



# **THE IMPACT OF URBANIZATION ON GREATER ESTERO**

**GREATER ESTERO COMMUNITY REPORT  
QUARTER 4 - 2023**



# ENGAGE ESTERO'S PUBLIC FORUM THE FUTURE OF GREATER ESTERO

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*Prepared by Allan Bowditch, ECCL's Chief Communications Officer*

## Introduction

The Engage Estero management team is pleased to provide the 4<sup>th</sup> Greater Estero Community Report (GECR) that summarizes the outcome of the recent Public Forum on the urbanization taking place in greater Estero and what this and other developments will mean for the future.

The meeting occurred at FGCU's Cohen Student Center Ballroom on October 25<sup>th</sup> and was sponsored by Greg Tolley, Executive Director of FGCU's Water School. In addition to the audience of over 200 residents, the meeting recording was watched by an additional 780 residents.

Residents learned what initiatives are in place and under consideration and what the impact will be on the future quality of life we can expect. Given the concerns that many members of the public have expressed about the way proposed developments will impact our way of life in greater Estero, it was essential to hear from Steve Sarkozy, Estero's Village Manager. The other distinguished panel members included:

- Daniel Delisi: Land use planning and water/environmental policy consultant
- Ross McIntosh: Senior commercial real estate broker and respected speaker
- Jim Wallace: Managing Partner Genova Realty LLC

The meeting was moderated by Shelton Weeks, FGCU Professor of Economics and Finance. [If you want to view the meeting recording, please click here.](#)

For more related information, please visit <https://www.esterotoday.com/gecr2023qtr3/> to review the previous *Greater Estero Community Report* released in September, which provided an update on the developments that are currently underway or are likely to be scheduled in greater Estero over the next few years. In addition, there was an update on what changes we can expect regarding our roads and bike paths. Details of this report can be viewed on Engage Estero's website.

We hope you find the details provided valuable. [Please keep us informed on how we can continue to support you.](#)



## Part One: A Review of the October 25th Engage Estero Public Forum on the Urbanization of Estero

By Allan Bowditch, Engage Estero's Chief Communications Officer, and Mike Wasson, a member of the Engage Estero Board of Directors.

Following Engage Estero's President Jim Gilmartin's opening remarks, FGCU's President, Dr. Aysegul Timur, emphasized the importance of engagement with the local community through partnerships to help grow the university further. Since 1997, 64 undergraduate programs have been built, seven doctoral programs, and this Fall, there has been a record enrollment of over 16,000 students.

Dr Timur said, "We are preparing our students to ensure they stay in our workforce here because I keep saying talent lives here! I am very proud that 87% of our students are from the State of Florida and 47% are from Southwest Florida, making it a truly regional comprehensive university."

Around 225 residents attended the meeting, and the YouTube video of the event was watched by 780 residents, making it one of the most-watched events that Engage Estero has hosted! The meeting can be viewed on Engage Estero's event page: <https://esterotoday.com/FutureForum> or the [full recording of the meeting on YouTube](#).

Dr Shelton Weeks, FGCU's Professor of Economics and Finance, who moderated the meeting, commenced the discussions, pointing out the importance of examining the future ahead and

the growth we will likely experience. He said, “There are many decisions to be made, and many aspects will impact our quality of life.”

The range of questions before the public Q&A covered the following topics:

- What will be the likely impact on our community from future developments?
- How can residents’ concerns about the local infrastructure be best addressed?
- With adaptive reuse and repurposing of under-utilized commercial buildings likely to occur, what controls address the public’s concerns?
- There is a perception that developers invariably get what they want; what can you say to a skeptical public that addresses their concerns?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of mixed-use developments?
- Connectivity, walking and bike paths, open spaces and botanical gardens, socializing, and recreational activities play a role in increasing longevity; what is Estero doing in this regard?

The questions are addressed in the summary to follow.





## GREATER ESTERO'S GROWTH IN SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES AND CONDOS

As a backdrop to the debate, Steve Sarkozy, Estero's Village Manager, pointed out some of the changes that have already occurred in Estero during the last 20 years and went on to explain that the rate of change is happening at an escalating pace as Estero builds out on the last remaining parcels of land within the Village Center (between US 41, Three Oaks Parkway, Estero Parkway and Coconut Road). If these lots are maxed out, it is estimated that this could add 3-4,000 more units within Estero.

