

Freshman P&Z Member Looks to Future

Lisa Hoover
Staff Writer

Longboat Key resident John Wild was recently appointed to the Town's Planning and Zoning Board. With many years of public service under his belt as well as a long history of serving in civic organizations, such as Kiwanis and the Boy Scouts of America, Wild brings a tremendous amount of experience to the board. He recently shared his thoughts about his appointment with Longboat Key News. Here is what he had to say:

What are some of the biggest planning and zoning challenges facing the Town?

Longboat is unique and nestled between Anna Maria Island's three tourist-oriented towns and the merchant district of St. Armand's Circle; Longboat should retain its "island of calm and tranquility" reputation amidst a sea of activity focused on trade and vacation commerce. We need to find appropriate ways to help our business community survive slower months, so they can remain viable to serve year-round residents.

Local businesses have suggested that relaxing the 30-day rental rule may attract more tourists to the area, but many residents are opposed to the idea. What do think about relaxing the 30-day rule?

I think the issue has been decided in favor of residents who valued the peace and tranquility of Longboat summers. I

have never favored anything more than a tightly controlled two-month experiment where neighbors had lots of input to perhaps even include veto power, with plenty of safeguards in place. I would not have favored this for clearly residential neighborhoods.

Are you satisfied with the way the Visioning Process is going? What would you like to see evolve from the process?

I was fortunate to participate in one of the focus groups representing Kiwanis, and found the consultant's work highly satisfactory. He did not "steer" the discussion but fomented dialogue amongst the participants that yielded some excellent data. I also favor the idea of encouraging a "buy in" by expanding the survey aspect of the work to reach as many residents and part-time residents as possible.

Should Avenue of the Flowers' list of allowable uses be modified to draw more businesses to the complex? What else could be done to attract new business and customers?

I'd perhaps favor some review of the sign ordinances, perhaps taking a cue from upscale communities elsewhere in how they allow directional signs that inform but do not intrude into aesthetic values. Rather than expand the list of allowable uses, I'd favor a case-by-case review of potential applications, and offer plenty of opportunity for public input

before making well-considered decisions.

Some Longboat Key residents say modifying some of the Town's regulations and ordinances (new allowances for the reconstruction of non-conformities, for example) will change the character of the Town. Others say that such changes are necessary and are in the overall best interest of the Town. What are your thoughts?

Let's be clear — the free market will bring about change in terms of non-conformities, as land will generally migrate to its best uses. When homes sell for \$700,000 or \$800,000 only to be torn down, you can rest assured the area will change and do so to FEMA-inspired standards. Some change is inevitable, but we should do our best to guide the process into a measured pace rather than one that is simply unfettered growth without fully considering consequences.

What appeals to you about being on the Planning and Zoning Board?

I volunteered, went to meetings over the past several years to observe and was honored to have gained the acceptance of the Town's commissioners, who were willing to give a "new guy in town" a chance to continue a career in public service. I had served on a Planning Board in my former hometown and came to enjoy the experience, as well as having learned the value of the planning process to assure residents of a consistent and



Wild

orderly Town appearance.

How will your professional and civic experience help you on the board?

I was lucky to have been one of 16 Councilmen, and later Mayor, of a town whose motto is "Planning Tomorrow Today," as well as having a wage-paying job in public administration. Not everyone actually gets to work in their academic field, but my career of 30 years working for the states of Indiana, Iowa and Missouri actually benefited from my having obtained a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Masters in Public Administration. When one retires, one shouldn't just switch off the mind and go fishing — the Longboat Key opportunity will allow me to give back and hopefully add value to my new hometown.

P&Z Approves Rebuilding Ordinance

Lisa Hoover
Staff Writer

The ordinance that addresses the rebuilding of non-conformities that has been bandied about for weeks was finally approved by the Longboat Key Planning and Zoning Board on Tuesday. Board members have been poring over details of the ordinance to ensure it is fair to property owners while also staying aligned with the Board's goal to reduce the amount of non-conforming structures in the Town.

The board has consistently said that they want to "grant generous rights" to property owners while reducing non-conforming structures on the Key. If a nonconforming structure is destroyed in a hurricane, property owners would have

a number of decisions to make and the Board says they hope to simplify the process for both the property owner and the Town.

