

**July 2022 NEWS**  
**Islamorada Community Alliance**

P.O. Box 1507  
 Tavernier, FL 33070

**A huge thank you to those who have sent donations to the Islamorada Community Alliance. You are Appreciated!**

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***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 development, lawful and transparent governance.

**Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember.  
 Involve me and I learn.**



**It's Happening in Islamorada**



**RV/Mobile Home Park**



**The Fills—  
 Still no progress**



**An Editorial  
 Opinion**



**Meeting into  
 the Night**



**A Lobbying  
 Controversy**

Where we love is home - home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.



## What's the Deal on the Mobile Home Park on the Ocean MM87.3?

**Sun Communities** is a publicly traded real estate investment trust that invests in manufactured housing communities, recreational vehicle resorts, and marinas. They own the former mobile home parks—San Pedro and Seabreeze plus the property in between. When Hurricane Irma hit in September of 2017, the two mobile home parks were devastated. Dozens of local residents who lived at these parks lost everything. But Sun Communities promised to rebuild the parks and give the former tenants an opportunity to return to the location they all loved.



Construction is underway and the new park is expected to open by the end of the year. The park site plan as approved by the Village shows 91 RV spaces and 53 mobile home spaces (to be elevated—the columns now visible to the far north and far south of property). In the center is the Welcome Center, swimming pool, and six three story modular homes that are to be deed restricted as affordable.



The 91 RV spaces will be part of what looks like a lovely RV park (based on rendering to left) with spaces rented by the night, a bit confusing for a property zoned “Mobile Home Park” where vacation rentals are not legal.

mobile home parks and to allow for conversion of lawfully permitted mobile homes to affordable housing that is less vulnerable to damage from severe weather events.

The Village code states: The purpose of the mobile home park (MH) zoning district is to accommodate existing

**Welcome Back!** We understand that pre-Irma tenants are being provided a “returning resident discount rate” and are being offered a 1230 sq ft modular home for \$590,000, land not included. The homes are not eligible for vacation rental licenses. Further, the Village 2022 Affordable Housing Fact sheet states that the maximum sales price of a 2 bedroom affordable housing unit is \$427,125.



“Procrastinate now, don't put it off.”  
— Ellen DeGeneres



## Status of the Fills: Still Nothing Done?

**Islamorada has been trying to fix this problem for more than a dozen years!**

On February 17, 2022 the Village Council decided to scrap the \$55,000 work done by consultants CPH when their master plan options to create a park on the Fills between Upper and Lower Matecumbe seemed opposite of what the community desired. Instead, Council voted to put in guardrails from one end of the Fills to the other on both sides to prevent folks from parking except in a few designated areas. CPH was asked to provide this simplified plan. So far, no guardrail plan after 5 months. Vice Mayor Henry Rosenthal continues to oppose the guardrails, as do many residents. He wants to get on with a rational effort to make the fills a beautiful causeway between two islands—without orange cones, ugly and costly guardrails, and without park amenities.

**The Lease:** The Village has a 5 year lease with FDOT that does not require any improvements but if the Village does want to make improvements, they must be requested in writing. When the lease is terminated any improvements made by the Village must be immediately removed. The current lease expires September 10, 2024 but can be renewed automatically for another 5 years.

**The big question.** Does FDOT require guardrails along the Fills for the safety of the pedestrians and bikers using the Heritage Trail? Why didn't someone ask that six months ago, a year ago, two years ago? If FDOT thinks guardrails are needed, why didn't they install them years ago themselves? Why aren't there guardrails all along U.S. One where the Heritage Trail runs parallel to U.S. One, sometimes just feet apart, throughout the Keys?

Now we want the new manager, Ted Yates, to chime in after he arrives in August.

