

**EMAILS TO COTI
PERTAINING TO CIVIC CORE PROJECT**

The following emails, over 100 in total, were received by COTI during the period May 19, 2016 to January 14, 2017 in response to a several digital newsletters sent to members and friends on the subject of the proposed Civic and Cultural Core.

Another well thought article. Sanibelions owe much to COTI in securing the legacy of the original founding fathers of the Sanibel Plan

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Thank you, thank you, thank you for all the thought and efforts Coti put into protecting Sanibel.

How do I know when to renew my membership?

.....
"loving it to death"

.....
Thanks for keeping a sharp but at this point noncommittal eye on the Civic Core Project. I would suggest two points.

1. The implicit premise of #12, asking what can be done to avoid more traffic coming onto the island (let's build a wall and make Ft. Myers pay for it), may be at odds with BIGARTS's goal to maximize attendance, i.e. revenue, at its events. Is there some way to recast this issue, or maybe just drop it?

2. There is never enough handicap parking at major BIGARTS events. It's likely that Sanibel's relatively senior demographic tends to need more than any legislated minimum number of reserved handicap spaces. How is this being addressed?

Thanks for all your good work!

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I support the Civic Core Project (CCP). I recognize that the planning committee has invested in a great deal of time, analysis, and consideration of alternatives. And I am unenthusiastic about changes recommended by well-intentioned people/groups who do not have the benefit of participating in all the due diligence that went into the recommended plans. The CCP committee should consider valid suggestions; however, do not turn your plans upside down to satisfy the whims of special interest groups. Hang tough! The CCP will be a fantastic addition to Sanibel. I can't wait for it to be completed.

Thanks for all your great work. Let's do it!

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Can you provide the names and professional affiliations of the civic core working group and the COTI board of directors? Thank you.

Sanibel Civic and Cultural Core Project:

Trying to emulate "upscale" cities is short-sighted economic folly.

"The economic base of Sanibel is the environment. Sanibel need not attempt to play any other role..." (Sanibel Plan, Sec. 1.3 Economic Assumptions)

Progress need not come with more and bigger of anything. Progress on Sanibel is best achieved by protecting and assuring the long-term viability of Sanibel's natural assets for years to come. Adhering to the award-winning Sanibel Plan which sets out what is important to Sanibel's economic well-being, namely its Vision Statement, is the best way to assure progress.

Sanibel Plan Sec 1.1 Vision Statement

"To provide a sense of direction for the future , this Vision Statement is a conformation of the community's shared values and goals to guide future decisions."

Hierarchy of Values

1. Sanctuary
2. Community
3. Attraction

This three part statement of the community's Vision of its future is a hierarchy, one in which the dominant principle is Sanibel's sanctuary quality.

The Civic and Cultural Core Project is primarily an Attraction needing 665 parking spaces to serve it. As an attraction it ranks last among Sanibel's values.

To make room for this project will require clearing a massive amount of native vegetation, which represents the top-ranked Sanctuary value. Clearing this vegetation which has always provided a buffer between the Periwinkle Pines residential community and the Public Works facility is a real slap in the face of Periwinkle Pines residents, and a further inconsistency with the hierarchy of values by placing an attraction ahead of a community.

This proposed project is simply inconsistent with the Sanibel Plan Vision Statement.

Sanibel Plan , Sec 3.2.2 Plan for Vegetation Preservation

- "3. Limit clearing of native vegetation
4. Protect vulnerable native species of plants from destruction."

Sanibel Plan, Sec 3.3.3 Transportation Element

" Sanibel does not intend to hand over more and more of its living space to cars."

" ... the city will look for opportunities to reduce the amount of land devoted to streets, roads, and parking areas..."

Tell me how this project is not inconsistent with these sections of the Sanibel Plan.

Sanibel Plan, Sec 3.3.7 Recreation and Open Space

" Objective 3. Encourage people to use alternatives to the private auto..."

" Policy 3.1 Limit parking spaces for motorized vehicles as to number and location in a manner that is consistent with natural resource conservation objectives and compatible with surrounding land uses."

So tell me how is providing 665 parking spaces limiting parking spaces.

So tell me how is placing a parking lot adjacent to the Periwinkle Pines residential community a compatible land use.

So tell me how is clearing massive amounts of native vegetation and wildlife habitat and replacing it with buildings and parking lots not inconsistent with everything in the Sanibel Plan.

The City Council will consider the project under Land Development Code Section 78.7 City exempted. This section permits Council to set aside all standards in the Land Development Code "... but no such development shall be inconsistent with the Sanibel Plan."

The only way Council can find the project not inconsistent with the Sanibel Plan is to look the other way and ignore the Sanibel Plan.

The alternative for Council is to amend the Sanibel Plan and do away with many of the protections that have contributed to Sanibel's success since incorporation.

Sanibel has always worked because it has remained an alternative to other seaside communities.

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Thank you for the hard and important work COTI is doing regarding this proposed project. I do regard COTI as my ombudsman with this as you present more issues than I would have thought of and have the clout to see that these issues will be faced by the city.

One question: if I am understanding correctly, the Herb Strauss Theater will be relocated within the new "campus". Does this mean moving the existing building or demolishing it and relying on the increased size of what was Schein Hall to handle performances that had been at Herb Strauss? Both options seem drastic.

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My wife and I have been on this island for about 17 years now.
We came here to enjoy the beaches, shelling, biking and tennis; but mostly, we came for the natural beauty of Sanibel.
We hope it will never change.
CCP has no place on this island!!!
The reasons for my opinion are many, and each reason can be challenged as being unreasonable. I don't care. When the referendum comes up for a vote on this issue, you can bet your bottom dollar we will be voting against CCP.
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Thank you for sharing the list of questions you developed re: potential impact of planned projects on Sanibel. Clearly, members of the committee have given careful thought to proposed developments and how they may affect the overall character of the island. It is reassuring to learn there will be careful and very thoughtful vetting of the overall plan with the unique foundational values / philosophy of Sanibel clearly in mind. Those are the factors that led family members to become island property owners.

