

OPINION

Opinion: Rivergrass Village violates protection plan

Janet Hoffman and Patricia Plummer Published 9:45 p.m. ET May 14, 2020

The League of Women Voters Collier County has followed the planning of new towns and villages in the Rural Land Stewardship Area (RLSA) for two decades. We support the program's goals to protect our natural resources and quality of life in Southwest Florida.

Thus, it has been extremely troubling to see Collier Enterprises claim in recent Naples Daily News articles (April 5 and April 8) that Rivergrass Village is consistent with the RLSA program and, furthermore, any challenge to the proposed village equates to an attack on the RLSA program.



Janet Hoffman (Photo: Submitted)

The League disagrees. Here's why:

» The County Planning Commission denied approval of Rivergrass by a vote of

4-1 finding it did not conform to the goals, objectives and policies of the RLSA program. Planning Commissioner Fryer stated, "Rivergrass Village promotes urban sprawl." Additionally, county staff gave Rivergrass a D-minus grade stating, "it is not consistent with the RLSA program goals."

» It is an RLSA requirement that Rivergrass "pay for itself" at build-out. Yet Collier Enterprises refused to provide access to its "locked fiscal neutrality" models. The cost to taxpayers for infrastructure such as roads, fire, schools, sewage and water treatment is unknown and will be a financial burden for 30 years or more. As Commissioner Taylor later stated on February 25, "this does the taxpayers a terrible disservice."



Patricia Plummer (Photo: Submitted)

» Rivergrass is not consistent with the RLSA program goals for a village – a walkable, bikeable development with interconnected streets leading to a village center. Instead, Rivergrass is split into “two-gated communities” by a soon-to-be six-lane highway down the center. In reality, the “village center” is a strip mall on a county highway. Residents living on the “wrong” side of the highway will be forced to cross multiple lanes to access amenities.

» Rivergrass fails to provide an adequate mix of types and prices of homes. Collier Enterprises claims that Rivergrass “answers a pressing need for moderately priced housing.” This is misleading. Ninety percent (90%) of Rivergrass homes are single family residences starting at \$394,000. According to the County Housing Operations and Grant Development Manager, “the sales value is 41% higher than the county’s median value.”

» Rivergrass will be located on 700 acres of primary panther habitat, which is contrary to the RLSA goal of moving development away from critical habitat and wetlands. Some suggest that the farmland where Rivergrass will be built is inferior and not essential habitat for panthers. However, the 2009 Florida Panther Review Team Report and the 2008 USFWS Florida Panther Recovery Plan include farm fields as essential to the panther survival.

» Collier Enterprises has made misleading statements regarding their commitment to preserving the environment and balancing growth by donating 5,243 acres of valuable, environmentally sensitive lands for future preservation. Their spokesperson explains, the donated land “is equal to the size of approximately six Central Parks in New York City.” In fact, the “donated” 5,243 acres will remain in commercial agriculture. This acreage also entitles developers to an expanded footprint with four additional villages the size of Rivergrass. The public would get 5,000 acres of development for 5,000 acres of agriculture. Not 1,000 acres of development for 5,000 acres of preservation, as implied.

Setting the Record straight, the League believes the Collier County Board of Commissioners erred when approving Rivergrass.

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