

ST. AUGUSTINE PORT, WATERWAY & BEACH DISTRICT
MINUTES OF SUMMER HAVEN RIVER WORKSHOP MEETING

Thursday, February 10, 2011

The Summer Haven River workshop meeting of the St. Augustine Port, Waterway and Beach District was held at the St. Augustine Beach City Commission Meeting Room, 2200 A1A South, St. Augustine Beach, Florida on Thursday, February 10, 2011.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jerry Dixon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America followed.

ROLL CALL

Chairman Jerry Dixon, Commissioners Barry Benjamin, Tom Rivers, Herb Rippe and Jay Bliss were in attendance.

INTRODUCTION BY CHAIRMAN DIXON

Chairman Dixon began the meeting by introducing himself and the members of the Board. He explained the purpose of the meeting was to explore the regulatory situation posed by the breach in the dune system at Old A1A in Summer Haven. The breach has allowed a large quantity of sand to pass into Summer Haven River and effectively stop the flow of water through the river.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS/COMMENTS -Taylor Engineering, Moderator

Dr. Steven Schropp of Taylor Engineering moderated speaker presentations. He said he wanted to compare the condition of the inlet today to what existed before the breach in 2008 and explore regulatory and funding issues. He asked anyone in the audience wishing to

speak to fill out a request form and encouraged all in attendance to look to the future of the Summer Haven River rather than spend time analyzing the past. He then introduced Rajesh Srinivas of Taylor Engineering.

A. SUMMER HAVEN BREACH - Taylor Engineering

Dr. Srinivas said Taylor was asked several years ago to study shoaling at the Matanzas Inlet because of the frequency of dredging needed in the nearby Intracoastal Waterway. He compared aerial photos of the inlet from 2008 to the present and pointed out how the breach had evolved from basically a new inlet to the sand flat evident today. He said measurements of the water flow at various points around the area have shown an 8.3% decrease in water flow through Matanzas Inlet, an average 80% decrease in the flow of the Summer Haven River at the south bridge of A1A, and virtually stagnant water at the north end of the river. He said these numbers were quite high, especially the inlet, and have contributed to heavy silting under the Matanzas Inlet Bridge.

B. SUMMER HAVEN CITIZENS PRESENTATION - Linda Ginn

Linda Ginn, 951 Gene Johnson Road, talked at length about the beauty of Summer Haven River and the history of the community. She then displayed aerial photos of the river before and after the breach and discussed the impact of sand filling the river. Much of the habitat for oysters, birds, fish and manatees has been covered by sand. She also pointed out the State of Florida has expended many dollars to provide fishing areas on the new bridges over the river and that very little water remains under either bridge.

According to Mrs. Ginn, the loss of the river will have economic impacts including loss of recreation venues, rental incomes and tax revenues. The sand flats will also more readily admit flooding tides into the Summer Haven community with a potential for great property damage to existing structures.

Mrs. Ginn said a solution is to remove the sand from the river and place it back on the beach. She suggested planting vegetation to reinforce the sand. She also said a government agency should take the lead in this process and find the funding necessary to restore the river. She cautioned all present to avoid the error of too much study of the problem in lieu of action. Mr. Jay Ginn added comments regarding the dramatic shoaling under the Matanzas Inlet bridge and the resulting loss of popular fishing areas.

C. ST. JOHNS COUNTY - Andy Ames, County Engineering Department

Dr. Schropp then introduced Andy Ames, St. Johns County Engineering Department, to discuss regulation and funding. He said St. Johns County government has been involved in the Old A1A for many years, most recently in 2006-2007 when the County and the Federal Emergency Management Agency constructed a berm between the Atlantic Ocean and Old A1A from Summer Haven to near Marineland. He recounted the response of the county and many other agencies in 2008 when the breach occurred. Taylor Engineering did a study at that time of the options for repairing the breach, but most agencies had process or funding issues, so nothing was done. He added that work will soon begin to reinforce the berm south of the breach by using sand dredged from the ICW.

D. FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (FDEP)

Martin Seeling and Bob Brantley appeared on behalf of the Florida DEP Bureau of Beaches and Coastal Systems. Mr. Seeling stated FDEP reviews many factors when considering permits for projects like restoring this breach, including effects on water quality and fish and wildlife. DEP staff try to balance these impacts, if any, against the benefits of a given project and determine whether the system will be helped or harmed by the proposed work.

Bob Brantley said Florida has the most active beach restoration projects in the nation, with 300 miles of critically eroded shoreline. Summer Haven has been designated critically eroded for years and as a result is eligible for State cost-sharing funds, when and if available. He said the usual issues in beach restoration are effective use of funds and the quality of the sand.

E. U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS - Regulatory Division, Jacksonville District

Mark Evans spoke on behalf of the Army Corps of Engineers Regulatory Division. He explained the ACOE is divided into a civil division, which funds projects, and a regulatory one, which issues permits. He said funding a restoration project through the cumbersome Congressional process requires ten to fifteen years. A better option would be to seek local government and private funds. He said he would not expect any objection from the ACOE or any of its related federal agencies for a restoration project such as the Summer Haven River.