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Thanks for all of your efforts to educate about the Civic Core project. My concern is, why is the mayor working so hard to secure funds before the residents even have a chance to vote on it? I am very opposed to the project and have a bad feeling that Sanibel's leaders already have their minds made up to move forward with it-regardless.

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As a resident of Sanibel for 39 years I am 100%OPPOSED to the project Thr planning boaed {otherwise known as the variance approval board) and the City Council have been trying to stuff this down the throats of the citizens for years uselessly spending money and time on the project. They are politically attempting to form a voting coalition from Big Arts, Senior citizens etc to vote for it through appealing to their self interests and not the good of Sanibel. If it should reach the point of a referendum the same ballot should call for a recall of all council members who have been voting for it including our present Mayor.

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Thank you for asking these questions that should be on every citizen's mind. Pertinent that you began with the questions about the fit with our Sanibel Plan and the destruction of "environmentally sensitive conservation land" explicitly mentioned among the Sanibel Plan maps.

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Excellent, well thought out questions.

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I understand that the City Public Works area will be used for new buildings. Where do the backers of this project plan to relocate it?

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Thank you COTI for publicly weighing in on this subject. I would like to point out, in addition to your thoughts, that the neighborhood of Periwinkle Pines (Egret Circle off of Dunlop Rd) stands to lose the most in privacy and serenity from this project. However, no one seems to notice us. Please could you drive around this circle and imagine what those of us on the North side will be facing. 'Paving Paradise' to put up a parking lot breaks my heart.

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What great questions!! These are some of the same ones I had upon reading the proposal. Glad I joined so you could represent my voice. Thanks!

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Hello Coti: I applaud you're taking a serious look at the proposed core plan.

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I realize many opinions could be championed for and against the core proposal. Personally I feel the current layout of Sanibel, Big Arts, Library, Community House and Strauss Theatre fit the island master plan perfectly. Updating and modifications to existing structures are always

appropriate when needed. I feel the long range view of our population growth--we are over 98% developed-- will not change significantly. I attend nearly every play at the theatre and event at Big Arts. The only event I found full to capacity last year was the dog show. Bottom line; current attendance needs are consistent with future needs in my opinion. Many millions have been spent to insure the island is maintained as a special sanctuary for its residents. Any time an undeveloped piece of real estate is threatened by development the public immediately steps up and purchases the parcel. Adding it to our conservation habitat inventory. I'm sure, given the opportunity the public would have added the new Doc Ford track to conservation usage.

The above thoughts are mine only and only deserve the weight of one individuals opinion. I currently serve on the board of the Senior Center and the following thoughts are not only mine but those of several other board members. The driving force for leaving the current Senior Center has been the implied obsolescence and closing of the facility. The lifting of the 50% rule currently before the council makes possible any needed up dates to the current facility. A new roof and a other minor changes can easily make the current facility fulfill not only the current needs but future needs of its patrons. I am certain many senior center patrons, if not the majority, prefer the current facility in the current location. There are those that feel diversification of people to different areas of the island are preferable to concentration.

I have been very active in Senior Center events for several years. The real need for space, events taking place inside the center, has been consistent over that period. During peak tourist season, six weeks at most, one exercise class does over flow slightly. Possibly the most important benefit the Senior Center offers is fabulous activities taking place outside the facility. This is the area where I in vision real growth. Trips, kayaking and other similar activities. The need for those activities require competent and caring staff which we have in spades. Not more space.

The one remaining issue for the Senior Center is parking. Shared parking should be championed by all Sanibel residents. The Senior Center has an excellent neighbor willing to allow shared parking that would give ample parking for the needs of both parties. Our goal should be how to optimize what we have most efficiently. Efficient use of tax payer dollars should be the goal of every citizen. It is always our money regardless of what public entity it comes from.

Thank you for soliciting our input. My wife and I have enjoyed this paradise for over thirty years.

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I have to admit I don't understand completely the proposed plan as it affects these facilities:
· Herb Strauss Theater – I think I understand this would be torn down and replaced
· Schein Performance Hall – What happens to this facility? And the existing Big Arts building and structure that surrounds the Schein Hall?
Is there a more detailed breakdown of the projected costs?
Thanks

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An example of COTI at its best. An objective approach to the future of Sanibel. Keep it up.
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Exactly the role COTI should be taking to direct conversation and explore and clarify Citizen concerns. Excellent article Mike!
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Who pays for the excess after the project goes over the budget as most projects do?
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As a full-time resident of Sanibel, I hope you will listen to people like me who support the original Sanibel Plan (I was living here when that was created) and ask them if we really :need this massive cultural center???? I feel the existing BIG ARTS bldg and the Strauss theatre are more than adequate. And I absolutely do not want my taxes raised for this project. Is this for us--the residents--???---or for the tourists whom we already know DO NOT support our restaurants, shops, lodgings etc. And since when is conservation land no longer conservation land because the City Council says so???? And finally, yes it will add to the already terrible traffic problems.-----and is this what we need on our "sanctuary island" ??? or do we want to turn it into another Naples or better yet Sarasota? We need to keep Sanibel as it should be, as it was meant to be, and to stop chipping away at the original Sanibel Plan.
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I would like to join a group
to discuss the pros and cons of this project. If COTI will be having such a committee, I would like to be a part of it.
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Dear COTI, Congratulations, you are at least thinking about the TEC. You should look, critically at the current usage of the Historical Museum and Big Arts. They are essentially dormant 6 to 7 months of the year. A resident may visit the museum once, but for the most part, it is visited by tourists, the museum is being touted more and more as a tourist attraction. During the summer, the one of the most popular Big Arts programs, current events, attracts at most 25 people. During the 'high' season, there may be a hundred or more, barely enough to fill a corner of Schein Hall.

