

September 5, 2006
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Chairman Ken Johnson and members Dan Wakley, Jeff Marker, Pasco Gibson, and Robert Turpin. Also present were the County Administrator (Hunter Walker), Public Works Director (Avis Whitfield), County Engineer (Roger Blaylock), and Marine Extension Agent (Christina Verlinde). Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Turpin moved approval of the minutes from the June 6, 2006 meeting; Marker seconded, and the vote carried unanimously. (5-0)

Woodlawn Beach Boat Ramp Request

Barry Koncan said he sent an email to the county regarding improvements at Woodlawn Beach Boat Ramp (Attachment in File). He said he uses this facility every weekend, and he has noticed the use of this facility has grown to a point that boats and trailers are backing up onto Soundside Drive. Koncan said there is also a problem with the narrow access to the boat ramp area. He said the ramp pad is slick concrete, and last weekend he fell and broke his ankle. Koncan requested the following improvements:

1. Installation of night lighting.
2. Additional ramp on the east side of the pier.
3. Removal of hurricane debris and light dredging on both sides of the pier.
4. Acquire waterfront property immediately to the west of the ramp for ramp expansion and a public park.

Marker said Koncan has some good points. He said dredging is a major issue with DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) and the Army Corp of Engineers. Marker agreed that some type of dredging is needed at the boat ramp. He asked if the county can be more pro-active with the state legislators regarding permits to dredge.

Whitfield said the only dredging the county is allowed to do is maintenance dredging to remove a maximum of 25 cubic yards of sand. He said this sand has to be on the pier itself or immediately at the end of the pier. Whitfield said maintenance dredging is to keep the ramp clean. He said the problem is with the grass beds. Whitfield said there is adequate room for a second ramp but permitting through DEP and the Army Corp of Engineers is doubtful due to the grass beds. Whitfield said the best opportunity to do a maintenance dredge is in the winter months when the tides are extremely low. He said the maintenance dredge will not provide a significant channel very far from the end of the pier. Walker asked Whitfield to check on hurricane debris near the pier. Whitfield agreed. Koncan said the boat ramp users will appreciate anything the county can do and thanked the committee for their consideration.

Turpin thanked Koncan for attending tonight's meeting. He asked Koncan which boat ramps he uses and where he typically boats. Koncan said he stays in the Intercoastal Waterway from Gulf Shores to Destin but he primarily boats from Navarre Beach to Pensacola Beach.

Wakley said this committee has not requested any dredging permits due to the history of refusals. He asked if there is adequate space for an additional boat ramp and more parking at Woodlawn Beach Boat Ramp. Whitfield said yes. There was discussion regarding expanding the parking area and other possible improvements. Johnson said county staff will consider each of Koncan's requests. Whitfield noted the county recently added a portable toilet at the Woodlawn Beach Boat Ramp parking lot. Walker said staff will provide a report regarding Koncan's requests at the next meeting.

Bradley Bane noted he also slipped on this boat ramp. He said additional trash receptacles are needed at the boat ramp. Bane discussed DEP transplanting sea grasses. Johnson said only certain grasses can be transplanted. Bane discussed the shoaling at Woodlawn Beach Boat Ramp and Oriole Beach Boat Ramp. He asked if any permitting process is underway for any type of dredging. Whitfield said there is no permitting requested at this time except for maintenance dredging. He discussed settlement of the ramp and planned maintenance over the winter months.

Blaylock said the county has had discussions with EPA and the Army Corp of Engineers regarding dredging, and they will not permit any dredging in or around grass beds. He said most of these smaller ramps were installed before permitting came into effect. Blaylock said there were boat ramps on the north shore that have been closed due to the problem with shoaling. He said shoaling will always be a problem along the north shore with the prevailing winds and the shallowness of the bays. Whitfield said these ramps have always been shallow water ramps for smaller boats.

Marker said public access to the water is a political issue all over Florida. There was further discussion regarding the permitting process to dredge. Turpin reviewed the criteria of submitting a dredging application and resource issues. Blaylock said Santa Rosa Shores Homeowners Association has tried for 25 years to get a navigation canal from the manmade canals out to deep water. He said they have spent in excess of \$275,000.00 going through the permitting process. Blaylock said his recommendation is for the county to support Santa Rosa Shores Homeowners Association in their five year pilot program. Turpin said he felt it will be better to spend resources on locating and purchasing waterfront property that is more amenable to deep water access.

