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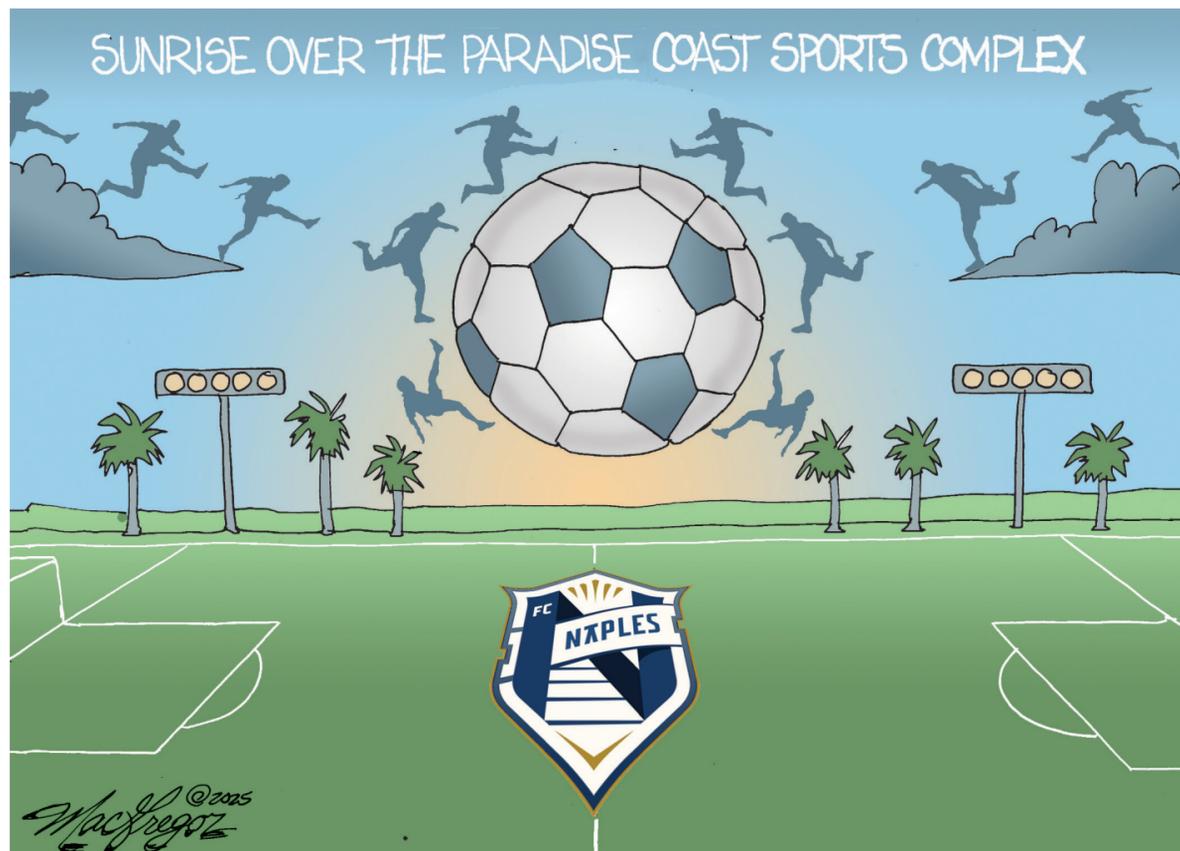
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SWFL INSIDER

Commissioners approve citrus grove amendment

A proposed development of 423 homes in southern Collier County, including 63 affordable townhouses, on a citrus grove near Picayune Strand State Forest is heading for the first in a series of state and county approvals. The Board of County Commissioners on May 27 unanimously voted to approve a growth-management plan amendment for the 169-acre Sabal Palm Road Residential Subdistrict, which will be sent to the state Department of Commerce for approval. It's an initial step in a lengthy process before plans are discussed at neighborhood information meetings, then head to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners for approval. "The 15% commitment to for-sale affordable housing is a unique commodity," County Planning and Zoning Director Mike Bosi said, noting nonprofit Habitat For Humanity is the only builder that's done that in Collier. "We've never had a for-profit developer suggest that." As part of the motion, Commissioner Bill McDaniel Jr. asked that the notice for neighborhood-information meetings sent to residents within 1,000 feet of 341 Sabal Palm Road be expanded to one mile to reduce "mis- and disinformation."

