

Cortez Village
Community Vision Plan
2000

How This Vision Plan Came To Be

Cortez Village Community Vision Plan 2000 was developed with the help of 1000 Friends of Florida and Manatee County Planning Department/Cortez Waterfronts Florida Program. The Cortez Waterfronts Florida Committee (CWFC), made up of local residents, property owners and business owners, provided a great deal of input, devoting two regular monthly meetings to the visioning process.

The Cortez Waterfronts Florida Program encompasses all of the area in Cortez that is defined and listed as an historic district by the National Register of Historic Places. This area includes all lands lying south of Cortez Road and all properties along 119th Street West and running south and west to Sarasota Bay. Also located in this planning area as a future addendum are lands on the north side of Cortez Road that, when developed or redeveloped, will have significant impacts on the historic Village of Cortez.

The first visioning session was held with the CWFC on February 10, 2000 at their regular monthly meeting. After the meeting a one page survey (stamped return envelope included) was mailed to all property owners in Cortez and hand delivered to renters. Of the 99 surveys mailed or hand delivered, 58 were returned (59%). The March meeting of the CWFC was devoted solely to the visioning process. Both CWFC members and local residents participated.

On April 1, 2000, representatives from the Waterfronts Florida Program office of 1000 Friends of Florida came to Cortez for an all-day visioning session. Issues that were raised at the other visioning meetings were clarified. Special thanks to Alex Magee and Dan Pennington for facilitating this important last visioning effort.

This plan is the synthesis of the three visioning sessions, the completed survey results, and other written community input that was received by the Cortez Waterfronts Florida Office. It reflects the vision of the people of Cortez, who proudly call themselves "Cortezians".

Special thanks go out to Alex Magee and Dan Pennington of the Waterfronts Florida section of 1000 Friends of Florida and to Teresa Divers of the Florida Department of Community Affairs, Coastal Management Program.

Underlying Assumptions of the Community

Cortez is defined and preserved by the continued active presence of the commercial fishing industry on its waterfront. All participants in the first visioning session in February 2000 agreed that the commercial fishing industry has preserved Cortez. It keeps the community free of tourist and weekend oriented marina or other 'visitor' attractors. It keeps the waterfront busy, and makes it less attractive to wealthy, part-time homebuilders who may be looking for quiet waterfront property.

So far, this community has been successful in keeping the village open and the waterfront accessible. Unlike other areas where smaller homes on waterfronts have been replaced by large designer homes that block bay views, gulf breezes, and that create a fortress of stucco as seen from the water, Cortez retains open skies. Cortezians enjoy unobstructed views of Sarasota Bay and, for the most part, enjoy cooling Gulf breezes. Homes are small and low on the small lots. Streets are narrow and walkable, and front stairs open onto the street, reflecting the welcoming neighborhood atmosphere in Cortez.

There is a certain tolerance required of residents in Cortez, and those who move here are expected to understand that need. Cortezians build, refurbish and repair boats in their yards. They build crab traps and mend fishing nets. They store commercial fishing equipment in their front yards. These activities have been a part of community life in Cortez for over 110 years. Putting up with the noise, unsightly clutter and accompanying odors is not for everyone. Those who move here need to not only tolerate the impacts of this commercial fishing culture, but embrace it. Almost all who live in Cortez understand that the sense of community is what makes this a special place.

What Cortezians Want Cortez to Look Like in 50 years

With maybe one dissenting voice, virtually all Cortezians want Cortez to be very much the same place in 50 years that it is today. Once again, the emphasis is on *community* - a working, commercial fishing community. There is no desire to change the fundamental character of Cortez. At their April 2000 meeting, the CWFC approved the following statement as the vision statement for Cortez:

The Vision for Cortez is to keep Cortez as much the way it is now as possible. Over the next 20 to 50 years, Cortezians hope to retain the unique heritage of Cortez. This includes continuation of the fishing culture and preservation of the existing community's character, with limited change.

On the Vision Survey, 78% of respondents "agreed" and another 18% "agreed somewhat" that Cortez has a definite community character that needs to be preserved. This is not a surprise. As early as its January, 2000 meeting the CWFC adopted the following mission statement:

The mission of the Cortez Waterfronts Florida Committee is to protect and maintain the values and neighborhood spirit of the Village of Cortez by guiding change in a way that preserves our community and our commercial fishing heritage.

Cortezians realize that this is a unique place. It is home.

What Did the Survey Tell Us?