However, along East Corkscrew, there are already 26,000 housing units approved and 19,000 more yet to be built! In addition, going North on Three Oaks Parkway, there are already 5,000 units that have been added in the last five years, and another 3,000 will be built in that area. Mr. Sarkozy said, "In just those two corridors we use all the time as residents, there's a huge amount of growth."

Growth is an issue that is occurring in many communities throughout the US, but especially in those localities that are considered attractive. Residents will be fully aware of the significant rise in the cost of homes and condos in greater Estero. It would be a far more worrying issue if no one wanted to live here! The Village's management team is fully aware of the likely increase in traffic density due to the increasing build-out and agrees there is "a huge challenge which faces the Village."

Given that there are only two main North-South roads in our locality and with Estero as one of the top five growth markets in the USA, the future traffic prognosis is concerning.

Sadly, as Dan DeLisi, A Land Use Planning and Water/Environmental Policy Consultant, pointed out, Estero also suffers because there are few major East-West arteries. In places like West

Palm Beach, where he has lived (he currently spends a considerable amount of time in the Estero area), there is a much better road infrastructure that was put in place before the build-out, making it far easier to navigate during rush hour.

DeLisi mentioned that the infrastructure in Estero missed out on the need for an increased roadway network when the Capital Improvement Plan was developed. Given the current situation, there are restrictions on what road improvements can be made, although there are plans to widen Williams Road between US41 and The Three Oaks and possibly Three Oaks itself.

But as a result of several essential land purchases by the Village, one being the 621/2 acres on the corner of US41 and Corkscrew Road with the designation of the 30 acres to the south of Estero River being designated a preserve, some potential growth has been averted.

“We’ve looked at other potential acquisitions out east on Corkscrew within the village, and the one mentioned, the Panther way, was a \$40 million purchase, just too huge. Hopefully, the county and various conservation programs can get involved, but the time to buy is now,” according to Sarkozy.



## RISKS TO WATER QUALITY AND FLOOD CONTROL.

Florida has one of the most robust storm-water regulatory frameworks in the USA. The concerns relating to nitrogen and phosphorous in freshwater systems should be well-known. DeLisi indicated that he felt phosphorus has been efficiently removed from storm-

water systems but not nitrogen. When development occurs, water quality and flood control are carefully examined.

He said, “There has to be pre- and post-analysis to ensure you take as much water onto the site in a post-development state as what’s coming onto the site before development. You can only discharge as much water as was being discharged in the pre-development state.

When you put down driveways, homes, and impervious surfaces, how does that happen, you may ask? It cannot be correct, you may think. You have to do that with storm-water management retention systems, digging lakes, for example. The state constantly evaluates what is working and what is not. We have found over the last 20 years that the water quality systems we have built have yet to work to the extent that had been hoped for.

The state, over the last two years, has gone through a rulemaking process to address that (the failings) and create new standards to get at specific nitrogen reduction. Hopefully, that is going to get ratified.”

On the subject of runoff flowing downhill to the Estero River, DeLisi said, “We can’t stop approved development, but we can work to set higher water quality standards. The state is working on these for ratifying the new stormwater rule, which requires significant net reduction post development on phosphorus and nitrogen being discharged off the property. That will require more stormwater retention and water quality measures. For example, more plantings will take up nitrogen and phosphorus. Some things can be done. If the state doesn’t ratify the regulations, the village or county could consider adding these regulations. “

On the question later in the meeting from a member of the audience regarding water level concerns, DeLisi said, “It’s a good question, but consider what’s there now, how much is being used and noted that analysis by others shows active agricultural use, like citrus growth which had been on the properties, sucks a lot more water from aquifers than residential use. Agricultural use covers all the ground, but irrigated lawns only cover part of the land. The amount of coverage drops significantly, and the water usage drops.” But DeLisi admitted, “the aquifers are dropping. This is primarily due to a lack of rainfall, and overall water usage is an issue.”

Jim Wallace, Key Principle of Genova Realty LLC., also agreed that water use between agriculture and developments “wasn’t even close.” Despite some members of the public disagreeing, it is a proven fact that agriculture uses much more water than urban development.



