



Where We Stand

Where We Stand is a publication outlining the positions adopted by the Board of Directors of the Bonita Springs Area Chamber of Commerce intended to educate the membership and community on where we stand on issues impacting business.

Outline of Position Statement Topics

Business Relations

Business To Business, Healthcare Reform, Large Business, Minority Business, Small Business

Economic Development

Business Retention, High Wage Job Recruitment

Education

Facilities Planning, School Choice, Post Secondary Education

Environment

Environmental Impact Statement, Estero Bay, Regulatory Agencies, Water Management, Wetlands Impacts/Mitigation

Good Government

Annexation, Blasting, City Charter, Congressional Redistricting, General Expectations, Ordinances, Privatization, Property Rights, State Constitution, Tax Reform, Zoning in Process

Growth Management

Concurrency, DRI, Future Land Use, Zoning

Infrastructure

Bonita Springs Utilities, Bonita Springs Road Impact Fee, County Landscape Ordinance, County Park Impact Fees, County Sign Ordinance, Impact Fees, Imperial Street, 951 Corridor, Sandy Lane, Stormwater Management, Transportation, Water Conservation, Water Quality, Water & Wastewater

Tourism

Beaches/ Beach Renourishment, Eco-Tourism, Off Shore Oil Drilling, Southwest Regional Airport, Tourism Funding/Bed Tax

Workforce

Training/Development, Workforce Housing

Board Approved originally August 10, 2002; Updated July 2005.

Business Relations

Basic Philosophy: The Chamber believes businesses should conduct themselves with integrity. Truth in advertising and all transactions should be the standard. Businesses should respond promptly to complaints with the goal of reaching a fair and reasonable resolution for all parties.

Business to Business

The Chamber strongly believes in doing business with those businesses that support it by being members in good standing. Members are encouraged to do business with fellow members by utilizing the referral services of the Chamber and its annual Buyer's Guide and Web Site.

Healthcare Reform

We support efforts to identify factors that impact the cost of, and access to health insurance for small businesses. We would support the establishment of purchasing pools to obtain stable premiums while also possibly allowing for standard plans that could be coupled with catastrophic coverage. We also believe the expansion of the Health Flex Plan with regulatory oversight could be of benefit and that the utilization of Health Savings Accounts could empower consumers to make quality and cost conscious decisions about their healthcare. We actively support the Governor and our elected officials in addressing and implementing meaningful healthcare reform and encourage them to work with the appropriate partners on the National level. (March 2004)

Large Business

The Chamber welcomes large businesses, that choose to locate in Bonita Springs. The Chamber will partner with other agencies and economic development groups - where possible - to assist in the development of an appropriate workforce.

Minority Business

The Chamber believes in the free enterprise system. It believes that all people without regard to race, gender, religious or political beliefs should have an equal opportunity to participate fully in the system.

Small Business

Recognizing that small business is the backbone of the local economy and that the Chamber's membership is comprised primarily of small businesses, the Chamber's business plan will reflect programs and opportunities geared towards supporting local, small business. The Chamber will work cooperatively with the Small Business Development Center and similar organizations to assist small business owners with their specific needs.

Economic Development

Basic Philosophy: The Chamber believes that striving towards a more balanced economy is important for our area. The tourism industry has historically been the foundation for Bonita Springs's economic development. This has enabled the development and construction industries to flourish and, as a natural outgrowth, has more recently resulted in major growth in the service industry. The opening of Florida Gulf Coast University as Florida's 10th and newest university as well as the expansion of Southwest Florida Regional Airport should significantly help in diversifying the economic base of the area. The Chamber is committed to working with the local economic development offices on a regional basis to attract a diversity of business to the Bonita Springs area and to improve the employment opportunities for our residents.

Business Retention

The Chamber offers its support in attracting and retaining business in our area. We support the role of local government to create a favorable business climate and pledge our support to other economic development organizations to coordinate a successful public/private economic development effort.

High Wage Job Recruitment

The Chamber realizes the importance of working to attract higher wage jobs to the area. The Chamber also recognizes the importance of helping our existing industries grow and adapt to our changing demographics.

Education

Basic Philosophy: We believe that a strong educational system will help to better prepare our future workforce. The K-12 School Board and Administrators should run the school system as a business with the quality of education and fiscal responsibility being the primary focus, resulting in superior classroom training. Teachers should be accountable with structured goals and objectives and fairly compensated for their attainment of these measurable goals. An integrated K-University educational plan is critical to the long-term success of our community.

