



Captiva Community Panel

MINUTES

Feb. 10, 2026

Attending: David Mintz, Linda Laird, Jay Brown, John Wade, Ken Suarez, Jon Rosen, Michael Bennett, Margarethe Thye-Miville, Sandy Stilwell Youngquist

Audience: 32 at peak

The meeting convened at 9:00 am, and the Jan. 13, 2026, minutes were unanimously approved (Thye-Miville/Brown).

LCISO Deputy Christine Zumbrum reviewed spring-break timing for Lee County and colleges and warned of increased visitors and victimization risk, urging property and vehicle security. She emphasized pedestrian/bicycle visibility requirements, noted many rental bikes lack lamps, described active traffic enforcement (radar/laser, stop-sign and passing violations), and raised dune-driving incidents prompting coordination with CEPD and Lee County Parks & Rec on signage and enforcement.

- The Sheriff's Office warned residents to secure property and expect increased enforcement during spring break, citing specific school and college break windows
- Deputies are increasing traffic enforcement using radar/laser tools and issuing education, warnings, and stops for violations like passing and stop-sign infractions
- Lee County prohibits open containers in public, including Captiva beaches and streets, and deputies will enforce this rule

Island Water Presentation

Island Water representatives explained they paused November rate-increase petitions after receiving nearly \$35 million in forgivable and zero-interest DEP loans and had their consultant (Raftelis Financial) reassess rate models. They reported no rate increase since 2009, rising O&M costs, projected 2026 revenue shortfalls, a 10-year \$122 million capital improvement plan focused on resiliency and capacity, and the need for an emergency reserve due to revenue interruptions after storms.

General Manager Diana Wilson presented adjusted recommended rates after external awards reduced the previously discussed 21% annual increases to 18% for each of three years and noted membership fees fell slightly because of those awards. She illustrated household impacts using a 5,000-gallon example and compared Island Water's projected bills to regional peers, stressing that Island Water remains below the regional average even after increases.

Panelists questioned why rates were unchanged for 16 years, and Wilson attributed the delay to operational efficiencies and higher actual water sales than 2009 projections that assumed diminished demand. The team confirmed Island Water has used an increasing block rate since 1992, with higher unit costs for successive 5,000-gallon blocks to encourage conservation and reflect capacity costs.

Panelists emphasized that community priorities focus on rapid post-storm water availability, and speakers tied the rate proposal to capital programs aimed at hardening the system and improving post-storm recovery and emergency reserves. IWA President Mark Koelmel noted post-Hurricane Ian recovery timelines and improvements in later storms as context for investments.

- Island Water revised its recommended rate adjustments from 21% to 18% annually for three years after incorporating external awards
- Example household impacts: a 5,000-gallon monthly bill rises by \$5.29 in 2026, \$6.26 in 2027, and \$7.41 in 2028 under the proposal
- Even after the 2026 increases, Island Water's 5,000-gallon monthly bill remains well below the regional average of \$48.99
- Island Water intends the increases to fund post-storm reliability improvements, infrastructure renewal, and irrigation demand capacity
- Island Water has used an increasing block rate structure in 5,000-gallon increments since 1992 to promote conservation and reflect higher marginal costs

Fire department update

Chief Jeff Pawul reported a successful open house turnout and clarified referendum voting logistics at the CCA Feb. 10 from 7 AM to 7 PM. He offered free CPR classes for residents and asked interested participants to contact the fire station to schedule groups of 6-12, and described recent helicopter and rescue responses to local medical and trauma incidents.

CEPD update

General Manager Brighton Heard stated CEPD postponed its February meeting due to lack of quorum and rescheduled it for Feb. 16, to be held in the CEPD office and via Microsoft Teams. Heard reported ongoing dune system improvements including immediate installation of ropes and bollards and signage to prohibit vehicle access, potential additional MOBI mats requested by residents and planned for Andy Rosse and Allison Hagerup Park subject to FDEP permitting and funding, and plans for added vegetation and woody species to reduce sand migration and increase biodiversity.

Heard described the Australian pine removal program offered free to homeowners with several hundred trees removed and more than half the grant remaining, and noted two full-time iguana removal specialists are available for properties with excessive iguanas.

Panel members asked about homeowner guidance for crossing dunes and blocked views; Heard explained Earth Balance's sea oat plantings sometimes omitted or mislocated crossover paths, CEPD will restore or re-establish dogleg angled crossovers to prevent scouring, and homeowners may submit engineered plans to the CEPD board to seek approval for dune modifications affecting views.

Concerns were raised about substantial sand loss since renourishment and escarpments observed on the beach, and panelists questioned whether sand type or placement affected outcomes; discussion transitioned to Blind Pass status and potential impacts on Pine Island Sound if it closes.

