

Planning Board Sends Brown to Meeting

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As Longboat Key comes into season, meetings start back up and issues are brought from the back burner to the foreground again.

In June, the visioning process was discussed by commissioners, after Planning and Zoning Board members sent them a sample questionnaire for review. In theory from that questionnaire would come a survey, which could be mailed to a select number of residents on the Key.

To their credit, board members would only make suggestions on a process which had begun months before shaped by focus groups directed by a consultant group hired by the Town Commission. A final tweaking, you might say.

The commission was disappointed in the results and distanced themselves from the project.

Consultant Herb Marlowe was not at that meeting, but assured commissioners he would contact each of them individually to discuss the questionnaire.

Afterwards, e-mails were sent sharing mixed feelings about having the visioning

process continue.

Initially, a survey was called for so that residents of the Key could give input so that the Town staff and commissioners would know how to proceed with setting policy and make ordinance changes in the future.

Items on the questionnaire would deal with land use, beach erosion, local governmental office particulars, and density issues.

A diminishing in the commercial and tourist trade on the Key in recent years, and the more immediate threat of disaster during an hurricane might have prompted the need for communicating with the populace.

And, there are other changes on the Key which could impact its economic health.

According to Pat Arendts, planning board member, it is also a fact that full time residents on the Key have dropped from 50% to 27% in the past 10 years.

Board member Walter Hackett feels that a survey is important, but educating residents should come first. Hackett feels that to get intelligent answers to thought-

ful questions may be impossible unless Key homeowners know what issues the Town is up against.

But, after that the Town needs to find out what the community wants.

"A survey is a tool," Hackett said, "a necessary ingredient."

Five planning board members joined their hands together symbolically, making a determination to keep the Town survey on track, even if its present form changes.

They may be beating a dead horse because they also think Town commissioners may want to shelve the survey, now that the questionnaire may have run its course.

"I feel we need a survey," Sandy Gilbert, planning board chairman said during that board meeting on Tuesday. "But, I believe there are enough commissioners who want to kill the deal."

Gilbert felt the commission could be fatigued, or tired of the process. He even alluded to the fact that commissioners are elected, so they want to please the populace.

And then there was the question of

funding.

A survey could cost as much as \$30,000.

"They have to fund it," Gilbert said. "You need funding to do all this."

He recommended that they send a representative to the Sept. 21 commission workshop to plead their case. It was agreed that James Brown be that representative.

The board vote was 5-3 in favor of sending a diplomat to the workshop, and that someone is Brown.

David Brenner was one of the three board members who disagreed with Gilbert.

"I don't think this is a useful tool at this stage of the game," Brenner said to the board, who had been gathered in a circle. "I think we know about the issues. We know enough so that we can get on with it."

Brenner thinks that what Longboat Key residents really want is for the sun to shine and the red tide to stay away and that is enough.

New Beach Sand Angers North Key Residents

Sand, from Page 1A

ing their item of contention on the Sept. 21 workshop agenda.

Paul and Jan Zipper took their stand, with Jan Zipper reading "We're upset because you're not" to describe their feelings.

"We have a terrible beach and we paid a lot of money for it," Gene Geleski, the fifth neighbor coming forward, said.

Do the neighbors of Sleepy Lagoon have a legitimate argument?

To understand the situation, we have to go back to when it all began.

Engineers hired by Longboat Key in 2005 applied to amend the Town's permit, so that a total of 110,000 cubic yards of sand could be spread on the north end of the Key. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection issued a permit to the Town of Longboat Key on Nov. 22, 2005 to replenish the beach at the north end of the Key.

Sand would be pumped near North Shore Road, so that a beach could be built in front of Longbeach Village Condominiums.

Though at certain points, the north-end beaches were 400 feet wide, in front of Longbeach the Coquina building sat on a slope some 15 feet from a seawall.

By May, the residents were informed by Juan Florensa, Longboat Key public works director, that the 1,000 foot long beach along Gulfside Road would be filled in with coarse gray sand which would be covered by a three-to four-foot layer of white sand.

Florensa explained this would be necessary because of FDEP restrictions.

