

# Preserving “Pure Florida”



## Findings, Recommendations and Vision Statement of the “Palm Island/Knight Island/Don Pedro Island Steering Committee”

*Chairperson*  
Carol Ann Wehle

*Vice-Chairperson*  
Valerie Guenther

*Secretary*  
Meryl Schaffer

*Members*

Pat Gordon	Gary Hudson
Anne Merry	Bob Pierce
Charles Visich	Gary Wilkins

*Charlotte County Liaison:* Kelly Shoemaker

Edited, written and prepared for the Steering Committee by JeanPaul Jenack.

Submitted to the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners  
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# **Preserving “Pure Florida” – Findings, Recommendations and Vision Statement of the “Palm Island/Knight Island/Don Pedro Island Steering Committee”**

## **1. Preamble**

**We, the residents and stakeholders of the Island, have come together to develop this set of guidelines to shape our future.** We are the islanders. We recognize, appreciate and fully understand that we own, live on and are guardians of a system of bridgeless barrier islands that are one of the last bastions of “Pure Florida” – with a pristine environment and idyllic lifestyle. As the islands develop and our population increases we run the risk of destroying many of these characteristics that we all believe are important. As stewards of the Island, we are committed to rising to this challenge by finding ways to accommodate island growth without forfeiting the very things that make the bridgeless barrier islands our rare and exceptional home.

## **2. Formation of the Steering Committee**

On February 25, 2003 the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners – hereinafter the “BCC” – determined “it would be in the best interests of the residents of Palm Island/Don Pedro Island to establish a steering committee to discuss matters of concern to the island residents.”

The BCC at that time established by resolution 2003-037 the “Palm Island/Don Pedro Island Steering Committee” – hereinafter the “Steering Committee.”

## **3. Purpose**

Specifically, the Steering Committee was formed with the following purposes:

- a. evaluating the recommendations of the public and county staff regarding matters affecting Palm Island/Don Pedro Island – hereinafter “the Island” – including such things as emergency medical services, fire suppression services, island infrastructure, and environmental issues.
- b. prioritizing the recommendations; and
- c. Presenting to the BCC its findings and recommendations on or before August 26, 2003.

Upon the request of the Steering Committee for additional time to gather information, on May 27, 2003, BCC resolution 2003-075 extended the Steering Committee’s deadline, allowing it to present its findings and recommendations on or before January 13, 2004.

#### **4. Membership**

Upon passage of resolution 2003-37 and resolution 2003-75 by the BCC, island homeowners’ associations and condominium associations were charged to designate seven persons to serve as “Organization Members.” Requirements included membership in one of the associations and ownership of property on the island.

Two additional members – who owned property on the island and were full-time residents – were to be selected and appointed by the BCC from resumes submitted to the BCC, as “Board Appointed Members.”

In March, 2003, the Steering Committee was formed, and consists of the following nine members:

<b>Member</b>	<b>Association or Residence</b>
<b>Chairperson</b> Carol Ann Wehle	The Condominium Association for the Beach Place, Inc.
<b>Vice-Chairperson</b> Valerie Guenther	President, Palm Island Estates Association, Inc.
<b>Members</b> *Dwayne Allen	“Board Appointed” [owner/resident, Palm Island Estates Unit 4] <b>Resigned</b>
Pat Gordon	“Board Appointed” [owner/resident, Pointe Bocilla]
Gary Hudson	Bocilla Beach to Bay Property Owner’s Association, Inc.
Anne Merry	Colony Don Pedro Condominium Owners’ Association
Bob Pierce	Palm Island Resort Homeowners Associations
Charles Visich	Knight Island Beachfront Property Owners Association
Gary Wilkins	Pointe Bocilla Property Owners Association
*Meryl Schaffer	“Board Appointed” [owner/resident, Palm Island Estates Unit 4] <b>Appointed to fill Vacancy</b>

\*Upon the resignation of “Board Appointed” Steering Committee Member Dwayne Allen, resumes were again solicited by the BCC, and Don Pedro Island resident Meryl Schaffer was selected and appointed to fill the “Board Appointed” member vacancy on July 22, 2003.

