

**ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE LANDS COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MAY 15, 2006**

The Hernando County Environmentally Sensitive Lands Committee met on May 15, 2006, in the Planning Conference Room. The meeting was noticed on the County web site and in the newspaper.

***Present:*** Bill Korn, Chair; Richard Poling, Gene Kelly, Linda Prescott, Marilyn Bates, Forrest Bennett, James Clayton, Michael Liberton, and Leland McKeown

***Absent:*** Paul Furman, and George Foster, Vice Chair

***Others Present:*** Larry Jennings, Deputy County Administrator  
Dawn Velsor, Lead Environmental Planner  
Mary Elwin, Planning Operations Assistant  
Terry Bickel  
Joe Murphy  
Cecil Davis  
Doug Davis

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

Chairman Bill Korn called the meeting to order at 5:40 pm.

**INTRODUCTIONS OF MEMBERS AND STAFF**

Members of the Committee and those in attendance introduced themselves.

**PROJECT UPDATES**

Mrs. Velsor gave a synopsis on the projects discussed in the memorandum accompanying the staff packet. Outlined in the memorandum provided to the Committee members was the endeavor to enhance the department's web-site with additional focus on environmentally sensitive lands issues, and the inclusion of the lands manager position in the 2006/07 fiscal year budget.

Mr. Murphy, a visitor, left the meeting at this time due to another obligation.

**Withlacoochee State Forest Corridor Connector Project**

Mrs. Velsor informed the Committee that a notice to proceed was issued to the Consultant, TBE Engineering, on May 9, 2006. During the next meeting, Mr. Korn suggested that TBE attend the next meeting and provide a report. Mrs. Velsor stated that the acquisition plan will need to be provided and could include conservation easements as well as fee simple title acquisitions.

### Peck Sink Floodplain Stormwater Park Project

Mrs. Velsor reported that a grant application was sent to Florida Communities Trust on May 2, 2006. Gene Atzman of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) informed the staff that House Bill 5001 is proposing appropriations for the project through Representative David Russell.

### Cost Estimate for Cypress Lakes House

Mrs. Velsor stated that she received a cost estimate of approximately \$80,000-\$90,000 to complete the house at Cypress Lakes Preserve. The fiscal year budget for the Sensitive Lands Program includes approximately \$80,000 to complete the house.

## **DISCUSSION OF FUNDING OPTIONS AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL**

Mr. Kelly stated that he has been involved in another series of meetings with the County's committee addressing capital funding needs. He informed members that the infrastructure needs list is daunting. Mr. Kelly stated that sales tax has been touched upon and there is a lot of competing interests [for additional funding sources]. He reported that additional funds for preservation or open space is not the focus of the capital financing committee.

Mr. Kelly stated that the ESLC committee's approach for trying to receive additional funding might have to be put off for some years. He stated that the approach may be a two-phase process; increasing visibility and then starting the debate on how to go about and get the additional funding. He felt that an ad valorem tax increase would be the best option and that a sales tax option would be difficult. The question should not be whether the program continues, but whether additional funding is to be provided.

Mr. Jennings commented that there are very few funding options available for the sensitive lands program. He added that efforts should focus on an approach during 2008. Peck Sink received a nice editorial in the newspaper and additional focus on the program over the next couple of years could yield a better funding opportunity in 2008, he added.

Mrs. Bates stated that she believed there are some advantages in putting it off a couple of years until such things as Bayport are completed. Mr. Jennings stated that a year would be needed before any election so that there would be discussion of benefits of the sensitive lands program.

Mr. Korn stated that the investments and expenses made on the trails and highways are important. He felt that they have been remiss in not moving faster. Fickett Hammock Preserve is just now getting a parking area. Signage is important. He commented that Brevard County has the most progressive land management program in the State.

Mr. Doug Davis asked if there was any way to get mitigation land monies. He stated that new homes have an environmental impact. He stated that the big projects are impacting the environment and the developers should be paying for it. Mr. Jennings stated that money can't be pulled from existing impact fee collections because they have to be spent for the purpose in which they are assessed; i.e. educational impact fees must be used for educational purposes.

Mr. Kelly stated that the eye-opener from the capital needs meetings is how the County collects its money for different uses. He commented that it would be difficult to measure the impact on a lot where the lot has already been cleared.

Mr. Korn asked whether the TPL could give a presentation at the next meeting on how to address funding. Staff concurred.

Ms. Prescott asked whether an assessment such as \$5.00 on all new houses could be done. Mr. Jennings stated that a method based on a rational basis would need to be done. Mr. Korn stated that 74% of all referendums pass and if it could be placed on the ballot, it would more than likely pass if the proper announcements were provided. The Commission would have to agree to put it on the ballot, Mr. Jennings said. Mr. Korn reiterated the need for signage promoting the program. Mr. Bennett stated suggested “stuffing” utility bills with flyers.

Mr. Kelly stated that he hopes, but not take for granted, that the Bayport Park would open imminently, and then the signs could be placed there. Mrs. Velsor concurred. Mr. Jennings stated that staff needs support from the Committee for the position, and perhaps a letter from the Committee would be helpful indicating its support.

