

## **Looking at an Opportunity** – published in the *Island Reporter and Island Sun*, Dec. 30, 2010

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When you use Google Earth (<http://earth.google.com>) to examine the satellite photos of the land on the north side of Periwinkle Way across from Donax Street on Sanibel, you find yourself looking down on a parcel of land carpeted with dark green trees and a bright green patch in the middle. If you look closely at the pattern of the vegetation, you can see hints of the ridge-and-swale system that forms the natural terrain of the island. The bright green patch in the middle is an open lawn abutting an old home.

This is the Bailey Homestead. The Sanibel Plan allows for the potential development of 36 houses on its 28 acres. The Plan, originally approved in 1976 soon after Sanibel incorporated as a city in late 1974, reduced the number of units that could be developed on the island from about 35,000 to approximately 9,000. Rare is the opportunity to reduce potential development even more. But that opportunity is here now, in the form of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation's plans to purchase the 28-acre homestead, restore the natural habitat, and retain the historic home that was built in 1896.

While most conservation land on Sanibel is wetland, the Bailey Homestead property is unique in that much of it – 15.22 acres – is upland habitat. This is the portion of the homestead on which farming had been done in the past. In the Sanibel Plan, this area is in the “Mid-Island Ridge” zone. One of the permitted uses in that zone is still, believe it or not, Agriculture, according to page 188 of the Plan.

The top of the list of permitted uses in this zone (as in most of the others on the island) is Conservation. Other allowed uses in the Mid-Island Ridge zone are Passive Recreation, Public Facilities, and Low-Intensity Residential, including single-family, duplex, and multi-family homes.

The SCCF plans for restoring and maintaining habitat, installing a butterfly house and an outpost of the native plant nursery, as well as a trail and a modest historical interpretive center in the 1896 home, all fit within the allowed uses of the property according to the Sanibel Plan. The bonus for Sanibel's environment is that the more intensive development of 36 residential units would not happen with SCCF ownership of the acreage.

### **Connecting the Environmental Dots**

Another environmental benefit in the SCCF plans for the property is that they make permanent a crucial middle link in a wildlife corridor that extends from Causeway Boulevard to Dixie Beach Boulevard and beyond. This is a “greenbelt” that snakes through the city's Pond-Apple Park, behind Matzaluna Restaurant and Ellington's Jazz Club, through more city property and more SCCF property. Beyond Dixie Beach Boulevard, this corridor leads right into wetland that is part of the J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

An aspect of preserving Sanibel's unique environment is preserving its few historic properties. The Sanibel Register of Historic Landmarks is a short list – including only ten houses. This home is one of them. Several of the historic landmark homes, however, have been moved from their original locations. Usually, Sanibel does not have the opportunity to preserve a historic home in its historic location. But at last, here is an opportunity to do just that.

The SCCF speaks of plans to apply for National Register of Historic Places designation for the Bailey home. This designation would potentially make some grant funding available for restoring the building. Part of the process of evaluating a property to determine if it is eligible for the National Register is examining what are called the “Seven Aspects of Integrity.”

The very first of these seven criteria is “Location.” According to the National Park Service, which administers the National Register of Historic Places, “The relationship between the property and its location is often important to understanding why the property was created or why something happened. The actual location of a historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons. Except in rare cases, the relationship between a property and its historic associations is destroyed if the property is moved.”

So, if Sanibel wishes to have the benefits of National Register listing for the Bailey home, it should remain in its current location. The SCCF plans provide for just that, and should, in our judgment, be welcomed and supported by the entire community.

*Committee of the Islands welcomes your input on this subject. Please email your comments to [coti@coti.org](mailto:coti@coti.org). Commentaries on other island issues are available on our website at [www.coti.org](http://www.coti.org).*