**Who is tired of waiting?**

**We like Henry's Plan.**

**Keep Islamorada Beautiful.**



**Join the Islamorada Community Alliance in our effort to help inform the residents of Islamorada about issues of concern. Spread the word.**

**Watch for our updates on Face Book and at our website:**

**[ISLAMORADA.ORG](http://ISLAMORADA.ORG)**

Truth will ultimately prevail where there  
is pains taken to bring it to light. – George  
Washington



## Letter to the Editor: Who is the Victim?

At the end of the May 12 Village Council meeting, about 11 pm, Village Attorney, Roget Bryan, abruptly announced his resignation, stating in part:

“I have no appetite at all for external political dynamics that involve personal attacks on my name, character, reputation, integrity and most egregiously my family. I refuse to tolerate, accept, or normalize such attacks on myself, any village manager here, other staff, as par for the course, and on this, I am unwavering and resolute.”



Not everyone thinks the Village Attorney was the victim. Some believe the taxpayers were the victims.

### Time for a clean sweep

Is Islamorada running rich or scared?

Islamorada's village government spent a total estimated cost of a quarter-million dollars to send well-heeled village attorney Roget Bryan quietly into the sunset following allegations of workplace misconduct. After the alleged incident, tinting appeared on Bryan's glass office door. What happened to transparency?

Bryan's exact non-disclosure and settlement package totaled \$184,555 while the estimate for an employee related to the same alleged incident was \$21,326. That level of inequity would be hard to swallow. Plus, our not-so-new legal replacement, namely Weiss Serota, may easily surpass those stated numbers.

In essence, our taxpayers should be mortified. Worse yet, our council showered praise and rewards upon Bryan, at 11 p.m., on Tab X, with no prior meeting notification of the vote to receive the behind-doors exit agreement. Currently, according to State Attorney Dennis Ward, his office is investigating the entire matter while our citizens shake their heads in disbelief.

Sadly, in today's world, our little village has decayed into a mecca for greedy developers, sleazy attorneys and employees seeking more time off and unrealistic payoffs. Meanwhile, any mention of the greater good or environment is quickly dismissed.

Will that become our legacy? Is this who we are?

Perhaps there is a little brighter light arriving this November as we now have seven new dedicated and forward-looking candidates who have summoned the courage to be named on the ballot and all have the reputation of caring about others before themselves. It's time for a clean sweep and to remove the tinted glass.

**Bob Johnson, Islamorada**

Progress was all right. Only it went on too long.

[James Thurber](#)



## Council Meeting Madness!

Perhaps the members of Village Council want to be good soldiers, so they sacrifice their own time and well-being for meetings, and they assume they're doing what's best for the community. Don't they understand the negative consequences? They overlook the collective toll on productivity, focus, and engagement.

Since March of this year, look how long our council meetings have dragged on:



March 10th: 5 hours 3 min

March 31th: 6 hours 7 min

April 21th: 5 hours 47 min

May 12th: 6 hours 16 min

June 2th: 5 hours 23 min

June 23th: 5 hours 57 min

As compared to meeting times one year ago, the length of council meetings is now between 1 and 2 hours longer than a year ago, same members of council. What's going on?

We do expect the council to foster an inclusive, learning environment, but surely it doesn't have to mean meetings that last well into the night. By the end of Council meetings, few members of the public are still zooming. Few on the Council are still alert. Most of the public, attending in person, are gone.

And to make matters worse many items on the agendas these last few months have been withdrawn when the meeting extends beyond 11 pm at night. Other items have been withdrawn so the new Manager, Ted Yates, can weigh in once he arrives in August. Will the Council ever catch up?

Research shows that people have short attention spans. Don't you agree with us that meetings that last past 9 o'clock at night are ridiculous?

## In Limbo: Crooked Palm Distillery at MM90

At the April 21, 2022 Council meeting a public hearing was held to consider approving the location at 90184 Overseas Highway for the site of a 5COP alcoholic use permit for the Crooked Palm Distillery, a Brewery/Distillery/Tasting Room. The Council approved the site, 4-1, conditioned upon neighbors and applicant agreeing to some restrictions.

Since then, it was determined that the previous minor conditional use and site plan approval were flawed. The applicant now must provide a more detailed site plan and be processed as a major conditional use.

The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.

