



## Culture is each generation's gift to the next



**Bayne Stevenson**  
*Chair of the Renaissance Fund Campaign & Board member of Friends of Boca Grande*

**B**efore masterplanning the proposed improvements to our Community Center, we defined our goals and values. These "goals and values" then guided the planning process. We met with the 34+ nonprofit users of the campus, and we listened. We met with Lee County and we collaborated. We hired the same Architects who designed The Island School. We have proposed a three phase construction schedule. And, now we ask for your support.

### GOALS AND VALUES

Honor the character, scale, and history of Boca Grande

Maintain maximum green space

Assure architecture is consistent and complementary to the existing campus and neighborhood

Understand the needs of the 34+ non-profit users to assure meaningful realignment and enhancement

Serve the needs of all ages and all demographics

Work with The Island School to meet their current and future needs

Thoughtfully replace theater to meet Americans with Disabilities Act and Federal Emergency Management Agency regulations and improve AV Technology, HVAC, and theater experience

Phased construction over three years to limit impact

Continue collaborative and cooperative relationship with Lee County



# A Master Plan: From **Vision** to Reality

BY SUSAN HANAFEE



**M**arta Howell, the executive director of the Friends of Boca Grande, always has a smile on her face when she speaks of

the Community Center campus. These days, when she talks about the master plan for a \$15 million renovation of the area just south of downtown Boca Grande, you could swear her grin is twice its normal size.

The renovation, expected to start this summer after approval by Lee County, will be phased-in over three years to include the least amount of disruption to activities and organizations that rely on the campus.

The master plan includes upgrades to The Island School, The Crowninshield House and its kitchen, the historic buildings that serve the Boca Grande Historical Society, Art Center, and Boca Bargains and various spaces that are used extensively by island groups. The crown jewel will be a new 242-seat theater building with all of the modern theater accoutrements and greater handicapped accessibility.

Changes to the existing theater had been on the wish-list of several interested people for well over a decade. There was even talk of adding a second story to the theater.

When Hurricane Ian struck the island a devastating blow, talk of repairs led to architect Jeff Mudgett, who had designed The Island School in the early 2000s.

Mudgett knew the island restrictions well. Any new construction on Gasparilla cannot exceed the height limits set by the Gasparilla Act, so putting a second story on the existing theater was out. In addition, the current theater does not comply with current flood regulations. FEMA rules limit improvements to a nonconforming structure to 50% of its market value - a pittance compared to what was needed.

"Jeff walked around and looked at all the structures and then suggested, 'We could tear down the multi-purpose room on the east side—that's not historic—and build a new theater there.' We

had never thought of that; it was an amazing idea," Marta said.

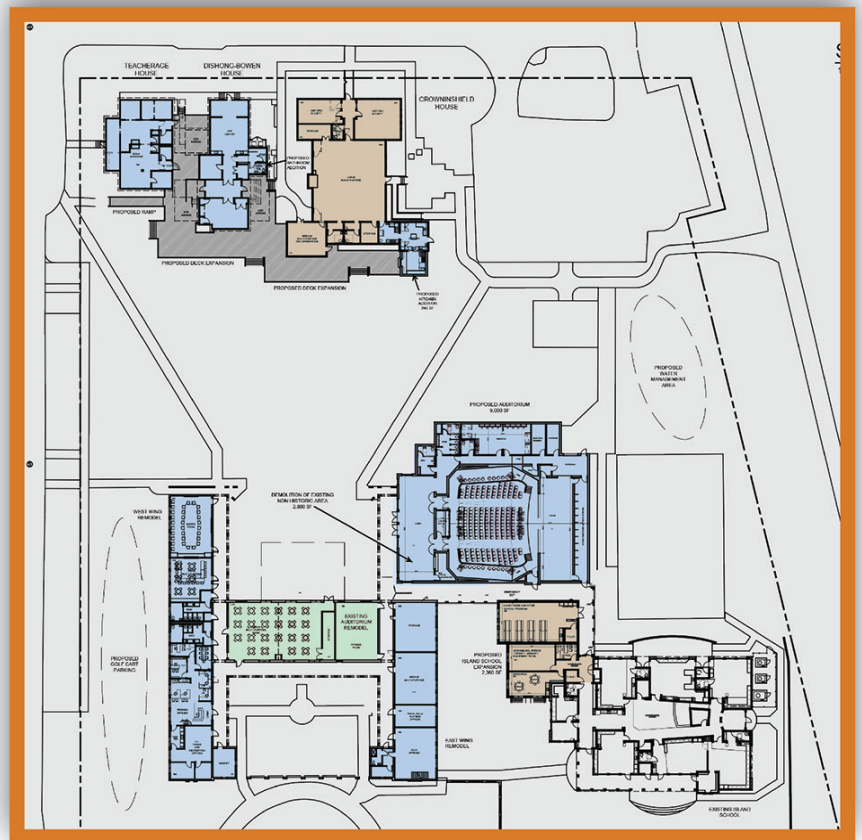
Because the Island School uses the multi-purpose room for lunch, planners reached out to them. They were quickly onboard and, by the way, had their own list of items, including additional space for counseling and speech and sensory therapy. Both the Historical Society and Boca Bargains were eager to have more room. The Art Center, envisioning some improvements to its building, was also happy to announce its support.