Additionally, county employee Kelly Shoemaker was designated by the BCC to serve as liaison between the Steering Committee and Charlotte County.

## **5. Geographical Area Addressed by the Steering Committee**

The geographical area to be specifically addressed and served by the Steering Committee as defined by the BCC encompasses Knight Island, Thornton Key, the Palm Island Resort and a portion of Don Pedro Island, and is comprised of the area on the bridgeless Barrier Islands bordered on the North by Stump Pass, and on the South by Don Pedro State Park. This area is commonly and simply referred to as “the Island” by homeowners, property owners and residents will be referred to as “the Island” for the purposes of this document.

## **6. Steering Committee Meetings/Activities**

In order to better understand issues and challenges facing the Island, Steering Committee members at regularly scheduled open-to-the-public monthly meetings have observed and participated in the following presentations:

April 17<sup>th</sup> presentation on Charlotte County’s Comprehensive plan with guest speakers Thomas A. Cookingham, Charlotte County Planning Services Manager and Elliott C. Kampert, Natural Resources Manager

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003 presentation on infrastructure by Tom O’Kane, Director of Charlotte County Public Works and Bernie Milosky, Regulatory Liaison of Charlotte County Utilities

June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003: presentation on the environment by Dr. Lisa Beever, Director of the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program and Tom Keith, Charlotte County Assistant Administrator and Andrew Kelly, Environmental Specialist from Charlotte County Community Development

July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003 Fire and EMS Presentation by Chief Didio, Charlotte County Fire/EMS and Wendy Dalzell, Co-Captain of Station 10

August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003 Presentation on ferry service to the island by Dean Beckstead (Owner) and Martin Cole (Manager) of Palm Island Transit, Inc., and presentation on crime and safety by Sheriff Bill Clement with Mark Caro, Captain of the Patrol Division, Jim Kenville, District 1 Commander, and, from the Marine Patrol Division, Lieutenant Andy Colba and Corporal Chris Pifer

The Committee has regularly taken direct input from Islanders in attendance on a variety of issues. Community participation has been both valuable and productive in helping to prioritize those issues of greatest importance to islanders. Committee members also reviewed data analysis of an island-wide poll, taken by the Palm Island Estates [PIE] Association, covering many island issues.

In order to best assimilate all information reviewed and present the Steering Committee’s findings and recommendations, it was determined that a “Vision Statement” be crafted, which could be used to advise and direct future development of the Island.

A “Visioning Workshop,” conducted on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003 by Kelly Shoemaker, Assistant to the County Administrator and Steering Committee Chair Carol Wehle, led to

the creation of a list of key topics and issues, prioritized by importance. Preliminary drafts of a vision statement were written by Kelly Shoemaker and Charles Visich, along with an outline of visioning notes prepared by Vice-Chair Valerie Guenther.

These drafts and notes were then given to island resident JeanPaul Jenack [Don Pedro Island, Palm Island Estates Unit 4], a professional writer, to consolidate, provide technical structure to and author the report presented herein.

## **7. Findings and Recommendations of the Steering Committee**

**FINDING #1: Islanders believe that preservation of the environment, our natural flora and fauna, is essential to preserving our quality of life.** Our island setting is natural, quiet and serene. We value our pure air and waters, and our open spaces with unencumbered views. The islands provide sanctuary for endangered and protected species of sea turtles and shorebirds, manatees, bobcats and gopher tortoises. The mangrove infrastructure within our network of clean waterways supports fish populations and seagrasses, and their “no wake” zones protect dolphins and manatees. We strongly encourage landscaping with the colorful, attractive native vegetation which supports our wildlife habitat, and believe that it is essential to preserve open green spaces for habitat so that the native fauna will continue to survive and flourish. Islanders pro-actively look for ways to preserve and protect the ecology of the islands through regulation and community awareness and education campaigns, and will continue to do so in the future.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT:** We, the Steering Committee, request that the County develop a program and provide assistance to the committee in finding ways to pursue land acquisition and in finding other strategies for the preservation of habitat and the creation of green spaces. The Steering Committee will take it upon ourselves to expand our present environmental programs and initiate awareness of the existing and future environmental programs in the community.

