

Staff Recommends State Tackle Sidewalk Plan

Sidewalk, from Page 1A

To extend the sidewalks north to the bridge, the Town would have to add another contribution to the FDOT grant. In 2001, \$70,500 was also allotted for professional engineering, which would include plans and administrative efforts to bid out the project to contractors with an extra contingency line item of \$50,000 also added.

The total sidewalk project in 2001 required that \$459,000 was set aside. In 2005, the project was re-evaluated, and the Town added an additional \$102,970 to the overall budget. It then became a \$561,970 sidewalk project.

Historically, Florensa says, FDOT would be in control of building sidewalks for the Town, but as their state projects increased, it was thought by FDOT officials if local governments could take care of the projects themselves, it would free

up state workers.

In order for the Town to do that, they became LAP certified, so that they could design, construct and manage the project themselves.

It would also be necessary to have the work done by outside contractors, because staff was already overburdened.

Florensa says that everything went according to plan. They had their set of plans, and advertised for contractors to fulfill the project. He said no one would bid on the project.

In order to keep the grant monies, work has to be done within a certain amount of time, Florensa said.

An appointment was made with FDOT officials to explain the situation.

Could FDOT take over the project since they could not find workers to carry out their end of the bargain?

While FDOT officials were making up their mind, Florensa had the job of

approaching the Town Commission with news of the uncompleted sidewalks and the pitfalls which now would lie in the Town's way.

He told them about the bidding problem, and also talked about the budgeted monies being inadequate. Four years later, services would cost more, Florensa explained to the commissioners.

Since the grant was approved several years ago, the money agreed upon would not compensate a contractor now because costs were up.

"Of course, we've already demonstrated the money is inadequate," Commissioner Peter O'Connor reminded the commissioners.

"They (FDOT) have assured me they will move ahead with the project," Florensa assured the commission. "We will have to terminate the LAP agreement for them to do that."

Commissioner Randy Clair was less

than pleased.

"I don't want to cancel the agreement with a grant already in place," Claire said to Florensa. "FDOT has pulled back on many of those grants. I don't want to forfeit the grant."

Commissioner George Spoll agreed with Clair during the discussion.

Florensa and Town Manager Bruce St. Denis said they would make sure that the grant would be intact if they signed an agreement.

"I will ask for FDOT assurances," Florensa promised, "before we forfeit the grant money."

Sullivan thought that FDOT taking over the project could solve the third problem to the sidewalk controversy.

"It's not a popular project in the community because the setbacks have to be so deep," Sullivan said. He thought maybe if FDOT workers were out there themselves, they would be a tad more lenient.

Turtles, from Page 1A

into the water.

"I haven't run across this before and I've been doing this for 10 years," Clark said. "It may seem like you're helping, but you're interfering. Let them go on their own."

There have been 15 hatchings this year, according to Mote. In the next two months, the rest of the nests along the beaches will begin to hatch. A second nest near the Colony was laid June 13. Mote says it will hatch in mid-August.

Turtle walkers walk the 35 miles of beaches each morning to check the hundreds of nest that have been laid. Because

of these daily checks and the fact that sea turtles hatch in the evening, it can be said the nest hatched Sunday evening.

"They can tell the surface of the sand is cooler," Clark said. They also hatch at night because it is a safer time when shore birds, the baby sea turtle's predator, are not on the beach. Some sea turtle projects in other areas have people who observe nests overnight, Clark says they do not have the resources to devote so many late-night hours to watching hundreds of nest on 35 miles of beach.

Clark says witnessing a sea turtle nest hatching is a very rare and awesome experience, but onlookers must respect the natural process.

"Though it's great to see a nest hatching, they need to let nature take its course," Clark said. "I know they look really cute and you want to help them, but it's a federal offense."

Scientists know that at some point the female hatchlings imprint the beach so they know to return there to lay their own nests. However, it is unknown when they do this, in the nest or while crawling to the ocean. Tampering with the crawl may be detrimental to this process.

"We're not sure if they're imprinting on the beach or while they're crawling down the beach," Clark said. "They're getting their cues. They need to be able to do it on their own."

Clark says that it is OK to watch the hatchlings make their first crawl, but do not interfere.

"Don't try to move down the beach with them," Clark said.

Because the hatchlings are only about two inches and this typically occurs at night, walking with them could be dangerous to the small creatures.

Sometimes the hatchling can grow disoriented if there are bright lights or obstacles, such as beach chairs, on the beach. If someone sees this occur, they should call the sea turtle hotline and Mote employees who are permitted to handle the sea turtles to handle the incident. The turtle hotline is 388-4331.



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