Since the outdated kitchen in the Crowninshield House was no longer available for cooking, a new one was conceived as part of the master plan. It offers the potential for the return of the much-loved spaghetti dinners and community fish fries and can be used for whatever catering needs organizations might have.

Many of the existing office spaces and meeting rooms also will be upgraded. The floor of the auditorium will be leveled so it can be repurposed to host bridge, exercise classes, a new fitness center and other functions. Plenty of greenspace will remain.

Since Lee County was dealing with myriad issues following the major storm, it was agreeable to the idea that the Friends organization would become the developer and the fundraiser for the project. This unusual public/private partnership between the county and a local not-for-profit was codified in the Florida Statutes and Land Development Code provisions just recently and is the first time that Lee County has entered into such an arrangement.

"After the hurricane, we knew we couldn't ask Lee County for money. We told them we would raise the needed funds, hire our own architect and contractor, and pay all the bills without having to go through county procurement and bidding, which drives up prices. In turn, they said they would continue to rent these buildings for \$1 to the current nonprofit tenants and would pay for maintenance, lights, water, roof repairs," Marta said. "That is huge because the not-for-profits couldn't afford



their spaces otherwise."

The Boca Grande Historic Preservation Board has already gotten a sneak preview of the Community Center campus master plan and had a positive reaction. Plans are to take the final drawings to the group for approval in May.

This entire planning process has come from the bottom up. After a community wide survey confirmed Friends should play a leadership role, each organization (and there are 34+ nonprofits that use the center) was interviewed about their wants and needs, hopes and dreams. Now those same organizations are helping to make the project a reality.

If they are successful in both their permitting and fund-raising, the plan is to put a shovel in the ground in August, commencing with work in the Crowninshield and the construction of the new facilities for the Island School. The total renovation is expected to be completed by December 2026. "If we're not able to meet that August start date, we'll begin in the spring," Marta said. "So far, we have hit no bumps in the road. We are keeping our fingers crossed."

*Early Conceptual Renderings and schematics by Parker Mudgett Smith Architects*

**PHASE 1**  
AUG 2024  
JUN 2025

**PHASE 2**  
JUN 2025  
JUL 2026

**PHASE 3**  
JUL 2026  
DEC 2026

# Preserving Tradition, Embracing Innovation

With the planned changes, Tonya is confident that the little gem that is the Art Center, will sparkle even brighter. The remodeling will give added emphasis to the courtyard between the Center and the Crowninshield House. In the

past, this area has been shared by the art organization and Boca Bargains. Now it will be covered by an awning and will be used exclusively by the Art Center for pop-up shows, weekly workshops, and opening-night receptions.

**Kimberly Kyle**  
Boca Grande  
Historical Society

Kim Kyle, of the Boca Grande Historical Society is excited for the changes to come! As part of the Community Center Master Plan, the Historical Society will be moving into the updated Timmy Smith Room, which currently is used for storage

in the Crowninshield House. The transfer from their current location will provide many benefits, including more exhibit space and a separate office and archival area. Frontage on Banyan Street will give them more visibility in the community.

