

**September 2021  
NEWS**

Islamorada Community  
Alliance

P.O. Box 1507

Tavernier, FL 33070

[info@Islamorada.org](mailto:info@Islamorada.org)

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



**Virtual Labor Day Program  
At the Monument**



The Matecumbe Historical Trust brought us the 2021 annual Labor Day Program virtually again this year. Speakers included (pictured above):

Barbara Edgar, Tony Hammon, Bob Pavey, Henry Rosenthal, Sue Miller, Bob Johnson ... and Cinnamon Edgar who placed the wreath.

**[Click here](#)** to view the outstanding video of the Virtual Program

by Attention Media LLC

Learn about a critical day in Islamorada's amazing history.

**CONTENTS**

**Page**

Help Wanted	2
Alligator Light	2
2023 Opinion	2
Congratulations IT!	3
Affordable Housing	3
Vacation Rental news	4
Budget Hearing	5
ICA is Watching	5
Noise Ordinance	5
Lower Mat Culverts	5

***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.

***Mike Forster:***

***10/21/1959 - 9/6/2021***

County Commissioner, former Village Mayor, restaurateur, and friend to all. Mangrove Mike died of COVID on Sept 6, 2021. Mike's love and generosity made a difference to all the people he touched. He left us a tough challenge, to fill the void he leaves, but his life provided a model of how each of us can make a difference. He taught us important lessons, constantly saying "We're better together."



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

### Help Wanted

#### Administrative Professionals



Keep Things Purring

Jill Zima-Borski is no longer with the Islamorada Community Alliance. We wish her well in her future endeavors.

We are now looking for an administrative employee with computer skills for engaging the community through social

media including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, writing and editing stories, updating our website, and doing online research and office administration.

### Alligator Light News!



Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, has approved a recommendation from the National Park Service that the Friends of the Pool, Inc., headed by "Lighthouse Larry" Herlth and Rob Dixon, be granted ownership of Alligator Reef Light.

An engineering study will be scheduled by the new owners to determine what is required to stabilize the aging structure.

Other restoration projects are being planned, including refurbishing the lighthouse keeper's quarter and painting the entire structure.

Back on February 1, 2019, it was announced that the six iron piling lighthouses off the Florida Keys would be given away to any government agencies or non-profit corporations who would use them for "educational, park, recreational, cultural or historic preservation purposes."

The lighthouses were once important navigational aids that helped warn ships away from the Keys' coral reef chain, but modern-day satellite navigation made the lighthouses obsolete.

The Alligator Reef Light is 4 nautical miles offshore. The station was established in 1873 and automated in 1963. It was last operational in July, 2014, and was replaced by a 16' steel structure with a less powerful light located adjacent to it. Alligator Reef Lighthouse is named after the USS Alligator, a Navy schooner that ran aground on the reef in 1822 and sank.

What a blessing that this beautiful iconic structure sitting on our horizon will be preserved! Thank you for saving Alligator Light.

### Editorial: 2023 Is Getting Close

The 2023 discussion at the September 2 Village Council meeting was certainly disappointing.

Councilman Rosenthal researched how Monroe County has been dealing with the end of residential building allocations. They extended their 2023 deadline several years by reducing the annual allocations so they could address issues that could reduce the "takings" claims.

Councilman Rosenthal studied the County "White Paper" describing ideas the County has been implementing. He thinks Islamorada should work towards that same goal by instituting a three month moratorium to investigate changes here.

The idea seemed to fall on deaf ears. Councilman David Webb felt this would be "kicking the can down the road." But that is what the Village has been doing for several years now, long before the current council got elected. Rosenthal was trying to stop "kicking the can." Instead fix as much as possible now.

Islamorada has approximately 80 BPAS allocations left including those saved for administrative relief. We need to use every one of them as wisely as possible.

When there are no more allocations, the TDR ordinance can provide more relief. But first, as Rosenthal suggested and the county is doing, a serious review is needed to address both the BPAS and TDR ordinances.

In the original TDR ordinance, residential development rights could only be transferred to **vacant residentially zoned lots**, the very lots that may have "takings" claims. Unfortunately it was changed, so residential TDRs typically are going to mixed use properties where vacation rentals are legal. Mixed use properties will still have non-residential uses that can be permitted so therefore no "takings" exist.

