

“Keeping Longboat Longboat”: A Plan for managing change over the next twenty years

Section 1: The Vision

Five factors make Longboat Key a special place. First are its natural physical attributes such as its beaches, warm weather, barrier island status with limited access, and a location near to but separated from more urban areas. Second is its built environment. The Town has a low- to mid-rise built environment that is protected by the Town Charter and regulations that guard it from becoming a “condo canyon” such as Fort Lauderdale, Clearwater Beach, and many others. Third, basic amenities for residents are generally available on the Key, minimizing the need to go off the island for basic retail, dining, and hospitality services. Fourth, the island is more than simply a retirement community in the classic Florida model. The Town is not a business center, nor is it a suburb whose primary function is housing for the workforce. It is a recreational community that provides for the active lifestyles of full-time and part-time residents, some fully or partially retired, and some still fully active in the workplace. The fifth factor is the people: the residents and visitors to Longboat Key. It is the people who create a sense of community, whose values emphasize the calm, comfortable lifestyle that characterizes the Town, and whose desire for quality will maintain the community into the future.¹

Within the context of a distinctive place that is undergoing change, the shared vision for the future is to preserve, protect, reinvigorate, and retain the special nature of Longboat. Some of the current changes, which impact the future, are happening now. The community identified the following examples during the development of this Vision Plan:

- The affordability of property ownership on Longboat Key has been impacted by dramatically higher property taxes and insurance costs.
- The Town’s major resorts are over 20-years old and are showing their age. Their management groups are examining what they want to be over the next 20 years.
- The “off season” retail base has significantly been reduced, increasing the disparity from the “peak season” population, making it more difficult to make a 12-month retail operation successful.
- The peak season has shortened, limiting the significant retail base to four months.
- The number of units devoted exclusively to tourism has decreased as resort operators have found the economics of operating in a highly seasonal environment difficult to sustain, particularly with conversion to residential development options so attractive.
- Country Club Shores is changing from a neighborhood of Florida-style ranch homes to an area with an increasing number of “McMansions”.

¹ Appendix provides a discussion of the Town’s history and background, as well as the visioning process and resultant findings that formed the basis of this 20-year Vision Plan.

- The Town's successful family businesses are finding that the next generation has no plans to continue in the family business. This contributes to the desire to sell out for other uses.
- The local arts center is no longer an independent institution but is now part of the Ringling School.

What is the potential future of Longboat Key if nothing is done? If no action is taken in response to these changes, Longboat Key will be a much less convenient island on which to live. All basic necessities, from gasoline to groceries to medical needs to entertainment, will only be found off the Island. Many would say there is nothing wrong with becoming a bedroom community. However, many who have lived on Longboat Key when there were significantly more diverse land uses realize fewer services and reduced conveniences will equal less appeal for property buyers, and therefore, lower property values. Visitors will still be amazed at the beauty of the island, but will also come to the conclusion that there is absolutely nothing to do here. They will opt to purchase homes where they can have both - beauty and function.

In the end, people do not care about local obligation bonds, new technological novelties for the fire and police departments, or widening the bicycle lane on Gulf of Mexico Drive. The general affordability of living on and visiting Longboat Key is an important issue. Residents and visitors to the Key also care about the convenience of basic services, parks and recreation, and cultural programs. It is clean air, and water, pristine beaches, good retail services and restaurants, and high property values that are important. Reviewing development, redevelopment, planning, and zoning at least every 20 years is essential. That is what "Keeping Longboat Longboat" is all about: managing change to achieve the desired vision.

The challenge and opportunity is to manage change in ways that reinvigorate, retain or enhance the quality, the distinctiveness, the culture, and the lifestyle that make Longboat Key so special. The purpose of the Vision Plan is to anticipate longer-term trends and issues, while dealing with short-term factors that will impact the Key and propose strategies that will ensure Longboat remains a high quality residential community.

In brief, the vision of this plan is designed to ensure that Longboat Key 20 years from now will:

- remain a community of quality services, buildings, and landscaping;
- exist within a natural environment even healthier than it is today;
- retain those features that make it such a special place today including the ability to dine, recreate and engage in basic retail shopping on the Key;
- restore and sustain the historical balance of tourism;
- reinvigorate diminished commercial areas; and,
- have added features or amenities that enrich the lifestyles of residents who continue to value the distinctive life-style of Longboat.

Section 2: Strengths and Weaknesses That Could Impact the Town's Desired Future

Fortunately, Longboat Key has recently had a reasonable balance of residential, tourism, and commercial land uses such that we are not trying to reinvent the wheel or establish totally new segments, but have the advantage of trying to rebalance or reinvigorate the community. In order to determine what our vision for the future should be, it is helpful to assess the strengths we have to work with and build on and the weaknesses we need to consider and address. This section lists those strengths and weaknesses that will impact the Town as it seeks to institute the vision. The ability of the Town to change the influence of these factors varies; and, their significance will vary during the next 20 years.

