

**THE COMMITTEE OF THE ISLANDS
COTI**

Statement prepared for the
Shared Use Path Plan
Update & Open House
City of Sanibel
November 16, 2006

The Committee of the Islands welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the master planning process for Sanibel's shared use path system. The path system is an important part of our infrastructure and deserves thoughtful analysis.

I. COTI

The Committee for the Islands was formed in 1975 to promote a continuity of good local government. In the succeeding thirty years it has remained active in Sanibel governance. Its stated purpose is to develop and promote policies and positions designed to maintain and enhance the quality of life on the islands and to preserve the islands' unique and natural characteristics. In pursuit of that purpose it recommends to the City of Sanibel relevant corporate positions and policies.

COTI is a registered Political Action Committee. Its current membership exceeds 500 individuals.

II. SANIBEL

Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary, one in which a diverse population lives in harmony with the island's wildlife and natural habitat.

Placard behind the dais,
Sanibel City Council chambers.

Sanibel is a barrier island comprising a wide variety of natural and altered environments. The community of Sanibel strives to sustain ecological balance and preserve and restore natural settings for residents, visitors and wildlife. The City of Sanibel was established in 1974 in response to concerns that overdevelopment threatened that balance. In the words of the Florida statute creating the city, the residents sought, "THE RIGHTS OF SELF-DETERMINATION, TO THE FULLEST EXTENT ALLOWED BY LAW, IN THE PLANNING AND ORDERLY DEVELOPMENT OF AN ISLAND COMMUNITY KNOWN FAR AND WIDE FOR ITS UNIQUE ATMOSPHERE AND UNUSUAL NATURAL ENVIRONMENT."

Sanibel is indeed unique. The balancing of interests that its character demands defies textbook solutions. Structures that work elsewhere are frequently inappropriate here. We urge the consultants to bring fresh thinking to the circumstances of this island.

III. THE SANIBEL VISION

Sanibel has developed a Vision Statement as a confirmation of the community's shared values and goals, to guide future decisions. We commend the full statement to the consultants' attention, but summarize some relevant elements here.

The statement is in three parts. The first part concerns Sanctuary, stating that, "Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary." The second part covers Community, including the words, "Sanibel is and shall remain a small town community whose members choose to live in harmony with one another and with nature."

The third and briefest part of the statement discusses Attraction, and justifies quotation in its entirety:

"The Sanibel community recognizes that its attractiveness to visitors is due to the island's quality as a sanctuary and community. The City of Sanibel welcomes visitors who are drawn by, and respectful of, these qualities; it will resist pressures to accommodate visitor attractions and activities that compromise these qualities."

The final section of the statement establishes that the vision is a hierarchy of values. The dominant principle is the island's sanctuary quality. Development of a community is subordinate to sanctuary. Attraction will be permitted only to the extent that it retains the desired qualities of sanctuary and community.

IV. SHARED USE PATHS

COTI believes that the purpose of shared use paths is to enhance the Sanibel experience for residents and visitors. The paths are part of the infrastructure of the community. They are not and should not become an attraction that brings to Sanibel people who would not otherwise come. They are subordinate to the sanctuary and community values of the island.

Consideration of the shared use paths requires finding a balance among potentially conflicting demands. These demands include safety, cost, environmental and community concerns, and recreation. It is important that the needs of all potential users receive weight. These needs vary. The principle safety issue for bicyclists is vehicular traffic. For pedestrians, bicyclists and roller-bladers can be as much of a hazard as cars. Many of the people who walk on the paths have reached the age where collision with any fast moving object is a serious concern.

It is our understanding that path width impacts the speed at which users travel. The wider the paths, the higher the speeds. COTI's position is that the current maximum path width of eight feet is appropriate, with occasional exceptions for ten-foot widths in areas of particularly heavy traffic.

In looking at costs, maintenance is an important factor. It is not enough to think just about construction costs. Sanibel's experience is that it costs about \$15,000 a year to maintain a mile of shared use path. This reality should be part of any expense analysis.

The 2003 Shared Use Path Master Plan listed 31 proposals for path extensions. Many of these suggestions are likely to reappear in the current input. The 2003 analysis examined each proposal with respect to six selection criteria; 17 failed to satisfy at least two of them. We believe that it is appropriate to consider path extensions that meet the balance standard described earlier and are consistent with the Sanibel Vision. We believe that no expansions into residential neighborhoods or into roads that have no outlet satisfy this test.

COTI believes that the shared use paths need upgrading. Sections narrower than eight feet should be widened to that level. The signage should be brought up to date. There are portions of the system in dire need of repair; one example is the stretch paralleling Rabbit Road between Gulf Drive and San-Cap Road. We favor improvements of this kind, but not wholesale modifications that could turn the system into a regional attraction.