When the Southwest Florida Symphony played in January, Schein Hall was barely one third occupied. The Monday night movies, during the season attract enough people to fill a corner of Schein Hall. The Writers Read attracts at most 70-80 attendees. The Forum sells out, but at the last minute, it is always possible to buy a ticket.

My point is this--Big Arts, even now is under-utilized. If you go to the Big Arts web page, it is very clear that they are doing everything possible to attract people from off island--a part of mass tourism. BA now has a marketing manager. Why should Sanibel promote mass entertainment when there are plenty of theaters, concerts and events on the mainland? It is instructive to compare the push for a 'community center' with the recreation center. Do you recall when Mr. Ruane was running for city council? He came to COTI with his pitch that included a brag about his PAC to support the Rec center. I was very familiar with the old facility. The swimming pool was excellent, the gym was a solid steel and concrete structure that had survived a couple of hurricanes. The doors and windows opened, so that with a couple of big fans, it did not require air conditioning. The same argument was made then, "It

is deteriorating and needs replacement". In fact, the old pool and facility needed routine maintenance, a new bathhouse, perhaps a shallow wading-exercise pool and a larger weight room. With those modest improvements, the old facility would have served Sanibel residents very well. The city and Mr. Ruane's PAC convinced the voters that we needed a new facility. The new Rec center is wonderful, luxurious, very expensive and under utilized. For 6-7 months of the year, there are often more lifeguards than swimmers and more office workers than weight lifters. The tennis courts are hardly ever used. The new building is hermetically sealed and requires year round air conditioning. We residents will be paying for this facility for years to come. It is mainly for the benefit of visitors, not residents.

Please consider the environmental effects of the proposed center. A 529 car parking lot will occupy more than four acres of land. How much more natural vegetation and wild life habitat will be lost to the bulldozers for streets, walkways and new buildings. Is the donation of 25 acres of city property to this enterprise in keeping with our 'sanctuary island'?

The open areas for the shell fairs, the arts and craft shows and other events will be trampled and eventually barren. COTI should seriously consider asking these programs to leave the island. There is more space off-island. The promoters of these events could attract more attendees and our traffic would be less.

Finally, when the ocean is lapping at the front door of the new facility, people will wonder, why in the world did they do this?

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How much money has council wasted so far without putting this up to a referendum?? An estimate of \$42 million translates into \$80-100 million in real life construction terms. There are many places on the island to build a new Center 4 Life so this is not a realistic excuse for the " whole campus".

AND WHO IS TO PAY FOR THIS MARVEL?? Certainly not the tourists or the short term snowbirds who inundate our island, utilize our services and then leave after being entertained in our cheap ECO Themepark. Maybe they can find more cultural, educational and recreational opportunities elsewhere while we struggle to preserve the few vestiges of the Sanibel plan that are left. Conservation land is not up for grabs to the highest bidder. NOT WITH MY TAXES!!

I have been a full time resident for 22 years. They and you are completely out of touch with the residents and voters on this issue.

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Greetings!!

We are so excited to have purchased a condo. at Nutmeg on West Gulf Dr. at the end of April, 2016 after 15 seasons as renters. Although we will maintain our Pennsylvania residency, we will be part time in Florida and paying taxes accordingly.

My question is this: do we have any input into decisions such as those outlined in the e-mail re: the Big Arts property and other island projects. I am asking what our status may be. We are very involved in the community (CROW, DING, Historical Village, Rotary, etc.) despite our part time presence....but what input will be accepted on community matters.

Please address my questions or feel free to direct me to who ever can guide us through this exciting transition from renters to property owners.

Many thanks for your attention!

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Just a thought ,if the island had a. Circulating bus or trolley we could make the parking areas smaller and leave more open space.
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Thanks for the email with COTI's initial thoughts, particularly the concerns. I see little benefit for Sanibel residents other than solving the problem of the Center 4 Life building. Surely there are more economical ways to fix that. Big Arts is big enough most of the time, and the Community House is too. The only people who may benefit are Sanibel businesses if the new facilities attract a lot more people from off island for events who also shop in the stores. We all ready have a huge traffic problem, and the new facilities will only make it worse by attracting more people. The residents will be double stuck: stuck with a \$2200 tax bill each, and stuck in traffic for more hours. This project is ill-advised for a barrier island that is half wildlife sanctuary. I hope COTI decides to oppose it.
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Good for Big Arts. No one else will benefit
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As you put together questions for the project team, please consider the following: Isn't it a dangerous precedent to develop conservation land? I would argue yes!
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I am opposed to using undeveloped conservation land for ANY development, parking, etc., and fear this Arts Complex proposal will only draw more people to Sanibel and add to congestion. Let's keep Sanibel green, natural, and quiet. That's why we bought here!
.....

COTI never surveys Sanibel residents for their opinions. Why is it that COTI refuses to do such simple opinion surveys?
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There are plenty of survey tools on the WEB.
Do you not want to know what we think??
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While it seems to be impossible to renovate the Center4Life, has anyone looked into replacing it with a raised structure with parking underneath?
Specifically, what is the impact on conservation land?
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We do not see a need for the proposed expansion , which will Citi-fy the nice relaxed Big Arts setting which presently exists.
The Strauss Theatre seems ok as is. We have attended a number of performances there , and the facilities were adequate and fit into the Sanibel relaxed environment .
Larger facilities may attract off island people which could aggravate an already crowded traffic environment.
Thank you for following this matter.