STRENGTHS:

- Conveniences that do not require one to drive off the island for most basic services
- The green and colorful natural beauty of the land and water
- Property values have steadily increased/appreciated
- The continued maintenance of the quality of the public services and safety
- Residents have facilities on the Key where their friends and family members can stay while visiting them
- Tourism acts as a "trial" mechanism. Visitors to the Key get to "try on" the Longboat Key lifestyle and decide if it is a lifestyle they enjoy. Some visitors will become residents/property owners because they like the lifestyle, share the community values, and want to be part of the community. Continuing to attract this type of new resident is the key to maintaining the distinctiveness of Longboat Key
- Tourism provides buyers for properties and helps keep property values high
- Tourists and visitors help support the retail businesses of the Key. Studies have shown that the Key has more retail than its year-round resident population can support. Tourists and visitors help make that surplus retail viable, thereby making life more convenient for residents
- Tourism financially benefits the community in the way of sales and bed taxes
- The Key is likely well positioned for a segment of the baby boom retirees
- Economic growth in the region could lead to more executives choosing housing on the Key, leading to a potential small demographic shift
- Continued population growth should ensure property values remain high and that the Key remains a preferred residential site
- As Sarasota continues to develop, the urban amenities available to residents of the Key will remain and likely improve
- With respect to restaurants, the growth of the region will expand the range of choices. This could have a negative impact on restaurants on the Key, but it may be balanced by a larger market

WEAKNESSES:

- The town is a barrier island vulnerable to environmental change and damage, as well as red tide impacts
- The combination of rising property taxes and rising insurance costs has made property ownership, particularly second home ownership, less attractive on the Key
- Some commercial facilities look either dated or poorly maintained, in addition to the fact that many commercial units are vacant
- Due to the Town's historic efforts to limit density, current Town regulations make it difficult for a tourism facility to develop or redevelop. Existing facilities would actually lose rooms if they redeveloped. As an example, under current zoning, an existing 150-room hotel on 10 acres could only rebuild 60 units
- Since the year 2000, the Town has lost approximately 250 tourism units (approximately 16% of the total stock of roughly 1,600 units), most of which were due to condominium conversions
- Tourism patterns are always changing requiring the tourism industry to continuously adapt to changing patterns. High-end tourist facilities are also highly competitive on a quality and amenity basis, regularly undergoing extensive renovations to remain attractive and competitive in the marketplace. This is particularly true for the market segment that Longboat would want to attract
- The Key's infrastructure is aging
- Pressures on water supply will continue to increase. The Town has to purchase water from Manatee County for its potable and a portion of irrigation supply needs
- The limited access to the Key, via SR 789/Gulf of Mexico Drive (GMD), a two-lane highway, is the primary cause of traffic congestion during the peak months of the year. Traffic on and off the Key will remain challenging and there will be continued use of Gulf of Mexico Drive as a throughway between Sarasota and Manatee Counties
- The major impact of Longboat Key cost of living changes will be in higher wage costs to attract workers to the Key, potential labor shortages if housing costs continue to escalate and the need for better public transit so that workers can access the Key
- Need for increased health care services

Section 3: Goals, Strategies, and Action Steps

This section of the plan details the goals, strategies, and action steps that will contribute to achievement of the vision as a preferred residential community offering a very high quality of life for its residents. The goals of the plan will provide direction for the coming 20 years while the strategies and action steps, including the initiation/timing and responsibility, will vary depending upon circumstances over the 20 years.

Goal: Help prevent Longboat Key from becoming unaffordable to current residents

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|--|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Develop a coordinated message to be used by all Longboat Key officials and staff regarding the impact on Longboat Key of tax practices of the School Boards, County Commissions, and other public bodies | October 2007 | Town Commission | Finance Department - Policy Statement |
| Develop a targeted education and outreach strategy to external taxing bodies to (1) reduce the tax burden they are placing on the Key and/or (2) provide more benefits to the Key | September 2008 | Town Commission | Finance Department - Develop Strategy Paper |
| Develop and participate in sustained policy efforts at state and federal levels to develop property and disaster insurance alternatives for coastal communities that help those communities remain economically viable. | September 2008 | Town Commission | Appoint liaison for Town Commission |
| Develop a Town function or position, which would seek to secure more external funding to the Town to support services or infrastructure | March 2008 | Town Commission | Create a funding development position or committee (with existing staff or voluntary citizen(s)) |

Goal: Continue to maintain the high level of public services and safety on the Key

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|---|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Maintain accredited and trained staff | on-going | Town Commission | Maintain adequate budget |
| Maintain appropriate facilities | on-going | Town Commission | Maintain adequate budget |
| Keep public safety plans updated | on-going | Town Commission | Annual review |
| Increase public education and information on public safety, particularly disaster issues | May 2008 | Town Commission | Increase public education – CRS Manager |
| Maintain the high level of readiness for disaster response | on-going | Town Commission | Maintain training and education |
| Maintain competitive salary and benefit package for town employees | on-going | Town Commission | Maintain adequate budget |
| Continue adherence to best management practices (BMPs) | on-going | Town Commission | Develop yearly review of BMPs - Public Works Department |
| Conduct cost/benefit studies on any major capital item | January 2008 | Town Commission | Develop reporting form - Finance Department |
| Encourage regional solutions | on-going | Town Commission | Maintain liaisons to regional groups |
| Continue planning and funding for adequate capital maintenance | on-going | Town Commission | Maintain adequate budget |

