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Collier planners back new village in rural area near Lee County line

Laura Layden
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Key Points

- A former citrus grower's plan to build a new village in rural Collier County has been recommended for approval by the county's planning commission.
- The proposed Corkscrew Grove East village would include up to 4,502 homes, commercial space, and affordable housing.
- In exchange for development, the developer, Alico Inc., will preserve about 4,500 acres of environmentally sensitive land.
- While environmental groups like Audubon Florida praised the plan's conservation efforts, critics raised concerns about its impact on Florida panthers and traffic.

A longtime citrus grower's plans to build a new village in rural Collier County have cleared another regulatory hurdle.

On March 19, the Collier County Planning Commission voted unanimously in favor of allowing Fort Myers-based Alico Inc. to create a stewardship receiving area on land where the company has grown and harvested oranges for decades.

The designation as a receiving area would allow Alico to develop a more than 1,400-acre village, known as Corkscrew Grove East.

The planning commission, sitting as the local planning agency and the Environmental Advisory Council, voted 4-0 to recommend approval to county commissioners, who will make the final decision.

The proposed village would have up to 4,502 residences and nearly 240,000 square feet of commercial uses, including retail shops, restaurants and medical offices, along with at least 45,020 square feet of civic spaces, which could be used for schools, churches and emergency services.

The village would include affordable housing.

The land is in a corner of Collier County that borders Lee and Hendry counties, sitting off Corkscrew Road, close to State Road 82. It's within the county's Rural Lands Stewardship Area, or RLSA.

The RLSA encompasses 185,000 acres around Immokalee east of Golden Gate Estates with the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge to the south and the Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest to the north. The stewardship overlay allows developers to build towns and villages on property with lower conservation value, in exchange for preserving the most environmentally sensitive land through a credit system.

Alico's petition would create new sending and receiving areas. In sending areas, land is preserved, generating the credits needed to build more compact and concentrated developments in the receiving areas.

Attorney: Village is in its rightful place

Naples land use attorney Rich Yovanovich, who represents Alico, told planning commissioners the application is one of nine to be submitted under the RLSA, with the others already approved.

"This is exactly where development is supposed to occur under provisions adopted in the growth management plan back in 2002," he said.

With the development of the village, Alico has committed to preserve about 4,500 acres of more environmentally sensitive land it owns nearby.

Mitch Hutchcraft, Alico's executive vice president of real estate, told planning commissioners how the 125-year-old company is winding down its citrus operations in Southwest Florida, and focusing on land management and development instead.

In early 2025, the public company announced it was getting out of the citrus business for good after its trees failed to recover from the blow of Hurricane Ian in 2022.

Hutchcraft explained how Alico had worked over many years to put many of its properties into conservation areas, including in the Devil's Garden and the Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest.

"We're committed to conservation and stewardship, and our community involvement includes Alico donated the 760 acres that is now the site for Florida Gulf Coast University," Hutchcraft said. "So, we have been part of the community for a long time."

With its plans for a village, he said, Alico went "over and above the original foundation of the RLSA to make sure that we were putting development in the right place and preserving the correct property."

He shared details about the property Alico is preserving, which includes much of its Felda Grove farther east that has "lots of high priority wetlands," and has served as primary panther habitat and acted as a flood plain to contain excess water. It would continue to be used for cattle grazing, but layers of development rights would be stripped from it.

With its village, Alico has gone the extra mile to protect wildlife, Hutchcraft said.

RSW celebrates major milestone for its expansion project

LOCAL & STATE, 3A

Naples Daily News
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025 | NAPLESNEWS.COM
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New village could have 3,200 homes

Developer agrees to preserve over 560 acres off-site

Laura Layden
Fort Myers News-Press & Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

With a unanimous vote, Collier commissioners approved a new rural village.

At a meeting Dec. 9, the board greenlighted the new village, known as Horse Trials.

The development is planned on nearly 1,218 acres on the north side of Oil Well Road, west of State Road 29. It's the eighth village or town the county has approved in the environmentally sensitive Rural Lands Stewardship Area (RLSA).

The stewardship area, adopted nearly 20 years ago, encompasses 185,000 acres around Immokalee, east of Golden Gate Estates, with the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge to the south and the Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest to the north.

The voluntary RLSA program allows developers to build higher-density towns and villages on property with lower conservation value in exchange for preserving the most environmentally sensitive land through a credit system.

See VILLAGE, Page 6A

Air rescue team pulls

What the 2026 Commercial Real Estate Data Is Really Telling Us About Southwest Florida

What are the numbers really saying?

Every year, our Managing Partner Matt Simmons takes the stage at the Market Trends of Southwest Florida event to cut through the noise and share what the data actually says about our commercial real estate market. This year, the contrast between national headlines and local reality was sharper than ever.

The headline the media wanted to write: commercial real estate is struggling, construction is soft, industrial vacancy is spiking. **The headline the data actually supports: $1.6 billion in commercial transaction volume — up 14% year-over-year. Commercial permits up 24%. The number of individual projects permitted up 61%. And commercial land transaction velocity accelerating dramatically into early 2026 as capital comes off the sidelines.**

Industrial: Two Speeds, Not One Story

The industrial vacancy headlines are technically accurate but wildly misleading. Yes, overall vacancy has risen above 7%. But when you break that number down by building age, a very different picture emerges. Buildings constructed in 2023 or later are sitting at 30%+ vacancy — and up to 46% in Charlotte County. Buildings from 2020 or earlier are essentially full. The problem is concentrated entirely in new, large-scale institutional distribution product that simply requires a longer lease-up runway.

The regional supply figure — 93 square feet of industrial space per household across all three counties — is within the healthy benchmark range of 50–90 sq ft. And with Collier County unable to accommodate its own industrial demand, Lee and Charlotte are absorbing that overflow. A major undisclosed industrial user is also expected to announce in Charlotte County in the coming weeks.

Office: A Structural Advantage

While major metros wrestle with 18% office vacancy, Southwest Florida sits at 3–6% — a remarkable figure that reflects the fundamental character of our market. Our office stock is predominantly small, owner-occupied buildings. We simply don't have the high-rise, multi-tenant towers that are suffering nationally. The market is bifurcating between distressed traditional office (selling at $150–$160/sq ft, far below replacement cost) and thriving medical office ($470–$545/sq ft), where new construction economics work and demand continues to grow.

Retail and Hospitality: The Real Story

Retail led all asset classes at 49% of total transaction volume. Major national brands are entering or expanding rapidly across Lee, Collier, and Charlotte counties — from Walmart and Lowe's on SR-82, to Buc-ee's in Port Charlotte, to Starbucks and Chick-fil-A retooling existing sites for drive-through-only formats targeting 80,000 daily vehicles.

Meanwhile, hospitality is undergoing a generational brand upgrade: Four Seasons in Naples, a JW Marriott on the East Trail, a billion-dollar South Seas rebuild on Captiva, and Margaritaville reportedly available at a price that could reset the barrier island hospitality market.

What This Means for Your Assets

Whether you own, lend against, or invest in commercial real estate in Southwest Florida, the market conditions in 2026 demand precise, locally grounded valuations — not estimates built on