## Community Planning.

Wallace made the point that community planning needs to take a 50-year perspective, which he congratulated Steve Sarkozy for doing for Estero. He pointed out that society and individuals constantly change, including their desires and wants.

In Florida, there is a Comprehensive Plan and a Land Development Code. The Comprehensive Plan is the policy document for how all land use decisions are made. The Plan is considered the most essential document for any town, municipality, or county. There is also the Land Development Code that includes zoning, which implements the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive plan defines what the future is going to look like.

The difficulty in the future for Estero regarding future development is that Florida has what is called a base zoning district. This is the lowest zoning district category with few rights for making changes. It allows for little room for maneuver by Estero to agreements for land use that Lee County sanctioned in the 1980s and '90s.

Within Estero Village, Sarkozy pointed out the requirement that to develop a Master Plan for the future, there is a need for a series of Master Plans for each of the functions the Village controls. These include:

- A Storm Water Master Plan
- A Traffic Road Master Plan
- Parks and Open Space Master Plan
- The Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan.

Sarkozy said that “these, together with a couple of others, are integrated into the Comprehensive Plan.” It is not a static plan developed from the various functional plans mentioned above. This forms a cohesive overall plan for the community.

He cited Estero Parkway as evidence of putting the various planning elements into effect. The Village's vision was to bring people out of their communities and create a linear park. The Village went overboard on the landscaping and created an opportunity for people to walk well back from the traffic, which can hardly see people walking or riding their bikes, creating a far more enjoyable environment and streetscape.

Similar plans exist for Williams Road between Three Oaks Parkway and US 41 and from Broadway to Coconut Road, along Corkscrew Road if possible, and for Ben Hill Griffin to Bella Terra. Wherever possible, there will be a 10 ft walkway as far back from the road as possible with a significant landscape to create the idea of a linear park environment in each of these locations.

Although the plans to convert the Seminole railway line into a bike and pedestrian right-of-way may still be some way off, such a development would provide additional recreational options for many people by linking up with the other Estero East-West bike and pedestrian paths, creating an integrated network that would also help to reduce traffic.





## Future Developmental plans

The vision for Estero's Northeast quadrant at Corkscrew Road and US 41, mainly the 30 acres north of the river, could involve several feasible options. One option would include a Botanical Garden with a link via an underpass to the Koreshan State Park.

Such a development would enable people to walk or bike in a garden setting with further ways to connect to other locations in the Village. Given the potential costs, commercial involvement must also be considered, but with the public's requirements in mind.

Wallace felt that given the significance to the community of this and other potential developments being contemplated, it might be worthwhile considering a "visionary planning expert" to "think outside the box" and provide suggestions that would help make Estero a desirable destination for both residents and visitors. "When trying to create a sense of place and a destination, I think it key to engage a planner. They can look at the transition from the public realm into a sense of place."

He also felt that looking at developments in other parts of the world, such as Europe, where there is much development of open spaces with fountains and parks to sit, read, and relax, is much in evidence. They are considered a destination with coffee shops, wine bars, or restaurants nearby. At Santana Row in San Jose, Wallace said, "They took a median that was 30 ft wide and made it 120 ft, and between the retail and residential, the parking is hidden, and it's packed all the time because of the things there are to do!"

Wallace pointed out that "changing behavior is the catalyst to changes in land use. We need to understand the driver of repurposing. Other restaurants will replace more empty retail stores, or maybe they will be torn down. We might see 60-year-old RV and mobile home parks now worth \$600,000 per acre or abandoned supermarkets being replaced by condominiums. We want less and less brick-and-mortar retail, and more and more people want to live where we live. So, how can we control growth?"

The panel recognized that, however unfortunate for those who live in our locality, growth will be inevitable. But as stated, "it needs to be good growth."

To illustrate how lateral thinking can be used to good effect, it was mentioned that a four-lane road similar to Via Coconut that runs past Coconut Point and also the Estero Recreational Center could be reduced to two with parallel parking on two lanes that would radically transform the space and how people would interact. That way, developments and how people react to them can change positively. It is an example of creating a pedestrian environment that fits an urban planning vision.

The Woodfield development at the corner of US 41 and Coconut Road was also discussed. While Lee Health was originally going to develop the property, it was suggested by the Village management that they work with a very well-respected and visionary developer, Dover Kohl, and partners. Victor Dover is a great planner who devised an excellent design with community involvement for Lee Health.