Goal: Encourage improvement, redevelopment, and development of commercial

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|---|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Encourage quality redevelopment consistent with vision | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue collaborative efforts with interested major developments of the Key to formulate a master redevelopment plan for their parcels | on-going | Town Manager/ Town Commission | Private development proposals |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore new commercial/tourism land use applications that bring benefits, including tourism as well as enhancing basic retail amenities for residents | 2009 | Planning and Zoning Board | Consultant review and report of selective sites |
| Support commercial revitalization and rebuilding that is compatible with the Key. Compatibility, for example, includes building heights, viewscales and building mass and intensity | September 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Review revitalization ordinance |
| Seek an adjustment of the property appraisal valuation method to use "present use" instead of "highest and best use" | 2008 | Town Commission | Seek legislative help with state amendment |
| Review building height requirements including impact of FEMA standards | March 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff Study |

Goal: Encourage improvement, redevelopment, and development of tourism

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|--|-------------------|--|---|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Amend the comprehensive plan to promote the goal of encouraging tourism with densities found on the island in the year 2000 | December 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff Review |
| Create mechanisms that allow(s) the recapture of the number of tourism units present in the year 2000 | 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Ordinance(s) amending the Zoning Code |
| Hold a charter vote on establishing a mechanism for replacing tourism units lost since the year 2000 and capped at the year 2000 level that could be made available only after public hearings and Commission approval | Fall 2007 | Planning and Zoning Board Town Commission | Town Clerk Office - Referendum Question (if approved: Amend Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code) |
| Seek an adjustment of the property appraisal valuation method to use "present use" instead of "highest and best use" | 2008 | Town Commission | Seek legislative help with state amendment |
| Review current town policies to determine what other actions could be taken to encourage the continued or future use of existing tourism facilities as tourism facilities | 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff Review |
| Enhance marketing efforts designed to attract new visitors via a public-private partnership between the Town, Chamber and Tourist Development Councils | 2008 | Chamber of Commerce | Chamber Report |
| Review building height requirements including impact of FEMA standards | March 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff Study |
| Obtain annual marketing report on efforts to market Longboat Key as a tourism destination | 2008 | Chamber of Commerce | Chamber Report |

Goal: Encourage improvement of residential properties that maintain quality and character of existing neighborhoods

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|--|-------------------|--|--|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Identify mechanisms to preserve the existing density for condominium units | TBD | Planning and Zoning Board Town Commission | Town Clerk Office - Referendum Question (if approved: Amend Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code) |
| Identify mechanisms to preserve the mobile home density for existing mobile home parks | TBD | Planning and Zoning Board Town Commission | Town Clerk Office - Referendum Question (if approved: Amend Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code) |

Goal: Maintain the beauty of the Key

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Continue the beach management program as needed | on-going | Town Manager/ Public Works | Maintain Budget and State Permitting |
| Seek adequate supply of alternative irrigation water to keep the island green and beautiful | 2009 | Town Commission | Public Works Staff Study |
| Revitalize community beautification efforts that serve to protect the natural environment, including Gulf of Mexico Drive | 2009 | Town Commission | Public Works Staff Study |
| Seek opportunities to purchase open space for public use, with public input, as to features, uses, and costs | on-going | Town Commission | Town Manager update Commission |
| Encourage public art in public places | 2009 | Town Commission | Planning Staff - Resolution |

Goal: Improve water resources

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|--|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Adopt additional conservation methods to further decrease the amount of water used for both consumption and irrigation | 2009 | Town Manager/ Town Commission | Public Works Staff Recommendation |
| Explore new technologies in potable and irrigation water supply and distribution | 2009 | Town Manager/ Town Commission | Public Works Staff Study |

