

March 2022 NEWS

Islamorada Community Alliance

P.O. Box 1507

Tavernier, FL 33070

info@Islamorada.org

Editor: Sue Miller

A huge thank you to those who have sent donations to the

Islamorada

Community Alliance

You are Appreciated!



ISLAMORADA
COMMUNITY
ALLIANCE

Advocacy For Residents, Education and Preservation

It's Council Meeting Time Thursday

**PAY
ATTENTION**

We all need to pay attention. Understand the decisions that are being made. Be a part of the process. You may think the current issues are only impacting someone else. But always remember—you could be next!

This Thursday there are several agenda items that deserve community-wide attention:

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>Pg</u>
Fills	<u>2</u>
Village nature walk	<u>3</u>
2022 Legislative Session	<u>4</u>
Affordable Housing	5
Did You Know	6

- * A discussion about Village owned affordable housing property, potentially providing \$4.55 million of Village land to an affordable housing developer without competitive bidding. (page 5)
- * Discussion about Council salaries requested by Councilman Mark Gregg—should Council get paid more than \$1000/month for their efforts?
- * Discussion about meeting rules requested by Mayor Pete Bacheler, to define acceptable meeting behavior.
- * Discussion about Fills progress requested by Vice Mayor Henry Rosenthal. (See page 2 for current status of Fills)
- * Manager search discussion: Update from consultant Colin Baenziger requesting more time to provide list of Village Manager candidates.
- * Resolution to approve the Quarter 1 BPAS allocations for market rate in spite of no apparent progress in extending BPAS beyond 2023 agreed upon at December 9, 2021 council meeting.

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 govern-

Agendas are available on the Village website under Village Council (Islamorada.fl.us)

A Decision at the Fills

At the February 17 Council meeting, Village consultant, CPH, was scheduled to present the “visions” of the future of the Fills based on the results of surveys and public interviews. The presentation was canceled. The explanation: The “visions” created by CPH did not resemble the survey results. They promised 3-5 visions but created just two very similar options. [Click here](#) to see more about the CPH visions for the Fills in our February newsletter.

A summary of survey results clearly indicated a majority of respondents wanted very limited or no improvements. Both visions created by CPH showed full blown park amenities: a trolley with 6 stops, as many as 18 picnic pavilions, 6 underpasses, 10 kayak launches, 4 pedestrian crosswalks. Nothing like the expectations revealed by the survey results.

One resident after another paraded to the microphone to eloquently plead for the council to not proceed with the “vision” for the Fills provided by the \$55,000 consultants.

Following Council discussion, Vice Mayor Henry Rosenthal made a motion to immediately remove the cones and tape and begin enforcing the “No Parking” signs that specify \$200 fines, allowing minimal 30-minute parking at the existing paved areas. He didn’t get a second from any of the other members of council, but there was a chant from the audience in attendance: “I’ll second the motion.”

Not influenced, the council suggested that they believed FDOT would require guardrails the length of the Fills and it was too early to remove the cones.

Vice Mayor Rosenthal had read the lease. Acting Manager, Maria Bassett, confirmed that no improvements are required by the lease and without improvements no master plan or engineering is required.

Four members of council thought \$200 parking fines were insufficient deterrent. Councilman Webb suggested the sheriff’s department should not be expected to enforce parking concerns.

Mayor Pete Bacheler made a motion for staff to come up with a concept with guardrails, vegetation and paid parking. The motion passed.

And now what is the next step and what will the cost be to Village taxpayers?



According to the lease with FDOT:

- ◆ All improvements must be at Village expense.
- ◆ Improvements must be set back 18 feet from the paved lane of traffic.
- ◆ Either FDOT or Islamorada can cancel the lease with 30 day notice
- ◆ All improvements must be immediately removed at lease termination

Why guardrails, the most expensive type of barrier discussed?

Will vehicles park in the 18 feet in front of the guardrails? Will an 18’ setback require relocating portions of the Heritage Trail? Will engineered plans now be required?

Our opinion: FDOT does not require guardrails elsewhere along the Heritage Trail. Why at the Fills? We pay for law enforcement to enforce laws, including no parking areas. Isn’t “no parking” enforcement at \$200/incident better than a expensive and unattractive guardrail? We like Vice Mayor Rosenthal’s idea! **Fix the Fills now—eliminate the cones!**

Lessons Learned, Lessons Forgotten?

Twice every month the Village has been sponsoring Nature Walks and Talks, most often at parks in the Village. If you haven't participated in these walks, you are missing a great opportunity to learn about our environment, plants, butterflies and birds.

On Feb 27 the walk was at Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park in Key Largo with Susan Kolterman, Florida Keys Naturalist. This state park is a history lesson demonstrating that our environment in the Keys can be saved!

The park location was once the site of Port Bougainville, a giant Key Largo condominium project on CR905 where construction was started over 40 years ago on 400 acres of pristine hardwood hammock, home to many endangered plants and wildlife. In 1980, Fritz Sharenberg took over the project.