Heard and others summarized that the county is completing an environmental study and is evaluating whether maintaining Blind Pass open provides net environmental benefits; Brighton noted the pass was not fully closed at his last check and that temporary closure can increase mangrove and seagrass growth while affecting turbidity and visual clarity.

CEPD board member Rene Miville reported Lee County's Steve Boutelle told him the county already holds permits and financing to dredge Blind Pass and will act when sand drifting from renourishment subsides to avoid immediate re-filling, with bids and mobilization to follow; Rene said a narrative would be prepared for the CEPD meeting on Feb. 16 to clarify the situation.

The panel agreed CEPD should obtain written clarity on the county's long-term position regarding Blind Pass and report back at the next panel meeting; members also discussed potential short-term physical sand controls such as slotted (fence) barriers where vegetation is not yet established.

The panel discussed Moby Mats at Laika and Wightman Lane and the existence of a homeowners association responsible for beach paths and pedestrian access. David Mintz requested that the association be contacted before any mat decisions and offered to provide contact information if needed.

The chair opened for questions; community concerns focused on vegetation at Jensen Curve and Blind Pass. Panelists agreed the Blind Pass discussion was informative and largely resolved immediate questions.

- CEPD will survey dune crossovers post-planting and provide a GIS file of access locations to Lee County for enforcement.
- Heard will ask CEPD's engineer for post-construction survey data or estimates on recent sand loss.
- The county is conducting an environmental study on Blind Pass and currently has permit and funding to dredge, but may delay dredging until sand drifting from renourishment stabilizes.
- The panel requested CEPD to obtain clear written county policy on long-term Blind Pass management and report back at the next meeting.

SCCF legislative and estuary update

Matt DePaolis provided a brief legislative update urging sign-ups for action alerts and noted Senator Martin's amendment removing a disparagement clause from Farm Bill 290. He reported ongoing estuary decline due to lack of lake-flow increases, referenced an Army Corps meeting and an upcoming Water District governing board meeting, and noted limited fish kills from recent cold temperatures.

The chair asked Matt to compile SCCF studies regarding Blind Pass and Pine Island Sound and to distribute them to Marguerite, Jay, Linda, and Brighton; Matt agreed to locate and send the materials.

- SCCF recommends signing up for legislative action alerts and reported removal of the disparagement clause from Farm Bill 290 via Senator Martin's amendment
- Estuary water quality remains poor due to low lake flows and the Army Corps reports no near-term flow changes; the Water District governing board meeting is upcoming
- SCCF observed limited cold-related fish mortality (tarpon in Tarpon Bay) but no large snook die-off reported
- DePaolis committed to locating and distributing SCCF studies on Blind Pass and Pine Island Sound to specified community members

South Seas redevelopment

David Mintz summarized seven pending lawsuits related to the county rezoning and South Seas' density and height increases, including appeals of limits on units and challenges to code amendments. The court previously limited units in one decision, and multiple appeals are in various stages.

A consolidated petition for writ of certiorari by CCA, timeshare associations, and condo associations challenges the Board's rezoning to allow up to 635 units and argues violations of due process (party status and cross-examination rights), unidentified easements, fire-service and sewer-capacity inadequacies, and inconsistency with historic development patterns; the petition is before Judge Schenko with a status conference set for March 26.

Mintz explained that Judge Schenko's order requires South Seas and the county to notify CCA before issuing permits, which gives CCA an opportunity to seek enforcement of lower-court limits and restrict construction beyond previously authorized units while appeals continue.

- Multiple lawsuits challenge South Seas rezoning, including a writ of certiorari before Judge Schenko that could invalidate the rezoning for procedural, evidentiary, easement, fire-service, sewer-capacity, or historical-pattern failures
- The court ordered notice to CCA before South Seas or the county may grant permits; this limits South Seas from building beyond existing authorized units while appeals proceed

Public records and property status

The group discussed reports from brokers that South Seas and the foundation properties are under contract but not closed, and noted that bond referendum results could alter the panel's ability to purchase some or all of the property.

Stormwater and wastewater coordination

Jay Brown reported minimal wastewater progress because a Sanibel-Captiva working group could not find a meeting time, and reminded the panel that Sanibel's required system upgrades have raised project costs and are driving efforts to reduce owner costs or secure grants for wastewater work. He reiterated that the county is leading the stormwater project, that the county's model of flows is not yet acceptable, and that the first draft report timetable will be missed until modeling issues are resolved.

Brown confirmed he has been investigating a performance-based septic system, has received feedback from Mark Thompson at SCCF, and is awaiting further technical input from the operator at Cruz Environmental on long-term viability. The panel acknowledged ongoing communications on the topic].