Goal: Protect and conserve the natural environment of the Key

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|--|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Adopt appropriate best practices used by other local governments | | | |
| • Explore green building strategies | December 2008 | Town Commission | Building Division Staff Study |
| • Water conservation | 2009 | Town Commission | Public Works Staff Study |
| • Examination of alternative fuels for the Town's fleet | 2009 | Town Manager | Public Works Staff Study |
| • Electricity conservation | June 2008 | Town Manager | Public Works Staff Study |
| • Examination of new waste to energy technologies | June 2008 | Town Manager | Public Works Staff Study |
| Develop a lobbying strategy with like-minded communities on the red tide issue | 2007 | Town Commission | Continue participation with START |
| Participate with other governments in cooperative actions to protect and restore Sarasota Bay | 2007 | Town Commission | Continue participation with Sarasota Bay Estuary program |
| Have town government model best practices in conservation and sustainable use of resources that are economically feasible | June 2008 | Town Commission | Public Works - Develop BMPs |
| Improve landscaping efforts on Longboat Key | | | |
| • Work to reduce pesticide and fertilizer run-off into the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay, including public education programs | Fall 2007 | Town Commission | Public Works Department |
| • Develop a public education campaign on Florida Friendly | 2009 | Town Commission | Public Works Department |
| • Develop and implement a beautification plan for Gulf of Mexico Drive | 2009 | Town Commission | Public Works Department |
| Acquire property suitable to a desalinization/Reverse Osmosis water treatment facility that can be used for other public purposes until such a facility is needed | January 2010 | Town Commission | Town Manager |
| Explore the feasibility of partnership options through which the Town could develop alternative water systems | 2009 | Town Commission | Public Works Staff Study |
| Participate in Florida and National League of Cities and US Conference of Mayors forums on environmental issues | on-going | Town Commission | Maintain adequate budget |

Goal: Promote community health

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|---|-------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Review of existing programs designed for community health promotion | June 2008 | Town Manager | Recreation Center Director |
| Continue efforts to construct sidewalks on Gulf of Mexico Drive | on-going | Town Manager | Public Works Department |
| Work with landscaping companies to reduce noise pollution and alternative ways of managing yard debris and tree pruning | June 2008 | Town Manager | Public Works - Develop BMPs |
| Develop policies to further minimize light pollution | 2009 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning, Zoning and Building Department Staff Study |

Goal: Keep or Improve the Island's amenities important to resident's quality of life

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Encourage the modernization and redevelopment of tourism facilities | on-going | | |
| Review Town Codes to identify more opportunities or incentives for retail amenities | September 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff Study |
| Encourage redevelopment strategies that would enhance retail amenities for residents such as mid-priced restaurants, a small cinema, etc. | 2009 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff Study |
| Develop incentives for retail amenities critical to residents | 2009 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff Study |
| Communicate that the Key wants its local businesses to prosper and that it will regularly review its policies to ensure consistency with this intent | on-going | Town Commission | Planning Staff Study |
| Encourage redevelopment of existing retail centers | on-going | Planning and Zoning Board | |
| Support efforts of the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Council to promote tourism and economic growth consistent with the vision | on-going | Town Commission | |
| Review the sign code | June 2009 | Planning and Zoning Board | Code Enforcement Division |
| Form a public-private collaboration to develop an appropriately scaled community center | September 2009 | Town Commission | Form Citizen Committee |
| Create an up-to-date communications infrastructure so that residents have full access to advanced communications technology | on-going | Town Commission | As directed |
| Create more access points for kayaks, canoes or small sail craft | March 2009 | Town Commission | Public Works Department |

Goal: Retain the service workforce needed for quality of life on the Key

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Improve public transportation options that enable workers to more easily get to worksites | on-going | Town Commission | Metropolitan Planning Organization |
| Participate in workforce housing initiatives in Manatee and Sarasota Counties | on-going | Town Commission | Manatee and Sarasota Counties |

Goal: Minimize seasonal traffic congestion

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|---|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Continue participation in regional transportation planning that would provide other alternatives that would reduce the need to go through Longboat Key to get to Sarasota | on-going | Town Commission | Metropolitan Planning Organization |
| Continue to monitor traffic signals for optimal traffic flow | on-going | Town Manager | Public Works Department |
| Continue working with the US Coast Guard on the seasonal bridge opening schedules at the various bridges that impact Longboat Key | on-going | Town Commission | Metropolitan Planning Organization |
| Continue working with viable alternatives for off-island traffic bottleneck sites at US 41, Bradenton Beach, and St. Armand's Circle | on-going | Town Commission | Metropolitan Planning Organization |
| Design, market, and promote appropriate and viable public transportation services for Longboat Key | on-going | Sarasota County Area Transit | Sarasota County Area Transit |
| Create destination points and routes so that public transportation lessens the impact of traffic on Gulf of Mexico Drive | September 2008 | Town Commission | Public Works Staff Study |
| Investigate the feasibility of a water taxi to and from Sarasota | on-going | Town Commission | Metropolitan Planning Organization |

Goal: Increase citizen involvement and engagement with Town government

| Strategy | Action Steps | | |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | Initiation/Timing | Responsibility | Action |
| Encourage the Town Commission to speak at neighborhood or condominium associations or otherwise engage the public in other informal forums | on-going | Town Commission | Public Information Officer |
| Create a mechanism through which the private sector can periodically inform the Town of any local policies and regulations that it views as problematic | Fall 2007 | Town Commission | Public Information Officer |
| The Planning and Zoning Board regularly hold informal meetings with citizens and business entities | December 2008 | Planning and Zoning Board | Planning Staff - Schedule Meetings |
| Use the Town Charter review process to discuss possible changes to the structure and system of Town government including, but not limited to, length of terms, single member districts, options for a stronger mayor form, and options for funding elections | on-going | Charter Review Committee | Final Report By Charter Review Committee |
| The Town Commission shall periodically review the Town's internal processes (e.g., budget process, human resource policies, etc.) | on-going | Town Commission | |
| Appoint citizen or staff member to actively and consistently represent the interests of Longboat Key at School Boards, County Commissions, and other taxing bodies | March 2008 | Town Commission | Appoint Liaisons |
| Advocate for changes in property tax valuation that would benefit local businesses and homeowners without harming the capacity of Town government to provide desired services | 2008 | Town Commission | Seek legislative help with state amendment |
| Develop time-limited and role specific projects related to the vision plan and seek citizens with specific skills to participate in those projects | on-going | Town Manager | Town Clerk - Advertisement |
| Secure residents who will serve on regional forums as well as town committees and boards | on-going | Town Manager | Town Clerk - Advertisement |

