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■ Paul Furry, who works for Salty Sam's Marina, on Wednesday details one of the boats for sale at the marina on Fort Myers Beach.

Plan would redefine San Carlos Island

BY DICK HOGAN

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A 30-acre swath of San Carlos Island could be in for some major changes. Two local businessmen are proposing a hotel, swimming pool, community learning center, condominiums, restaurants and homes.

The project plans, submitted recently as an amendment to Lee County's land-use plan, would change the face of the island now dominated by commercial fishing and mobile home parks.

Darrell Hanson, owner of Salty Sam's Marina, said the proposal he and adjacent property owner Ray Alvarez have made is an idea whose time has come.

"I think it's timing and I think at some point too much of the land is just under-utilized," said Hanson. "What we're trying to accomplish is waterfront development, with a marina open to the public, restaurants, shops, a hotel and condominiums."

The proposed amendment cites as reasons for the changes "the decline of the local shrimping industry that has created a vacuum in the island identity and prospects for the future."

Current land-use policies favoring commercial fishing on the island were "an attempt to save the shrimping industry and keep some large vestiges of that here," said Joe McHarris of Bonita Springs-based McHarris Planning &



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■ Artist rendering of San Carlos Island.

Design, the planner for the project. "But with the onslaught of inexpensive farm-raised shrimp from Vietnam and Thailand, it's really held that place down because you can't do anything else."

Dennis Henderson, co-owner of Gulf Shrimp Inc. on the island, operates a shrimp fishing and packing operation plus Beach Seafood market and restaurant. He's in favor of the proposed project.

"Really that piece of property there would be a better deal if they develop it

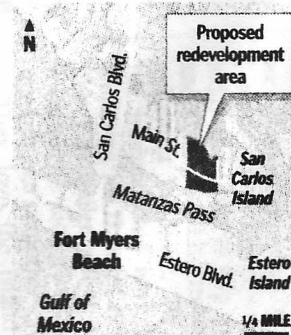
like that," he said. "I think it's a great idea, they don't have any choice."

Henderson, who owns a trailer park at Main Street and San Carlos Boulevard, said it's no longer economically feasible to continue operating his park or the ones that would be replaced by the redevelopment: Oyster Bay and Ebb Tide. "You can't get enough rent off those places to pay the taxes with the (property) taxes going wild."

■ See **SAN CARLOS D2**

Redevelopment would change island's character

The project would include a 300-room hotel, a community learning center, canoe and kayak launch and 600 homes.



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SAN CARLOS

■ Continued from D1

He acknowledged that the shrimping business is in trouble, but said he's staying where he is for the foreseeable future. "We own our property free and clear — that's the only reason we can continue to stay here. If I were going into business today and I had to buy docks and a boat, I couldn't make it."

Lavetta Buchholz, 79, and her husband Bud have been wintering for 13 years at their Ebb Tide trailer, selling shadowbox-style dioramas depicting long-ago seaports.

They love the island and where they live, but are philosophical about the future.

"By the time it does come, it could be two, three, four, five years and maybe we will be

ready to not come down," said Lavetta Buchholz. "I mean, who knows what will happen."

Hanson said he expects it will take at least three years to get the plan amendment, zoning and land use they need.

Paul O'Connor, planning director for Lee County, said he hasn't gone through the plan in detail and that issues such as traffic on San Carlos Boulevard will have to be addressed.

After a review by the Local Planning Agency, the Lee County Commission will get the proposal around February and decide whether to send it to the state for comments, he said.

O'Connor said he's already met with the group proposing the changes.

"I told them to try to get some local support for it," he said. "That can never hurt when you're asking for something different."