Facilities Planning

The Chamber supports educational facility planning that will keep pace with the area's growth and provide appropriate learning facilities that are easily accessible.

Post Secondary Education

The Chamber believes that access to post secondary education is vital to the continued growth of our local economy and the strengthening of our existing workforce. The community is enriched by Florida Gulf Coast University, our local community and private colleges. These institutions should attract and retain highly qualified instructors and continue their outreach and involvement in the community.

School Choice

It is the Chamber's position that improving the student assignment process is a critical factor in attracting new and growing existing businesses in the community. We support the student assignment plan that was proposed by the Student Assignment Task Force that allowed for choices within four geographic zones of the County. (December 2003)

Environment

Basic Philosophy: The Chamber seeks a balance between economic growth and protection of the natural environment. We believe that economic and environmental objectives are best achieved through consensus building and cooperation between the business and environmental interests. The Chamber believes that the best way to protect and restore natural resources is through a strong healthy economy.

Environmental Impact Statement (*Official position presented October 1999*)

After reviewing the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) the Chamber expressed a number of concerns to the Army Corps of Engineers. It is the position of the Chamber that the EIS will have a negative impact on economic development and growth, quality of life and environmental sustainability. The EIS fails to adequately consider the following four primary areas: State Comprehensive Planning laws, economic impacts, streamlined permitting process and scientific research to support the conclusions of the report.

The Chamber has suggested at public hearings and in letters to the appropriate individuals, that this document be reviewed and that the public have an opportunity to comment on the revisions made by the Army Corps of Engineers prior to finalizing the document. The final document should be used as a planning tool and not be used as a regulatory document.

Estero Bay

The Estero Bay is an important resource for the local economy. This resource supports many related businesses and attracts tourists, new residents and, more importantly, new business. The Chamber supports the preservation and restoration of this aquatic preserve. The Chamber further supports public access to this resource and feels additional regulations should be determined based on hard science.

Regulatory Agencies/Organizations

While the Chamber supports measures necessary to protect the natural environment, it also opposes duplicative regulations and standards not based on science. Decisions should be made locally by state, regional or local agencies that are adequately staffed and have technically knowledgeable resources. Non-regulatory environmental organizations should include representation of the business community and should focus on positive, balanced approaches to preserving the environment.

Water Management

The Chamber believes that good development can help positively affect water management in our area. We support new development that strives to re-establish historic flow ways and utilizes proven means to maintain appropriate water levels. Redevelopment of projects completed prior to current permitting standards should be promoted without creating undue burden on the property owner.

Wetland Impacts/Mitigation

The Chamber supports a uniform wetland assessment methodology that would be adopted by all permitting agencies. This approach would ensure predictability in the permitting process and ensure standardized wetland preservation/mitigation requirements. The Chamber further supports the ability to impact and mitigate wetlands on infill smaller parcels located in the urban areas. This would protect a property/business owner from losing the right to develop their property and maintain the economic viability of the project.

Good Government

Basic Philosophy: The Chamber supports a representative government and believes in the right to freely elect representatives to public office. The Chamber feels that the public officials should be available to the public and that officials should adhere to the Florida Sunshine Law.

Annexation

The Chamber believes that those areas interested in annexing into the City should be provided with the appropriate information on the pros and cons of this action. We suggest that the City contract for an unbiased professional study to determine the advantages and disadvantages to both the requesting party and the City. (March 2005)

Blasting

The use of responsible blasting is successfully utilized in many areas of Florida, especially in Collier County; therefore, we believe that blasting can be successfully employed in Lee County to the satisfaction of both property owners and related businesses. (April 2004)

City Charter

The Chamber believes that the citizens voted for the incorporation of our city based on the Charter adopted in accordance with the Florida Constitution. We believe that this is a fundamental document that should only be changed after careful public debate and input. While the Charter should contain matters relating to structure and government form and be reserved for substantive matters in these areas; administrative issues and local regulations should be addressed through ordinances.

Congressional Redistricting

The Chamber favors congressional redistricting which takes into consideration the fair and adequate representation and the local nature of communities – their values, interests and issues – believing that the interests of local citizens are best served by local representatives. The Chamber opposes redistricting that creates statewide geographic areas, rather than local districts.

General Expectations

The Chamber believes that business should be able to expect the following from government:

- An opportunity to participate in the government process. Timely flow of information so that the business community can be informed and react prior to final decisions being made.
- Access to government officials and staff who are responsive to concerns and needs of the community at large.
- Accountability to the public for decisions that affect the delivery of services to our area.
- Stability in policy making. A clear and equitably enforced process for developing any adhering to policies on taxes, fees, finances, laws and regulations.
- The highest of ethical standards.

