

***Captiva
Community
Panel***



MINUTES

March 11, 2025

Attending: Linda Laird, John Jensen, David Mintz, Tony Lapi, Ken Suarez, Jon Rosen, John Wade, Bruce McDonald, Sandy Stilwell Youngquist.

Absent: Michael Bennett and Margarethe Thye-Miville

Audience: 21

Meeting convened at 9 a.m. The Feb. 11, 2025, meeting minutes were unanimously approved (McDonald/Suarez).

The meeting addressed several community issues, including the transition with Ann Brady's retirement and departure from the panel and Jon Rosen's appointment by the CCA as her successor. Sergeant Rich Zeltman highlighted the importance of deputy participation in future meetings to enhance community engagement.

Traffic concerns during the spring break season on Captiva Island were discussed, with a call for patience from visitors. Parking regulations around the Civic Center were also addressed, indicating that new signage is needed before enforcement can begin. Updates on beach resiliency projects were provided, including the submission of funding applications and the potential impact of proposed legislation on property taxes, which could affect local services.

The home-elevation assistance program was detailed, noting a 75-25 funding match and the current lack of an application deadline. With over 3,000 applications submitted, the program can only support around 900 structures, raising concerns about funding availability. Challenges for property owners under contract with vendors were also discussed, particularly regarding penalties and funding uncertainties. David Mintz provided updates on road projects, including efforts to manage sand accumulation and ongoing rezoning negotiations with South Seas, which aim to address community concerns about increased density.

The upcoming hearings on the South Seas Redevelopment rezoning application were highlighted, with significant community opposition expected. Concerns raised included traffic, environmental impacts, and emergency response adequacy. Community members were encouraged to participate in the hearings to voice their opposition, with assurances that their input would be valued. Additionally, a draft survey on storm preparedness was introduced to gather community feedback, and the iguana management program was discussed, along with funding challenges for Protect Captiva and implications of recent court decisions on building permits.

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 a.m. Video link: <https://youtu.be/OtBtF1Euch4>

Chapters & Topics:

Traffic and Community Updates

Mintz addressed parking issues around the Civic Center, noting that no parking is allowed on certain streets until proper signage is established with the county. Chief Pawul reported a successful open house event and discussed ongoing efforts for beach resiliency measures, mentioning that funding is currently a barrier to progress.

Program Details and Eligibility for Elevation Assistance

Chief Pawul explained that the home-elevation assistance program has no deadline and requires a 25% cost share from property owners, which must be paid upfront. Although over 3,000 applications have been received, only enough funding exists for approximately 900 structures statewide. Property owners can sell their homes but must adhere to deed restrictions and maintain flood insurance.

The road projects committee, led by Mike Bennett, is focusing on hardening Jensen's curve and Santiva, with Lee DOT's Doug Busby overseeing field operations. There are plans to move sand piles on Captiva Drive to enhance accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists. Additionally, Pawul provided an update on discussions regarding proposed rezoning of South Seas, to address public safety concerns about building height and density.

Beach Renourishment Funding and Planning Update

CEPD Chair Wade outlined plans for the upcoming beach renourishment project, highlighting the expectation of potentially receiving substantial funding from the Florida DEP without the need for match funding based on legislation expected to be approved during the current legislative session. The project is scheduled to commence in early July, with dredging activities anticipated to begin shortly after the holiday. A public hearing regarding the tentative apportionment will be announced at the end of the month, with the next CEPD meeting set for April 7.

An audience member highlighted concerns regarding the beach cleaning service's performance, mentioning that many fish remained on the beach after their efforts. Complaints about increased ATV and golf cart activity were noted, prompting outreach to golf cart companies to reinforce regulations. Additionally, Wade shared updates on the parking lot's popularity and the upcoming turtle management plans in conjunction with beach renourishment.

Updates on South Seas Redevelopment Hearing

Mintz provided an update on the South Seas Redevelopment rezoning application, which is currently under review by the hearing examiner. The county has recommended approval, but significant opposition has emerged from various community groups, including Protect Captiva and the City of Sanibel, with numerous witnesses testifying against the application. Concerns include increased traffic, environmental damage, and violations of the historic development pattern.

The group is preparing for hearings on March 20 and 21 regarding an application that has faced significant community opposition. Mintz reassured participants that the hearing examiner is open to hearing from many speakers, even if their testimonies overlap. He highlighted the importance of conveying the community's concerns about historical development patterns and environmental impacts.

Mintz highlighted the role of community voices in the legal process, encouraging personal testimonies. He confirmed that while the opposing attorney can cross-examine witnesses, the hearing examiner prefers to minimize this to maintain a constructive environment. Mintz expressed confidence in the hearing examiner's integrity and decision-making.

Survey Development and Wastewater Update

Gooderham introduced a draft survey designed to collect community feedback on storm preparedness, incorporating suggestions from Chief Pawul. The survey will focus on communication and community concerns, with plans for online distribution to maximize responses. There were suggestions to clarify certain questions and to make them more specific to enhance participant understanding and engagement. The goal (pending feedback from the CFD board) would be to post the survey online by the end of the week in hopes of having a report on responses to the panel for the April meeting.

Update on Iguana Management and Protect Captiva Funding

Laird said the iguana management program is ongoing, with Alfredo catching approximately 25 iguanas per week at a cost of \$30 each. A \$500,000 grant has been applied for to support this program and assist in removing invasive Australian pines. McDonald inquired about the funding status for Protect Captiva, revealing that over a million dollars has been raised, but additional funding will be needed for appellate lawyers and ongoing legal challenges.

Action Items:

- Jeff Pawul will provide a detailed document regarding the Elevate Florida program to community members interested in the program.
- John Wade will follow up with Sanibel regarding the status of the parking lot and drainage improvements at the southern part of Captiva.
- David Mintz will ensure that the community is informed about the upcoming hearings regarding the South Seas rezoning application.
- Ken Gooderham will incorporate suggestions from Chief Pawul's board into the survey before finalizing it. He will set up the survey to allow multiple responses from the same IP address to accommodate families, and will finalize the survey based on feedback and send it out to the community by the end of the week.
- David Mintz will make calls to set up a meeting regarding the septic situation on Captiva.
- David Mintz will seek volunteers for the development committee by the next meeting in April.

Key Questions:

- What is the status of the Elevate Florida program and its application process?
- What are the anticipated impacts of the South Seas rezoning application on local traffic and evacuation?
- What are the specific conditions proposed by the Captiva Island Fire Control District regarding the South Seas rezoning application?
- How will the community be informed about the outcomes of the hearings regarding the South Seas rezoning application?
- What is the status of the wastewater consulting study being reviewed by the City of Sanibel?