The survey was sent to all households in Cortez and all property owners in the Waterfronts Florida Boundaries. The survey results say that Cortez is a special place and should be planned to stay that way. Besides asking if Cortez has a definite community character (as addressed above), the survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with the following statements:

Storage of commercial fishing equipment and some commercial boat repair are appropriate uses in the residential portions of Cortez. (**agree/agree somewhat: 87%**)

Property owners should be unrestricted in what they do, including use for marinas, condos, or any other use. (**disagree : 56%**)

Cortez residents should have some say in what happens on the old Sigma site and 1912 Schoolhouse. (**agree/agree somewhat: 88%**)

FEMA regulations that require elevation when improvements are made to older (but non-historic) homes should be changed to allow more flexibility for growing families. (**agree/agree somewhat: 91%**)

Traffic control devices need to be installed in Cortez such as speed humps. (**disagree: 62%**)

I am concerned about the effects of a planned third traffic lane on Cortez Road which will speed traffic through the Village making it harder to turn right onto Cortez Road and left into the Village. (**agree/agree somewhat: 62%**)

Other statements and portions of the survey said:

Tourism should be (choose one): promoted; kept at present levels and better planned; less than it is now. (**kept at present levels/planned: 65.5%**)

The three most important issues in Cortez are: (list them)

1. New development/Sigma/Schoolhouse/Vacant Properties
2. Community Character/Intrusion of large homes
3. Traffic Issues/Access/Cortez Road widening.

The survey results helped determine what subjects would be discussed or clarified during the visioning process. For instance, tourism was discussed in detail at the final visioning session on April 1st. At that session the idea of tourism being “better planned” was elaborated and defined. The survey also invited respondents to write their comments, concerns and suggestions on the back of the survey. This is very much a working Village. The survey generated wider input and provided a forum for those who could not make the visioning meetings.

Goals For Cortez as Identified in the Visioning Sessions and Survey

The goals for Cortez were developed with input from all visioning sessions plus the vision survey. Goals were ranked by importance through use of survey responses and input at the March 16, 2000 visioning session with the CWFC and local residents. The number one goal identified in this vision plan is to maintain village character through control of building size, setbacks and elevation requirements. This plan categorizes goals and strategies by the ability to easily identify actions that can be taken to implement those strategies. Groupings may not coincide exactly with the goals that were discussed at the visioning sessions, but all goals discussed are included herein and classified as goals, strategies and actions.

The following goals were identified (in order of significance):

- I. ***Maintain Community Character:*** Cortezians are very concerned about the effects on the village of large, elevated homes that dwarf other homes in the Village, that either occupy too much of the lot (setbacks too small), are so tall they block light and breezes from neighbors, or loom over the streetscapes. Such large, incompatible homes have a negative impact on the historic character of Cortez and encourage gentrification of the community.
 1. ***Strategy:*** Develop design standards for new homes to ensure that they fit the scale and character of Cortez. Provide guidelines for architects designing the homes, staff reviewing the design and for the Manatee County Historic Preservation Board (HPB) in approving new construction and alterations.
 1. ***Action:*** Apply for grant funds to develop compatibility design standards for Cortez. *(This has been done and a grant was awarded by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources).*
 2. ***Action:*** Develop design standards with grant funds and/or other sources and then distribute them to local architects, planners and the HPB.
 2. ***Strategy:*** Develop specific development standards for Cortez to include setbacks, building heights, allowable uses and building size. Present these to the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for adoption in the Manatee County Land Development Code (LDC).
 1. ***Action:*** Use the vision plan to develop a special overlay district and specific use standards for Cortez. This district will allow fishing-related activities such as storage of fishing boats, crab traps and other fishing equipment in front yards as an acceptable and historic use in Cortez.

2. **Action:** Use the design standards as a template to develop and adopt special building standards for Cortez. These standards will recognize that certain areas of historic homes have smaller setbacks and that these setbacks should be preserved to allow for additions to accommodate expanding families.
 3. **Action:** Negotiate with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to develop and adopt special elevation standards for Cortez. Standards to propose include: not imposing the “50% rule” on non-contributing structures that are working to restore historical significance or for limited expansion of non-contributing, pre-FIRM homes; and reduced elevations for new construction so that new homes will better conform to the character of existing homes and to preserve the circulation of Bay breezes and light, open spaces.
- 3 **Strategy:** Develop special standards and procedures for historic homes and properties in Cortez for presentation to the BOCC.
- 1 **Action:** Work with the County to amend the LDC to eliminate the need for an elevation variance for contributing structures in Cortez (LDC Section 718.10.1).
 2. **Action:** Explore the possibility of setting up a revolving fund for historic homes to pay for restoration/maintenance of historic features when repairs are made.
 3. **Action:** Prepare Ordinance allowing tax breaks for historic homes consistent with Chapter 193.505, Florida Statutes, development of an implementation process, and adoption by the BOCC.
 4. **Action:** Work with the Cortez Waterfronts Florida Committee (CWFC), the BOCC and other agencies to develop incentives for keeping and restoring historic materials on Cortez homes and other structures.