Mr. Kelly stated that there should be a stand alone sign on Bayport for the ESL funding of the Bayport project.

Cecil Davis stated that in 1997 or 1998 instituted a gas or road tax to preserve Paynes Prairie to make passage ways under roads for preservation of wildlife. He felt consideration should be given for fuel tax or other areas of taxation that could be used for the sensitive lands program. He stated that the projects at Bayport and the one behind Weeki Wachee Springs are phenomenal. He felt that the internet should be used as a tool.

Mr. Korn commented that if a Commission candidate made this issue a platform for their candidacy, it may help the program. Mr. Doug Davis stated that perhaps the program can be “married” with other programs such as tourism and social services. He stated that Brooksville stands prominently in history. He stated that he is the Camp Commander for the Local Sons of Confederate Soldiers. He felt the program would attract ecotourism and historical tourism. Mr. Korn stated that there is supposed to be historical signage included in the Bayport project. He stated that pooling the monies together would help. He noted that the Florida Department of Transportation owns sixty acres in Chocochatti Prairie and perhaps partnerships could be established.

In recap, Mr. Korn stated the Committee needed to invite representatives from the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and that fiscal year 2007/08 would be a reasonable year to approach the funding issue and begin developing strategies. Mr. Korn suggested that perhaps a sub-committee should be established to put together a specific plan of action for revenue sources. Ms. Prescott suggested that perhaps someone from Brevard County could come to Hernando

County to address some things they did for their sensitive lands program.

Mr. Jennings stated that the County could discuss increasing the levy and taking it out for a longer time period. Mr. Korn suggested a brainstorming workshop could be done. Mr. Liberton stated that he was in favor of a workshop meeting of the Committee. Mr. Korn suggested inviting representatives from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and other municipalities that are involved in programs. The highest and best lands need to be acquired, he added.

Mr. Kelly asked if the next meeting could include someone from TPL and others and then the next step would be to schedule a workshop meeting. Members concurred. Mrs. Bates asked about the time frame for the meeting/workshop. Mr. Korn suggested that in order to keep the momentum on the meeting/workshop, that it be scheduled as soon as possible. It was a consensus of the members that the evening meetings work best. Mrs. Velsor stated that Paul Hinson from the Fish and Wildlife Commission is interested in the program and may be interested in participating with the County.

Based upon the discussion, it was a consensus that the web-site should be enhanced, the lands manager position would be placed in the budget, and the Bayport project would be completed.

#### **MINUTES OF MARCH 13, 2006**

Mr. Liberton moved to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2006, meeting. The motion was seconded by Linda Prescott, and carried unanimously.

#### **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

Cecil Davis - Mr. Davis felt it would be a good idea for the Committee/County to acquire Griffin Prairie as he felt it is useless except for collecting water. He stated that it is not wise to build anything in a fish bowl. The property has flooding issues. He added that there is immense historical value to Griffin Prairie as it is contiguous to Hope Hill where historical/archaeological digs have occurred. Mr. Korn commented that there hasn't been anything submitted during the open cycles for the property.

Doug Davis - Mr. Davis provided a history of the Chocochatti Prairie. Mr. Davis explained how the Seminole Indian Tribe started in Chocochatti Prairie and how it has extreme, historical significance. He indicated that run-off from the property goes to Bystre Lake. To alleviate flooding problems in Bystre Lake, run-off needs to occur, as it naturally does, to Chocochatti Prairie, he explained. Mr. Korn questioned the willingness of the owner to sell it. Mr. Davis stated that the Commission denied him on developing it so perhaps there would be a willingness to sell it.

Mr. Davis stated that Dr. Roger Landers would like to be involved in the historical aspects of the property. He commented that perhaps the Seminole aspect of the property together with the

federal, state, and local government involvement including tourism, could save the property.

Mr. Davis stated that the only suitable use for the land is to develop it as they have outlined. Mr. Bickel stated that there is a karst area on the northeast corner of the property.

Mr. Korn suggested that during an open cycle for acquisitions, the owners would make application. Mr. Kelly stated that he thought there is a cooperative funding project already approved by SWFWMD to do some kind of stormwater retrofitting within this system and he believes it incorporates a City-owned portion of the property. The City is pursuing development of the Good Neighbor Trail and involves a local park. The SWFWMD has been trying to find strategies for the Bystre Lake drainage area. Mrs. Velsor recollected problems with willing owners to sell the property.

Mr. Kelly commented that acquisition costs would be high considering the flooding issues, hydrology of the area, and the restoration of the system. Mr. Jennings stated that all of the lots around it are impacted by stormwater changes.

Mr. Jennings stated that the County and SWFWMD are doing a lot of work on hydrology and flooding on the County and in the process of developing Best Management Practices for the floodprone areas. Mr. Kelly stated that the County needs to find a strategy for restoring it short of buying it.

### **SCHEDULE AND FOCUS OF NEXT MEETING**

Mr. Korn stated that the next meeting should involve someone from the Trust for Public Land and others to discuss funding options for the sensitive lands program and receive input. An acquisition map showing Peck Sink would be helpful, he added. Staff would try to establish a meeting the second week of July and notify members.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Elwin, Planning Operations Assistant

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Approved by the ESLC on August 16, 2006.