

# Building height, density changes to be discussed at Community Panel meeting

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## **Proposed building height, density changes to be discussed at Community Panel meeting**

Proposed changes to the rules governing building heights and density on Captiva will be on the agenda at the next meeting of the Captiva Community Panel, set for Tuesday, June 13, beginning at 9 a.m. on Zoom.

These changes have been moving forward at the county without any notification to or input from the Community Panel and the Captiva community. These proposals came to a head last Tuesday when the Board of County Commissioners unanimously moved these new rules to a June 20 public hearing. The scope of these rule changes and the potential impact to Captiva will be the focus of panel discussion Tuesday.

The changes include:

- Eliminates the three-units-per-acre density restrictions inside South Seas, with no restrictions cited to replace them.
- Eliminates the current height restrictions on Captiva (and language in the Lee Plan that references those restrictions). It is replaced in general with restrictions of 35 feet above a distance 12 inches above the average

elevation of the adjacent roadways. In areas where development is governed by base flood elevations, height is measured from “the lowest minimum habitable floor elevation for which a building permit may be issued.”

- In the Captiva-specific section, South Seas is exempted from building heights language, with no replacement restrictions stated.
- Structures in a coastal high hazard area V-zone may increase both the “lowest minimum habitable floor” and the overall structure by four feet without deviation or variance approval.
- South Seas may be seeking a de facto rezoning to Outlying Suburban, which with this new language would allow building heights up to 75 feet “when the applicant demonstrates through a zoning action that the additional height is required to preserve environmentally sensitive land, secure areas of native vegetation and wildlife habitat, or preserve historical, archaeological or scenic resources.”
- Removes reference to the 2002 Administrative Interpretation governing South Seas density and development, and exempts development inside South Seas from LDC Section 33 regulations.
- Eliminates the 75% requirement for condominiums to initiate rezoning, special exceptions or variance, replacing it with initiation allowed by the association’s president or manager when authorized by the association board.

Members of the Community Panel attended last Tuesday’s commission meeting and have been in discussion with county commissioners and staff, as well as other island organizations concerned about these proposed changes. They will update the panel on their findings and plans.

The Captiva Civic Association sent the following message (attached [here](#)) to its members Wednesday afternoon:

***Captiva’s history of low-rise, low-density development is under attack.***

*The consequences for the future of the island are extremely serious.*

*At the behest of the new owners of South Seas Island Resort, Lee County has set a public hearing on June 20 to consider changes to the county’s Land Development Code that would:*

- *Eliminate the three-units-per-acre density restrictions inside South Seas, with no new density restrictions cited to replace them*
- *Exempt South Seas from Captiva's building height restrictions*
- *Raise the permitted heights on Captiva by 11 feet -- allowing the construction of three-story buildings above base flood elevation*
- *Create a path for South Seas to plan a new, larger development with buildings up to 75 feet high.*

*Under the guise of resiliency and conformity, the county is rushing to enact these sweeping changes without regard for the community's concerns, prudent planning principles or preservation of Captiva's unique and fragile environment. The county and South Seas are sacrificing our unique island ambiance for the sake of bigger buildings and more dwelling units.*

*These proposed changes will be aired at a public hearing before the Board of County Commissioners to be held on Tuesday, June 20, beginning at 9:30 a.m. in the county's commission chambers in downtown Fort Myers. A coalition of island organizations and individuals is planning to speak out against these changes and the heavy-handed way they've been pursued -- in the hopes of convincing a majority of the county commissioners to reject them.*

*If you believe in protecting Captiva, we need your help.*

- ***Speak up.*** *Send a message to all five Lee County Commissioners to ask them to reject this unwelcome change in building heights and density. A sample letter and the commissioners' emails are attached.*
- ***Show up.*** *If you can, come to the June 20 public hearing and show your support for Captiva's historic low-rise, low-density development. If you are able to attend and willing to speak in opposition to these changes, let us know by sending an email to [protectcaptiva@gmail.com](mailto:protectcaptiva@gmail.com).*
- ***Stand up.*** *Pass this call for help on to other Captivans willing to protect our island -- encouraging them to send a message and attend the hearing in person.*

*Bigger buildings and more dwelling units will undermine the unique and unparalleled nature of Captiva, put an unnecessary strain on island resources and roadways, destroy the tranquility and traditions we have all come to expect on the island, and forever change the path of Captiva's future in ways none of us want to see.*

*If you want to protect everything that is Captiva, we need your help.*

## **Zoom information for meeting:**

**When:** Jun 13, 2023 09:00 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81193040028?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81193040028?pwd=eUgvV1k1bmMwbU81YTc5MDFHR1pMUT09)

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