

March 14, 2014

To: The Board of Sarasota County Commissioners

cc: Sarasota County Planning, Zoning, Transportation, BRNC, Lake  
Sarasota Community Group

Re: Board Memo of March 18th, 2014 -- Spine Road

For almost a decade, the Bee Ridge Neighborhood Committee (BRNC) has represented the neighborhoods of the Bee Ridge Corridor, from Lake Sarasota, Laurel Oaks and Bent Tree to Heritage Oaks and Misty Creek.

For much of this time the Committee has worked with County staff from Planning, Transportation and Zoning on several aspects of the widening of Bee Ridge Road. Their unstinting willingness to help ensure that the improvements to Bee Ridge Rd. meet the needs of our communities has been gratifying. We believe the finished product will add up to a safe, aesthetically appealing, and sensible road with attractive roundabouts, walkways, fencing and buffering.

One problematic element of the project has been the intersection of Bee Ridge Rd. and Mauna Loa Boulevard. The cumulative projected development within the "Bee Ridge Park of Commerce" (BRPOC) and the Ansin Tract immediately to its west includes a hotel, drugstore, two restaurants, a grocery, two new residential areas containing 90 and 360 condos respectively, a giant Racetrac gas station, and tens of thousands of square feet of office and retail space. These significant additions, when added to the existing healthcare facilities on the BRPOC and Ansin tract, will put intense pressure on the Mauna Loa intersection, since the current road configuration of Ansin and BRPOC is a *cul de sac*.

The **Board Memo of March 18th 2014** (Memo) recommends retaining Spine Road on the future road plan. If and when Spine Rd were built, drivers would have an alternate means of exiting from the BRPOC and Ansin tract facilities by going north along Spine to Palmer and farther still to Fruitville and even to University Parkway. Without this northward connector, all traffic has no choice but to enter and exit via the Bee Ridge/Mauna Loa intersection.

Building a viable north/south artery linking Bee Ridge to University via Spine Rd. thus appears to serve certain transportation goals of the County. So long as contiguous neighborhoods are not adversely affected, the idea appears to deserve careful consideration. But if we step back from the focus on Spine Rd. to look at the larger picture, certain concerns arise. Specifically, the plan has the potential to seriously impact communities south of Bee Ridge Rd. These impacts, not addressed by the Memo, are what we wish to briefly bring to your attention.

Creating a north-south Spine Road artery gives southbound drivers on the new connector the option to proceed straight into Mauna Loa Blvd. south of Bee Ridge Rd. (See map below.) Mauna Loa, the main internal road for the wholly residential neighborhood of Lake Sarasota, would now become a segment of a north-south connector fed by at least seven significant east-west corridors: University, Fruitville, Palmer, Webber, Bee Ridge, Proctor and Clark.

Our Communities feel a closer look is warranted here. Focusing solely on roads north of Bee Ridge Rd., the Memo does not speak to the potential “collateral damage” to Lake Sarasota. The creation of a north-south corridor could transform the character of this neighborhood from a quiet residential place (with 25 mph roads) into a piece of a much larger road system. And it’s not just one neighborhood: Mauna Loa Blvd. connects to Proctor Rd. via Hand Road, a small two-lane road that serves two schools

(Oak Park and Lakeview Elementary), a dog park, and Sarasota Baptist Church.

Transforming an internal neighborhood street into a segment of a major connector fed by cars from seven major east-west corridors not only compromises the safety, security, and serenity of the neighborhood and schools, but could also adversely impact property values in Lake Sarasota.

Appropriating a neighborhood's road to serve as a segment of a major thoroughfare appears to go directly against **Transportation Policy 1.6.2:**

*This policy addresses the need to design arterial roadway systems to deter traffic intrusion into adjacent neighborhoods by facilitating movement of traffic through residential areas.*

Much is at stake, raising questions:

- Would the momentum of the new corridor's success lead to widening Mauna Loa and/or Hand Rd., involving the taking of property and other disruptions?
- Is there an alternative parallel route that would avoid passing through Lake Sarasota?
- Would the County pledge to implement serious traffic-calming measures to discourage intense vehicular traffic from flowing through Lake Sarasota and past the schools and church?

In considering the retention of Spine Rd., these concomitant impacts need the Board's careful scrutiny. A traffic study could reveal not only the connector artery's impact on Lake Sarasota, but also offer a clearer vision than anyone now has of the cumulative impact all the new development in the BRPOC will have on traffic at the intersection at Mauna Loa and Bee Ridge.

In conclusion: The BRNC at this point has taken no position with regard to the retention of Spine Rd. But we respectfully request that the Board look at the whole picture, and carefully consider the impact of this “connector” upon the communities of Lake Sarasota, Oak Park School, Lakeview Elementary School, and Sarasota Baptist Church, as well as upon the intersection at Mauna Loa and Bee Ridge Rd., and make ample provision to forestall consequences that otherwise could prove irreparable.

On behalf of the Bee Ridge Neighborhoods Committee and the Lake Sarasota Community Group,

Thomas Matrullo  
Member, BRNC  
Secretary, Lake Sarasota Community Group

*Below: Map shows potential north-south artery from University Blvd. to Clark Rd. via Spine Rd.*

