

## County drops Perico Island median improvement plans

By Ryan Paice  
Islander Reporter

A dispute over proposed improvements to a pair of medians on the Palma Sola Scenic Highway ended as abruptly as it began.

"Manatee County is not moving forward with median improvements on Perico Island at this time," County Commission Chair Kevin Van Ostenbridge wrote in a June 2 statement emailed to The Islander.

Van Ostenbridge, who represents the island, did not respond to a follow-up email from The Islander the same day asking for details about that decision.

His message marked a shift in the county's plans, which Van Ostenbridge seemed adamant to pursue less than a month ago.

The county applied in May for a Florida Department of Transportation permit to improve two medians on Manatee Avenue/State Road 64 by replacing the trees and landscaping with Alexander palm and royal palm trees, a sod border and new irrigation.

The plans also involved an agreement with the DOT for the county to maintain the medians, instead Bradenton, which currently maintains the spaces.

The medians currently hosts oak trees and sabal palms that were planted in 2008, as well as ground plants, which died due to lack of maintenance since the last improvements.

DOT district landscape architect and scenic highway coordinator Darryl Richard shared the county's application May 11 with members of the Palma Sola Scenic Highway Corridor Management Entity to collect feedback on the proposal.



White flags line a median June 2 outside near the Perico Bay Club along the Palma Sola Scenic Highway. Islander Photo: Lisa Neff

The CME serves as oversight for the 4.5-mile stretch of Manatee Avenue, from its intersection with 75th Street on the mainland to Gulf Drive in Holmes Beach, as part of the Florida Scenic Highway program.

The Palma Sola Scenic Highway also includes a stretch of East Bay Drive in Holmes Beach, from its intersection with Manatee Avenue to the Bradenton Beach Scenic Highway where East Bay Drive turns into Gulf Drive/State Road 789.

Holmes Beach city engineer Sage Kamiya, who

serves as a member of the CME, responded to Richard in a May 11 email to express concern with replacing the medians' existing trees.

"Removing what I understand are existing live oaks and sabal palms does not seem consistent with Palma Sola Committee preferences," Kamiya wrote.

CME member Joshua Linney wrote in a May 12 email that he would "definitely oppose" replacing the trees: "I think it is unnecessary and does not maintain or contribute to the natural character of the area."

Carmine DeMilio, the deputy director of parks and grounds for the county's property management department, supported the plans in a May 11 email.

"With all due respect, we are only attempting to beautify and enhance these medians," DeMilio wrote. "The existing conditions can be considered an eyesore and lacking maintenance to some. . . . I'm not sure that this is the standard or condition that reflects Manatee County and the surrounding cities, especially as visitors enter and exit the island."

Van Ostenbridge also backed the plans in a May 12 email to CME members.

"These two medians are part of a countywide initiative that the entire BOCC has embraced. All of the medians on Manatee Avenue are to take on this new look. Let's not waste any additional time on discussion. Please, move forward with site work ASAP," Van Ostenbridge wrote.

The CME had scheduled a special meeting in June, two months ahead of its next regular meeting in August, to discuss the matter.

Palma Sola Scenic Highway CME member Ingrid McClellan told The Islander June 2 she was happy Van Ostenbridge would drop the tree replacement.

She said replacing the existing trees with different palm trees would be a waste of money and the medians could be improved more efficiently with regular maintenance instead of expensive additions.

"I think that was a smart decision because more county commissioner, county department and citizen input is necessary for such a change," McClellan said.

Despite Van Ostenbridge's June 2 statement, the CME still held a special meeting in June but shifted its focus.

Without the county's proposed improvements, and the maintenance agreement that would go with it, McClellan said the CME should ask the city of Bradenton to better maintain the medians moving forward.