According to Florensa, FDEP officials say the reef running along that beach has to be protected because this is an area where local marine life feed. It was an environmental concern.

It is important to note that this reef was a hard bottom artificial reef which the Town had built for \$1.5 million to lessen damage to the coastline.

At the time, Whatmough walked the beach and was unsatisfied with the result.

Gulfside Road Residents Irate, Speak Out

The following message was read Longboat resident Jan Zipper at Monday's Commission meeting in protest of the recent beach renourishment project.

We're upset because you're not.

We're upset because we trusted the commissioners and you let us down.

We're upset because you still fail to realize the damage that's been done.

We're upset because no one is being held responsible, yet we're expected to live with the consequences.

We're upset because you let Manson leave for Mayport in spite of warnings from your engineer that the unfinished portion of the beach would be over washed and erode. It did.

We're upset because you let Manson leave because it was a good deal for you, a good future reference for Manson, likely entirely financed by the Corps of Engineers, but an additional two month

inconvenience to the residents who use and love our Gulfside Beach daily.

We're upset because while Manson was gone your employees and consultants didn't recognize the beach was eroding from the north and accreting to the environmentally-sensitive Gulfside Beach area to the south as predicted.

We're upset because when Manson finally returned and wanted to restore the shoreline as required the Town said "No."

We're upset because the DPW said that the beach was OK when Gulfside Beach work was done when in fact it was a dangerous disgrace.

We were happy when Commissioner Jeremy Whatmough agreed.

We were happy when the Town agreed to apply for a permit modification to make repair.

We were upset when your engineer dragged his feet and then submitted an incomplete application.

He gave his views to his fellow commissioners.

Town Manager Bruce St. Denis told commissioners he would get white sand, but it would come at a cost.

The white sand would require that the Town go through another permitting process with FDEP. By June, Florensa advised residents and the commission alike that FDEP officials had still not responded.

Paul Zipper was concerned at that point FDEP may not allow a permit modification.

During this time period, contractors on the project — Manson Construction — left the site to complete a job in Mayport, Florida.

The heavier gray sand washed south to land on top of white sand complicating the already combustive situation.

Coastal Planning and Engineering, consultants used by the Town for their beach renourishment projects, were called in to address the Commission.

Douglas Mann of CP&E gave the Town three possible options: regrade the exposed coarse area, take no action and let nature take her course, or stockpile additional white sand until FDEP approves the permit modification.

On one hand, many town residents felt safer with the immediate threat of Gulf waters flooding their homes removed with the wider beaches.

On the other hand, white sand that had been there was now gone.

However, the desire for aesthetics and beauty was increasingly becoming an issue.

While the commission and staff struggled through solutions, McKenna had hit the streets in her neighborhood with a petition.

By late-July, McKenna had 42 signatures.

At that time Mayor Joan Webster says that neighbors of Sleepy Lagoon wanted a wider beach because high waters had

We're upset when an octogenarian had to stand in front of a bulldozer before the Town would instruct Manson to grade the disgraceful portion of our beach.

We're upset because even after renourishment the high erosion areas still disappear.

We're upset because you will do the same thing eight years from now.

We're upset because our neighboring islands to the north and south have beautiful white sand beaches and we no longer do.

We're upset because we burn our feet to cross our bonus strip of grey sand when the sun is strong.

We're upset because the Florida DEP approved LBK's requested exemption from Florida law regarding matching native sand, while our neighbors both north and south willingly comply.

We're upset because the Florida DEP who monitored Manson's every move could let this happen.

threatened to wash away some of their homes for years.

"They need to be patient," Webster said in late July. "We have been told the beach will equilibrate in 10 years."

Neighbors of Sleepy Hollow say that CP&E said if Manson left there would be technical problems.

They also ask why Manson was not allowed by the Town to restore the gray-sand-only area to its prior shoreline profile as required by Change Order 11, Item 5.

Neighbors also feel the Town and CP&E were half-hearted in their pursuit of permit modifications by FDEP.

"It is our understanding that we will be on the Sept. 21 workshop to discuss this matter in depth and we hope you will review the information in the binders provided for you," McKenna said. "In closing, we hope that this matter can be resolved for everyone concerned so that additional steps can be avoided."