

The Vision Works



by Barbara Joy Cooley, president, Committee of the Islands

On February 20, the New York Times reported the fiery death of an ancient bald cypress tree called the Senator, near Orlando. The very existence of this magnificent tree seemed to be an anomaly to the reporter, who described Florida as “a state known for its sprawl and its zeal for pouring concrete.”

The fact that Sanibel has fought against the prevalent sprawl and pouring of concrete is what now sets it apart from other travel destinations – and it is why the travel expert Arthur Frommer selected it as the number one place to go in the world.

The introduction to our island’s section of www.frommers.com

states that Sanibel “tolerates none of the neon, amusement parks or high-rise condominiums cluttering most Florida beaches.”

Just who is it that tolerates none of that? The residents of Sanibel, that’s who.

That’s who fought to incorporate the city in 1974, to prevent zealous overdevelopment – sprawl and pouring of concrete – from taking over this sanctuary island. What emerged from that fight was the Sanibel Plan, the document that serves as a blueprint for the way to keep Sanibel special – and the Sanibel Vision Statement, which articulates the community values underlying that document. And Sanibel’s residents have held their ground every time some threat arises to the Sanibel Plan – insisting that the vision it embodies be upheld.

When I hear enthusiastic visitors describing why they like Sanibel so much, I occasionally say, “You know, it takes work to keep it that way.” They always acknowledge the truth of that. Struggles against overdevelopment occur in many places; this isn’t news to them. But they know that the story of Sanibel gives hope to other places that want to remain special, natural, sanctuaries for wildlife.

It isn’t always a losing battle. It can happen. It is doable. We’ve done it. Now let’s keep it that way by remaining vigilant and upholding the Sanibel Plan and Vision.

The Committee of the Islands was founded in 1975 by those inspired individuals who helped incorporate Sanibel as an independent, self-governing city. The Committee welcomes your input on this subject. Email your comments to coti@coti.org. You can find commentaries on other island issues on our web site at coti.org. You can also visit Committee of the Islands on Facebook.*

On The Wall At City Hall

“Sanibel is and shall remain a barrier island sanctuary, on which a diverse population lives in harmony with the island’s wildlife and natural habitats.... Sanibel is and shall remain a small town community whose members choose to live in harmony with one another and with nature; creating a human settlement distinguished by its diversity, beauty, uniqueness, character and stewardship.”

These sentences, taken from the Sanibel Vision Statement, are displayed in large type directly behind the dais in City Hall where City Council holds its meetings. They are key phrases meant to remind all those attending -- the Council, city staff, and the audience -- what community values we have agreed upon against which to measure the issues and actions deliberated at these meetings. You can read the full Vision Statement on the Committee of the Islands website at www.coti.org.