



An inquiry into its appeal to investors, innovators, visitors and residents

2012 CONFERENCE

October 17-19, 2012
Anna Maria Island

Hosted by the communities of Anna Maria Island, the Anna Maria Island Preservation Trust, and the Island Players Theater

December 2012 Conference Follow-up

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Recommended Reading

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[Authenticity, Sustainability, and Folklore](#)

by Peggy A. Bulger

[Valuing Florida's Clean Waters](#)

by E. Stanton & M. Taylor

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Anna Maria Guest House



Preserving the past, Embracing the future

Vision

Authenticity advances sustainability for Florida's future

Conference challenges Florida orthodoxy with facts on the ground

A revived century-old main street in mid-October was the setting for the first Sustainable & Authentic Florida Conference that folklorist Peggy Bulger said "traced the historical trajectories, outlined the present realities and charted the imagined future of Florida."

For three days, scholars and citizen advocates from Florida places in the vanguard of change freshly stirred issues long stifled by the sprawl and empty civics of Sunshine State orthodoxy.



Conference Hosts and Speakers

Photo: R. Chinnis

For more than 100 people and graduate students from around the state, the conference in Anna Maria tackled Florida's great unmentionables.

"Is Florida over?" asked retired USF social historian Gary Mormino. "How can we replace, or should we repair, the former growth machine? We have made Florida. We must now make Floridians."

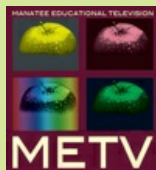
The difficulty, of course, is that Florida endlessly promises visitors that



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retirement here will deliver endless vacations, while offshore condominium investors occupy only Florida's waterfront edge. Still others who arrive in flight from poverty and oppression settle into ethnic enclaves where they remain linked to countries of origin, in the way that northerners still consider where they come from as home.

Consensus from conflict

Nonetheless, the conference did approach consensus about how younger Floridians no longer buy into the dream machine. Instead, educated but deeply in debt and with limited job opportunities, they pour into residential downtowns for networking inspired by loft living where they create "the new laboratories for better communities," in the words of environmentalist Clay Henderson. For photojournalist John Moran, the door has opened on "a new way of thinking that doesn't pit environmental preservation against economic prosperity."

The conference talked about how mainstream denial of climate change and the alienation caused by globalism might impel these new urbanists to work at climate economies. In the first instance this would depend on conserving irreplaceable resources that would balance global with local priorities. Citizen advocates from Miami Beach told how dispossessed young adults 35 years ago led the fight to protect their city's architectural heritage that, backed by creative investors, launched today's universally recognized "South Beach" brand.

These "investors look for 'the economics of amenity,'" said Partners for Livable Communities President Bob McNulty. "They look for places of distinct architecture, design and landscape that represent the infrastructure for redefining the strategic advantage of communities."

For water scientist and conference facilitator Duane De Freese, "sustainability and authenticity mean opportunity."

Conference blogger Andy Fairbanks identified his own generation as "a creative class of entrepreneurs in our thirties, [who] want something different than our predecessors. Golf courses are out and bike trails are in. Sustainability and authenticity matter. Developments that supply this are booming."

New Urbanist and Rollins College Professor Bruce Stephenson discerned that 'civic urbanism' is inspiring creativity and lowering the cost of living while raising quality of life."

Summing up the conference, registrant Susan Berry of Maitland "found the program empowered us with concepts and skills for answering our individual needs and addressing policy changes. Now it's up to us to carry this message into our own communities, to engage with local and state leaders for positive, transformative discussion and action."

Also by conference end, the City of Miami Beach had bid in a 2013 follow-up conference, and two more cities were bidding to host a third in 2014.



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SAFL Conference Attendee Contact Information

Thank you for joining us and making the inaugural Sustainable &

Authentic Conference a great success. Please [click here](#)

to download the attached document with a list of attendees and their contact information.

Manatee County means what it says



Conference Director Herb Hiller speaking at Florida Maritime Museum

In the same mid-October week, Manatee County introduced a new marketing brand that gained instant credibility when the Sustainable & Authentic Florida Conference also took place throughout the county's coastal region.

The brand is Real. Authentic. Florida. The conference showed more than 100 Floridians why the brand is the real thing.

The opening conference session took place at the Florida Maritime Museum in Historic Cortez Village, and from there convened for the next two days at the oldest performing stage in the county, the Island Players Theater in Anna Maria.

Landmark venues supplied more than just discussion sites. There was a walking tour of Cortez, Florida's oldest still viable fishing community with a back-of-the-house visit to the A.P. Bell Fish Company led by proprietor Karen Bell. There was a water tour aboard the Island Pearl through upper Sarasota Bay, where director Charlie Hunsicker of Manatee County Natural Resources and fishing guide Rusty Chinnis narrated



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stops at a pair of conservation islands.



Ed Chiles leading walking tour along historic Pine Avenue Photo: C. Hodge

There were walking tours led by Anna Maria preservation leaders Ed Chiles and Mike Coleman along historic Pine Avenue, the half-mile connection between Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico locally famed as the "greenest main street in Florida". Along the half-mile street, coarse sand walkways have replaced concrete sidewalks, native landscaping has replaced exotic plants, and heritage architecture now houses more than two dozen one-of-a-kind shops. Front porches with slat-back chairs allow for the exchange of endless greetings.

Conference dinners took place at Mar Vista in the historic north end of Longboat Key and at the BeachHouse Restaurant in Bradenton Beach across the street from Anna Maria Island Resorts, where conference participants stayed. Lunches included a fish fry in Cortez of teeming Spanish mackerel and at the Village Café at Rosedale in the historic Green Village on Pine Avenue. The cluster of re-purposed historic buildings here is a model for combining historic preservation with modern and sustainable development where businesses operate on net zero energy, generating more energy than they consume. Site for breakfasts was the Studio at Gulf and Pine across the street from the Island Players Theater, and a showplace for Florida artists and Florida art.

The conference and the county's new brand represent a bold vision for post-recession Florida. Together they affirm a so far rare commitment to ascending historical and conservation values.

Sustainable and Authentic Florida Conference 2012

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