Collier moving forward with ballot referendum to boost tourism taxes

To help finish Paradise Coast Sports Complex and fund other tourism-related uses, Collier County registered voters may be asked next year to increase the tourist-development tax by one penny, to 6 cents — joining 12 other Florida counties earning the maximum tax. Collier has a 5-cent bed tax, paid by those who lease rentals of six months or fewer, including hotels, Airbnbs, RV parks and campgrounds, but the state Department of Revenue confirmed Collier is a high-impact-tourism county, which allows it to impose an extra 1%. Commissioners agreed by consensus to take the next steps to put a referendum on the ballot for the next general election, Nov. 3, 2026. If commissioners approve draft language for a ballot referendum this fall and voters approve it, the 6% tax would go into effect Jan. 1, 2027. Board Chair Burt Saunders said this will enable the county to finish future phases, adding, "It will generate almost \$10 million a year."

DeSantis signs heart-friendly bill

Gov. Ron DeSantis signed House Bill 1607 into law — a major step forward in protecting students and increasing cardiac arrest survival rates in Florida

schools, according to information provided. Thanks to this new law, the American Heart Association says, all public schools including charter schools will now be required to create cardiac emergency response plans with clear steps to reduce death from cardiac arrest; have at least one well-maintained, accessible Automated external defibrillator; and provide basic first aid, CPR and AED training, including hands-on practice, for middle and high school students. DeSantis also signed legislation that will protect restaurants from the growing issue of third-party reservation piracy. The legislation was championed by the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association and passed with bipartisan support to combat a deceptive and growing practice that has caused widespread harm to consumers and hospitality businesses in Florida and across the nation, according to information provided. Across the country, tech-savvy scalpers and unauthorized third-party platforms have been using bots to grab reservations at in-demand restaurants, then reselling them online or via social media — often at steep prices. This practice has led to customer frustration as legitimate guests are blocked from making direct reservations or are being duped into paying for something that should be free. It also has increased no-shows when reservations go unsold but are never canceled, costing restaurants critical revenue and depriving servers of expected tips.

New site pending for county fair

When residents head to the annual Collier County fair next spring, it likely will be at a new, larger location. County commissioners on May 27 directed staff to draft a sales agreement to allow non-profit Collier County Agricultural & Fair Exposition Inc. to purchase at least 100 acres of county land off Camp Keais Road to relocate. Commissioner Bill McDaniel Jr., whose district covers the site, asked that the county not make a profit on the deal. The Real Property Management division recommended a purchase price of at least \$13,045,48, plus incurred interest, per acre, based on the county's purchase price and financing costs. The county purchased 1,046.19-acre Camp Keais for \$13.6 million in March 2021 and still owes \$9.6 million but estimates the current value at \$16 million. The Fair Board submitted a letter of intent to purchase land for the fair and other events, including 4H and Boy Scout events, gun shows, Christmas tree sales, the Country Jam and Demolition Derby. Access would be off Oil Well Road. The fair board leases land nearby from the county at Immokalee Road and 39th

Avenue N.E. The fair, which began in 1977, draws about 90,000 annually.

Collier gets federal waiver to provide rental assistance

Collier County has joined one other municipality nationwide that receives a U.S. Housing & Urban Development waiver to pay the gap between what it costs to live in Naples and HUD's fair-market rent cap. Collier's Community & Human Services Division applied last July, the HUD approval letter shows, but Director Kristi Sonntag said the fair-market rent waiver was only approved after county commissioners traveled to lobby officials in Washington, D.C. "The only other jurisdiction in the nation is New York City, so I'm pretty proud of us and our commissioners that we have that waiver," Sonntag told the county's Affordable Housing Advisory Committee last month. "It's huge, particularly for those individuals who are our most low income ... We're already drafting our letter for when we expire in October 2026 to get it again." HUD noted Collier provided information to prove its FMR determination "is not an accurate reflection" of its rental market, where median rents are "consistently higher," about 7.5% more.

United Church of Marco Island awards Our Daily Bread Food Pantry \$50,000

United Church of Marco Island has awarded \$50,000 to help Our Daily Bread Food Pantry distribute a projected 2.1 million pounds of food (estimated 1,750,000 meals) in 2025 through its Fixed-Site Saturday Pantry in Marco Island and mobile distributions throughout southeast Collier County. This will provide food assistance access six days a week averaging 10 monthly opportunities for families overall.

PNC Foundation awards \$100,000 grant to FGCU

The PNC Foundation announced a \$100,000 grant to Florida Gulf Coast University to create an innovative outdoor classroom at the Naples Children & Education Foundation Early Childhood Development Center. The project will extend learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom, incorporating science, technology, engineering, arts and math concepts into a nature-based environment designed for early learners. Grant funds will be used to renovate the existing outdoor play space and purchase dedicated STEAM activity equipment. Construction is expected to conclude this fall. Once complete, the new classroom will serve approximately 100 children in Collier County, ranging from 6 weeks to 5 years of age. [NW](#)