

**December 2021
NEWS**

**Islamorada Community
Alliance**

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This month, the Islamorada Community Alliance (ICA) is celebrating its one year anniversary. We believe our first year demonstrates the importance of citizen participation in the decisions made by our local government. Residents who care about each other and the place they live can make a difference, if they just speak up. Collective and well-thought out action can result.

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The Village conflicts are often rooted in differences between the residents that seek to protect quality of life and our environment versus those that exploit local resources as a means of achieving economic gain.

ICA emerged to educate and guide local participation to meet the challenges presented when it appeared that the environment and quality of life were taking a backseat.

For the sustainability of our community and its economic viability, we have to protect our environment, address workforce housing, traffic, and the limited infrastructure. But for too long, the public was too quiet and investors emerged, exploiting loopholes in our regulations for personal gain. And no one was there to say “NO” and demand change.

The Islamorada Community Alliance selected the roseate spoonbill as its logo. According to the Audubon website, “The roseate spoonbill shorebird is a local indicator species—a canary in the coal mine. If the spoonbill is not doing well, that tells us there is a problem in the ecosystem. “



The ecosystem here is in trouble and we want to help. Organizing the ICA has made a huge difference in the last year. Oversight and balance needs to be a clear goal.

We hope more and more of you will join the effort to make Islamorada the best it can be: an environmental treasure for generations to come.


Let’s all speak up.

Our Mission:

To provide Islamorada residents with information about events occurring in our community that will impact our quality of life, preservation of our native ecosystems, land develop-

Village Clerk Resigns: Village Clerk, Kelly Toth, announces her resignation and the future resignation of her Village firefighter husband, Geo Toth, on Face Book. Both Kelly and Geo are longtime valued employees. Kelly has worked for the Village a total of 14 years, though not all consecutive. Geo has been with the Village for 20 years. They have been married since March 13, 2011. Best wishes to the Toths!



 Kelly Toth is 😊 feeling happy with Jim Mooney and 6 others.
7h · 👤

New Adventures. Last week I gave my 30-day notice to the Village resigning from my position as Village Clerk. My last day will be Dec. 21st. Geo and I have been planning to move to TN since early 2020 and a job opportunity presented itself that I could not pass up. I will be moving to TN at the end of December and Geo will join me next summer. So excited about this change and the company I will be working for. There are a lot of people that I will miss (and some I won't). LOL 😊

Other Staff News: Mary Swaney is now working in the Finance Department as the “Procurement and Grants Administrator.” Her former position as Assistant to the Village Manager/Public Information Officer has been filled by Katie Atkins, Former Aide to Monroe County Commissioner Michelle Coldiron. Katie’s first day was Nov 29. Welcome to Islamorada Katie!

In Katie’s own words: “It was an excellent experience working for Commissioner Michelle Coldiron and Monroe County. I feel honored to now be working for the Village of Islamorada and am so thankful to be closer to home.”



New Marina Dockmasters Office: On April 8, 2021, the Village Council directed staff to investigate options for building a concrete structure to serve as the Marina Dockmasters Office instead of proceeding with the purchase and installation of a modular structure. At the April 30 meeting, a rendering of a small concrete office was provided by a local contractor. Finance Director, Maria Bassett, stated the modular building would be 600 square feet (20x30) and was approximately \$300/sq ft. or \$180,000. Building Official Sheila Denoncourt stated a local contractor quoted a concrete structure would be approximately \$340/sq ft. or \$204,000, \$24,000 more than the modular, but would take much longer to build. The modular was approved, 3-2 with Gregg and Rosenthal preferring the concrete building. The modular office is just about done now.



Rendering

The Concrete vs Modular Look?
Which would you have preferred?
We think Gregg and Rosenthal were right!
The cost is coming out of the marina revenues.



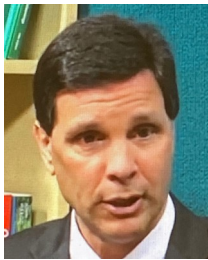
Actual modular now in place

New Citizen Committee: Get Involved: The Land Acquisition Advisory Committee that was created in 1999, has been inactive for over 12 years. At their November meeting, the Council voted to activate the committee and appoint new members. If you are interested in serving fill out an application or talk to a member of council. Each councilman will appoint two. It is expected that some appointments will be made at the December 16 Council meeting.



The committee will research strategies regarding land acquisition, create and maintain a priority list of potential acquisition properties and identify funding sources.

To get an application, go to the Village website, under Village Council, Boards and Committees ([click here](#)) – then click on Citizens' Committee Application on the left side.



Meet and Greet New Planning Director: December 1, 2021 was Dan Gu-lizio first day in Islamorada as Planning Director. At 5 pm, prior to the December 16 Council meeting, the community will have an opportunity to meet the man who will be addressing the challenges the Islamorada community faces regarding the sustainability of our community, the environment and our limited infrastructure and resources. Let us welcome him to our community.