"Port B" as it is now called, was to have 2,806 units, a full marina, shopping malls, restaurants, a town hall and fire department. Built in Mediterranean style with numerous waterways dredged through the wetlands and hammocks. A development order was issued in 1982 and immediately challenged by numerous environmental organizations.

ICA's own Capt Ed Davidson, convinced an enormous environmental law firm to sue all the north Key Largo development projects in federal court under the Endangered Species Act. As a result, condo and resort projects, worth an estimated \$3 billion, that were threatening to bring 35,000-45,000 new residents to Key Largo -- never got approved, and thousands of acres of vulnerable high hammock lands were consequently purchased for parks and preservation., including Port B.

An October 18, 1982 Monroe County Grand Jury released a report which concluded that while they could not find criminal action, "... **This Grand Jury can only conclude that the performance of governmental agencies involved will stand as a landmark in ineptitude.**"

The Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park was named for Dagny Johnson, a year before her death in 2003. Through the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, Dagny, though confined to a wheelchair, had worked nonstop with the environmental groups that fought to stop developments that were planned for north Key Largo and elsewhere in the Keys.



The Mediterranean Minutes from Miami

Take a moment to admire the illustration below. Do its picturesque pastels and cozy villas appeal to you? If so, you aren't alone. In the 1970s, the "Mediterranean minutes from Miami," also known as Port Bougainville, charmed visitors with lavish marketing and lively open-air models. Yet while developers turned heads, they failed to open the pockets of key investors.

By the 1980s, visions of a new Venice lay crumbling, but interest in Port Bougainville remained - especially among locals. Most outspoken of these was Anna Dagny Johnson, a lawyer-turned-naturalist who believed this land should be restored to the public. Neighbors from the Izaak Walton League, Upper Keys Citizens Association, and others joined her to ensure this park, along with the endangered plants and animals that call it home, was protected in 1982.



Preservation of onshore hammocks was critical. The reefs offshore of developed areas in the Keys have been declining significantly for decades. Those off undeveloped north Key Largo, remain in far better condition than most Florida Keys reefs. A lesson learned.

Exploring the park's trails gives visitors a chance to see some rare species of plants and animals. Over six miles of nature trails provide a wealth of opportunities for birdwatchers and photographers. Most of the park's trails are paved and accessible to both bicycles and wheelchairs. A big thank you to Susan Kolterman for educating residents with nature walks and talks. And thank you to people like Capt Ed and Dagny, who decades ago, worked diligently to provide this opportunity for all of us to enjoy the Keys environment at its best.



The 2022 Legislative Session



Lobbying. What's Up with this? The Village has contracts through September 30, 2022 with two state lobbying firms, Peebles, Smith and Matthews for \$75,000/year and Gray Robinson for \$50,000/year: a total of \$125,000. The two contracts with the firms were extended by the

Village Council in 2021 to provide lobbying services through October 2022.

BUT WAIT! According to the lobbyist website, [Click here](#), Islamorada has three registered lobbyists, Roy Dean Cannon Jr., Ryan E. Matthews, Joseph R. Salzverg, all three work for Gray Robinson. There are no lobbyists with Peebles working for Islamorada. The lobbyist we used previously at Peebles was Ryan Matthews and he now works for Gray Robinson. See the press release: [Click here](#). Did Matthew's departure from Peebles save Village taxpayers \$75,000 this year?

A few years ago, our Village Attorney's salary was increased by \$30,000 directing him to coordinate lobbying efforts. It would be beneficial to taxpayers if regular reports were provided to the public and on the website as to Islamorada's goals and the lobbyists' accomplishments during legislative sessions.

In the past, the Village Council established priorities prior to the legislative session each year as an agenda item at a council meeting. How were the Village 2022 legislative priorities established for the lobbyists this year?

The 2022 Session in Tallahassee: Much of the news this legislative session revolved around the impact of **Senate Bill 2508** on South Florida. The bill would force water managers to advocate for more water for agricultural users as a condition of receiving state funding for Everglades restoration projects. At best the bill was confusing. Hundreds of fishermen headed to Tallahassee to protest, giving up their charters to fight for the future of water, our most critical resource.

The Senate learned, that **Captains for Clean Water** is united, and determined to protect the waters of Florida. The fishing captains understand the critical importance of sharing precious water supplies as stated clearly on their website:

"The Florida Peninsula is one of the most unique landscapes on earth. Periodically inundated in a sub-tropical setting, it features one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world, the Everglades. The control of this water—draining it, redirecting it, and containing it—has been an evolving story over the last two centuries of man versus nature. And a story where there is no true winner, unless we can find a balance that ensures the ongoing health of each."

For years South Florida residents have recognized the critical importance of restoring the Everglades. Just as significant progress is being made, Big Sugar and their powerful lobby steps into the picture once again. But the "Captains" did an amazing job —teaching us that



when the message is important and the voices are united, they will be heard, drowning out the cries of the big money corporate lobby. Those fishermen from South Florida who went to Tallahassee were powerful. Their message was clear.. they won't give up. Water is too important. The story is not yet complete but neither are the efforts of those who demand representative government.





