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Longwater and Bellmar Villages: A grand deal or a raw deal for Collier County?

At the hearings and in their advertising, Collier Enterprises proudly exclaims that in exchange for the County's approval of three 1,000-acre villages and a 515-acre town core, that 12,300-acres will be preserved. The developer's website states: *"Collier Enterprises will preserve more than 12,000 environmentally sensitive acres as part of the plan for the Town of Big Cypress and the villages of Rivergrass, Longwater, and Bellmar."*¹ The Conservancy believes that preservation of important environmental lands is the most significant benefit of the Rural Lands Stewardship Area (RLSA) program. However, preservation is only one side of the coin, development is the other side. Before Collier County makes a deal with Collier Enterprises it is important to have all the facts. Here are the facts and the other side of the coin that Collier Enterprises is not telling you:

- IN EXCHANGE FOR CREDIT FOR THE PRESERVE, THE DEVELOPER CAN BUILD **SIX** VILLAGES, **NOT THREE!**
- DEVELOPMENT IS ALREADY PROHIBITED WITHIN 86% OF THE 12,300 ACRE PROPERTY BY VIRTUE OF THE SITE'S LOCATION IN THE RLSA.
- IF THE DEVELOPER DID NOT SET ASIDE THE PRESERVE, THEY COULD BUILD LESS THAN 2,500 HOMES. USING CREDITS FROM THE PRESERVE, THE DEVELOPER COULD BUILD MORE THAN 20,000 HOMES.
- THE DEVELOPER STATES THEY ARE RESTORING FLOWWAYS WITHIN THE CAMP KEAIS STRAND, WITHIN THE 12,300 ACRE PRESERVE, BUT THE RESTORATION IS INADEQUATE FOR HYDROLOGIC RESTORATION.
- LONGWATER AND BELLMAR ARE JUST ONE PART OF A 45,000-ACRE MASSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE RLSA.

Longwater and Bellmar fail to be fiscally neutral.

- A BUSINESS-AS-USUAL APPROACH IS INAPPROPRIATE FOR ESTIMATING THE VILLAGES' COSTS.
- LONGWATER AND BELLMAR WILL RESULT IN A \$92.2 MILLION DEFICIT FOR TRAFFIC IMPACTS.

¹ TownofBigCypress.com. Accessed April 30, 2021.



Conservancy of Southwest Florida has been awarded Charity Navigator's prestigious 4-Star top rating for good governance, sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency. Charity Navigator is America's largest and most respected independent evaluator of charities.

- COLLIER COUNTY ERRONEOUSLY DISREGARDS VILLAGE TRAFFIC AS BACKGROUND TRAFFIC WHEN ASSESSING FAIR SHARE OF COSTS FOR ROAD IMPROVEMENTS.
- TAXPAYERS WILL SUBSIDIZE A NEW ROAD, BIG CYPRESS PARKWAY, WHICH WILL BE USED PRIMARILY BY TRAFFIC FROM THE DEVELOPER'S VILLAGES.
- IT IS INAPPROPRIATE TO USE FUEL TAXES AND GRANTS TO SUBSIDIZE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS NECESSITATED BY VILLAGE TRAFFIC.
- THE ECONOMIC ASSESSMENTS UNDERSTIMATE POPULATIONS OF THE VILLAGES, THEREBY UNDERSTATING COSTS OF THE VILLAGES:
 1. ECONOMIC ASSESSMENTS INCLUDED A VERY HIGH VACANCY RATE
 2. ECONOMIC ASSESSMENTS USED OLD DATA WITH FEWER PEOPLE PER HOME
- THE DEVELOPER FAILED TO PROVIDE THE REQUIRED FISCAL IMPACT ANALYSIS FOR WATER AND WASTEWATER IMPACTS.
- THE COUNTY COULD COLLECT MORE IMPACT FEES IF THEY WANTED TO.

The Villages will result in severe traffic issues.

- TRAFFIC EXPERT STATES THAT IMMOKALKEE ROAD WILL BE AN *"AVOIDABLE TRAIN WRECK"*.
- LONGWATER AND BELLMAR WILL ADD TRAFFIC TO FAILING ROADS, EVEN AFTER COMMITTED ROAD IMPROVEMENTS ARE COMPLETE.
- COUNTY TRANSPORTATION STAFF STATED THAT THE CUMULATIVE TRAFFIC IMPACTS FROM THE VILLAGES WILL BE SIGNIFICANT.

What are the environmental concerns?

- LONGWATER AND BELLMAR WOULD DESTROY 2,000 ACRES OF PRIMARY PANTHER HABITAT.
- THE PROJECTS WOULD RESULT IN A SIGNIFICANT LOSS OF ADULT BREEDING PANTHER HABITAT
- THE VILLAGE PLANS FAIL TO ADDRESS LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY FOR WILDLIFE.
- VILLAGE RESIDENTS COULD PRESSURE PANTHER REFUGE TO HALT PRESCRIBED BURNING.
- AGRICULTURAL LANDS ARE AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF PRIMARY PANTHER HABITAT.

Loss of Agricultural Lands will be significant.

- THE VILLAGES WILL CONTRIBUTE TO 10% OF THE STATES' ANNUAL LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS.
- 71% OF THE LANDS TARGETED FOR DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE RLSA ARE USED FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION.

Longwater and Bellmar are not villages.

- COLLIER COUNTY PLANNING STAFF STATED THAT LONGWATER'S DESIGN DEPICTS A TYPICAL SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT, RATHER THAN A VILLAGE.
- COLLIER COUNTY PLANNING STAFF STATED THAT BELLMAR'S DESIGN DEPICTS A TYPICAL SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT, RATHER THAN A VILLAGE.

In summary, the real deal that the developer is offering to the county is 12,300 acres of lands that are mostly protected through the RLSA program and a flow-way restoration plan that provides inadequate hydrologic restoration, in exchange for credits that would allow the developer to build **SIX 1,000-acre villages!** Longwater and Bellmar Villages alone would significantly increase the county's population, create severe traffic impacts, contribute to 10% of the states' total yearly loss of agricultural lands, pass tens of millions of dollars of costs on to taxpayers, and destroy two thousand acres of primary panther habitat of the endangered Florida panther. Instead of a grand deal, as portrayed by the developer, Collier County would be getting a raw deal by approving Longwater and Bellmar.