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Comment: I can see some benefits from this project but don't see how adding to the Civic core area will help traffic and parking problems. Most people would still be using Periwinkle to get to the area. Dispersing various buildings around the island (example - using "old" Doc Fords area) - would make more sense traffic-wise. Also, REDUCING, not adding, the number of weekend festivals and events in general. Traffic has significantly reduced the quality of life on Sanibel and will continue to erode wildlife habitat. Upgrades to existing buildings seems more in line with small town island life. Consolidating community centers may be another way to "re-size." Business interests should not continue to dominate the current and future planning for Sanibel.
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Thank you for the updates on the Sanibel Civic Core.
While I understand the impulse to increase cultural offerings, I am concerned that yet another large construction project on Sanibel will increase traffic congestion, harm small businesses, and make navigating Sanibel on foot, by bike or by car an even more frustrating experience. Based upon the information provided to date, it seems the costs outweigh the potential benefits of the project. Sanibel's natural environment has long distinguished it from the rest of Florida, and I hate to see that environment further jeopardized by increased construction and the attendant congestion.
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I am persuaded that neither BIG Arts nor the Senior Center actually need additional square footage or seating capacity. Here is why.

It is only for short periods of time during peak winter tourist season that their facilities are at or approaching capacity. If the 400 seat Schein Hall lacks capacity for an artist or presenter, schedule 2 sets per evening or add a date. This is how it is done throughout the world without adding seating capacity. If the Strauss Theater lacks seating capacity for a particular play, schedule additional days.

Granted, both Schein Hall and Strauss Theatre could be improved with interior remodeling and perhaps a small backstage addition. The backstage area at Schein needs to be brought up to date. I know less about Strauss.

There is not now a lack of parking spaces to serve all of these venues. All the needed parking may not be at the doorstep, but it is nearby. Do what SCCF does when their on-site parking is inadequate. Shuttle people in from nearby parking areas, rather than clear massive amounts of native vegetation and wildlife habitat to accommodate ever more cars. The proposed project's added spaces will sit unused for most of the year. Another example of sharing parking is found at the 600 seat Gusman Concert Hall which is a part of the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami. There are no parking spaces adjacent to Gusman Hall. Patrons park at University lots and walk, or ride a shuttle, or avail themselves of valet parking. There are no parking lots dedicated just to Gusman Hall. It works fine and people end up seated for the concert with no complaints about parking.

On the matter of Phillips Gallery, several years ago while I was still working for the City, I met with each owner of Sanibel's privately owned art galleries. My purpose was to ascertain whether they felt Phillips Gallery was unfair competition because Phillips paid no real estate taxes and the City paid their utilities bill. To a person the private owners felt Phillips competition was unfair but for political purposes they did not want to pursue the matter. I dropped the matter, but it should be reconsidered now. The City's position now should be to phase out and close the existing Phillips Gallery, or have them pay a fee in lieu of RE taxes and pay their own utility bill. BIG Arts should not be permitted to build another gallery but continue its art gallery business operation by cooperating with private art galleries by sharing space on a rotating basis. The present Phillips Gallery space could be converted to office or classroom space.

It is foolish and not a responsible use of existing resources, buildings, land and money, to build new and add capacity which will ... underutilized for at least 8 months of the year. The only way to utilize the proposed added capacity (floor area, seating and parking) is to draw people from off-island--the very definition of an unwanted attraction. Remember, in Sanibel's Vision Statement "attraction" ranks last among the Hierarchy of Values.

The notion that progress on Sanibel comes with added capacity for everything is sheer folly. Surely, Sanibel "needs" additional beach parking. Surely, Sanibel "needs" additional roadway capacity. But, by and large, everyone would oppose both because they know it would diminish Sanibel's values.

The senior center building does not lend itself to continued use in its current condition. A new building on the same site makes a lot of sense without clearing additional land. Either build to the rear while still occupying the current building, or tear down the existing building and replace it in place.

From the Sanibel Plan, Sec 3.2.2 Conservation Element, the major thrust of the entire Sanibel Plan is committed to the objective set forth in the City Charter of Sanibel to conserve the "unique atmosphere and unusual natural environment" of this island community.

"Planning priority should be given to reducing the need to use motor vehicles ... Sanibel needs to reduce vehicular traffic and redevelopment can be an effective means of attaining that end"

The project is being touted as a community gathering place, but this won't happen except for the occasional special event--as happens now. Without retail shops and eating and drinking businesses, people will simply go to their venue and return home, as they do now.

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I would like to know if the residents can VOTE on this project that most of us do not need, want, or like. We do not need any more projects that entice more visitors.
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I'm glad to see COTI is taking an interest in this project that appears to be a bonanza for Big Arts which is scheduled to receive \$21 million or 1/2 of this projected \$42 million project. If Big Arts is already able to contribute \$12 million to the project, as they indicate, they could certainly use that money, their borrowing ability, and perhaps donations to improve their present structures, programs and parking capacity, if necessary, and not burden the entire island residents with debt for their enhancements. Big Arts is great but not so great that every island resident should be forced to pay for their improvements.

It seems to me it will increase traffic and congestion on Periwinkle. Presently the groups seeking improvements are decentralized which probably already reduces congestion somewhat. To have all of the activities located in one central location, as described, seems to be pure folly. Wow!...parking for 400 cars! I can visualize massive bottlenecks at the proposed entrances. If Big Arts and the others wish to expand, they should do whatever they can afford and not burden the rest of us with a massive and questionable project.

Also: Who or what are the "other funding sources" referred to? Who comprises "The Civic Core leadership team" that came up with this plan? Who actually did "several years of preliminary planning"?

If the time spent dreaming up this project had been used to address our traffic problem instead, that issue might be solved by now. If the creation of an obscure internet site, that few are aware of, describing traffic conditions, represents the best effort of those trying to solve the congestion problem, I am not optimistic about their future efforts to address this issue (although I hope there will be some).

It's a shame so much of the project's activity will take place during the off-season when many residents aren't around. The plan to begin construction in January seems absurd.

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Thanks for your initial thoughts on the Sanibel Civic Core. I'm hoping that COTI will be monitoring the plans every step of the way because this is a really big deal for our sanctuary island. It has the potential to alter forever the low-key feel of our unique community.