Ordinances

We believe that ordinances should be adopted in the context of regular amendment cycles that allow for adequate analysis and public comment. They should be integrated into a larger visioning plan consistent with the adopted Comprehensive Plan. (June 2003)

Property Rights

Basic Philosophy: We oppose federal statutes, regulations and policies that unnecessarily restrict the free exercise of private property rights. No government body should use its regulatory powers to take private property without paying the owner its fair market value. We understand that regulatory agencies may limit property rights in regards to environment, endangered species, conservation and historic preservation. However we oppose frequent attempts to impose additional onerous and duplicative restrictions. We encourage the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the public.

State Constitution

The Chamber opposes the use of State Constitutional initiatives when an issue can be resolved legislatively.

Tax Reform

The Chamber is not opposed in principle to the objective of expanding the tax base in exchange for lowering the tax rate. However, we do oppose the concept of constitutionally mandated taxes on goods and services. We advocate a broad-based review of Florida's entire tax structure. (February 2002)

Zoning in Process

This process, which would essentially enact a moratorium on business, should only be used in an emergency situation. (March 2003)

Growth Management

Basic Philosophy: The Chamber supports long-range planning as an important growth management strategy and encourages input from a broad representation of individuals. We support public/private partnerships to accomplish growth management strategies and believe that this strategy will result in decisions that benefit both the residents and the business community of Bonita Springs. The Chamber supports the principles embodied in the Growth Management Act which require that local governments prepare interrelated plans that address how issues such as land use, housing, infrastructure, coastal management and capital improvements will be met. The Chamber also supports the idea that land use decisions and infrastructure planning must be coordinated with other local governments to ensure that regional objectives can be properly met.

Concurrency

The Chamber supports the concept of concurrency meaning that necessary public facilities and infrastructure should be in place concurrently with the completion (impacts) of development. Concurrency is one of the foundations of the 1985 Growth Management Act. It ensures that local governments have a plan in place to meet their obligations to provide necessary infrastructure, parks, roads, etc., in a timely and efficient manner. Reasonable guarantees should be made for long-term projects and to allow for exceptions in certain cases.

DRI

The Chamber believes that the Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) law should continue to be streamlined and that decisions regarding the DRI should be made principally by local governments. The Chamber opposes modifications to the review process that will further remove authority from local government decision-makers.

Future Land Use

The Future Land Use map for the City of Bonita Springs must consider projected growth patterns for the next 25-30 years and beyond. Use of previous studies such as the Bonita Improvement Study should also be considered when making land use decisions for our community. Appropriately sized and located areas should be designated for future urban development and associated infrastructure as well as environmentally sensitive areas which need to be preserved for the public benefit of the Bonita Springs community. The designation of future urban areas does not imply that such developments will occur in the near future but allows for proper long-range planning for growth of residential, commercial and essential community services. The designation of future urban areas should provide an incentive for property owners to develop in areas where appropriate infrastructure exists and to develop at densities that will not result in urban sprawl.

Zoning

The Chamber does not support specific zoning or commercial land use developments.

Infrastructure

Basic Philosophy: Bonita Springs is one of the fastest growing areas in the State of Florida. We believe that we need to better plan for adequate infrastructure to accommodate this growth. Infrastructure issues should be looked at both locally and regionally to best accommodate our rapid growth.

Inadequate infrastructure impacts the quality of life of our residents and visitors. Typically infrastructure issues require significant capital investment. Improvements to our infrastructure could relate to our roads, traffic patterns, potable water and wastewater system, irrigation system (reclaimed water), storm water system, emergency vehicles, public transportation, libraries, parks and recreational facilities.

Bonita Springs Road Impact Fee Statement

The Chamber continues to support legal and equitable impact fees based on the appropriate studies and rational nexus as required by the law. We question whether the proposed methodology of eliminating certain road projects within the city in an effort to maximize the fee is prudent or fair, and we are concerned that the proposed methodology does not take into account the impact of future increases in ad valorem revenues due to new construction and increases in assessed values. We support the concept that existing law allows for credits when redeveloping both commercial and residential properties. Lastly, we recognize the need to develop and promote workforce housing.

Bonita Springs Utilities, Inc.

Bonita Springs Utilities, Inc. (BSU) is a not-for-profit, member owned, cooperative providing water and sewer service to residents of a 58 square mile area including unincorporated Lee County and the City of Bonita Springs. The Chamber recognizes the need to support BSU's continued investment in bringing quality water service to the residents of the Bonita Springs area without negatively impacting the water source and the environmental soundness of its continued gravity expansion wastewater project.