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

Affordable Housing, Let's talk the truth...Gorman and Company: At the March 10 council meeting, Gorman and Company, a **Wisconsin for-profit group**, will make a presentation. [Click here](#). They were approved by Council in Sep of 2021 to develop affordable housing on Village owned property on Woods Avenue, MM90. In the competitive bid process, they were ranked second. They were to be given a long term land lease from the Village with the stipulation they would develop **eight** deed restricted apartments.

Gorman now wants to reduce the number of units to **seven**. Village costs to provide land for affordable housing has been costing well over \$125,000 per site. Islamorada then typically leases the land long term to a developer for up to \$200/year for each unit built. Yes—just \$200/per year for 99 years.

Add \$4.55 million Village lots: In order to get tax credit grants for construction costs through the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHRC), Gorman is asking the Village for additional land to lease. The Woods Ave project is too small to qualify for a FHRC grant. Gorman is proposing they will provide 16 units of affordable housing on four lots the Village bought at MM88.6 (Key Heights area) for \$1.8 million and 17 units on the old Silver and Spice (Walgreens) property Islamorada bought for \$2.75 million, a total Village investment of \$4.55 million. Leased without competitive bidding?

Gorman also needs the Village to guarantee affordable housing allocations not currently available.

Gorman history in Islamorada: Gorman developed the Wet Net at MM81.1 on Upper Matecumbe, a successful affordable housing projects with 36 townhouse units, all 3 bedrooms and 2 baths. Gorman's annual rental income is \$630,000 at the Wet Net. They have a 99 year land lease with the Village and pay Islamorada \$5050 per year, according to the Village budget. Gorman received a \$8.8 million grant from FHRC, 70% of the Wet Net construction cost, with just 30% of the total cost of the project at their own cost.

Our Opinion:

- 1. Do not reduce the number of units on the Woods Ave site. Every affordable home is significant when the Village's cost of land is so high.**
- 2. Do not negotiate Land Leases until an appropriate revenue is evaluated.**
- 3. Never waive competitive bidding for leases on taxpayer investments.**
- 4. Assure compliance for all affordable housing**

Speaking of Compliance: Who lives at the Wet Net? Gorman provided a "certification recap" from 2/28/2022 for the Council. The report showed most occupants of the project are low or very low income employees. Their place of employment was deleted from the recap.

A detailed certification form is required by the FHRC to assure tenant income requirements are met. Yet there are nine occupants on the recap form from Gorman whose income exceeds the limit. The recap did not include the columns indicating when the occupants employment information was certified. That date appears on the actual certification report received from FHRC, obtained via public record request. The report received from FHRC shows the income of 21 of 36 tenants has not been certified since 2015.

Did you know?

CPH: The Council approve a contract with CPH for \$55,000 to create a master plan for the Fills, but six months later the work product proved to be unacceptable to the Council. Did you know that the Village also has approved design/permitting contracts with CPH for work at the Green Turtle Hammock (\$129,945) and the breakwater at the Founders Park marina (\$101,190). Hopefully the Village will have better experiences with those contracts than the one for the Fills.

Strawberry Shortcake versus Key Lime Pie: If you were concerned about the shortcake being named to replace the Key Lime pie as the official dessert of Florida this legislative session, worry no more. Key Lime pie remains the official **pie** of Florida. Strawberry Shortcake is the official **dessert**!

Laura Quinn—the ‘Bird Lady’: Did you know that the predecessor to the Wild Bird Center was at Laura’s home on Coral Road on Plantation Key in Islamorada?

Do you remember Port Antigua in 1973 before a single home was built?

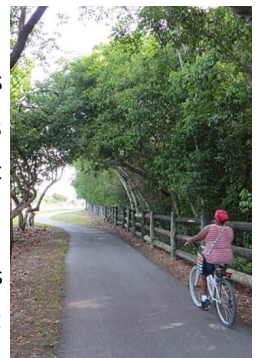
Do you remember the billboard on Sea Oats Beach pre-Hurricane Georges in 1998 when there were still sea oats there?



Islamorada Status Report: Did you know there

is an action list that provides the status of work the staff has been directed to do by Council. [Click here](#) to see a recent status report.

Heritage Trail: Did you know that the “bike path” along the side of U.S. One through the Keys is part of the 110 mile long Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail and is a Florida State Park that consists of multi-use trails that link the islands of the Keys. The trail is also part of a larger effort called the East Coast Greenway, which will link multi-use trails from Florida all the way to Maine.



Veterans Key: Did you know the island to the bayside of Anne’s Beach, is called Veterans Key? Veterans Key is 2.5 acres of high ground located at the tip of Lower Matecumbe Key and conveniently is only 850 feet from US1. Because of its proximity to the Boy Scout Seabase, many folks call the island Scout Key.