When I first saw the sketches of the proposed Civic Core, I thought, "This looks like Naples". With fountains, pavilions, and 500 parking spaces, it could almost pass for a shopping center. In my opinion, these features do not reflect the historical and cultural heritage of Sanibel.

I'm also concerned about the environmental impact of this development. What habitat will be lost when we bulldoze green spaces? Are there endangered flora or fauna currently living in the wetland areas? How will we handle the pollution that will be caused by the increased traffic of cars, trucks, and humans?

Let's be very careful about treasuring and preserving the magnificent home we're blessed to live in.

Future generations deserve a legacy that includes the character of Sanibel as we know it.

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I appreciate that COTI is looking out for our island in the matter of the proposed Civic Core. Besides the concerns you listed I am wondering if the increased number of parking spaces will decrease the amount of attractive plantings around the remaining building in favor or

paving. As trite as it sounds, let's don't "pave over paradise." We came to Sanibel for the natural setting and all that entails, not the arts.

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Much good work has been done on this project. I would like to see more analysis of the governance of the facilities once completed. Everything I have seen to date indicates that all facilities will be owned and managed by the City. The governing agreement and the ability of the many varied interests, such as Big Arts, Center 4 Life, et. al., to be fairly represented in this management agreement, seems to be critical.

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COTI,

Will COTI take a stand to protect the environment by vigorously and publically denouncing the civic core project that will destroy 13.5 acres of wetlands for a totally needless facility? Think how many gopher tortoises, snakes and other creatures will die under the bull dozers blade.

The project defies the Sanibel Vision Statement,

3.2.2. Plan for vegetation preservation and Sanibel Plan 3.3.3. "Sanibel does not intend to hand over more and more of its living space to cars".

This will be a test for COTI, are you for the island environment or for buisness and the tourist industry?

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If the Civic and Cultural Plan requires use of 13.5 acres of conserved land, then the city should buy up an equivalent parcel of land on Sanibel for conservation.

If this is too costly then the project size should be reduced to preserve the existing conserved land parcel.

Our conserved lands are what make Sanibel the special place it is where the natural environment is protected. This concept should over ride any plans for future development.

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I have a strong gut check on the Civic and Cultural Core project and development on Sanibel, and other recent "improvements." Termites or not I hate what's happening to the Community House. History has reverence. Does our island leadership?

I come to Sanibel to get away from the over-organized infrastructure, development, traffic (funny), "community amenities", pavers and parking lots.

Ageism is too well practiced in most places. Sanibel should not isolate it's residents with master plans to provide "places" with social or entertainment venues for seniors. We value people best by being intergenerational.

The island is the place. Buildings, plazas, halls, theaters, galleries, pavilions, really? Drive to Ft. Myers if you can get over the causeway. Let's stop all this spending and development and meet each other on beach walks.

And removing acreage from conservation land to pull this off is an affront to the very ethos of Sanibel. Could there be a more slippery slope?

Appreciate COTI. Keep asking questions and striving for some measure of accountability.

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Hi - the City has said there would be public meetings to discuss this project but have not said when/where? At least I can't find that information on the project site.

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I do not approve of removing any land from protections. You create a dangerous precedent, guaranteed. Where is the poll showing support from Sanibel residents?

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My first reaction to this e mail was to immediately respond my overwhelming THANKS. All of your points voice my concerns to the letter. There is not enough information in detail to go ahead with this project.

I understand the center 4 life is outdated but is there not a less expensive alternative.

This whole project is not worth going against the Sanibel Plan.

My hope is that your group will help educate the council members and the public this core idea inconsistency.

A Grateful Island Full time Resident

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Thanks for soliciting and publishing citizens' comments. We have resided on the Island for 22 years and have been COTI members for e entire time. (I have been a board member.) The Sanibel Plan is too good to jeopardize for what seems to my wife and myself to be commercial reasons. Environmental land is too important to consider replacing with yet another attraction to off-islanders even if they once lived here. (I am talking about the many residents of Shell Point who were once Sanibellians.) Quite aside from the debt involved, the replacement of native vegetation with hard surfaces, structures, roads and parking lots, seems unconscionable to us. The inconvenience we face when seeking parking space for events at BIG Arts is less of an irritant than the trauma (Sacrilege is an appropriate word.) of violating any element of the Sanibel Plan. We will be voting "No" on both ballot questions in March.

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recently there was an article in the daily rag regarding the city councils feedback from people that the influx of recent building in the city core has run amok and ruining aspen's character. wow- ticked me off--- wrote back (so pissed I didn't realize it was going to be in the paper) but ok--- that these people's sudden found concern about the aspen's character are only about 30 yrs late--- take a hint, get a clue, don't let it happen to you

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Thank you for the email update about this project and referendum.
I am opposed to this project, but hope the city will provide more transparent answers. If COTI decides to oppose this project, I will volunteer for your organization to help educate voters and defeat this project.

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This project seems too elaborate for a small island like Sanibel. There is already enough on this island to entertain, and we seem to have trouble managing what is here, traffic wise. I don't think we need to turn Sanibel into a state of the art cultural center. That is not why people come to Sanibel. If anything, they come for its low-key lifestyle. There are other cities in southwestern Florida that satisfy those inclinations and if that is what people want they should go to those places instead of turning Sanibel into another one of them.

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I attended concert in Ft Myers tonight at the Barbara Mann theater and spent 1/2 hour in the parking lot after the concert trying to exit. Is this really what we want our lovely Sanibel to turn into?

.....

Thank you for sending me the email about the ongoing effort approved by the City Council to enlarge the Big Arts complex --spend a huge amount of money to do this and hope the residents will go along with it. It is a great mistake if the residents of this island think this is a good idea. Worst of all they are going to take conservation land including wetlands OUT of protection and this sets a very very bad precedent. Many of the residents on Sanibel are elderly like myself and are not going to many of the BIG ARTS programs because they are in the evening and many people like me can't drive at night and don't like staying up late.