“Our story is a great example of how the Friends organization collaborated with us to make certain that there would be improved use and accessibility in the new facility, which will translate into even better performances to the delight of our patrons. At the same time, because of good

planning, we won’t miss a season,” says Peter. The new theater will include an expanded lobby area, more seating capacity, enhanced technical capability, and larger backstage areas, along with handicap accessibility.

**Peter Powell**  
Royal Palm Players

**Tonya Doherty**  
Boca Grande  
Art Center



“The addition of a multipurpose building will allow for the school to continue our after-school programming and provide space for our students to eat lunch. We will also gain two small spaces to allow for speech services, elective

classes, and counseling services, and an office space to conduct meetings,” explained Christine, who is Head of School. She is excited about the positive impact the improvements will have on the school and community.

**Christine Oliver**  
The Island School



**Susan Haggarty**  
Friends of Boca Grande

“This is about solving problems that have existed for some time and about making the Community Center campus better, not bigger,” Susan says. “All of us are very excited about the benefits and opportunities that will result from these changes.”

**Jinny Cotherman**  
Boca Bargains

“We are thrilled to be part of the changes,” said Jinny Cotherman, who co-chairs the operation along with Wendy Freeman and Candy Sasser. “Our building will remain the same size on the outside, but we will be way more functional on the inside.” The organization will be moving the furniture

and artwork it sells to the south side of the existing building, known as the Teacherage; breaking through the walls alongside the Historical Society fireplace to make the area into one large space. The porch between the Art Center and Bargains will be used for outdoor furniture.

**Betsy Clayton**  
Lee County  
Parks & Recreation

Enthusiasm for the renovation of the Community Center extends southward to Fort Myers, explains Betsy Clayton, Lee County’s Communications Director. County officials are viewing this as “a great project—one that will benefit the whole community.”

Betsy said that, to date, District Commissioner Kevin Ruane has been involved in meetings on the project and all five Lee County commissioners are very supportive. “The county values the partnerships it has in Boca Grande,” she added. “And we are fully committed to this site.”



For more information visit [www.ccobg.org](http://www.ccobg.org).

# How you can help

Every donation counts, no matter how big or small



**\$15M**



**\$11,211,302** committed as of March 29, 2024

We hope that every Boca Grande community member will dig deep to help the **34+ nonprofit organizations** that use the Community Center renovate the campus to meet modern needs.



### Hats Off To You!

Make a contribution to the Friends of Boca Grande Renaissance Fund. All donors will be recognized, not for the amount that they give, but for the support they show by lending their name to the project. Every donor, no matter how big or small, will be listed in alphabetical order and receive a Community Center Cap!



### Hold The Seat!

Donors who contribute \$25,000 (which can be paid over time) will help furnish the new Theater. Your name will be proudly displayed on the back of one of the new, comfortable seats in the Theater.



### Leader of the Pack!

Donors who contribute \$50,000+ will be recognized on a bronze plaque, similar to the ones at the Boca Grande Health Clinic and The Island School. This plaque will be displayed in the new lobby of the theater.



## To join these supporters, call the Friends' office at (941) 964-0827!

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Boca Grande Chamber of Commerce • Boca Grande Charities • Boca Grande Community Croquet • Boca Grande Duplicate Bridge Players  
Boca Grande Fire & EMS Department • Boca Grande Fishing Guides Assn. • Boca Grande Garden Club • Boca Grande Health Clinic  
Boca Grande Historic Preservation Board • Boca Grande Historical Society • Boca Grande Isles Property Owners Assn.  
Boca Grande Planter's Club • Boca Grande Sea Turtle Assn. • Boca Grande Woman's Club • Louise DuPont Crowninshield Community House, Inc.  
Friends of Boca Grande Community Center • Gasparilla Island Kids Classic Tarpon Tournament • Gasparilla Island Bridge Authority (GIBA)  
Gasparilla Island Conservation & Improvement Assn. (GICIA) • Johann Fust Library Foundation • Lee County Elections  
Lee County Municipal Services Taxing/Benefits Unit • Lee County Parks & Recreation • Lee County Sheriff's Department  
Lee County Youth Summer Camp • Mote Marine • Royal Palm Players • Sundown Colony Property Assn.  
The Grande Chorus • The Island School • United Methodist Church (Strawberry Festival)