



May 18, 2021

**TO: Honorable Commissioners Alan Maio, Chair; Christian Ziegler, Vice Chair;
Nancy Detert; Mike Moran; Ron Cutsinger**

RE: Siesta Key Coalition – Concerns regarding Proposed Hotel Developments on Siesta Key

Dear Board of County Commissioners,

In the interest of providing consistent information to all Commissioners, we respectfully request a meeting with each of you regarding proposed hotels on Siesta Key. We understand we cannot discuss matters of quasi-judicial decisions to be made by the BOCC.

Our broad areas of concern include:

- Impacts to Community Character and Quality of Life
 - Insufficient Community Input and Impact Studies
 - Inadequate Neighborhood Workshops
 - Inconsistencies of Staff Application Comments
1. In view of these concerns, we ask that Community be given a seat at the table to help shape the decisions regarding these hotels and changes to existing regulations. *The Community, as a whole, should be involved (as it was in 1999) before such significant modifications are made to our Overlay District, Comprehensive Plan language for barrier island protections, or UDC zoning.*
 2. In review of the applications, we ask that the County initiate its own study of the **cumulative** impact of **multiple hotels** and how precedents could set in motion undesired development by others to follow suit.

Please consider the following overview of Siesta Key stakeholder concerns.

We share them with each of you as our elected representatives and as stewards for resource protection for our barrier island communities. We ask for your help.

Impacts to Community Character and Quality of Life

These proposed changes will reshape the very characteristics which made Siesta Key and our beaches an invaluable asset for our county and especially, for all who live and work here. Our barrier island has

been an economic driver for vacation tourism without losing our ‘neighborhood feeling’ and **accessibility**, unique in all of Florida.

These requested changes to our Comprehensive Plan, UDC and Overlay District codes will impact the **entire** barrier island. The impacts reach far beyond the 750’ stipulated by the Workshop notification criteria. We are certain County Planning Staff will verify precedents set by decisions on these applications **will impact 30+ acres of commercial land on the Key and an unidentified amount of land countywide.**

You may be aware of increasing concerns voiced by residents and visitors on Siesta Key. The challenges noted include increased and significant bridge access delay in seasonal periods, on-island traffic congestion and beach crowding that was far worse than past years. There is growing tension at several public access points where multiple beach front landowners have taken steps to restrict trespassing landward of the high mean water line. We have learned many other Condo and Homeowner groups are considering the same course of action. Ninety percent of our beaches are privately owned. None of the proposed hotels own beach front property and only one is on the beach side of a primary road.

Insufficient Community Input and Impact Studies

In the late 1990s, leading up to the “Siesta Key Community Plan 1999 (Growth Management)”, Sarasota County Planning Services, the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners *proactively* sought input through systematic outreach meetings and workshops with the stakeholders of Siesta Key over a multi-year period. **ALL the residents were surveyed.** The foundational document, leading to the SKOD and County FLU policies, had a key theme: **development must be viewed as especially sensitive on the barrier islands and therefore “Density and Intensity should not exceed that of the existing zoning.”**

None of the Hotel Applicants is planning a development within the **existing codes that apply to our barrier island and the SKOD. How is a single voice more impactful than all the community it impacts?**

We ask you to consider that **a single developer with approximately an acre of land, is attempting to:**

- Reverse years of community input and planning and drastically modify our comprehensive plan and SKOD codes,
- Change county-wide zoning regulations,
- Set barrier island-wide precedents with material and multiple Special Exceptions,
- Receive expedited allocation of county staff review resources to achieve a goal which impacts everyone who resides or owns land on Siesta Key?

Inadequate Neighborhood Workshops

Three hotel developers have now held neighborhood workshops.

We have not had **professional and meaningful opportunity to** address these applications as a community. Plans, in all cases, were primarily conceptual.

No one could answer basic questions such as, locations for garbage pickup, whether balconies would be on the building, if there would be a bar or restaurant and if it would be open to the public, etc.

As an example, two condominium associations adjacent to the Calle Miramar Village site, felt they were not able to get their questions asked or answered and requested follow up meetings of the developer team. The requests were ignored, even after copying the lead planning staff that encouraged such interaction. The most important purpose of a neighborhood workshop is not just to explain your plan, but to listen to concerns, and attempt, if possible, to modify the plan to address or mitigate the issues. There has been no effort or desire to do so.

We are aware that Staff has requested more information and more consistency in the applications. To date, no comments from the public are included in the workshop materials. There has been no attempt to follow up on requests or questions by participants.

Inconsistencies of Staff Application Comments

Planning Development Services staff has made initial comments on three hotel applications. Significant inconsistencies and unexplained variations exist in the comments to each of the hotels. Comments that should apply to all three hotels are only made to one or two of the applicants. Setbacks required to be changed for one, but also applicable to another, are missing. The comments made to the Old Stickney Point applicant are substantially fewer than to other applicants, despite similar plan conditions. We believe review should be consistent across all applications.

Recommendations.

We have an existing barrier island “Community Plan”.

If changes are to be made to Siesta Key, they should be guided by the Community, not individual property owners. The process leading to the visionary 1999 Siesta Key Community Plan for Growth Management remains a “BEST PRACTICES” model for community development.

If COVID-19 considerations prevented venues for community input and meetings, perhaps the process can be paced NOW for community engagement, allowing comprehensive impact studies.

The cumulative impact of four (4) Hotels on Siesta Key should be studied.

A comprehensive, bridge to bridge traffic impact study (including pedestrian and bike) of our barrier island is critical and should include peak season, time of day, and weekend data. This study should be a cumulative analysis of all four proposed hotels. The locations of all four hotels are next to road segments that the DOT graded E and F.

Siesta Key Coalition, Inc.

Our grass-roots coalition came together in June 2020 in response to the growing concern of Siesta Key residential associations and stakeholder organizations to multiple proposed hotel development applications. We are all residents who love our barrier island home and volunteered to be involved on behalf of our neighbors. We are not ‘anti -development’ and support enhancing redevelopment that is supportive for our community and economic growth.

Siesta Key Coalition, Inc. has grown to 59 neighborhood and condominium Associations comprising over 5,300 households. The Siesta Key Association and the Siesta Key Condominium Council, with their combined 8,500 members, are also partners with officers on our Board and committees.

Request for Commissioner Meetings

Our leadership respectfully requests to meet with each of the Commissioners. We will abide by lawful conversation and exclude quasi-judicial matters. We wish to address broader legislative matters impacting smart growth management, hospitality and enhancing redevelopment.

We will be reaching out to your administrative staff to schedule these meetings at your convenience.

Thank you for your consideration and your public service.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Siesta Key Coalition, Inc.

Respectfully yours,

/signed/

Mark T. Spiegel

President

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CC: Jonathan Lewis, Sarasota County Administrator
Mathew Osterhoudt, Planning and Development Services

Siesta Key Coalition Board Members:

Catherine Luckner, President of Siesta Key Association of Sarasota, Inc,

Neal Schleifer, Director, Siesta Key Condominium Council

Rodney Linford, Director, Siesta Key Coalition, Inc.