Lets face it--- this is for the tourists---to get more tourists on this island to go to the stores owned by Council members. It's always about the visitors. If we keep chipping away at the Sanibel Plan we will find one day that Sanibel is not what it was supposed to be. Soon we will have to take the word "Sanctuary" out of the Sanibel Island signs and we will forget what Sanibel means to those of use who were here when the vision of Sanibel was created all those years ago.

I understand that change always happens BUT we the residents and taxpayers must make sure that the changes the City crams down our throat are the changes that are good for our Island and our Island life and making huge parking lots and grabbing land that has been in conservation will alter the future when some other unwanted project gets approved by the City and we are forced to live with it. This project of course will increase the traffic problems we already have and will upset everyone. In the early 1970's we had a few people with a vision who created an independent city---the City of Sanibel---and they wrote a land plan that was visionary and one of the first in this country and it saved Sanibel as a Sanctuary Island and got it out of the greedy hands of Lee County who wanted to create on Sanibel another Miami

Beach. We need to honor that Plan as much as we canand we definitely do not need the Civic and Cultural Core project. And we absolutely should not take land out of conservation---ever.

I wrote to you about this issue when this first came up, and I hope others will write, and feel as I do.

.....
I wonder if they will use the same traffic "expert" that testified at the Doc Ford's that the restaurant would not effect traffic?

.....
We definitely Do Not Like the idea of the Civic Core--at all. Not only will it cost too much, cause MORE traffic, but Sanibel will lose some of its charm. If folks want new, they can check out all the NEW that is being built up and down the Coast.

.....
Dear David bath et al,

Thank you for the thoughtful, thorough, timely and important information. I definitely share the concerns expressed and would venture further to the quite secretive and presumptuous approach to the project from the beginning. There was never , to my knowledge, a questionnaire or by telephone polling of Sanibel residents(taxpayers and interested citizens) to determine whether of not the citizenry were feeling the need or even wanted a Civic Core. I always wondered why after the Council railroaded through the Doc Ford's restaurant(a fait accompli in my opinion after wasting an entire day at the meeting) why we should not have more input or information re the Civic Core. I have spent much time at Big Arts and the Big Arts Periwinkle taking classes, attending workshops, lectures, films, attending concerts and art shos etc. I am a member of Big Arts and support the organizations. Many of my friends are also involved and some teach CLASSES AND HAVE FOR YEARS!!! Were any of us asked to a focus group, to form an artists committee or given an opportunity to share ideas or even fill out the questionnaires that were supposedly distributed to those enrolled in Big Arts Programs? Unfortunately, you are well aware of the answer ... Furthermore the design of the Core project is quite aesthetically unpleasing and architecturally disappointing. Too much cement , no concern for the environment, not enough green space. no place to draw or paint near the building---just a few of the many shortcomings to just one of the buildings! Big Arts offers classes in the Periwinkle annex and has not even installed proper lighting and ventilatiion for the studio used for drawing classes , Figure Drawing. They must be awaiting the new building. As for the Center 4 Life/ Senior Center i wondered why after the design of the Rec Center did not provide the appropriate rooms for Adult Group exercise classes with restrooms conveniently located nor has a supervisor or someone with training on the exercise equipment be assigned to work in exercise room, which should have been larger. The adjacent room(quite small for most yoga classes is the only room that has a wood floor for dance class or yoga but is not of a very useable dimension. The Civic Core plan seems to also suffer some of the same shortcomings that could easily have been prevented. The planners seem to be short-sighted

(all that we were privy to seems to suggest) in not seeking out an architectural firm that would have been more environmentally conscious. Often such projects reach out across the country to architects and landscape architects who would share the concerns for sustainability , "green" buildings, solar power etc. Many times several architects after a national search will submit designs and models for the project that would create an energy and sense of positive attitude and enthusiasm for the concepts and outcome. I always thought since some of the teachers at the Rec Center also teach at the Senior Center and have to go back and forth in quick succession that the use of the Property on Rabbit Road that housed the former Doc Ford's might have been a convenient location for new Senior Center which would facilitate proximity for people who travel between the rec and senior center, parking is already there and the traffic congestion around Perwinkle would not increase. I apologize that I did not write this out in advance, but decided to just put my thoughts into writing in a timely manner. Please let me know if there will be any way that I might be able to help. After the disastrous year with the water issues , I personally would rather spend money and energy to continue to preserve our ecosystem, insure that we will have clean water and beaches that we will be able to use and that the wildlife will not die through not taking the time to take care of the natural world around us that makes Sanibel such a special place. More cement, parking lots, increased traffic, exhaust fumes, noise and litter are not what will enhance the daily life here. sea reeze, fresh air , fish jumping, children running joyfully into the ocean, turtle nests, shorebirds, a sense of history in time and place are valuable assets that we need to protect. Thank you for working so hard and so well for all of us!

.....

AND, I forgot to mention the loss of environmentally sensitive land!!! I can't understand how COTI would allow for this to happen, just to encourage MORE BUSINESS to flourish. That's what we are NOT to be about.

.....

It is my opinion that this (these) building(s) is totally out of character for this island. I like the current smallish buildings at almost ground level with the old character of the Sanibel I came for. As a senior with some limited mobility I appreciate being able to park close to where I am going! Some upgrades are needed---but probably not at a cost of 42 million dollars.

.....

tyvm for all the facts!

.....

STOP taking the sensitive land leave it be you do not need more buildings on Sanibel !! You can't handle the traffic now, if you feel the need to spend money spend it where it counts no more condos or any building for that matter spend it on clean water and protecting what you have!! You know you can't even find a place to eat here on the water you have blocked it you need to STOP!

.....

