

## **COMMITTEE OF THE ISLANDS SHARED USE PATHS ON SANIBEL**

Last November COTI developed a position paper for the Shared Use Path Plan Update and Open House. A copy of that position paper is attached. We believe that enough has happened during the six months since then to warrant a current statement.

### **INTERVENING DEVELOPMENTS**

December Referendum. In December the Sanibel voters approved a referendum to relocate part of Periwinkle Way. The vote was necessary to support Council's plan to increase the separation between the road and the shared use path, for safety reasons. This move was part of \$1.5 million package of safety improvements Council had passed last summer. While the referendum was not explicitly on the package, we think it is fair to interpret the outcome as voter endorsement of the Council's emphasis on safety.

March Referendum. The March ballot included a referendum question on adding the Sanibel Vision Statement to the City Charter. The question passed by a 2 -1 margin. It is clear that Sanibel voters want the Council to shape its actions in accordance with the Statement and its hierarchy of values.

Consultant's Report. The draft shared use path consultant's report appeared in April. Though the report was not accepted by Council, it offers valuable additional input, particularly from the survey the report describes. We identify some highlights in the next section.

Drumbeat of Bad Fiscal News. One normally expects good news and bad news to be interspersed, with the optimist looking for a predominance of the former. Unfortunately for Sanibel, recent months have seen a succession of bad news for the City budget. We have lost our share of the toll revenues. Weigh station revenues are down and may disappear. Our share of the county gas tax will decrease on the next recalculation, owing to our declining share of total population. Costs from red drift algae are clearly going to blow by the budget allowances. Property values have ended their annual climb. Ratables may actually decline, depending on how the real estate market responds to our water quality problems. The state legislature may restrict our ability to raise revenues from property taxes. While this move may not affect the budget this coming year, we can't ignore the longer term implications. SUP improvements as well as other discretionary programs will be affected.

## **SPRINKLE REPORT**

Although its organization masks this fact, the Sprinkle Report taken as a whole can be read as an endorsement of the City's management of the shared use paths.

"Per capita and per area, the City of Sanibel has one of the most extensive shared use path networks in Florida and even in the country." Of 442 path users surveyed for the report, nearly 150 volunteered complimentary comments. The only other responses with this level of frequency concerned maintenance and path width issues. In looking at safety issues, the consultant identified, "only one area of Sanibel that has consistently been a crash problem over the last three years." It is the area for which Council has already approved and funded relocation of Periwinkle Way.

In short, at least from the survey data, there are no major problems with Sanibel's shared use path network and there is a lot that is good about it.

## **THE SANIBEL VISION**

The consultants included the Sanibel Plan in their document review. It seems clear that they read and heeded the Vision Statement, ending their section on the Plan with, "...path-related planning should always be done keeping in mind that the goal is not to induce additional visitors."

Given the action of the City's voters in March we need to examine the shared use paths through the lens of the Vision Statement. The Statement directs decision-makers to resist pressures to accommodate visitor attractions that compromise the qualities of sanctuary and community. We believe that the purpose of the paths is to enhance the Sanibel experience for residents and visitors. It is not to bring to the island people who would not otherwise be here. The current path network provides an infrastructure for the community; we believe that significant elaboration of the network, particularly as to path width, is likely to cross the line into the kind of visitor attraction the voters were trying to prevent.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

While we see no major problems with the path system, we continue to believe that there is room for improvement. That view matches our position in November, but with one important difference: we are now much more concerned about Sanibel's budget picture. We will make recommendations for possible improvements, but they come with the caveat that funding may not be available.

Maintenance. This area received a lot of survey comments. The principal concerns appeared to be pathway surface and vegetation control. We suggest that this is a function for which we need better metrics. What is adequate maintenance? How do we know when vegetation is under adequate control? Perhaps the consultants can give us guidance on best practices for a maintenance program, including metrics.

Maintenance is a function that COTI believes should be funded at a level that preserves our path network.

Path Width. Path width was the other area of major comment by the survey participants. It is impossible to tell from the report whether their concern was principally segments that are currently narrower than eight feet, or the eight foot sections. We continue to believe that eight feet should be the minimum goal for path width. We were gratified to see that the consultants believe that an eight-foot width is adequate for all sections of the system. We do not share the view that we should fund a more “desirable” ten-foot width, except where traffic levels clearly demand that width. Adequate is what we can afford.

Path Extensions. We note with interest that the report does not make any unqualified recommendations for extension of the paved paths. It recommends “for consideration” six possible extensions from a prioritized list. The priorities are essentially based on the absence of negatives. There is no affirmative case made for any extensions. COTI believes that reserves should be established on an ongoing basis to fund path extensions as Council determines they are warranted.

Signage. The report contains substantial recommendations on signage. As we said in our November presentation, we believe that signage needs to be improved. With the exception of suggesting that the words “bike path” are not appropriate, we have no specific recommendations.

Segways. In the January discussions at Council on Segways, COTI took the position that these devices have a bad accident record on Sanibel, and should be barred for safety reasons. Our view didn’t prevail, but it hasn’t changed. The record of the meetings at that time describes four Segway accidents during the trial period, two of them involving serious bodily injury. It appears that the consultants’ recommendation relied on national data, without a review of the Sanibel record. We regret that we still have the tours, but at least the tours have guides who can warn pedestrians of the possibility of approaching danger. There would be no such assurance for individual riders. Motorized vehicles do not belong on the shared use paths. We believe that the current ordinance should be retained.

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Sanibel's shared use pathways are an important asset of the community. We need to maintain them for the future. COTI appreciates the opportunity to participate in the current review of the path network.

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