F. GUANA TOLOMATO MATANZAS NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE - Mike Shirley

Mike Shirley represented Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve. He cautioned against devising a quick solution which might make the problem worse. He pointed out that systems such as beaches and rivers change all the time gradually, and that events such as the tropical storm in 2008 can trigger the system to suddenly take advantage of these potentials for change. He said their studies of the breach have revealed occupation of the new sand flats by vegetation and wildlife.

He said an option would be to do nothing at all which has the advantage of low cost. Another option is partial restoration of water flow by altering the river's course. The most expensive option, in his opinion, is complete restoration, which may have many unintended consequences.

Chairman Dixon asked Dr. Schropp if he thought the project would be permissible. Dr. Schropp said he believed it would if FDEP and ACOE could be satisfied it was safe and feasible. He said the biggest question was whether the sand removed from the river would be beach quality.

Commissioner Benjamin asked Dr. Schropp to estimate the cost of restoration. Dr. Schropp said he thought the entire cost could exceed one million dollars, but that it was impossible to say without more data. Dr. Srinivas said his preliminary estimate from looking at aerial photos was about \$150,000.

Chairman Dixon said the early plans for Salt Run dredging contemplated using State funds, but that funding was so slow they ended up using a combination of Port District and FIND grant money. Commissioner Rippe asked whether the reduced water flow through Matanzas Inlet could cause silting. Dr. Srinivas said reduced flow was definitely contributing to silting inside the inlet but that the inlet would probably not silt over completely. He reiterated the 8% decrease in water flow through the inlet is a very significant amount.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Steve Steinmetz, 260 Barrataria Island, said our government should have set aside money for events such as this and that the inlet created by the breach is not natural. Only the Summer Haven River is a natural structure.

Sid Varner, 9183 Old A1A South, explained that his house is next to the breach and that he personally had spent \$150,000 to save his house. He said he offered to repair the breach as

soon as it happened but that no agency would allow him to close the breach. He said he could have the breach repaired and the sand removed from the river in one week, as fifty thousand cubic yards is not that much sand.

Gail Hankinson, 9150 Mellon Court, said the sand FIND is about to place on the beach is very fine and that the course sand now filling the river would be even better for the breach. She said the Summer Haven community never asks for help and that a little seed money from the District would do a lot of good for the river. Chairman Dixon said the Board would be discussing funding at the next meeting.

Mike Greenberg, 2 St. Andrews Court, said he and his students at the Whitney Lab have collected biology samples in the river for the last 30 years. They have seen a decrease in diversity due to the weakened flow of water in Matanzas Inlet. He cautioned that care needs to be taken in devising a restoration solution because the effects of such projects are often unexpected.

Carlos Cardenas, 9173 Old A1A, read a letter from Longtime Summer Haven homeowner Tom Schmidt. Tom's family donated much of the County-owned land in Summer Haven, including the lots where the breach occurred. He said Summer Haven is a scenic gateway to St. Johns County from the south. Notably, Mr. Schmidt's family originally donated right-of-way for the Intracoastal Waterway. At that time, ICW project managers assured them development of the ICW would have no adverse effect on the Summer Haven River.

Mrs. Davron Cardenas, 9176 Old A1A, said the Summer Haven River was part of the Florida East Coast Canal System, which existed prior to the ICW. In the 19th century, visitors from St. Augustine rode 12 hours by sailboat to reach Summer Haven to fish, crab and gather turtle eggs. The ICW was established in 1927. That year, the bridge across the Matanzas Inlet was built. In 1960, Old A1A was given to St. Johns County and the federal highway was re-located. Gene Johnson, well-known Summer Haven oysterman and restaurateur, took an oyster lease on the entire Summer Haven River in 1933. That oyster lease still exists today.

Flagler County resident Rich Crouse said the road from Marineland to Summer Haven and the public access it affords to the Summer Haven River, the ICW and the adjacent wetlands is one of the greatest assets of our county.

Carl Blow, St. Johns County FIND Commissioner, said FIND has been placing good, beach-quality sand on the beach next to Old A1A for many, many years. He suggested the Board study the Rose Bay restoration project in Volusia County as an example. The project involved every local, state and federal agency possible and took 15 years from start to finish.

Paul Haif, St. Johns River Water Management District, said Rose Bay was led by the City of Port Orange and the Water Management District. It was a gigantic 50 million dollar project. He said the Summer Haven River problem is quite small by comparison, but that the possibility of a re-occurrence will be an issue for permitting agencies.

Martin Seeling of DEP responded to a question by Commissioner Rippe by saying DEP would be able to permit some type of restoration project, although he could not say what.

Dr. Schropp said some type of permit would definitely be available, but a topographical study and test borings would be necessary to begin the design of the project. Chairman Dixon suggested the District should fund the initial studies and then look to other agencies for the bulk of the cost. Commissioner Rivers asked Dr. Schropp to prepare an estimate of the initial costs for presentation at the next meeting.

Commissioner Rippe thanked the audience and agency representatives for their participation. He said he is encouraged by the fact the only obstacle to the project seems to be the availability of funds. Chairman Dixon said he was encouraged by the large attendance.

ADJOURN:

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Dixon at 8:22 P.M.

Secretary-Treasurer

Chairman