The site was originally going to be just a traditional suburban strip mall, and the Village wanted something other than that due to the traffic generated and the questionable land use. When Lee Health sold the property, the Village wanted the developed plan kept in place, and Sarkozy stated that 90% of the original plan is now in the proposed development for the site. He indicated, “This will be far better than what could have occurred without going through an involved planning process.”

Although HCA Healthcare purchased 100 acres in Estero north of Hertz for \$52.5 million in 2019, they have sold much of the property. The potential outcome and range of options for the property still need to be clarified. Given its significant location and visibility on US 41 between Williams Road and Corkscrew Road, the style, structure, and layout that will appeal to residents and the Village will be very important. This is another property where there is a need to “create a sense of place” that will be distinctive and appealing to those who want to live there.

There was mention of the land earmarked for a school in the area close to the northeast corner of Three Oaks and Corkscrew Road. Although the school will not proceed in that location, the question was what might happen to the land owned by the School Board. If the land was offered for sale and at what price it might be purchased by the Village.

Although citizens in Estero may think that developers always get what they desire, this is not the case. Indeed, many of the panel consultants to developers indicated that they invariably have to increase their charges because of the “Estero Effect.” It was explained that Estero Village is well known among developers as being tough on what they request. The Stock development along Corkscrew Road, East of Lowes, took five years to achieve approval when the norm in most municipalities is two years. Wawa’s has also taken considerable time to reach the approval stage, and there are many other similar examples. Ross McIntosh said, “Developers don’t like to develop in Estero because it’s too demanding.”

## Mixed Use Developments.

A mixed-use development is a community that combines residential, recreational, and commercial spaces. There are several examples of this type of development already in Estero. The Stock Residential and Commercial project is one good example. Located on the south side of Corkscrew Road, between Three Oaks Parkway and I-75, Estero Crossing (east of Lowes), it will feature 306 apartments and 60,000 square feet of retail shops.



The commercial space is pedestrian-friendly, with brick-paver walkways, benches, and lush landscaping. Various businesses, including restaurants with indoor and outdoor seating, other entertainment venues, boutique-style shops, and even health and wellness offices and studios, have or will be located there. Another example is the commercial and residential properties, which comprise Sprouts and the area on the northwest side of the junction of Estero Parkway and US 41. The Woodfield development will also be mixed-use on the northwest corner of Coconut Road and US 41.

Such developments are considered environmentally sustainable. It encourages public transportation and pedestrian and bike travel, reducing a neighborhood's carbon footprint. By limiting car usage and street congestion, mixed-use communities can minimize air pollution and promote energy conservation. Conversely, they often require a higher up-front investment than traditional single-use development projects.

Additionally, mixed-use developments can be more challenging to finance and manage than conventional development projects. There is also the additional worry that as the number of commercial stores declines, ensuring the space for retail and other commercial uses in the future may become far more challenging than it is today.

These should be integrated “wherever it makes sense.” They can be created to make “real destinations” that are interactive spaces with human scale and a sense of place, as Wallace explained.

# Adaptive reuse and repurposing of under-utilized commercial buildings

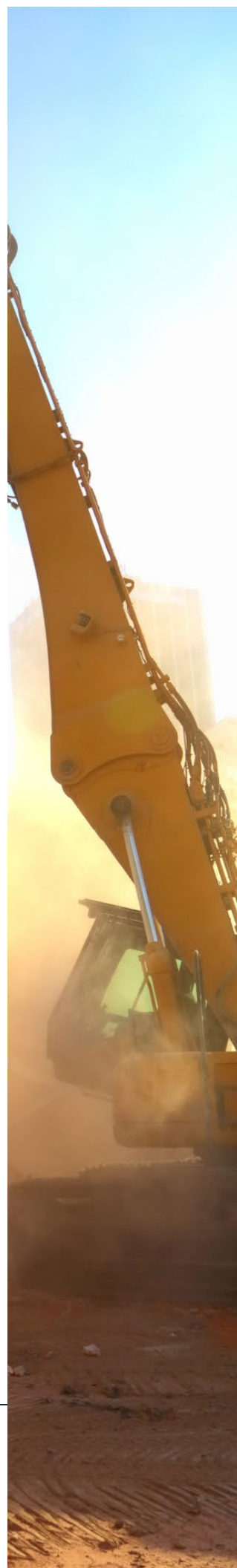
The discussion about this topic indicates that this will be a growing trend in many parts of the USA, and Estero will be no exception. Those in the Brooks will be familiar with the decision to demolish the building in the Brooks Town Center formerly occupied by Winn Dixie and build a larger Condominium there.