County Landscape Ordinance (*Official position presented 10/98*)

The Chamber supports reasonable measures that would further the Chamber's commitment to the beautification and aesthetics of the Bonita Springs community. However, stricter landscape standards may result in increased development costs. Since the quality of open space will be heightened, the Chamber believes that a balancing of the quantity of open space and enhanced landscaping in residential projects can be achieved, without impacting cost, while accomplishing the overall goal of improving the aesthetics of new development projects. This balancing will require flexibility in design review by reviewing agencies.

County Park Impact Fees (*Official position presented 6/97*)

The Chamber opposes the use of impact fees from the Bonita Springs district to purchase land to build a community park outside of the Bonita Springs Impact Fee District. While the Chamber does support the development of a community park in the Estero area, the impact fees targeted for this development should come from the district in which the community park will reside.

County Sign Ordinance (*Official position presented 10/98*)

The Chamber supports the current Lee County sign ordinance. It opposes the amendment of the sign ordinance to allow for Electronic Message Centers in south Lee County and, particularly, Bonita Springs. Furthermore, the Chamber suggests that the current design standards for signs be strengthened and that the County and City take a more active role in ensuring that businesses adhere to those design standards.

Impact Fees

The Chamber is aware of the economic importance of new development to our community and the new infrastructure that is associated with this development. We support the use of all existing impact fees as a supplement to tax funds to construct this new infrastructure. Our support of the levying of impact fees is based on local governments' commitment to comprehensively assess the costs of providing services and adjusting impact fees proportionately to ensure the compliance of these fees with the rational nexus test.

Imperial Street (*Official position presented 12/98*)

The Chamber supports a four-lane divided arterial road with connection to Livingston Road in the south and Three Oaks Parkway to the north. This connection should include a logical transition between Livingston Road and Three Oaks Parkway that does not affect the function of East Terry Street.

951 Corridor (*Official position presented 12/98*)

The Chamber strongly supports the development of a 951 corridor. The road should be shown to connect to CR 951 in Collier and extend northward, west of the CREW lands, to a connection with SR 82 or points beyond. We believe it should be planned for an eventual six-lane configuration. This would serve as a major thoroughfare to Florida Gulf Coast University and Southwest Florida Regional Airport. Right of way acquisition should commence in earnest as soon as possible to outpace the rising cost of land.

(Additional Statement Added 08/05)

As we have expressed for many years now, we believe that the extension of County Route 951 is essential to our local transportation network and we will not support any route that will result in a no build status. As you are considering the various routes, we ask that the decision you make be practical and visionary as you look beyond the 2030 Transportation Plan. Within the City limits of Bonita Springs we specifically support the Bonita Grande alignment. We believe that the proposed alternative routes warrant additional consideration and research within this fiscal year.

Sandy Lane

We support the extension of Sandy Lane as a proposed North/South arterial that will provide some relief to the US 41 corridor. We also believe that a connection to Old 41 would greatly enhance our transportation network in this area. (July 2004)

Storm Water Management

The Chamber encourages the city to address issues raised by the Storm Water Utility Advisory group appointed by the Mayor. The Chamber believes that local government needs to weigh carefully the specific benefits from storm water programs that may be proposed before public resources are expended. The Chamber did support the proposed MSTU referendum in 1998 based on the assumptions that monies collected within the districts would be used only for projects within that district. Its support was also based on the assumption that the money collected would not replace funding that might come from the county or the South Florida Water Management District and would not cause a reduction in funding from these entities.

Transportation

Florida is a "donor" state when it comes to transportation funding. We support federal legislation that would reward counties and cities throughout the State who pay the maximum fees in gas taxes by providing a higher return to these areas based on their maximum funding.

The Chamber strongly supports the development and enhancement of the area's north-south corridors. Specifically the Chamber supports the Three Oaks extension, the 951 corridor and the six-laning of U.S. 41 and I-75. We also recognize that the Bonita Beach corridor is our city's gateway and improvements should be made to this road and the aesthetics of this corridor. The Chamber believes that the Bonita Springs City government needs to be a catalyst to bring together the county governments of Lee and Collier Counties and to work with the Florida Department of Transportation to ensure that our transportation needs are being met. The Chamber encourages local government to pursue grant funding to expedite construction of our area roadways. The Chamber is an active member of the Southwest Florida Transportation Initiative (SWFTI), a public/private group assessing funding opportunities and expressing our area's needs to local, regional and state officials.