Cheryl Meads to Make Presentation: Cheryl is on the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), appointed by Governor DeSantis to represent the 6 counties from Monroe County north along the east coast. At the November 16 Council meeting, she will present an introduction to the District, their responsibilities, recent accomplishments and the impact they have here and throughout South Florida.

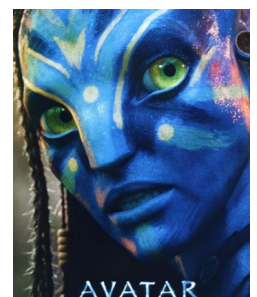


Mayor/Vice Mayor Selection Dec 16

Who will be our mayor this next year?!?

While the position is largely ceremonial, there is much prestige and perhaps standing with the community and other agencies when you are the "MAYOR." According to Village code the mayor shall serve at the pleasure of the village council and shall have the same legislative powers and duties as any other councilmember, except in addition to carrying out the regular duties, the *mayor* shall preside at the meetings of the council and shall be recognized as the head of village government for service of process, ceremonial matters, and the signature or execution of ordinances, contracts, deeds, bonds, and other instruments and documents. The *mayor* shall have no administrative duties other than those necessary to accomplish these actions, or such other actions as may be authorized by the village council, consistent with general or special law.

Resident Jon Landau is leaving Islamorada: His spectacular home on Plantation Key has been listed for sale. Landau is best known for producing Titanic, a film that won him an Academy Award. He also produced Avatar, the biggest money maker in movie history. Now he is in New Zealand producing Avatar sequels 2-5. Avatar 2 is expected to be release in December 2022 and the next three sequels are expected to be released by 2025. Islamorada will miss Jon and his wife, Julie.



Go to Islamorada.org

Christmas Spirit in Islamorada: Islamorada Village Councilman, Henry Rosenthal, loves Christmas and the spirit of the season. After elected to Council in November 2020, Henry asked the Village to make the holidays more festive in Islamorada by adding more Christmas decorations. He got no support back then but didn't give up. In September 2021, the Council passed a budget with increased expenditures for Christmas décor. Finally, at their meeting in November, Village Council approved, 5-0, a program to provide the community with significantly more Christmas decorations.

The areas enhanced with holiday décor include the Islamorada welcome sign, the North Plantation Key stop light, Founders Park, the Hurricane Monument and the southern entrance to Islamorada at Craig Key. These areas are decorated with LED lights, garlands, wreaths, interactive selfie features, pole mounted and ground level decorations.



A favorite is the decorated stately palms and the huge bright Christmas ball in front of the Hurricane Monument creating a fantastic "photo opportunity." And Founders Park never looked so lovely. Henry has even more ideas for next Christmas. Thank you Councilman Rosenthal.

Christmas at the Marina: The boat owners at the Village marina at Founders Park are also demonstrating great Christmas spirit. They certainly have added significantly to the beauty of the park.



Annual Holiday Fest: This year's Fest, hosted by the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with Founders Park, has been the talk of the town. It was absolutely bigger and better than ever. There was a parade, snow mountain, crafts, music, and food! Everyone loved this incredible event.

Watch for the video coming soon.

Federal Infrastructure Bill; Do Not Forget the Florida Keys:

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

December 7, 2021

On December 7, Senators Rubio and Scott sent a joint letter to Michael Connor Assistant Secretary of the Army –Civil Works Department of the Army requesting funding be allocated for projects in Florida based on the funds made available in the recently passed Federal infrastructure bill.

Our Senators specifically referenced the need to allocate no less than \$1.5 billion towards restoring the Everglades.

In total, the letter mentions the need of funding for 76 specific Florida projects. Many of those projects listed reference on-going efforts that require Federal funding.

The only mention of any project in Monroe County states “Florida Keys Water Quality Improvements” without the specifics that were listed for many other Florida projects. Perhaps it is time for Monroe County and all the municipalities to work together with a Federal lobbyist to make sure that our Area of Critical Concern is not forgotten.

[Click here to read the letter.](#)

Monroe County Offers Assistance. Islamorada’s Turn to Act?

Representative from the Monroe County staff made two presentations at the November Council Meeting.

First: 2023 and Buildout. The County has undertaken an effort to reduce the impact of “BUILDOUT.” Because we are an Area of Critical State Concern, a limit to the number of homes we can support was established, thus the term “Buildout.” Islamorada is scheduled to reach “Buildout” in July 2023. Monroe County has reduced their annual residential building allocations to extend their “Buildout” date to 2026.

Florida constitution prohibits government from “taking all beneficial use” of private property without just compensation. Monroe County is implementing changes to reduce the number of properties with possible “takings” claims.