While there are still many residents who are unhappy about this transformation for many reasons, it is an example of adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse takes many forms, from preserving heritage to transforming vacant buildings into opportunities to revitalize communities. While not everyone agrees, prolonging the lifespan of buildings is a sustainable strategy with social and financial advantages.

The cinema in Coconut Point might be another example of adaptive reuse in Estero. Although the building may become a cinema once again, given the reduction in people visiting cinemas, owners may wish to seek other ways of generating revenue. Such a building could lend itself to many uses. Similar buildings have been converted into indoor Pickleball courts or ten-pin bowling establishments or subdivided into small boutique stores.

Some buildings have sought a change in zoning from commercial to residential to enable condominiums to be constructed. While this tends to raise questions about increasing traffic density if conversions from commercial to residential occur where there is already an infrastructure that supports those who move in, the mixed-use environment can help to curtail a proportion of the journeys that would happen in a non-mixed-use environment.

Society and individuals are constantly changing, and their desires alter over time; thus, it is necessary that what buildings served an essential purpose in the past may not be appropriate for the future and need to adapt. So, the issue of reuse and repurposing will become a necessary part of how Estero copes with the public and commercial owners' needs in the coming years.



# Resident Input in Future Plans and Developments.

Although it appears that the Village Management and Planning, Zoning, and Design Board has provided public input on planned developments and community projects involving recreation and relaxation, many citizens are frustrated by the difficulty in knowing when and how their opinions can be heard. In the more recent case of the proposed land development that includes the Golf Driving Range on Williams Road and Via Coconut, while there were some focus groups conducted with the public, such studies are qualitative. They should not be used to base major decisions.

When Lee Health, who originally owned approximately 45 acres of land on the northwest corner of Coconut Road and US 41, considered what to construct there, they turned to the public for their opinions! There were several iterations of the plans that Lee Health developed that were shown and discussed with additional public input. All agreed that the final plans that emerged were excellent, and there was good public support.

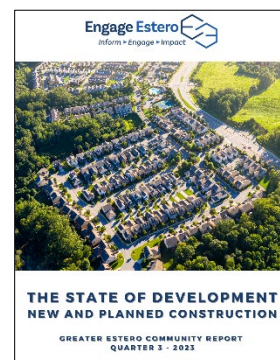
Unfortunately, when the land was sold to South Carolina-based developer Woodfield Development and ELV Associates, no one knew what the development would look like until the developer presented its plans to the Planning Zoning and Design Board with an announcement to the public only days before the meeting! This is also true for many other developments. Citizens are concerned about the short notice given in advance of these meetings and about the limited opportunity to express their opinions on other important projects being considered by the Village.

Wallace indicated that “the public should collaborate with the developer to ensure your goals are incorporated into their plans and reward developers who over-achieve.” Wallace also felt that all stakeholders should be involved at the conceptual stage long before it goes to the Planning and Zoning Board! He said, “That worked very well for us in the past. There are no real workshops today, only brief public information meetings, all after the concept is designed. It’s too late, then. The Village needs to hold real workshops for future projects, particularly for re-purposing, and do it early in the process.”

It is hoped that this perspective is taken to heart by the Village to provide more opportunities to provide input, as explained by Jim Wallace.

If you would like to examine the developments planned or currently underway in greater Estero, please click here:

<https://www.esterotoday.com/gecr2023qtr3/>.



*(Engage Estero wishes to acknowledge and thank the team at WGCU who attended and reported on the meeting and provided several photographs of the event which have been used in our report)*

## Part Two: Audience Participation

The audience raised several vital questions during the public's Q&A session regarding their concerns about the likely growth and development of the greater Estero area. Most centered around the impact on our roads, safety, infrastructure, and the environment. Some of the responses have been covered in Part 1 because of their link to issues covered in that report.