[Thomas Jefferson](#)



## **FREEBEE RIDESHARING PROGRAM—new**

**schedule July 1.** Freebee provides door-to-door transportation service free to the public with electric vehicles. Two Tesla Model X vehicles that accommodate up to seven passengers and one larger vehicle that can accommodate a wheelchair and up to nine passengers provide the Village-wide service. Rides are available from the north

(approximately Mile Marker 90) to the south end (approximately Mile Marker 72) of the Village.

The service also allows riders to access businesses near Mile Marker 91.5 in Tavernier, specifically the Tavernier Town Center, the Mariners Hospital Complex and the Good Health Clinic.

Beginning July 1, 2022, the service hours were expanded to begin providing the transportation services at 7:00 a.m.

### **Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday**

One vehicle operates from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Two vehicles operate from 12:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

### **Friday, Saturday**

One vehicle operates from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

One vehicle operates from 12:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

One vehicle operates from 2:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.

Download the Ride Freebee app from the App Store or from Google play. If you don't have a smart phone, you may call [855-918-3733](tel:855-918-3733) to request a ride.

**Free to Whom?** As reported previously, the service is free to riders because Islamorada taxpayers are paying the company \$342,000 per year. Other South Florida communities received 50% of the cost of this program through an FDOT grant for their first three years. Islamorada missed out on this grant, and local taxpayers missed a savings of almost \$500,000 over the first three years of Freebee service.

## **Islamorada—Customers of the Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District**

Instead of developing our own wastewater treatment plant, Islamorada installed a pipeline to send our effluent north to Key Largo where it is treated by the Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District (KLWTD). We are therefore their customers. No seat on the Board. The Board of the KLWTD is talking about a rate reduction for customers. ([Click here to read the story](#)) However this is not likely to impact Islamorada. We have a separate agreement unlike the customers from Key Largo. Perhaps more research/discussion is needed.



“I want to be the kind of elected official who not only pays attention but who acts on behalf of people - just average people. Fancy lobbyists get to tell their story, but the average person doesn't.” Maxine Waters



**Lobbying for Islamorada...** For the last dozen years, Islamorada has paid lobbyists to fight for us in Tallahassee and in Washington. The Council has extended the contracts for the firms hired, year after year, waiving the required competitive bidding. We are paying \$123,000 per year for our Tallahassee lobbyists. Are we getting our monies worth?



At the Village Council meeting on June 23, our lobbyists were present to basically “lobby” us... attempting to explain how much we need them. Maybe we do, maybe not. They were unable to tell us what “Islamorada specific” benefits we received from them. There was not even a short list.

Many Florida municipalities, large and small, are using lobbyists in Tallahassee. A review of the Florida Lobby website provides the compensation statistics for those who hire registered lobbyists. Of the 150 cities identified on the state website, 135 cities pay less for lobbying services than tiny Islamorada pays. The 15 that pay more include cities like Orlando, Miami, Tampa.

Go to <https://islamorada.org/LUCRATIVE-LOBBYIST-CONTRACT>: We think you’ll be enlightened.

There are three individuals who lobby for Islamorada in Tallahassee, all three registered with the firm Gray-Robinson. We pay the firm \$4,000 per month. We continue to pay another lobbying firm, Peebles, Smith and **Matthews** \$6,250/month based on a September 2021 contract, even though they are no longer registered as a lobbying firm, since **Matthews** moved to GrayRobinson in January. Matthews claims that because he owns Peebles, Smith and Matthews, he is therefore still entitled to the \$6,250/month. William Peebles is no longer a lobbyist with the firm now owned by Matthews. The \$75,000/year contract states that if Peebles is no longer lobbying for the firm, the contract with Islamorada is automatically terminated. Is there an explanation? Is Islamorada entitled to a refund?

### Who can help us the most?

Monroe County also uses GrayRobinson to lobby for virtually the same **local priorities and grant funding** that are important for the county as well as the municipalities. The County pays GrayRobinson \$96,000.

When it comes to **water quality, Florida Bay, Everglades restoration**, it is the fishermen who have an extremely impactful voice in Tallahassee.

When it comes to **critical insurance issues** it is FIRM (Fair Insurance Rates for Monroe) who helps the most.

When it comes to **municipal issues and state preemption** it is the League of Cities that covers that.

**What does our \$123,000 lobbying bill buy us?**