Infrastructure update

Mike Bennett described Captiva as ground zero for sand migration, explained that county matting work will require disturbance of some plantings, and emphasized localized safety issues where sand and vegetation force bicyclists into traffic. He said the county inspected Captiva Drive and intends to develop a work plan to repair shoulder settling and other hazards, and noted multiple areas of concern including near the Mucky Duck and Andy Rosse Lane.

Panelists discussed sand fences, temporary barriers, and planting projects as mitigation measures, noted limitations when land is privately owned, and agreed further conversations with DOT and county staff are needed to develop longer-term solutions. Participants were reminded by Deputy Zumbrum they can submit Lee County RFAs for right-of-way issues and that county responsiveness has been good.

Development Committee

Margarethe Thye-Miville announced a fundraiser Friday, Feb. 13, 5:30-7:30 p.m. with musician Kat Epple, encouraged panelists to promote the event, and noted Protect Captiva art auction pieces remain on the Civic Center walls with an online auction benefitting the legal fund. Panel members were urged to share the flyer and to invite supporters to help reach fundraising goals.

Community transportation proposal

The panel reviewed a real estate agent's letter proposing a trolley or golf-cart service from South Seas to the village to reduce traffic and serve residents who won't use resort amenities, and the panel discussed operational, financial, and participation questions while seeking input from South Seas associations.

Sandy Stilwell Youngquist described operating the prior S-Car-Go service, reporting strong ridership and community support but high personnel cost, staffing and insurance obligations, and eventual loss of vehicles to hurricane damage, leading her decision not to restart the service.

Panelists debated whether trolley access into South Seas is permitted, noting shared road ownership and gated access issues, and acknowledged these legal and logistical matters would affect any transportation implementation.

Blind Pass permitting and panel follow-up

The panel discussed Blind Pass permitting, the requirement to evaluate opening versus remaining closed, recollections of past county commitments to keep it open, and the need for staff to compile studies and interlocal agreements to ensure the panel is prepared if policy reversals are proposed.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m. Video link of the proceedings is https://youtu.be/hd2wiR_FpU4.

Action Items:

- Deputy Christine Zumbrum will verify whether Sanibel allows open containers on its beaches and report back
- CEPD and Lee County Parks & Recreation will evaluate and pursue signage and enforcement options to prevent vehicles from driving on dunes and beach access areas
- Island Water Association will maintain and provide supporting materials on islandwater.com for further review by members
- Fire Chief Jeff Pawul will schedule CPR classes for residents when groups of 6-12 request them and accept requests via station phone or the fire department website
- Brighton Heard (CEPD) will hold the rescheduled February meeting on Monday the 16th in the office and on Microsoft Teams
- Brighton Heard will discuss additional MOBI mat installations with the commissioners (CEPD).
- Homeowners will contact CEPD to request removal or restoration of individual dune crossovers near their property.
- CEPD will perform a full post-planting survey of dunes to mark crossover locations and produce a GIS file for Lee County.
- Brighton will ask CEPD's engineer to check whether post-construction surveys or engineering estimates show the amount of recent sand loss and report back.

- Rene Miville (and Steve Boutelle) will prepare and deliver a narrative on Blind Pass status and county dredging intent at the CEPD meeting on Monday.
- CEPD/Panel liaison will request written clarification from Lee County on its long-term Blind Pass policy and report the county position to the panel at the next meeting.
- David Mintz will provide the homeowners association contact information for Wightman and Laika Lanes upon request
- Matt DePaolis will locate SCCF studies related to Blind Pass and Pine Island Sound and distribute them to Marguerite, Jay, Linda, and Brighton
- Jay Brown will obtain and report technical feedback from Cruz Environmental on the long-term viability of the performance-based septic system.
- Lee County will inspect identified Captiva Drive addresses and develop a work plan to repair the most serious shoulder settling and hazards.
- Mike Bennett will continue conversations with DOT and county contacts to coordinate mitigation and repair plans for sand migration and right-of-way issues.
- Community members can submit Lee County Requests for Action (RFA) for vegetation, signage, sand in the right-of-way, or other roadway concerns as needed.
- Margarethe Thye-Miville will make sure an Eventbrite sign-up link is added to the fundraiser information and send the event flyer to panel members for distribution.
- Panel members will distribute the fundraiser flyer to their mailing lists and encourage attendance to increase fundraising toward the stated goal.
- South Seas homeowners associations will discuss the transportation proposal among themselves and report their position to the panel.
- David Mintz will follow up with associations and confirm next steps to bring the transportation matter back to the panel
- Panel leadership will wait to hear from South Seas associations and cooperate as appropriate once they report back.
- Matt DePaolis will gather SCCS/SCCF studies and the interlocal agreement (city, county, CEPD) and report to the panel about Blind Pass policy and commitments