**FINDING #2: The island is mainly zoned single family residential, and Islanders most emphatically wish to keep it that way.** Islanders believe that single family residential zoning is integral to maintaining the current quality of life on our island. It is the goal of the community to remain a single family, low density area. This objective is in harmony with the original intention of Charlotte County’s Comprehensive Plan with respect to the bridgeless barrier islands. We believe that height restrictions on the islands both contribute to the islands’ visual aesthetic and serve to inhibit density. Islanders do not want any further commercial development or commercial activity beyond those that currently (2003) exist on our island. We believe that density is a key Island issue, and that any additional commercial development will inevitably lead to an increase in density. We do recognize and appreciate the commercial enterprises already in existence and a part of our island community in the limited areas zoned for tourism. We need to foster and develop better communication between those enterprises and the single family residential neighborhoods, so that the needs of both may be met and so we may work together in a unified manner to preserve the essential nature of our island. We require that Island zoning reflect all of the above.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON ZONING AND DENSITY:** We, the Steering Committee, request that the County Commission move forward with having the zoning on our islands compatible

with the Comprehensive Plan, which is to have the appropriate zoning category that reflects one residential dwelling unit per platted lot, and this re-zoning needs to occur *prior to* the County considering the issue of central sewer.

**FINDING #3: Islanders have no interest in and do not want a bridge from the mainland to our island – not now, not ever.** Every property owner and homeowner on our island purchased their property with the full understanding that they were doing so on a bridgeless barrier island with boat-only access. Islanders appreciate and have deliberately made the choice to own property and live in just such an area with limited access from the mainland. We appreciate and value transportation to and from the mainland by privately owned boat or by ferry service, and believe that it is an integral part of the island’s uniqueness and charm. The seclusion of the islands discourages crime, which sustains the high quality of life here. Limited access has provided us with a safe, secure, quiet and beautiful environment to live in, raise our children or enjoy retirement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON ISLAND ACCESS:** We, the Island Steering Committee recommend that the County look to the Committee for a recommendation with respect to parking restrictions, not only to the property owners on Panama Boulevard. We want the County to recognize our need for parking and to preserve adequate parking on one side of the road.

**Finding #4: Islanders want the rustic, “Old Florida” atmosphere that appealed to them when they first came to the island.** Islanders have chosen to make a commitment to live on these islands which requires the sacrifice of mainland convenience in exchange for the individual privacy and the low-stress, quiet lifestyle that the islands afford them. We prefer and encourage the use of golf carts, not wanting to become an automobile dependent community. We choose to keep our unpaved roads because they promote golf cart usage over automobile usage, they slow traffic and are environmentally friendly, and they contribute to the rural feeling of our surroundings. We find the lack of street lights on the islands part of the unique aesthetic, and will prohibit any future sources of light pollution here. Lighting restrictions are essential for the protection of sea turtles during nesting season, and we enjoy being able to see the Milky Way from our yards. We also recognize that the economic, architectural and residential diversity of our islands is part of the island’s distinctive character. The future exclusivity attendant to this lifestyle will bring significant increases in island property values, along with a parallel increase in costs associated with living here. The future ramification of this includes both benefits in the protection of property values, as well as adversity. On many other barrier islands that have bridge access to the mainland, we have seen generations of island families forced out of their homes by escalating costs. We hope to learn from their history, and wish to prevent this from happening here.

**RECOMMENDATION ON LIFESTYLE AND INFRASTRUCTURE:** We as a committee are unanimously and unalterably opposed to the establishment of any central sewer system to the extent that it promotes, encourages or allows for increased density. We, the Steering Committee, require an in-depth public workshop before making formal recommendations on this issue. We request that the Board of County Commissioners defer any decisions with respect to water and central sewer until we have made our formal recommendations.