Vision Plan Appendix

In 2005, the Town of Longboat Key Town Commission authorized the development of a 20-year vision plan document. With the guidance and assistance of the Arrington-Marlowe consulting firm, the Town crafted the plan with the input and participation of the Island's citizens, property owners, business owners, and developers. Numerous Focus Group meetings (including those with affinity groups) were held to obtain vital public information and feedback on the vision of the community for the next 20 years. Through solicited and unsolicited written comments, Town Hall meetings, telephone and personal interviews, and additional Focus Group meetings, the Town tested the public's response to various draft versions of the plan document. The Town of Longboat Key Vision Plan is the culmination of two years of work by Arrington-Marlowe, the Town Commission, the Town's Planning and Zoning Board, the Town Attorney, Town Staff, and various established subcommittees throughout the process, as well as all of the members of the public who volunteered their time toward the goal of establishing a vision for the future of Longboat Key. The Vision Plan Appendix provides some of the information collected throughout the plan development process, as well as supporting data.

Points of Community Consensus

The strength of a vision plan is directly proportional to the level of community consensus in support of it. The following points enjoyed a high level of consensus and were valued input in the writing of the plan:

- There is strong support for the vision of "keeping Longboat Longboat". While there are nuances in that agreement it clearly means protecting the natural environment, maintaining a small town feel, preventing significant increases in density, maintaining a low-mid rise skyline, and keeping basic retail amenities for residents.
- There is clear desire to maintain basic retail services designed for residents on the Key. The community appears receptive to supporting legislative tax relief or some limited incentives as long as these measures are not rewarding bad management or overly trying to influence market/economic dynamics.
- Rising property taxes and insurance costs are negatively impacting everyone, businesses and second homeowners in particular. Maintaining a reasonable degree of affordability, along with business services and the second home marketplace are critical factors in being able to keep Longboat "Longboat".
- There is the strong desire to help maintain restaurants on the Key, coupled with the desire for increased outdoor dining options. There is a general willingness for some level of relaxed regulations if that would make a difference.
- Overall there is recognition of the value of tourism and the desire to maintain the "limited, historic" tourism traditional to the Key. There is clear agreement on the type of tourism the Key does not want.

- There is clear willingness to allow existing tourist lodging facilities to re-build at least the current number of units.
- There is strong appreciation for the public safety services provided by the Town and a clear desire to maintain the quality of those services.
- Regional or larger solutions will be required for many of the issues facing Longboat. However, that did not mean LBK had no responsibility for or role to play in these broader issues such as water supply, Sarasota Bay protection, etc. A continued effort to work with other local governments and other bodies to address these issues is encouraged.
- There is strong agreement to protect and maintain the natural environment of the Key, particularly the beach.
- The word “balance” seems to encapsulate the desires of residents. Keeping a balance between tourism and residential needs, keep a balance between retail services and the residential character.

Population and Economic Growth in the Region

Both Manatee and Sarasota Counties have experienced growth pressures during the past decade, and project continued population growth. For example, in 2005 unincorporated Manatee County reportedly issued nearly 6,000 new housing permits. Manatee’s growth is happening in many neighborhoods, including fast growing areas such as Ellenton and Parrish. 2004 population projections were 296,385 for Manatee County, with 2030 population projections of 453,900, a 52.8% increase.

Sarasota County growth is somewhat more focused in communities along the Interstate 75 corridor. Census data for Sarasota County indicates steady rates of growth averaging +/- 2.7% over the last three years, with cities such as North Port leading the way with steady double digit rates of growth during six of the past seven years. The Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) at the University of Florida projects that Sarasota County will continue to experience steady growth over the next 25 years, growing from 367,867 residents in 2005, to approximately 532,000 residents in 2030, a nearly 45% increase in total residents.

The Sarasota County Comprehensive Plan calls for the growth to occur primarily within the Urban Service Areas locating the highest densities within Commercial Centers and Corridors, Planned Commerce Developments, and designated Town and Village Centers outside these urban service corridors, which allow densities up to 25 units per acre.