In their presentation, the County encouraged Islamorada to reduce the Village annual allocations while changes to development code are implemented and funding opportunities pursued to reduce the cost of “buildout.” It is expected the municipalities will pay 50% of “takings” claims while the state will pay the other half. This could cost Village taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. There are about 700 vacant buildable residential lots. With lots worth hundreds of thousands and often much more, the cost of takings claims could be huge.

On December 16, the Islamorada Council is scheduled to approve the number of BPAS allocations to be distributed in 2022. We will see if they follow the advice of Monroe County and extend the 2023 buildout.

Second: Traffic improvement ideas: The County presented a report on November 18 outlining possible improvements that can be implemented to reduce highway congestion. The Village Council was tasked with providing the Florida Keys Transportation Coordination Committee, headed by County Mayor Rice, a council approved list of 5 top priorities for improvements to traffic concerns in Islamorada.

The Islamorada priority list is to be approved by council and forwarded to the County by the end of December, approved at the County level in January, and then forwarded to FDOT in February. Difficult schedule!

[Click here](#) for County Buildout ideas

[Click here](#) for Traffic proposals

[Go to Islamorada.org](http://Islamorada.org)

Critically Important Land Use Decision

On December 2, the Village Council heard arguments and then voted 4-0 to reject a request for a Future Land Use Map change for a property on Plantation Key. The property, located between U.S. One and the Old Highway, included two lots classified by the Village as high quality hammock. The request asked for the classification to be changed from Residential Conservation to Mixed Use.

Why does the Islamorada Community Alliance think this land use issue and the decision made are critically important?

- ◆ The Village cannot continue the practice of adding value for developers at the expense of the community.
- ◆ The staff report considered the goals and policies established by our Comprehensive Plan . The Council listened.
- ◆ The Village has traffic and environmental issues. Up-zoning in an Area of Critical Concern is not appropriate. Our community needs to demonstrate we are committed to protecting our fragile environment. And not making traffic worse.
- ◆ Owner bought this property recently knowing what was allowed by law. Zoning 35 years ago is not relevant.
- ◆ There is already adequate property that is appropriately zoned.
- ◆ This would be a damaging precedent—numerous undeveloped lots in that area have the same designation. Dozens of property owners would gain the right to do the same thing.

The Fills—December 1 Exercise

We have been trying to resolve the trash, traffic, parking and safety issues at the Fills for years. On December 1, the public got to make selections for Structure ideas, Barriers, Trail Enhancements, and Access and Safety.

But there was considerable frustration with the red dot/green dot exercise and even more confusion with the online yes/no process. The purpose of the effort was to further determine the ideas that the residents and businesses like or don't like for the future Fills master plan. It is difficult to figure out how this exercise could possibly be of value. It is quite unlikely that the red/green at the live exercise or the very different yes/no exercise online will be a true indicator of what the folks of Islamorada want to see.

Let's hope in the end we will be content that whatever is decided will be better than what we've had in the past. But perhaps we should expect more. Won't we be paying for it?



Go to Islamorada.org For Breaking News



Civility: Our Thoughts



At the December 2 Council meeting, the emotions got out of control. Manager Greg Oravec and Attorney Roget Bryan were harshly criticized during public comment. It was embarrassing. The speaker was representing a group and her troubling comments reflected on the entire group.

In a public setting, incivility may improve viewership of public meetings or provide the local press with some salacious headlines. We do not want to turn our Council meetings into the equivalent of the ultimate Reality TV show where louder is better. It's time for leaders to take a stand against such harsh personal attacks during public comment. Cultivating civility is a cornerstone of leadership.

Every community has a brand and if Islamorada wants their brand to suggest professionalism, then we all need to protect that brand by acting respectfully! Talent will leave, or be difficult to attract, if staff is expected to submit themselves to such extremely unfair public dialog. If we want the best talent, the environment we demand at our meetings should be deserving of that talent.

According to a study on civility by Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, incivility is bad for democracy. "It pushes people away from politics and from paying attention to politics, and lessens their willingness to be engaged." At a time when we are craving community engagement, we must prohibit incivility.

It is critical for the Council to accept the leadership challenge of ensuring the public "narrative" is that civility matters and anything less than that will not be tolerated. While staff work may not always be as good as it can be, it is never okay to allow someone to take a public tongue lashing, while considering the First Amendment.

Elected officials need tools for dealing with this discomfort. Members of Council need to publicly state when norms are not being followed. It is powerful for people to feel they have been "stood up for" and hopefully sends a message to everyone watching, and reporting on the meeting, that the community expects better.

When public discourse breaks down – and this can happen because of strong emotions, the council needs to move to recess for ten or fifteen minutes to regain control. Sometimes even adults need a "time out."

In the future all of us need to always focus on the situation, not the person. Constructive criticism can be a very good thing. What we witnessed Dec 2 was not constructive.