

Sarasota County Commission unanimously OKs Lakewood Ranch developer's plan for new community



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Sarasota Herald-Tribune



The developer of Lakewood Ranch got clearance Tuesday to build a new community of up to 5,000 homes on over 4,000 acres of undeveloped land in eastern Sarasota County.

The development, dubbed Lakewood Ranch Southeast, will be east of Interstate 75, between Fruitville Road and the Sarasota-Manatee County line.

Sarasota County commissioners approved two ordinances Tuesday that are necessary for Lakewood Ranch's plan, despite strong opposition from residents of east county.

Previous coverage: [Sarasota County commissioners approve Lakewood Ranch development plan in rural east county](#)

In other news: [As Manatee County ends red-light camera program, drivers warned to obey the law](#)

“Please don’t take away what I invested as a health care professional in this county to live a rural lifestyle,” said Cindy Martin, who lives next to the Lakewood Ranch property. “Protect me. Protect us on Fruitville Road.”

Lakewood Ranch’s plan

Two decades ago, the County Commission adopted the Sarasota 2050 Plan, which allowed for communities to be master planned, but also set aside green space for protection and conservation.

The plan allows for a few different forms of development, such as “villages” and “hamlets.” “Villages” are more urban and allow for a greater density of housing units than “hamlets,” which are farther east.

Lakewood Ranch proposed creating a new designation called “Village Transition Zone,” which will only apply to the 4,120-acre property in east county. The designation is meant to provide a transition between the “village” and “hamlet” designations. It will allow more homes to be built on the property than were previously permitted.

The county commissioners unanimously approved a growth plan amendment that creates this new designation and makes changes to maps that are part of the 2050 Plan.

They also approved the Lakewood Ranch East Southeast “Development of Critical Concern” (DOCC). A DOCC is a “large-scale development that is presumed to create significant impacts on the environmental systems, drainage systems, public facilities, and the local economy,” according to [a county memo](#).

Katie LaBarr, a planner with Stantec Inc., who was representing Lakewood Ranch, said that as the county’s population and housing demand grows, Lakewood Ranch Southeast will “provide an opportunity for moderate density development as an alternative to large-lot urban sprawl.”

“This will minimize infrastructure costs, traffic congestion and environmental degradation,” she argued.

LaBarr said the development will be home to a variety of housing types, including single-family homes, villas and townhomes.

Numerous residents of east county expressed concerns about the plan, including Martin. She said she moved to east county because she wants to “live in the country.”

“My girls were raised there with cows, horses,” she said. “There’s lots of animals.”



Feedback from the state

The commissioners had voted in late August to send the comprehensive plan amendment to the state for review and comment. None of the agencies that reviewed the amendment had any objections, but some of them provided the county with “technical assistance” comments.

One example, in [a letter from the Department of Economic Opportunity](#), related to urban sprawl.

“Given the character, size and location of the development potential on the proposed site, the amendment should be revised to be supported with additional data and analysis to demonstrate that it will not contribute to urban sprawl,” said James D. Stansbury, chief of the DEO’s Bureau of Community Planning and Growth.

Lakewood Ranch's attorney [wrote a letter](#) in response to the state agencies' comments. In the letter, he remarks that the county staff's report and Lakewood Ranch's application include "significant data and analysis demonstrating that the project will not contribute to urban sprawl."

Sarasota County commissioners discuss plan

Commissioner Ron Cutsinger disagreed with the assertion by some citizens that the Lakewood Ranch plan is "urban sprawl."

"For me, urban sprawl would be a little patchwork of small, little developments that really have no master planning associated with them at all," he said.

Cutsinger also noted that the developer of Lakewood Ranch is going to "enhance and maintain" environmental areas "in a consistent way."

Commissioner Nancy Detert said that when the 2050 Plan was passed, "no one envisioned the growth that we would experience nor the critical need for housing."

"Which has become even more critical due to the hurricane, because I think we're going to get a lot of people from Fort Myers that aren't going to want to live through two to three years of building down there," she said. "They're going to skip over Charlotte, which is damaged, and come right to Sarasota, where we already have a housing shortage."

The next step for Lakewood Ranch is to request various areas of the property to be rezoned.

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