**Finding #5: Islanders value their beaches and waterways, and believe that they must be actively sustained.** As a boat-only access community, nothing plays a larger role in our lifestyle than our beautiful beaches and waterways. Our open, wide, unspoiled beaches have remained that way through diligent stewardship and low density, and islanders intend to keep them that way. Voluntary beach clean-ups, the island Turtle Patrol and other island-generated activities all contribute to the quality of our renourished beaches. The prohibition of vehicles, campfires and fireworks on the beach helps to preserve and protect them, both as shorebird and sea turtle habitat and recreational areas. We value Stump Pass and its access for boaters. The network of pristine canals that provides access to our homes also provides our recreation. Fishing, swimming, walking, shelling are among the passive water sports our beaches and canals afford us – all environmentally compatible and in tune with the Island.

**RECOMMENDATION ON BEACHES AND WATERWAYS:**

**Finding #6: Islanders recognize that the combination of individual privacy and a strong sense of community is a powerful one on the islands, and continuously pursue ways to reinforce both.** Our sense of community extends to our neighbors and to the natural environment in which we all live. Islanders have a great respect for individual privacy while at the same time demonstrating great generosity, combining to create the “island spirit”. We value the various community events that provide opportunities for islanders to enjoy themselves with their neighbors, and applaud the volunteer organizations that sponsor them. We support the Island Fire Brigade, our all-volunteer fire station, and are proud of the commitment and capabilities of our volunteers. We appreciate the contributions of the Sheriff’s Department, and the off-hours response of the ferry in emergencies. In the future, fire, emergency services and law enforcement need to be continually monitored and revisited to gradually accommodate increased need. These are valuable services to all, and are important to the safety of island property owners.

**RECOMMENDATION ON SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY:** We, the Steering Committee, require a comprehensive workshop on taxes and all of the implications of being a part of the urban services district before making a formal recommendation on this issue. We as a committee support the 165-hour training course and the direction that Fire & Rescue Team is taking. Our thanks to Chief Didio. We recommend that the Steering Committee work with Station 10, under Jay Julian, to deal with the issue of home addressing. Station 10 will develop a plan to for home addressing, and the Steering Committee will take responsibility for implementing the plan. Vegetation around the hydrants is a concern, so the Steering Committee will initiate an “adopt-a-hydrant” program so that property owners can keep the hydrants free of growth. The Steering Committee recommends that the Sheriff’s Dept. assist us in establishing a Neighborhood Watch program. We also recommend that the County work with the Steering Committee on the enforcement of existing regulations and that the County appoint one point of contact for the reporting of code or ordinance violations.

**GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE:**

- 1- That the Board of County Commissioners pass a resolution approving the “Findings, Recommendations and Vision Statement of the “Palm Island/Knight Island/Don Pedro Island Steering Committee”

- 2- That the Board of County Commissioners approve a one-year extension for the Steering Committee, through January of 2005, so that it may continue its directive and produce protocols or by-laws for the operation of the committee.
- 3- That the County provide in their budget adequate funds for a facilitator to assist the Steering Committee in developing a Community Plan
- 4- That the County appoint a representative to give the Steering Committee timely and accurate advance notice of any pertinent activities of the Board of County Commissioners, the County or any sub-agencies of the County, relative to the island.
- 5- That the Steering Committee obtain status as a “standing interested party” in all matters pertaining to the island, including, but not limited to, zoning and/or permitting requests.
- 6- That the Steering Committee forward all future meeting minutes to each of the County Commissioners with a short précis of the action items from the meetings.

**Items for future discussion:**

waterway maintenance,  
roads,  
short term rentals,  
levels of service,  
signage,  
beaches,  
communication

**Conclusion**

The Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners through their creation and support of the Palm Island/Knight Island/Don Pedro Island Steering Committee, has given islanders an important and effective tool for reviewing and making recommendations on issues of critical importance to the islands. By providing the Steering Committee with County presentations, information and assistance they have been fundamental in the creation of this document. We urge the Board of County Commissioners to give serious consideration to the recommendations made herein. It is the Steering Committee’s sincere hope that the cooperation forged between the County and islanders continue, and be encouraged to flourish to the benefit of all.

Looking towards the future, islanders need to take steps as a cooperative unit to take control of our own destiny, by working towards progressive autonomy in all things related to the Island. In this way, we may leave a legacy of natural beauty and quality of life that is “the island”, so that generations of future islanders may continue to enjoy the environment and lifestyle that we enjoy today.

APPROVED 12/13/03