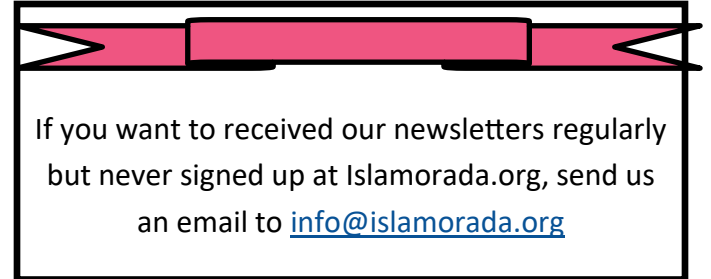
Entire resorts are being created via vacation rental licensing, using residential development rights that were once affordable mobile homes and often housing for our workforce.

The County has numerous ideas being implemented, including acquisition of land and development rights, using funding sources, sources also available to the Village.

Please don't continue to "kick the can down the road." Every single "takings" possibility that we can eliminate without a lawsuit is important.

Councilman Rosenthal was right - changes to the BPAS regulations and TDR process merit serious discussion.

## Go to [Islamorada.org](https://Islamorada.org) For Breaking News



### IT Department Got it Right!

Islamorada "may just have the best closed captioning program of any local government body in the United States of America."

Congratulations to our IT employees Vince Tarves and Ramon Navarro. We are so proud of you.

A resource on the Florida League of Cities website is a recent article, [Five Municipalities Doing Captioning Right](#), which highlights how some local governments deal with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) issues.

The article declares Islamorada to be the entire country's **number one** municipality for getting it right, with the large cities of Boston, Hawaii, Los Angeles, and Eureka Springs, Arkansas listed behind the Village in the top five. The article claims:

***"As far as we know, Islamorada is the gold standard for video captioning in American local government."***

Note: Florida League of Cities was formed in 1922 as a vehicle to exchange ideas and experiences to help municipalities all over the state. There are now over 400 member communities including Islamorada. One resource the league provides is important information relating to the ADA and its impact on municipalities.

### Affordable Housing near School

On August 16, the Achievable Housing Committee acted as the selection committee to recommend to the Village Council the best qualified developer to take on the building of 17 affordable housing units on Village owned land along Gardenia and Woods Avenue to the north of Plantation Key School.

There were two applicants: Habitat for Humanity of the Upper Keys and Gorman and Company. Both have completed successful projects in Islamorada. Habitat recently completed Windley Point and Gorman did the Wet Net several years ago. Extra points were assigned to Habitat for being a local contractor and a not for profit. Gorman did not qualify in either of those categories. Habitat garnered the most points and was the recommended choice of the Committee.

At the September 2 council meeting, the council chose an option suggested by the Village Manager. Habitat will do nine single family homes, either 3/2 or 2/2 layouts on Gardenia Street to be sold and owner occupied. Gorman will build eight multi-family rental units on Woods Avenue. If for any reason, Gorman is not able to do the rental project, Habitat will do all 17 units.

All 17 units will require that the units have owner occupants or renters who are qualified for affordable housing based on the Village income limits. The units will be deed restricted in perpetuity.

## Welcome to Islamorada Community Alliance

### Vacation Rentals... the Right Way



Islamorada is a magnificent vacation destination for folks around the country and the world. It is one of the main businesses that drives our economy.

And it is so lucrative, there are people who are willing to ignore the law and its restrictions, not just to help pay their bills, but as a way to get rich quick, often at the expense of peace and quiet in residential neighborhoods, our fragile environment, and traffic!

Enter Rentalscape, an online service by DECKARD TECHNOLOGIES whose goal is to arm cities with compliance reporting tools.

They were invited to the September 2 Village Council meeting to present a hint of what their software can do to help with vacation rental compliance issues. Scanning the internet for vacation rental ads, among other things, they identify bookings, especially those under 29 days.

Deckard started the presentation by surprising the council and audience with a statistic: Islamorada vacation rentals have revenues of approximately \$22 million per year! With less than 300 homes or condos that have Village licenses to, a significant portion of that revenue might be a result of unlicensed short term rentals.