On the issue relating to concern about the potential congestion to Coconut Road west of US 41, Steve Sarkozy admitted this continues to be a challenge. Two new high-rise buildings at the Colony and the approved Ritz-Carlton Residences will significantly increase traffic along that road. "It's a potential future mess if it's not already a mess," said Sarkozy.

Those properties are both outside of the Village of Estero boundary. They are in Bonita Springs and Lee County. They will receive all the impact fees, and despite discussions that have taken place about the possibility of Estero receiving a contribution to help improve Coconut Road (west), there is currently no agreement in place on this issue at this time. As residents will be aware, Coconut Road (west) is located in the Village of Estero and is the only access road to these developments!

When residents on the north side of Coconut Road (west) want to make a left-hand turn onto Coconut to head eastbound toward Route 41, it can be not easy to filter into the traffic, and this will increase exponentially once the build-out is completed.

Sarkozy pointed out that a simple, cheap proposal would be to introduce stop signs on Coconut Road (west) where this occurs. However, that would seriously impact those heading to US 41 from the western end of the road. The Village has proposed three roundabouts to keep traffic flowing, but that is a costly solution.

Road widening on the northern side of the road would be problematic because of the proximity of several communities along that side. There is also a limited right of way on Coconut Road (west), which prevents the Village from including streetscapes, walkways, and bike paths similar to Estero Parkway along the road. Discussions are continuing to find an acceptable solution.



Another resident complained she was not hearing about any developments or improvements for the west side of US 41 to help ensure Estero was seen as an overall combined community. Sarkozy commented, “U.S. 41 was the old suburban model with a wide median. It is recognized that crossing 41 is a daunting and dangerous task for pedestrians. A bridge is an option but has many practical difficulties for pedestrians and bikers.



An idea discussed with the Lee Department of Transportation (LDOT) was converting US 41 into more of an urban landscape with bike and pedestrian paths. This would make it easier to “stage” the crossing for bikers and pedestrians. It is something that the Department of Transportation is receptive to. It would change the character of U.S. 41 but creates the opportunity to have commercial frontages closer to the road providing easier access and connectivity than is currently the case.”

The existing underpass below US 41, close to the Estero River, is being considered for a walk and bike path, as indicated in Part 1 of the report on the Public Forum.


Dan DeLisi commented there are pockets of areas west of 41, for example, north of West Broadway, that may be right for development. If the village starts looking at those areas, they could be made walkable. DeLisi suggested a destination on the west side of 41 would be a good way of helping to regenerate the area.

There was a question about the ratio of citizens living inside and outside gated communities. The members of the audience felt the needs of people outside gated communities were different from those living within gated communities and needed to be addressed differently. Sarkozy stated that the ratio was approximately 80% gated and 20% outside gated communities. With a population of about 40,000, it represented around 8,000 people living outside gated communities and represented a diverse group.

Sarkozy said, “We found when we did our focus groups and surveys on the park and open space master plan that there was a desire by people in gated communities to want opportunities outside their communities.” Sarkozy continued, “People would really like the opportunity to get out and walk on a 10 ft wide area. The idea for the future is to connect gated communities to walkways and other neighborhoods, schools, retail, libraries, etc. Many gated communities are smaller. They are not all the size of the Brooks.”

Other residents were concerned about the slow progress of the widening of Corkscrew Road to the East of Ben Hill Griffin Road. Completion for Phase 1 was scheduled for the end of 2023, but this is now estimated to be finished by the latter part of 2024.





Entering Corkscrew Road from various developments, such as Wild Cat Run, especially when turning west, is considered extremely dangerous. There is a high volume of traffic at many times of the day, with many traveling at high speeds.

Sarkozy agreed it was a problem. He said, “Unfortunately, much of this roadway is not part of the Village of Estero but under the County’s jurisdiction.” He said, “We pressed the county on the need for safety, but it is a difficult process to address. You may have to turn right and then do a U-turn to return west. It is a dilemma. We have reached out to FDOT but do not yet have a response to that problem. Everyone needs to realize that the county is responsible, and there is a need to bring them to the table.”

Regarding East Corkscrew Road growth, a resident asked, “Is the sewage facility capacity adequate for the growth?” The answer was, “Yes, the sewage plant along Alico Road has expansion plans.”

