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Prospect of selling Rauschenberg property to a developer is deeply concerning | Opinion

Captiva simply cannot absorb any major new developments

Robert Brooks

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Key Points AI-assisted summary

- A proposal to sell artist Robert Rauschenberg's former 22-acre Captiva property to a developer is facing community opposition.
- Opponents argue that large-scale development would strain the island's single evacuation route and threaten the ecosystem.
- Advocates for preservation want the land used for a fire district helicopter landing zone, public green space, and stormwater management.
- The community is urging the Rauschenberg Foundation to honor the artist's legacy by choosing preservation over commercial development.

Captiva is a place defined not by what has been built, but by what has been protected. The legacy of Robert Rauschenberg stands at the heart of that truth. His 22 acres on Captiva are more than land — they are a living testament to his belief that creativity, nature, and community belong together.

Rauschenberg once said, “Art can change the world… but you have to care about the world you’re changing.” Now Captiva needs that care!

That is why the prospect of selling this property to a developer is deeply concerning and profoundly out of alignment with the values Bob championed.

Captiva simply cannot absorb any major new developments without putting both people and our barrier island ecosystem at real risk. With only one road on and off the island, hurricanes and other natural disasters already pose tremendous evacuation challenges. Large-scale development would elevate that danger to an unacceptable level for residents, first responders, and visitors alike.

Bob understood this vulnerability and this beauty better than anyone. “Environment is not a separate thing,” he said — and he lived those words. Preserving this land now is not just a choice; it is a necessary step in honoring his legacy at a moment when it matters most.

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The community is not asking you to give something up — we are asking you to stand with us in stewardship.

The Captiva Island Fire District must retain the 9.81 acres along the bayfront to preserve the helicopter landing zone essential for emergency medical evacuations and critical safety operations that serve the entire island. Without it, our first responders lose the ability to save lives when every second counts.

We also face a shortage of public spaces on Captiva — almost none remain. This land presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation and other nonprofits to collaborate in protecting green space and providing real community benefit. With undeveloped land available, we could finally address the persistent flooding issues in the Village through stormwater management and retention — something residents have needed for decades.

Additionally, the ten existing buildings on the site hold potential. Repurposing several of them for community needs and renovating others as single-family residences consistent with current zoning, would respect Captiva's scale and character rather than erase it.

And most importantly: selling these parcels to the Community Investor and Fire District ensures the property will **not** be rezoned for hotels, condominiums, or high-rise structures. Captiva's small-island feel — the very essence Bob treasured — would be preserved.

Rauschenberg believed deeply in making decisions that align with conscience. As he reminded us, "The world is but a canvas to our imagination." Captiva was his canvas — the place where he dared the world to look again and see differently.

The ultimate question before the Rauschenberg Foundation Board is this: Will this foundation protect the masterpiece he helped shape — or allow it to be painted over?

This is a moment that will echo for generations. Choose preservation over profit. Choose community over commercial pressure. Choose Bob's vision over developers' plans.

In doing so, you honor not just his name — but his soul.

Robert Brooks is a resident of Sanibel.