Efforts are continuing in the adjacent City of Sarasota to encourage redevelopment and infill growth in the downtown area. The City of Sarasota had an estimated permanent population in 2005 of 55,596, and a functional population (resident plus seasonal population) of 80,994 persons. In 2030 the estimated permanent population will be 65,334 persons, with a functional population of 95,179. The City characterizes itself as

nearly built-out, emphasizing policies to promote infill. Toward that end, the City reports that between 1999 and 2005 nearly 12,500 building permits were issued, including 10,746 permits associated with remodels or redevelopment activities.

Current Population Numbers vs. Fewer Residents

Given density controls and community preferences, it seems unlikely that significant population growth will occur on Longboat Key. However, given changes in housing preferences toward larger houses and demographic trends toward smaller families, there is the possibility that the population of the Key may decrease. A trend toward the construction of mega-homes on existing home sites and the combining multiple contiguous residential lots for the construction of a single large house is seen on Longboat Key as well as in other Florida communities. While the phenomenon of condominium redevelopment is not yet widespread, there are projections that older multifamily structures will either be replaced with newer, larger units or that existing developments may be sold and remodeled into fewer, larger units. If either of these events occurs, Longboat Key could have fewer residential units in the future.

Year Round vs. Second Home Population

Currently, Longboat Key is predominately comprised of second home owners and so the first assumption that can be made about the future is that the current year-round/second home owner mix will remain the same. However, there are two other trends that might emerge. One, is that as homes increase in value, the island will be increasingly comprised of extremely wealthy people for whom Longboat Key is a second, third, or fourth home. Another trend is that the rising property taxes for non-homesteaded property coupled with rising insurance costs will significantly reduce the proportion of second home owners. This trend will mean the future Longboat Key will be more a community of full-time residents than the current mix.

Regional Economic Development

Both Sarasota and Manatee Counties have adopted plans and policies to encourage various forms of economic development and redevelopment. Manatee County's EAR update includes various strategies to attract high wage paying businesses and jobs to the area, along with a mix of strategies to continue support of existing tourism and agricultural industries. The County has adopted many strategies to accomplish these goals, including enhanced recreation and tourism activities. At this point, it appears the focus has been within urban areas, although promotion of the County's coastal areas may be compatible with the plan.

The local Chamber of Commerce has recently established an economic development council on which the Town participates via a seat filled by the Mayor. Since sustaining the historic tourism of the Key is a long-term goal of this vision plan, coordination with this council, as well as the economic and tourism development efforts of both counties, will offer benefits for the Key. It should be noted that the Sarasota Convention and

Tourism Bureau and Manatee County promote Longboat Key. A portion of the bed tax is used for marketing each county, which benefits the Key. As a result of the current trend towards reduced tourism beds, the bed tax revenue has decreased and this trend may continue, affecting not only the Sarasota Convention and Tourism Bureau budget, but other programs supported by the bed tax, including beach re-nourishment.

Other common efforts for both counties are the revitalization and creation of vibrant mixed-use commercial areas on the mainland. These developments, as constructed or redeveloped, could offer more shopping, dining, and business opportunities off-island to Longboat residents.

Additionally, as high tech and other high wage paying businesses are attracted to the area through economic development efforts, demand for executive housing will be an ancillary result. The Key offers high quality neighborhoods and residential enclaves, many with beach and bay water access that are often desired by corporate executives. The ability to operate a home-based business may also be of increasing significance.

The Baby Boomer Retirement

The retirement of the baby boom generation will have significant impacts on the workplace, on the leisure industry, and on destination communities such as Longboat. Some general themes are that baby boomers will want more active retirements such as that offered on Longboat Key, and that many baby boomers will semi-retire in the sense they may still be somewhat engaged in income producing activities. The newer residents of Longboat in many ways exemplify these projected trends.

State Property Tax Policy

Rising property values and subsequent increases in property taxes are impacting Longboat in ways that could further change the Key. While property taxes have risen for everyone the increases have most negatively affected second homes and businesses that do not have the homestead exemption. It has placed pressures on commercial property owners and business to either increase rents or prices (to cover both taxes and insurance) or, if eligible, consider converting to residential uses.

Should these trends continue, the Key is at risk of losing both basic retail services as well as decreases in property value if the second home market declines. The Florida legislature is debating the issue, and the rapid rise in property values in recent years has leveled off. The issue will remain significant until some public policy is established that alleviates the problem.

Workforce Housing and Availability of Service Workers

Both in Manatee and Sarasota Counties, one of the key growth concerns surround the affordability of much of the newest market-housing product to the average wage earner. Both jurisdictions are exploring strategies to ensure that a percentage of new growth

includes workforce housing. In Sarasota County, inclusionary zoning regulations require new development within the Urban Service Boundary to provide a percentage of “community housing”.

In Manatee County, workforce housing is being framed in the term “affordable living”. This phrase is intended to address the costs of living including, but not limited to, the real estate costs of housing (e.g. land and structure). Toward that goal, the intent is to examine the broader cost of living index, such as transportation and energy costs borne by residents.

It is well acknowledged that cost of living on the barrier islands are beyond a reasonable workforce affordability index. Moreover, with the island communities at or reaching build-out projections, countywide policies and programs have excluded the islands from their programs.