II. **Prevent Incompatible Development on Vacant Properties:** The type, design, traffic impacts and uses that will be allowed on vacant properties in Cortez is a major concern. Vision survey results indicate that development of vacant lots is the number two concern of Cortezians, just after large homes.

- 1 **Strategy:** Provide clear guidelines to developers of the old Sigma property about what Cortezians want on the site based on the recommendations of the participants at two vision sessions that dealt with the site on March 16th and April 1st, 2000.

1 **Action:** Discuss community concerns at the scheduled pre-application meeting and request that plans be presented to the Cortez community. Concerns agreed upon by the community include:

a. Compatible uses.

Commercial fish houses
Boat building/repair
Aereration/shellfish aquiculture
Small marina
Small, at grade cottage, set back from the water
Limited dry storage with building height no higher than a typical two story building.

b. Incompatible uses.

Tourist destination businesses
Condominiums or resort cottages/villas
Large dry storage facilities
Privacy fencing that blocks views or mars open space look
Anything that generates unacceptable levels of vehicular traffic.

c. Like to see on the site

Any marina developed should be eligible for participation in the 'Clean Marina' program.

Any marina should be small in scale and limited in the amount of external people and traffic that are drawn to the site.

Levels of activities at the site should be steady rather than having peak times which would impact the neighbors.

Dredging should only be done to support current levels and types of boats, not deep water dredging.

Activity should be focused on weekdays, not on weekends.

No activity should increase levels of pollution in Sarasota Bay.

Existing residential access along 121st St. should be maintained.

No offsite parking should be allowed nor should activities on site attract more vehicular traffic than can be parked on the site itself.

Small boat repair facility that will serve local fishing boats

and that is geared towards boats arriving from the water, not boats trucked in over the streets.

Dry storage that is sensitively placed (including location, height and orientation) that avoids conflicts with the adjacent properties views and open space and that fits into the neighborhood.

All uses on site should be water dependent, i.e., focused on the water, not the land.

The physical scale of any project should be supportive of and compatible with the existing Cortez community.

d. Not wanted on the site

Existing residential access along 121st St. should not be through parking lots.

No offsite parking.

No parasail or jet ski rentals on site.

No boat repair facilities that depend on boats being trucked in over Cortez streets.

No public address system on the site.

No huge buildings and design that is insensitive to the neighborhood like the Bradenton Beach Marina.

No resort residential on the site.

No homes or buildings sitting right on the water. Structures should be set back.

Hours of operation should be set which respect the residential character of the neighborhood.

2. **Action:** Continue to monitor the development requests and approvals on the Sigma property for compatibility with the Cortez vision plan.

B. **Strategy:** Monitor and provide input on the County renovation/reuse of the 1912 Schoolhouse.

1. **Action:** Continue to monitor and work with the County to provide input and ideas on the renovation/reuse plan for the 1912 Schoolhouse.
2. **Action:** Waterfronts Florida and FISH work together to develop a plan and funding to put outdoor, handicap accessible bathrooms on the Schoolhouse site within a reasonable amount of time.
3. **Action:** Invite the project manager(s) for the 1912 Schoolhouse to CWFC meetings on a regular basis for updates on plans and progress.

- C. **Strategy:** Expand the Cortez Vision Plan to include input and recommendations for other vacant lands either in Cortez or which directly effect Cortez.

Action: Develop a subcommittee to study, take input and discuss the north and south sides of Cortez Road to ensure that any new development of vacant lands or any redevelopment of land will enhance the Village, rather than negatively impact the Village.

2. **Action:** Take a pro-active approach to the development or redevelopment of other vacant lands in Cortez at a later date through subcommittee input.

III **Control traffic in Cortez to maintain the safety of our children and other pedestrians and to provide safe and efficient movement along Cortez Road through the Village.**

- A. **Strategy:** Work with local County agencies to control traffic inside the Village.

Action: Work with the Manatee County Transportation Department to install a stop sign on 45th Avenue West somewhere between 123rd Street West and 124th Street West.

2. **Action:** Work with the Community Traffic Safety Team and the Manatee County Sheriff's Department to request more citations in Cortez for those who ignore speed limits and traffic signs.

- B. **Strategy:** Work with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to ensure that traffic controls and signage on Cortez Road meet the needs of Cortezians entering and exiting the south side of Cortez.

- 1 **Action:** Contact FDOT about the plans for a third lane on Cortez Road to ensure that local residents have input into design that is sensitive to the pedestrian traffic on the road and to cars exiting Cortez.

