

# Mound Key may get historical site designation

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FORT MYERS — If owners are allowed to develop on Mound Key, they might first have to convince Lee County's Historic Preservation Board.

The board met late Thursday to discuss designating the island, including the 26 privately owned acres, a historic site, just a few days after one of the three owners there got a minimum use determination (MUD) from the county. The MUD is an acknowledge-

ment that the creation of the lots pre-dates the county's land use regulations, meaning development would be exempt from some density restrictions. Any development would still have to go through county and state permitting processes.

If the board votes to designate the island a historic site, the owners would then have to obtain a certificate of appropriateness from the board — one more development hurdle.

The state has been trying to buy the remaining private land on the island,

which experts recognize as perhaps the most significant archaeological site in South Florida. The Calusa Indians are believed to have centered their thriving civilization on Mound Key between 500 and 1500 A.D., and shell mounds and other artifacts are plentiful. Some 149 acres of the island was donated to the state by the Koreshans when the group donated the land that's now the Koreshan State Historic Site in Estero in 1961.

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Recent activities have added a sense of urgency to efforts to buy the remaining land, with both county and state officials and private supporters of the archaeological site adding their voices to the cry to save Mound Key.

"This cloud may have a silver lining," said county planner Linda Riley, coordinator of the county's Conservation Lands Acquisition and Stewardship Advisory Committee, which advises commissioners on spending the new environmental lands tax. "The MUD has really spurred the agencies to action."

Riley said there are four potential funding sources to buy the land, three of which are state programs. The Division of Parks has a land acquisition fund that's been trying to buy

the land for more than 20 years. Mound Key is also a part of the Estero Bay Buffer Area, a purchase listed on the state's Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) list for the year. There's also an emergency archaeological lands purchase program. The CARL program has the advantage of condemnation power, which the other state programs lack.

But the three programs share one common problem. State regulations do not allow any of the three to pay more than the appraised value for land, and landowners on Mound Key have said that's just not good enough.

The county program, however, is not bound by that restriction. Riley said that under extremely unusual circumstances, the advisory board could recommend commissioners pay above the appraised value. The final decision on purchases rests with commissioners.

Any of the four programs

could look to buy the land through a partnership with a group like the Trust for Public Lands or the Archaeological Conservancy, private groups not bound by the state's regulations.

As for the county program, committee members won't even consider purchasing the land unless it's proposed to them, and proposals must be accompanied by a letter from the owner expressing a willingness to sell. Albert Gregory, who heads the state's park land acquisition program, said none of the three private owners — Margaret Carmichael Paull, Jay P. Collier or Stan Hansen — expressed a willingness to sell at appraised value, and one expressed no interest in selling at any price. Riley said she feels the purchase would probably rank high on the county committee's list if it were proposed, but the seller would have to be willing. "We can't help out here without willing sellers," she said. "But if it is nominated, I'm sure it will be in the running."