

Tom Rothman 11/16/05

My Sense of a Rural Place

In one of the discussions we had on an issue in council, the question came about what 'rural' means. I struggled with defining it but finely came down to creating this list of characteristics that seem to define 'rural' for me. They're based on my remembrances of living in a small semi-rural community in New Jersey.

Since we tend to think of or want Sanibel to remain a 'rural' community, I thought it important to define just what that is.

Lots of Open space –I think of farming first but our protected lands certainly qualify.

2 Lane Roads with rather narrow shoulders – the narrow shoulders tend to be traffic calming.

Slow Pace/Simplicity of Life – at times I've been envious of the Mennonites in Lancaster, PA because of what appears to be from the outside anyway, a simpler, less complicated lifestyle. Certainly, not having a phone to put up with is a blessing.

Low Housing Density - typical for farming communities although seems to go against some of the principles of smart growth.

Low Speed Limits – In part because of the road design but also because of the slower pace of life.

Few or no 'Housing Developments' – housing developments (several houses built at the same time that looked much alike) were a sign of urbanization. Few homes looked like any other.

Minimized paving – dirt or gravel roads are more prevalent. Increased paving was another sign of urbanization.

Low Taxes – people and families were independent and did for themselves.

Low Expectations for Government Services – this was the driver for the lower taxes above. Also, farms and open land tend to put fewer demands on government services than residential housing.

Little Traffic or Congestion – the rural community has few reasons to draw people and their cars into the community from outside. Most traffic was from the residents themselves.