



Celebrating 40 years of island conservation

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March 10, 2009

House Speaker Larry Cretul
Representative Gary Aubuchon
Representative Dean Cannon
Representative Paige Kreegel
Representative Ken Roberson
Representative Nick Thompson
Representative Trudi K. Williams
Senator Dave Aronberg
Senator Mike Bennett
Senator Garrett Richter

Re: PCB MLA 09-01 Dept of Community Affairs
SB 360

Honorable Senators & Representatives:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation and its members to express our strong opposition to the House Proposed Committee Bill (PCB) MLA 09-01 and Senate Bill 360. These bills, proposed as initiatives to stimulate the economy by streamlining government and cutting red tape to make it easier to do business in Florida are not economic stimulus but rather a blank check.

Under the guise of economic development these bills propose major cuts and exemptions to the agency that coordinates the comprehensive planning process to provide seamless linkages between Florida's 67 counties and provides independent review of the state's largest developments -those with the greatest impact on regional water resource availability, wildlife & habitat and transportation capacity, to name a few.

These bills would eliminate DRI review for dense urban areas, redefined as areas supporting 1000 people per square mile or 1.6 people per acre. This definition includes seven entire counties with populations over 1 million and **all of Lee County's private lands outside of the DRGR**. Opening up all of Lee County outside the DRGR would add massive demands on the local communities which would be precluded -by this legislation- from assessing local impact fees on new development. This simply shifts the burden and costs of growth to the existing taxpayers. This is not economic stimulus, this is more of the same lack of planning that allowed overbuilding in the first place.

The elimination of transportation concurrency is a serious concern for our area of the state where the backlog of road projects is an indication of how growth has not paid for itself and the traffic congestion has deteriorated conditions for current residents and turned others away from the area creating a greater impact on existing businesses struggling to survive.

Florida currently has over a five-year inventory of unoccupied homes, commercial strip centers and tens of thousands of residential units approved by local governments that are not yet constructed. The legacy of the boom of the past several years has been degraded local conditions and quality of life resulting from expansion of urban development into rural areas through sub-DRI projects, traffic congestion, inadequate schools, water shortages and diminished wetlands and wildlife habitat. In fact, existing state growth regulations did not slow the boom and had nothing to do with the current economic downturn. It is the simple principle of supply and demand that tanked our economy.

Bottom line, this bill will reduce or eliminate regulatory overview not only on large but even smaller developments (most of our developments are currently sub-DRI). Rolling back planning review, concurrency and environmental compatibility will not stimulate the economy with thousands of vacant homes and empty commercial units throughout our region. Instead it will shift the burden and cost to existing taxpayers and businesses to pay for current and future growth. We support the Department of Community Affairs and strongly urge you to oppose these bills.

Sincerely,



Rae Ann Wessel
Natural Resource Policy Director

Cc: Governor Crist