Water Conservation

The Chamber supports efforts that encourage water conservation and works cooperatively with the South Florida Water Management District on flood control, water quality and water management issues.

Water Quality

The Chamber supports efforts for improved water quality and encourages public/private partnerships and cooperation with organizations like Water Enhancement & Restoration Coalition (WERC) whose goal is to improve water quality within the Estero Bay watershed. We encourage retrofitting older developments to meet the current standards for water quality.

Water and Wastewater

It is inevitable with the present and future growth and development of the Bonita Springs area that additional capacity will be needed for water supply and wastewater treatment. Knowing this the Chamber supports the development of regional water supply and wastewater treatment facilities in locations determined appropriate to accommodate them. Bonita Springs Utilities is recognized by the Chamber as the regional supplier of these utilities.

The Chamber also encourages the regional development of an irrigation water supply plan. This plan should encourage use of reclaimed water and surface water sources as a priority over groundwater sources. The plan should also require aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) and/or other storage for irrigation water.

Tourism

Basic Philosophy: Tourism related services are a major part of our economy. The Chamber actively promotes our area's tourism assets locally through professional publications and globally through the Chamber's web site. We work cooperatively with the Lee Island Coast Visitor and Convention Bureau and we support regional tourism initiatives with Collier County as we recognize that it is our job to "move people" around our community and provide visitor services. We encourage our local governments to support initiatives that will serve to enhance and promote tourism in southwest Florida.

Beaches/Beach Renourishment

Tourism revenue, growth and the prosperity in Bonita Springs can all be directly linked to our beautiful coastline and beaches. We support efforts that ensure the protection of our shoreline from beaches extending north from Bonita Beach to the north end of Lovers Key State Recreational Park. Specifically, the Chamber supports environmental standards that impact the tourism industry through beach renourishment and enhancement. The Chamber encourages and supports local governments' requests for state funding for beach maintenance.

Eco-Tourism

The natural resources of Bonita Springs are one of its greatest assets. We support and encourage the development of eco-tourism opportunities both in Bonita Springs and in other parts of southwest Florida. We specifically feel that the areas east of I-75 being acquired by the South Florida Management District should be considered a passive recreational area for residents and visitors alike.

Off Shore Oil Drilling (*Official position presented annually since 1997*)

We strongly oppose any off shore oil drilling that could negatively impact our coastal community.

Southwest Regional Airport

Based on the growing number of arrivals at the Southwest Regional Airport, the Chamber supports the expansion plans for the mid-field terminal complex. Expansion of the airport's facilities should give it a competitive advantage to attract and maintain major carriers that can offer competitive air travel rates. We would oppose any reductions in the funding for the proposed mid-field terminal and related improvements.

Tourism Funding

We support the Lee Island Coast Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) and the Tourism Development Council (TDC) and their expenditure of funds generated through the local bed tax. We believe it is important for the VCB to attract visitors through national and international advertising and promotion. We also support the targeted funding for Beach Renourishment for the public beach areas in our community. Additionally, we support enhanced facilities to support tourism in southwest Florida.

Workforce

Basic Philosophy: The Chamber believes that to have a viable economy the community must address and support the needs of the workforce. A workforce that is well trained, motivated and reliable is an asset to our community and will support economic growth. Services to support the workforce such as housing and healthcare need to be readily available within the community.

Training/Development

The Chamber believes workforce training begins with our school system, colleges and university which are complemented by the efforts of our local employers in continuing education and training of our workforce. Training needs to be locally accessible and appropriate to the changing needs of our economic base. We encourage cooperation between our Workforce Development Board, economic development agencies and private business.

The Chamber has actively worked with our local grade and high schools to determine business resources, financial and personnel, to help them address school-to-work issues.

Housing

The Chamber recognizes the importance of having a mix of housing types and cost points that are readily available throughout the community to provide a range of affordable housing options for our growing workforce. To have a healthy and balanced economy, the community must provide affordable housing to our workforce within the community. The Chamber accepts the federal definition of "affordable" housing as housing for which a household spends no more than 30% of its income for housing (principal, interest, taxes and insurance).

We believe that private/public partnerships will best address this issue. We encourage local government to make this issue a top priority and we support the efforts of non-profit organizations whose mission is to provide affordable housing specifically to our workforce as well as special needs housing including senior citizen housing. We encourage local employers to recognize the importance of workforce housing and to participate in developing programs that will increase the supply and availability of workforce housing.