Shoreline and Coastal Issues

Sarasota County’s Comprehensive Plan, in particular, addresses the inventory of stabilized shoreline, as well as beach nourishment activities and concerns. It has been reported that at one time, as much as 23% of its Sarasota shoreline was hardened. However, as a result of the Town’s proactive beach management plan, which includes an island-wide restoration/fill project, essentially all of these hardening structures are covered with sand. The Town’s evaluation and appraisal report (EAR) update included policy changes that effectively prohibit the addition of any new armoring or groin construction within the community, unless it is integrated in the Town’s long-range beach management plan. The Town continues to actively stay abreast of coastal nourishment actions of its neighbors, and work regionally where necessary to help deter further erosion of the shoreline.

There are regional efforts from scientific and legislative perspectives. The Town has been a participant in those efforts. For a community that places high value on a quality beach experience, this issue is critical. However, solutions will require the participation of many parties, including continued Town participation in mitigation and clean up as well as continued support of research.

Surface Water Quality

Surface water quality issues have included concern for the Sarasota Bay watershed. Water quality in the watershed has improved with further improvements being sought since recent studies rate the Bay as “fair”. The City of Sarasota has initiated a septic replacement program, which should effectively eliminate this source of contamination over time. In addition, the Sarasota County stormwater effort has nearly completed a program to improve flooding and water quality discharge from this basin into the Bay. Similarly, Manatee County has adopted strategies to fund and construct stormwater management systems in urban areas aimed at improving water quality.

Water Resources

Given rate increases and other demands upon Manatee County for water, Longboat Key has examined alternatives for irrigation sources. At this time, this examination has not yielded a viable supply or financially desirable alternative. Water conservation methods have helped to reduce the overall water usage, but no wholesale new source of irrigation water has proven feasible. Many of irrigation wells in the Town are declining in yield or water quality. Given that reclaimed water is not likely to be as readily available as hoped, the Town will need to find or seek new sources of irrigation water.

Manatee County is actively upgrading its water capacity to meet a projected water deficit in the face of substantial new demands for water from population growth. However, water capacity projects are focused in areas of growth corridors, rather than the barrier islands that are considered at build-out. Manatee County has stated that it will continue to enforce and implement water conservation requirements as one of its supply strategies, such as those instigated in 2003. Given that the Town is in a contractual relationship with Manatee County, it will need to continue discussion of conservation approaches and other supply issues with the County.

Climate Change

There is scientific consensus that climate change (global warming) is occurring, with a continuing debate about the human impact in that phenomenon. Regardless of causative factors, there is some likelihood over the next century of sea level rises. These rises are unlikely to occur within the 20 year time frame of this plan, but the potential impacts of global warming is a topic the Town will need to monitor during the course of the vision plan.

Transportation Issues

Longboat is impacted by significant pass-through traffic along GMD from points both north and south of the island. Given the restricted access, and the many constraints associated with adding additional lanes to increase capacity, transportation options are focused on Transportation Demand Management (TDM) methods, as opposed to capital improvement projects. The Town effectively implements most of the TDM measures. However, an increased interest in expanding transit options is being expressed by the Town, working with both counties. Since the Town of Longboat Key does not operate transit services, the community will continue to work collaboratively with both county systems.

Manatee County's Imagine Manatee plan identifies alternative forms of transportation to the automobile as one of its goals. Convenient, safe, and reliable transit systems are the base of the implementation strategies, and one that could prove beneficial for the Town. There is increased interest and effort in providing trolley service and connections to the Sarasota and Manatee County public transportation systems have

been achieved. It appears both resident and workforce users could benefit from increased service, if convenient routes and sufficient headways were offered.

Natural Disasters and Insurance Costs

Everyone understands a hurricane of sufficient force and location could have a devastating effect on Longboat while hurricanes of lesser force or more distant locations can significantly disrupt life on the Key. These are simply facts of life for barrier island residents. As new structures are built, they are designed to mitigate these risks.

While the potential risks of hurricanes or some other form of natural disaster may impact decisions to remain on the Key or purchase on Longboat, it is the actual cost of insurance that is impacting the Town today. Rising insurance costs make it more difficult for current residents to remain, particularly if their homes are second homes. Rising insurance costs are now a factor in purchase decisions as well as a financial issue for current residents.

The State of Florida has taken some mitigating actions. However, a long-term solution is yet to emerge.

Rising Expectations for Quality

Understanding Longboat Key as a recreational or destination community means the community is judged by the presence of desired amenities. No such community can offer all desirable amenities. It can be assumed that people who choose to reside or visit Longboat Key prefer the type of amenities that the Key offers. This means the Island must protect or enhance its existing commercial services and recreational amenities, and strive to develop additional options desired by residents.

The challenge with amenities, particularly when viewed from a 20-year perspective is twofold. One, the expected quality usually rises. Some of these changing expectations are simply stylistic. Others, however, represent substantive improvements that people want in safety, energy efficiency, cost, design, timesavings, or choice of experience. Second, new amenities arise. Cell phones are now almost a necessity. 20 years ago there was no such expectation. It is not known today what may become expected over the next 20 years, but it is likely there will be one or more new amenities. The Town must be in the financial and technological position to respond when they emerge.