2. **Action:** Contact FDOT about striping and signage to keep the access to Cortez Road from the south side of 119th Street West open when the light at 119th Street is red.

IV **Maintain commercial fishing to protect the waterfront from incompatible development and to maintain the historic fishing culture of Cortez.**

- A. **Strategy:** Educate the general public about the economic benefits, lifestyles, and environmental effects of commercial fishing through establishment of a Commercial Fishing Subcommittee.

- 1 **Action:** Work with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Marine Fisheries Division to write, produce and promote commercial fishing public service announcements. (*The Commercial Fishing Promotion Subcommittee has been formed and has met with Fla. Ag & NR to coordinate PSAs.*)
 2. **Action:** Coordinate with other commercial fishing areas both inside and outside of the Waterfronts Florida program to push for statewide airing of PSAs.
 - 3 **Action:** Provide input and ideas on commercial fishing brochures to be published by Fla. Ag. & NR.
- B. **Strategy:** Retain the IL Future Land Use Categories and LM zoning on waterfront properties and discourage any new residential development of the waterfront.
- Action:** Provide recommendations to County reviewers when property owners apply for future land use map amendments or rezoning of waterfront properties using this document for consistency.
- C. **Strategy:** Support dredging and submerged land lease fee agreements that benefit existing commercial fish houses.
- 1 **Action:** Write a letter to the West Coast Inland Navigation District supporting a dredging program to improve access to the Cortez Bait and Seafood site. (*Letter has been written and sent to WCIND.*)
 2. **Action:** Continue to monitor the submerged lands lease problem and send support letters if requested or needed.

V **Get drainage problems and backups resolved and improve drainage in Cortez.**

- A. **Strategy:** Work with the Manatee County Transportation Department to repair or clean problem drainage conveyances.
- 1 **Action:** Solicit more input on use of the map in the Waterfronts Florida office to identify all drainage problems in Cortez including blocked ditches, broken or silted pipes, collapsed pipes or gutters and blocked outfalls. Problem areas identified at vision sessions so far include:

Cortez road draining onto property at the corner of 119th St. W.
Mangroves blocking the ditch by the southwest end of the 1912 Schoolhouse property.

Collapsed storm drains at the end of 123rd St. W.
Need for stormwater treatment to prevent pollution of Sarasota Bay.
Need for discussion of stormwater runoff when discussing any added pavement on Cortez Road.

2. **Action:** Use completed map and put together temporary subcommittee to show Transportation Dept. representatives where the problems lie and to discuss options for remedies.

B. **Strategy:** Work to decrease additional impervious surface in Cortez.

Action: Consider the effects of maximum lot coverages on drainage of adjacent properties when developing design standards for construction in new lots.

2. **Action:** Include requirements for pervious parking and construction techniques in any LDC revisions that give special standards for Cortez.

VI. **Tourism should be contained at present levels and better planned.**

A. **Strategy:** Allow “passive” attraction of tourists and discourage “active” tourism.

1. **Action:** Discourage use of the Cortez waterfront (except for areas adjacent to Cortez Road) for parasail, charter boats or other active tourist destinations.
2. **Action:** When the 1912 Schoolhouse is developed, encourage visitors to leave cars in the parking lot at the Schoolhouse if they wish to tour the rest of Cortez to reduce traffic on residential streets.

VII **Other Issues that are important in Cortez include: Reconstruction of the Miller/Few dock; Burtons Store removal; retention of existing structures; and renovation of the Old Fire House.**

A. **Strategy:** Use the Miller/Few dock and net camp as a community access to Sarasota Bay , for launching canoes and for passive recreational use.

- 1 **Action:** Form a subcommittee to put together an application for funding of reconstruction. (*Grant funding was approved by the WCIND for the County to begin dock reconstruction in October, 2000*)

2. **Action:** Use the Miller/Few dock subcommittee to put together a restoration plan for the dock and to oversee the work in conjunction with Manatee County.
- B. **Strategy:** Find a way to remove the Burtons Store from its present location. (The vision participants said to demolish it [burn it] but Cortez Village Historical Society members are working to move it to a place where it can be secured and restored.)
 - C. **Strategy:** Retain existing structures in Cortez that are not considered contributing historic structures to prevent the introduction of large, less consistent structures in their place.
 1. **Action:** Review the COA criteria for demolition in section 514.3.2.4 and revise as necessary to protect non-contributing structures in the historic district that, if demolished, would lead to new, incompatible development.
 - D. **Strategy:** Renovate the Old Fire House (a.k.a., Cortez Community Center) to be utilized as a community asset for fish fries, the Fishing Festival and for use by local residents.

Action: Use the first year Waterfronts Florida Grant and local manpower to renovate the Old Fire House. (*First year grant has been approved for use for renovations.*)