business Ad Hoc Development and Redevelopment Committee would be charged with helping to find solutions to these and many other problems associated with transportation and accessibility.

### **Resiliency**

Resiliency is primarily related to two things; storm surge and sea level rise. Whether the storm surge is due to Hurricanes or other weather events, evidence is mounting that it is becoming more of a problem for the west coast of Florida than previously believed.

One just has to look at the recent devastation caused by the storm surge associated by Hurricane Irma to understand the importance of the issue. Better yet, look at water level in our canals that is associated with minor events such as King Tides to get a sense of the problem.

The clearest Florida example of what can happen to a city that ignores resiliency is Miami. Miami routinely floods with high, high tides. Charleston South Carolina is another coastal city that experiences routine flooding when minor weather events occur.

Sea level rise is more insidious and gradual but has the same results. Once again, visit the canals off of South Barfield road at the south end of Marco Island after a high tide and observe how some of them are already overflowing their banks.

Regardless of what you believe about climate change, and the effects of human vs. natural forces, we are experiencing some of the effects and we must start planning about becoming more resilient.

The Ad Hoc Business Development and Redevelopment Committee can help by tapping into the business that are most affected by storm surge and sea level rise. Builders, waterfront business

owners, marina operators, and other have a vested interest in understanding and combatting these issues. Unlike government entities, they are directly affected and their livelihood is dependent upon combatting these natural occurrences.

## **Conclusion**

We are at a critical time in the history of Marco Island. We are in the process of revising our Comprehensive Plan and have a mandate by the State of Florida to address three critical issues: *Community Character, Resiliency, and Transportation/Accessibility*. Having a committee that focuses on the business implications of these issues will give Growth Management, the Planning Board, and the City Council a unique perspective on them. Businessmen and women are used to thinking outside of the box, their survival depends upon it. Why not tap into their expertise and combine it with the data that is traditionally gathered from residents to make plans and move forward?

## **Action Requested by City Council**

Motion to form Ad Hoc Business Development and Redevelopment Committee

Reference:

Bannon, M. Crespo, A. (2020). Planning New Horizons: Marco Island Comprehensive Plan Update. *Presented at Marco Island City Council Update 12/7/20.*