

Summary of the Master Plan and Beautification Steering Committee on February 2, 2010
Prepared by Jim Cox, PBA President and Steering Committee Member

At its January 12th meeting, the Steering Committee asked the consultant (EDSA) to develop an option that did not involve a parking garage or that located such a facility at the current location of the SRIA offices. On February 2nd, EDSA provided another draft that incorporates many of the ideas supported by PBA from the survey of March, 2009 and the PBA meeting on January 28, 2010.

Major components of the revised plan are:

Parking Garage – The plan will NOT have a parking garage. However, in order to restructure the roadways and add more landscaping, there is a net loss of 160 spaces in the core area (out of 1,900 currently available). The Committee asked EDSA to address this in the final plan, as a plan with a reduction in parking might not be “saleable” to the public or to the County Commissioners. Ideas to make up the parking spaces include providing a system for employee parking and shuttles from Gulf Breeze; and building more parking capacity by using the SRIA site for parking or adding a parking lot on the public space available between Avenida 13 and 14. If more parking is needed in the future, the recommended location to build a garage is to the west of the pier in what is now the Sheriff Substation parking lot or on the SRIA office site.

Roadways – The current plan extends Pensacola Beach Blvd. straight South through the Visitors Information Center (VIC) parking lot and directly into the Casino parking lot. There will be three traffic circles, and people will have a choice of continuing east as they do now, or proceeding straight to the Casino lot or to the west. EDSA feels this will keep traffic moving, but at a slower speed as the circles have a calming effect on traffic. EDSA claims that the reconfigured roads will handle about 25% more traffic than the present system. The VIC lot disappears and concerns were expressed about the impact on parking for the Sandshaker, which was given access to parking in this lot by the SRIA.

Toll Plaza – The plan will recommend aesthetic improvements to the toll plaza and investing in new systems similar to the Sun Pass to improve the flow of traffic at the toll plaza.

People Movement – There will be a “Beach to Sound” pedestrian promenade that connects the Casino and Quietwater areas. The roads will be slightly elevated with bridges, and the walkway slightly dipped to provide a wide, open walkway (not a tunnel) under traffic. There will also be a pedestrian promenade all along the Sound from Surf Burger to Paradise Bar. Two or three pedestrian walkways will connect this promenade to Via de Luna and to the Gulf. Pedestrian walkways will also be enhanced going north to the Grand Marlin and west to Hotel Indigo. The plan will also endorse an expanded trolley system using open-air trolleys.

Ferry System – The plan will support the concept of a ferry system and encourage further planning for it with the City of Pensacola, Escambia County and the National Park Service. This is not something that the Beach (or the toll) should be expected to unilaterally fund. Buck Lee reported that the National Park Service and the City are currently planning to set up a service between their two locations.

Entertainment – The plan will not include any specific recommendations about Gulfside Pavilion, but will encourage redeveloping it in the future to accommodate larger (2,500+) crowds and bigger named entertainment.

Eco-tourism – The plan will recommend a park area and an eco-tourism facility on part of the existing SRIA office site.

Moving public buildings – The plan recommends moving the VIC, the SRIA offices and the Sheriff’s substation. The VIC would move close to the toll plaza near the water towers. The SRIA offices and the sub station would move down Via De Luna next to the fire station.

Building Cap – The roadway plan is designed to accommodate future development, particularly more hotels on existing sites zoned for such use. I encouraged EDSA to include language in the plan that keeps the current residential building cap of 4,126 units. I believe it would be helpful to reinforce the building cap in the plan submitted to SRIA and the County Commission.