It seems as if the council is assuming that Sanibel residents are in some (strong) support of this (Civic & Cultural Core) project. Pushing for the March votes indicated seems predicated on that assumption (to try to go ahead with the project) rather than to seek evidence that a majority of islanders are in strong support.

My first concern would be the fact that the project is not in "synch" with the Sanibel Plan. I hope that most of us here recognize that the S.P. is the reason we have wanted to be here, and our assumption would be that very little change would be anticipated in THE Plan in future projects here. So I begin by wondering if there really is a large group of resident islanders in support of the idea of the plan??

We're ALL very concerned by the level of traffic problems already existing on the island. Certainly any changes which might affect traffic on the roadways we must all depend on should assure moving in the direction of lessening traffic problems and our ability to move around and on/off our island in our daily lives here.

Cost seems out of proportion to what we are presumably to achieve in the project currently being proposed.

Isn't it time for the overall community to be involved in such major undertakings, rather than a certain few of us (usually with "vested interests"!) to be leading the way and deciding what is really best for most residents of our community.

My own thinking is that we should BEGIN with a ballot in March which could clearly show the level of interest and support our community actually has for this kind of major scene-changing project, and IF most are in favor, we might then begin to determine, point by point, what the community as a whole wants it to consist of. This approach would certainly provide more confidence and assurance among ALL of us, that we are here for the same important reasons and there is reason to expect them (the much touted and praised S.P.) to remain in place unless/until the town as a whole determines to subscribe to departures such as this.

Thanks for an opportunity to express an opinion. I'm hopeful that most others will feel free and comfortable in doing the same.

.....

Thank you for the information concerning the civic core. If I lived in Periwinkle Pines I'd be livid with this design. To basically wrap Big Arts, SCA, parking lots and the event areas around a residential area is shameful. Currently, Big Arts and SCA are located in non residential areas and it should stay that way.

I don't live in the Pines but just imagine if this plan was wrapped around your house, car doors, car alarms locking and unlocking....lots of noise in a now quiet area.
Thanks for all you do

.....

I am against this project for all the reasons you list. Beyond voting against it, I would like to know how much money our City Council has spent planning this .

.....

Traffic is the main problem for the island, not just in terms of increased numbers but also in air pollution due to slow moving vehicles. By keeping various venues with their various programs separate from each other, this does reduce congestion, so why change this? This is an island, not a city and nature is the main focus not musicals. I just wonder why this started in the first place. Are the commercial companies just wanting to increase sales? I do think that not a lot of people are aware of this possible change and maybe Council should arrange to have several public meetings to clarify the changes.

.....

Thank you for providing this information. I just came down to Sanibel for the holidays. It is disturbing that the "Island Sun" of December 23, 2016, presented an article, "Sanibel's Civic Core Project Educational Campaign Begins", which fails to mention anything about the removal of 13.5 acres of conserved land as part of the plan!

I think this needs to be brought up clearly in any kind of article that is being written on the subject. Although I am a huge supporter of the arts and like some of the concepts being presented, I would hate to see Sanibel lose its land and possibly gain even more congestion due to the new Center that is being proposed.

.....

Don't do it.

.....

It's about time that COTI made a compelling statement on this project. Sanibel does not need this enormous waste of sensitive land and our money.
A proper postscript to this comment should be "VOTE THIS PROJECT DOWN!"

.....

Your recent questions further highlight the need for more written clarification, in addition to verbal presentation. Appears at this time residents are not properly informed to vote on March 7. Uninformed voters can bring about an emotional outcome.

Thank you.

.....

Thank you for being there for all of us and asking important questions. You are doing a great job!

.....

Thank you COTI. Additional important questions to be answered. They just keep piling up.

Under "What about the Money": How much have taxpayers already donated to CCP group for studies , design, plans and time of our City employees over the past 4 years ?

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congratulations on your lucid discussion of issues at the CORE, especially as they relate to the integrity of the Sanibel Plan.

I would welcome specific illumination of the activists (orgs? or individuals?), and the organizations that formally promote/endorse the CP, on the authority of whom? (formal by Board vote? by membership vote? by executive statement? {naively, I presume statements by hired officers do not speak for any organization.})

So far you have been objective and neutral. I look forward to your saying: violate the Sanibel plan and declassifying conservation land? NO.
In the coming election: VOTE NO.

To which I would add: NEVER.

.....

Stuart did an excellent job of confronting the questions regarding this proposal. I would only add that I would like to see a discussion of other alternatives to addressing the Center-4-Life building. What would it cost to rebuild on-site a raised structure with additional parking underneath? The other thing that concerns me is the suggestion that Lee County might supply \$20 million. I don't see how anyone in our affluent community could, in good conscience, ask the taxpayers in the rest of the county (if that's what's proposed) to subsidize our cultural dream. Yes we certainly do need more specifics!

.....

A most thoughtful presentation of concerns and issues raised by the Civic Core proposal! Should be mandatory reading for every citizen of Sanibel!

.....

I read your email and, like the previous one, I was frustrated by what the message does not include. Critics who offer a one-sided negative view, with no mention of the benefits and no viable, thoughtful recommendations are a dime a dozen and of little or no value. It would be much more helpful to the reader if you provided an objective, thoughtful, informed analysis of the pros and cons of the proposed plan. It seems to me that if you spent a little time doing some investigating, many of your pejorative questions would be answered.

In order for residents to make informed decisions, we need good information on the benefits and drawbacks of the proposed plan. To say there is no plan leads me to believe you have not done your due-diligence. Also, you offer no constructive, viable recommendations. You are in a position of influence; you need to do much better at helping

the community make the right decision. You sound like someone who is upset because you have not been able to exert your influence on the planning committee.
Do your homework and provide us with good, objective, factual information. With good information, people usually make the right decision.

.....

This is a very bad precedent for the island. Taking/destroying conservation land for a building is contrary to Sanibel values and creates a slippery slope which can result in more "land grabs".
Just say no.
A Sanibel landowner for 45 years

.....