How will the municipality respond to the various lawsuits regarding infrastructure and development? It appears that the Village of Estero was involved in a lawsuit on Panther Way by River Creek and was marginally successful. “GL Homes has now come in and done a great job building and preserving the space,” commented Sarkozy. Currently, the Village has no litigation pending. The County has had several lawsuits and settled for fear of losing out under the state Bert Harris Act, which says a government entity cannot downzone property unless they buy it. Lawsuits can be damaging and reduce the ability to spend money on essential developments and are to be avoided if possible.

A question was raised about whether the Village was considering supporting its own Police Department. Sarkozy said, “Estero is one of the safest communities in the region, if not the state. Part of that is because of all the security linked to gated communities, so you don’t get theft of cars and home break-ins.” He also pointed out, “We have a great relationship with the Sheriff’s Department and are constantly communicating with them.

They have a substation in Estero, and we know week by week what’s happening. Many private developments have their own security, which saves taxpayers dollars. Estero encourages security in residential communities when private developers bring projects for approval. I think for some time, we will be fine. But it’s an open question for if or when we need to supplement what’s going on.”

On the issue of the number of new apartments versus complete houses being built, it is a concern in our locality. Unfortunately, it seems that the Village has limitations on the developer’s choice if they have approval for residential units. It’s the developer’s decision, but the marketplace controls what gets built. Jim Wallace added, “With higher mortgage rates, the demand has moved to rental apartments. And current rental rates are \$2500 to \$5000 per month, that’s a \$30,000 to \$60,000 cost per year. If a person can’t afford 20% down and wants a nice place - they rent.”

A Rapallo resident said we used to go to Coconut Mall and see entertainment, and we are looking for more of that sort of thing. We have to travel to Naples or up to Fort Myers. What about a plan to have a 500-seat theater at the corner near where Hertz is now?

Jim Wallace responded, “I proposed a 600-seat theater at another location, but it’s not going to happen.” Sarkozy jumped in to add, “It’s going to happen! With the whole notion of Estero and the traffic patterns being equidistant between Fort Myers and Naples, the opportunity for that kind of entertainment district is huge. While there are things I can talk about, there are other things I can’t, and this is one of the things I can’t talk about yet. But that’s one of the twinkles in our eye!” Clearly, Sarkozy went as far as he dared on this important topic. He said, “Consider yourself officially teased!”

The subject of impact fees was discussed, although it is a complex topic. It seems that impact fees always lag the development, but you need the infrastructure before the development. You can’t issue bonds for impact fees. Several of the panel noted the Lee County commissioners probably don’t charge enough for impact fees, and Ross McIntosh, who lived in Collier, said Impact fees always get to be a political debate, so contact your county commissioner if you want to have an “impact on impact fees!”

After a lively and informative discussion lasting 2 1/2 hours, sponsored by Greg Tolley at FGCU’s Water School, for which Engage Estero was extremely grateful, the meeting was closed by Jim Gilmartin, thanking Prof. Shelton Weeks and all the panel members.

## *Part 3: Conclusions and Recommendations*

Reaction to the Public Forum from many residents that attended was extremely positive. The meeting was considered informative and valuable. Residents felt that they had learned and understood the difficulties that faced greater Estero in the years ahead.

Urbanization is unfortunately not something that can be stopped, but it can be made to fit with the vision that the Village has for residents in Estero. The public appreciated that the difficulties that faced the traffic congestion that was likely on East Corkscrew Road and Coconut Road (West) were acknowledged.

But it was evident from the meeting that:

- The Village needs to incorporate the opportunity for public input at a much earlier stage regarding planned developments and recreational changes being considered. This was a perspective that was expressed by Jim Wallace and is currently a desire that has been communicated to Engage Estero by many members of the public in the last two months.
- While it is evident that the Village often takes a “hard line” to achieve what they feel will be an appropriate design and incorporate open space, etc., that fits with their vision for the Village, there doesn’t appear to be a cohesive vision for the Village that takes account of all the developments on a holistic basis.
- It was suggested that individual planners or companies with a proven track record in “thinking outside the box” and anticipating the future needs of residents well into the future would be desirable. That does not imply that the Village management is doing a poor job in this regard, but outside perspectives can provide a broader, more lateral assessment of how a Village like Estero should adapt to future needs. It is a cost worth considering.

. What We do, we do with purpose, passion, and pride in our community.



*Inform > Engage > Impact*

**Engage Estero: A Community Engagement Association**

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