Longboat Key has many amenities today and some simply have to be maintained and protected to remain excellent. Examples are beach and bay access points, picnic areas, and sidewalks. Other features over the course of 20 years may have to be improved. Some examples are the community center, tennis courts, and parks. Finally, some new or expanded amenities may need to be considered to meet the changing expectations. Examples include a small theatre, an expanded cultural arts or performing arts center, recreational facilities for children and grandchildren, and improved access to electronic services such as better cell phone service, and Internet connections.

Visitor/Guest Facilities and Tourism on the Key

At its core, Longboat Key is not a typical tourist community, but tourism is an important part of the economy which support retail services, real estate and restaurants, beach re-nourishment and other quality of life features of the Town. Many LBK residents first came to Longboat Key as tourists or visitors. Tourism is part of the Town's history. This plan proposes that it continue to be part of its future.

The word "tourism" evokes many reactions depending on the connotations one associates with it. There are clearly types of tourism that are not desirable for the Key. The only type of tourism that will fit well with Longboat in the future is its historic model: individuals, families, and business groups seeking a quiet and leisurely retreat.

Residents benefit by having tourists on the island, although the income of most residents is not tied to tourism. This fact, coupled with the negative connotations, for some, of the word tourism, makes it easy to say that tourism is not something to be encouraged in the future. However, limited tourism has been part of the Key and is an essential ingredient of the economy that supports the commercial services useful to all residents and provides future buyers for the Town's residential properties.

Keeping Basic Retail Amenities for Residents

Concerned residents want two things to occur with the commercial or retail sector of the Town. First, they would like to see improvements made to existing physical facilities. By this, they mean that too many of the existing commercial facilities look either dated or poorly maintained. Second, they would like to see:

- expansions of some current businesses such as a larger Publix;
- vacant stores are filled with additional services that would reduce the need to go off the Key such as health care services, bookstores, computer repair and supply services, and clothing stores.

In both cases, the desired improvements are designed to better serve those living on the island, not to attract shoppers from the mainland.

Part of the charm and distinctiveness of the Town is the fact that the Key is to a good degree self-contained. One does not have to drive off the island for most basic services. This fact is part of the calm and quiet nature of the community. Keeping the current commercial spaces viable will serve to help maintain the special character of Longboat Key into the future.

The businesses reported as most at risk are the local small businesses that may not be as financially strong or diverse as the chain stores doing business on the Key. These same businesses may be more sensitive to fluctuations in the number of people on the Key and have less capacity to survive business slowdowns due to fewer numbers of people on the Key for a period of time. The irony, of course, is that small local businesses make a business sector distinctive. They are the businesses that one

cannot find everywhere. They are also the types of businesses that people associate with a small town feel. Having a national or regional chain store does not make a community distinctive by definition. Having a one of a kind restaurant does. To keep the Key distinctive, retaining a small town feel, the continued viability of the retail sector is important.

Infrastructure

Within the Town's infrastructure there are a number of issues. One is that the infrastructure of the Key is aging and the issue of replacement will become more significant over the next 20 years. A second issue is that of infrastructure improvement, in particular maintaining water and sewer infrastructure. Future issues could include placing electric utility lines underground for both aesthetic and public safety reasons as well as improvements that will ensure residents have access to current and future advances in telecommunications.

Aesthetics

The green and colorful beauty of Longboat is a critical part of the island's character. The protection of this physical beauty is so significant that any discussion of the future must address how the aesthetic environment will be protected and enhanced. Buried power lines, more landscaping along GMD, and use of Florida friendly landscaping in public or private areas are all critical elements of the unique aesthetics of the Key.

Health Care

Health care needs often determine a resident's length of stay on the Key. As residents age, there may be an increased need for health care services and a long-term care facility. However, such services may not be financially viable on the Key due either to the small population of the Key or FEMA requirements that would preclude some facilities.

Green Building

"Florida Friendly" landscaping has become the accepted methodology for minimizing the negative impacts on the environment resulting from the grounds maintenance on and around residential and commercial properties. The natural extension of this environmentally friendly philosophy has gone to building construction: hence the buzzword "green building".

In July 2007, the Sarasota Herald Tribune attempted to explain green building. "It is the practice of increasing the efficiency with which buildings and their sites use and harvest energy, water and materials. It also involves reducing the impact that buildings have on the environment and human health." Also known as "sustainable building" or "environmental building", green building presumably provides the benefit of reducing operating costs through increased productivity, use of less energy and water, better air

quality, and reduced environmental impacts. Standards for green building have been developed all over Southwest Florida by various building associations. Some examples of methods and materials are: poured-in-place wall systems that can withstand higher winds and that are many times more energy efficient than concrete block; Energy Star-rated appliances and windows; solar water heating; and, native plants that require less water, fertilizer, and maintenance.