Definitely.
Ok, but who do we contact?

.....

I am a home owner on Sanibel for 20 years. You raise excellent questions! I would not vote for any project that is promoted by fuzzy, lazy thinking. Keep the pressure on the city leaders to answer COTI questions. Good job...keep them honest!

.....

My family spends time on Sanibel every summer. My mom owns a property handed down from her parents, and it will be passed on to me and my 2 brothers. We all have families, and we all spend time on the island, biking through the trails, boating, shelling and doing a whole lot of nothing with our children.

What we love about the island is the nature! Sanibel is an oasis in Florida, which is one of the least environmentally friendly states in the US. So few areas of Florida can boast to have 70% nature preserve.

We would like to help in saying "no" to the proposed Civic and Cultural Core project. We won't be on the island to vote, but would love to sign petitions and send money where needed. Please send me information on how to help!

.....

Just a question re : eligibility of voters for the civic core referendum.
We are property owners but not Florida residents . Are we eligible to vote ?
We have quite a few concerns regarding this project and feel it is being railroaded through.

.....

Thanks for your thoughtful and clearly written commentary on the Civic Core Proposal. Unless many of the questions you raise are answered satisfactorily, it seems clear that the sensible way to vote at this time is No. So far the City Council and proponents have not made a clear enough or detailed enough case.

Speaking of the March 7 referenda, we apparently will not be able to vote, even though we have been second home owners and taxpayers for decades. City Hall says that only residents who have their primary homes here and vote here will be able to vote on this proposal, despite the fact that it will increase our taxes. This is not the case in our town in Connecticut, where second home owners are able to vote on projects that will affect their taxes.

Two questions for you: Do you have any idea how many second home owners are in the same boat? Does this unfair regulation come from the city of Sanibel or the state? We would like to see it changed.

.....

I feel very strongly about your cause and am concerned that the Civic Core proposal will pass because people are unaware of it's import to us. I would like to help spread the word, helping in whatever way I can. If you're looking for volunteers, please let me know. Thanks.

.....

So the monstrous Civic Core plan has been scrapped "for now" . I am still frustrated at your lack of not having taken a stand against it from the start. What does it take to get past the first line; "13.5 acres of environmentally sensitive land"? Not to mention the increase of hours of exhaust-spewing traffic? Thanks to the residents for waking up and taking a stand. I will not be renewing membership in any of the local organizations who didn't stand for the good of the island. And no more donations for land acquisitions as in the past.

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Very well written update, on target inquiries. There is a lot due the citizens before March. I appreciate any and all efforts by COTI.

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Great news.

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As they say in Australia, "Good on ya Mate".

.....

I did not see any objective communication from COTI on the benefits of the Civic Core Project. If I missed something, please send me the reference.

I have been very disappointed in your position and in your role in obstructing and finally killing the project. We need people and organizations that contribute solutions to enhancing the Sanibel quality of life. Obstructing change makes no contribution.

.....

Thank you a job well done. I was there and did express my opposition to using protected land for this project.

I, also, want them to preserve Dunlop Road. The whole proposal was far too much for this small island.

My next concern is where will they put the new Center-for-Life which seems to be forthcoming.

The current location allows for multiple access roads. However, the handout seemed to indicate this location does not allow for future rebuild. Let's hope there are good specs to review before this goes up for a vote.

.....

Thank you all for your involvement in this issue. You have tackled an issue that would have been a disaster to the Island and been proactive in doing so.

You always have been an association that has worked to keep the original "Sanibel Vision" as a priority and I thank you for all you have done again.

.....

Another great job for COTI. Well done.

You continue to protect our island.

THANK YOU.

.....

Thank you for your work on this, Mike. I did attend and give a comment at the meeting last Monday. Although I am pleased this project appears to be over, I wish the Council had given more weight to the environmental destruction the project would have caused and rejected on that point.

I will renew my membership next month!

.....

Thank you, COTI, so much for protecting the environment and the sanctuary vibe of Sanibel! You all are great.

.....

Thank you for your loud and consistent voice to help defeat the City Council's insane Core Project Referendum notion.

Recently the COTI leadership played a pivotal role in raising public awareness to defeat another ill considered proposal that would have permitted additional 25 mph vehicles on our already unsafe and congested roads.

Through COTI the residents and taxpayers of Sanibel have finally found a way to defeat the City's plan of continued commercialization of our island nature sanctuary and to revive the Sanibel Vision Statement as our guiding principals.

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Good work!

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Pheewww! We are so happy. Thank you for the awesome job you do!

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Thank you Coti for all your efforts.

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CONGRATULATIONS !!!

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Great job COTI!

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Thank you for raising the relevant questions about the proposed project. It is reassuring to know that COTI is safeguarding the values of the Sanibel Plan. It is also a great relief that the project is not going forward - at least for now...! Thank you!

.....

Thank you very much to all members of COTI!
I just came down to Sanibel for a long week-end and picked up a copy of the "Island Sun". Just wanted to take a moment to thank you and COTI for protecting Sanibel. It was wonderful to see the full page "Sanibel Vision Statement", along with Stuart Langton's thoughtful article. We mustn't lose sight of why this island is so special.

It is good to see that the Sanibel City Council has rescinded the Civic Core resolution.

Appreciate your vigilance and caring.

.....
Thank you very much for the enormous time and effort you made examining the Civic Core Project. You asked the right questions time and time again to no avail. The final letter by Stuart Langton brought up even more thoughtful questions.

If the City Council had really studied this issue as you have done, it would have never been approved - let alone put up as a referenda.

I am grateful that COTI does such a tremendous job to ensure the sanctity of our islands.

.....
How can we Islanders ever thank you enough for using your clout and inform all of us Islanders, who love and value our sanctuary Island. All of us appreciate what you do and the care you give to our special Island Paradise where man and nature live in harmony.