Wakley suggested the county assist the homeowner associations with building their own boat ramps in subdivisions to relieve pressure at the public boat ramps. Blaylock said the subdivisions will have the same problem with water depth. Turpin said this suggestion can be included in waterway planning.

Florida Sea Grant Waterway Planning Process

Verlinde asked if the committee would like her to schedule a workshop on waterway planning policies with the Florida Sea Grant Program. Johnson requested Verlinde set up the workshop. He asked if the Florida Sea Grant Program has provided any technology to help the county with GIS (Geographic Information System) technology to track the location of sea grasses, boater usage, and morphing technology for land evaluation.

Wakley said he reviewed the Florida Boating Improvement Grant Program, and the grants awarded over the past five years have been for boat ramps, launches, and waterway management planning. He said the county has the potential to receive these grant funds.

Other Issues

Johnson said recently passed House Bill 71.75 has taken away the county's ability to use the FBIP (Florida Boaters Improvement Program) for artificial reefs. Turpin said Florida Statutes gives authority to local governments to collect and use a portion of vessel registration fees. He said House Bill 71.75 was intended to deal with derelict vessels, and this bill has mandated the counties to use FBIP funds for removal of derelict vessels instead of artificial reefs, waterway planning, or boater safety. Turpin said Escambia County is requesting artificial reefs, boating safety, and waterway strategic planning to be added back as appropriate spending of FBIP funds. He said currently FBIP funds can only be used to build boat ramps, remove derelict vessels, and install waterway signs. Turpin said there are two grants open, and he suggested Santa Rosa County apply for the FBIP grant for boater safety. Johnson asked if waterway GIS technology will qualify for this funding. Turpin said according to the RFP (Request for Proposals) he felt the grant will be awarded for projects regarding boating safety. There was continued discussion regarding the types of projects that may be approved for FBIP grant funding.

Verlinde provided information to the committee regarding the Regional Waterway Management System for Lee County (Attachment in File). She also provided information on the economic impacts of artificial reefs (Attachment in File).

Marker reported on a derelict vessel near Santa Rosa Shores. He asked what can be done to remove this vessel. Whitfield said Code Enforcement may be working this issue. He said he is aware of several derelict vessels near Navarre Beach. Walker said the county is working on derelict vessels and he will check on the status of this vessel.

Whitfield said the Road and Bridge Department will be installing lime rock to stabilize the new parking area at Oriole Beach Boat Ramp at a cost of about \$9,000.00. He said the entire project with landscaping improvements will cost approximately \$15,000.00.

Marker moved approval to request the Board of County Commissioners allocate up to \$15,000.00 from the Boater Registration Funds to make the necessary improvements at Oriole Beach Boat Ramp; Turpin seconded, and the vote carried unanimously. (5-0)

Wakley asked if the Marine Resource Officer position is in the 2006-07 budget. Walker said the new position was cut from the budget. He said the budget was reduced by direction of the Board of County Commissioners.

Turpin said because of the changes in House Bill 71.75 Boater Registration Fees can be used for issues regarding derelict vessels. He said he has obtained estimates to remove derelict vessels, and the costs range from \$1,000.00 to \$10,000.00. Turpin said if the owner of the vessel can be identified the costs can possibly be recovered. He discussed a waterway clean up contract in Escambia County to clean up 35 square miles of waterway. Turpin said FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) is funding 90% and Florida Department of Community Affairs is funding 10%. There was discussion regarding the Water Management District already completing waterway debris clean up. Turpin said now is the time to apply for funds if Santa Rosa County has any debris to be removed from the waterways. Whitfield requested Turpin provide him with information on the waterway clean up project.

Turpin said the large area artificial reef site permit expires on the 22nd of this month, and he has requested an extension. Turpin said he has also requested separating the permit into two permits. He said there will be one permit for public reef deployments on the east site and a separate permit for private artificial reef deployments on the west site. Turpin said the purpose of splitting the permit is to get the east site designated as permanent for grant funding.

Johnson requested an update on the Oyster Restoration project. Verlinde said the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences, Aquaculture and Shellfish group has been working since May and has completed oyster restoration in southeastern Escambia Bay near the western shore of Garcon Point. She said about 3,800 bushels of oyster shell have been placed in this area. Verlinde said next week the group will be moving to northern East Bay near the mouth of Blackwater Bay. Gibson requested the coordinates of the next planned placement of oyster shell.

The next scheduled Marine Advisory Committee meeting will be on Tuesday, October 3, 2006 at 5:00 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the Marine Advisory Committee at this time, the meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.