The ordinance, commonly referred to as "139," outlines the rights and, in some cases, the restrictions of property owners who wish to rebuild a nonconforming structure after a hurricane or other catastrophic event. Details like whether the new building may contain a staircase or landing take on new meaning as property



Gilbert

owners struggle to stay within the local, state and federal guidelines.

While owners of nonconforming structures have the legal right to rebuild the same structure in the same location as it was prior to being destroyed, there may be occasions when doing so would present a danger to the health, safety and welfare of Town residents. If, for example, rebuilding a structure in its same location would place it perilously close to the water, Board members want to be able to work with the property owners to find a solution acceptable to both the owner and the Town. Ordinance 139 helps establish ways for property owners to rebuild without giving up their rights, as well as giving the Planning and Zoning

Board some measure of control over the rebuilding process.

Board Chairman Sandy Gilbert credits Town Attorney Dave Persson and Planning and Zoning Director Monica Daigle with the swiftness in which the ordinance was drafted, revised and brought to the Board for discussion. As hurricane season approaches, the Board said they wanted to have the ordinance in place as a precautionary measure. It is scheduled for a first reading at the Town Commission meeting on June 10 followed by a second reading on July 15. Persson has said that if the ordinance were needed before it receives approval by the Commission, it is still available to be enacted on an emergency basis.

Key Bridges Need Erosion Control

Lisa Hoover
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As Town of Longboat Key officials prepare for hurricane season, Town Manager Bruce St. Denis has been overseeing details ranging from how to notify residents of an impending emergency to where to put debris after a storm. While assessing the Town's evacuation and re-entry routes, St. Denis expressed concern over the state of some bridges leading to the Key. St. Denis has said that not only are reliable bridges crucial to an effective evacuation, but they are also important after a storm to allow for off-Key debris removal, recovery operations and re-access to the island by residents.

St. Denis recently shared his concerns with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) this month in a letter written to District One Secretary Stanley Cann, asking FDOT to review the condition of eight local bridges:

1. The small concrete bridges on John Ringling Boulevard just west of the new John Ringling Bridge in Sarasota

2. The small concrete bridges between St. Armands and Lido Key, just south of the New Pass Bridge on SR-789

3. New Pass Bridge
4. The Cortez Bridge
5. Anna Maria Bridge along Manatee Avenue
6. Perico Bayou Bridge along Manatee Avenue
7. Palma Sola Bay along Manatee Avenue
8. Longboat Pass

St. Denis concluded the letter by stating, "We recognize that evacuation must be the highest priority for the FDOT. However, the Town feels that strong consideration should also be given to return routes so that people and communities can resume the process of getting their affairs in order."

Earlier this week, St. Denis received a reply from Cann outlining what steps FDOT has taken to ensure the safety and reliability of local bridges. Cann said that the State's post-storm recovery plan includes inspections of state, county and

city bridges in the impacted area within 24 to 48 hours. The inspections are intended to determine the safety and usability of the bridges, and if any are deemed unsafe, they will immediately be closed.

Cann said that FDOT's hurricane response plan also calls for repair work to begin quickly on any damaged bridges. He said in most cases, repairs by qualified designers and contractors would begin within three days of the event. Cann acknowledged that recent bridge erosion studies have shown that two bridges in the Longboat Key area require erosion protection: the concrete bridges on John Ringling Boulevard just west of the new John Ringling Bridge in Sarasota and the small concrete bridges between St. Armands and Lido Key.

An FDOT spokesperson said that erosion protection projects are done to protect the foundations and columns of bridges and to prevent future erosions. There is no word on when the projects are scheduled to begin.

Speeding Boats Drive Complaints

Residents on the north end of Longboat Key are complaining and organizing a petition to present to Town commissioners regarding the fast-moving boaters and jet skiers that drive through the north end of Sister Keys to the southern end of the island group.

In a letter to commissioners, one resident states that along Sister Keys, "Cigarette boats fly by the narrow area between Longboat Key and the Sister Keys at over 80 miles per hour, their sound deafening. Small powerboats and Jet Skis hug the edges of the Sister Keys running through the grasslands as they speed along. There is not a pelican, tern, heron or seagull in sight. They have been driven from the islands by the excessive noise and wave action. The wave action makes fishing from a small boat impossible. No kayaks or canoes can be seen either — the waters are too dangerous for people to enjoy." The resident who wrote the letter thanked commissioners for their service and dedication, and hopes this matter can be resolved in the near future.