The program Deckard proposed, costing approximately \$25,000/year, would provide lists of properties that advertise and book short term rentals, a significant help to the Village code compliance efforts. The Council seemed impressed. Public comment was mixed. Those who rent short term seemed worried, sometimes angry. Those who don't rent, seemed enthusiastic about the possibility of improved enforcement.

Councilman Mark Greg commented at the end of the presentation and discussion, "If you are following the law, there is nothing to worry about. If not, we are coming for you."

### Vacation Rentals... License Fee

Numbers tell a story! How much does it cost the Village for Vacation Rental code enforcement?

Our Vacation Rental ordinance, originally established in 2001 says: "Funds collected by the application fee shall be used for code compliance related to vacation rental uses, with any excess funds to be used to further affordable housing programs. For purposes of this section code compliance shall also include all activities required to process the applications, inspections, and prosecutions."

Much has changed since 2001 when the annual vacation rental license was set at \$1000/year:

- Village costs for enforcement have gone up.
- Entire mini-resorts are created with vacation rental homes, some built with mobile home building rights
- Vacation rents have skyrocketed

The only thing that has not increased is the cost of a vacation rental license.

For the most recent annual numbers available, 2020 fiscal year, vacation rental enforcement costs, according to our Finance Department, were over \$265,000. License fees brought in \$215,000 that year. Code citations brought in a little over \$12,000.

Finance Department calculated the enforcement costs related to Vacation Rentals exceeded the annual fees collected by a total of \$232,537 over the last seven years.

Almost a year ago, the Achievable Housing Committee voted 8-1 to recommend that Council pass a resolution to increase the annual fee so that enforcement costs do not have to be paid using our tax dollars. The goal –to pay the enforcement costs and have excess to help mitigate affordable housing needs generated by vacation rentals.

Everyone understands how desperately we need long term housing for our workforce. Strict enforcement of our rental laws may well eliminate illegal short term rentals and encourage investors to rent long term.

It appears that most taxpayers and residents of the Village are delighted to see the current Council address improvements to code compliance concerns.

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

### Budget for 2021—2022

Does anyone care?

Last year property owners in Islamorada paid 3.015 mills or **\$301.50 for very \$100,000** of real estate taxable value to the Village.

**Good news:** On Sept 3, 2021 the council voted to **decrease** the tax rate to 3.000 mills or **\$300 for every \$100,000** of taxable value, a decrease in the tax rate of about 1/2 of 1%.

**Bad news:** Most properties saw taxable values increased by well more than 1/2 of 1% so the taxes you pay will likely go up. Total taxes collected will go up over 5% in 2022.

**More bad news:** the budget document presented to council confirms that the Village anticipates a 20.7% increase in spending.

The staff explained that this increase looks worse than it may be, as it includes some one time costs and costs that will be covered by sources other than Village taxes.

**Even more bad news:** to cover some of the expenses the Village will use a few hundred thousand dollars from our fund balance.

Pre-Irma, our fund balance was considered healthy at \$5,758,570, about 40% of our annual expenditures. As a result of Hurricane Irma in 2017, the Village used every dime of our fund balance and actually ended up with a deficit of over \$800,000. The 2018 budget had already been approved pre-storm with a millage rate of 2.8.

In 2019 the council raised the millage to restore the fund balance, while anticipating FEMA reimbursements. At the August 4 budget workshop for the 2022 budget, the fund balance did look healthy at \$9,208,115— 60% of annual expenses. **Funds for 2023:** It was mentioned by Councilman David Webb that perhaps we should set aside some of the fund balance for costs associated with the end of residential building permits in 2023, likely a very costly problem.

But in just one month, at the September 3 Budget Hearing, the numbers had changed. The expenses increased by \$2.3 million and the fund balance increase of \$1.6 million disappeared and \$640,000 is scheduled to decrease the prior fund balance to cover some of the added expenses, including generous personnel salary increases.

**Does anyone care about the Village budget?** On September 2 there was a regular council meeting with a “light agenda” and the meeting lasted 5 hours and 5 min.

The Budget Hearing the next day approved expenditures of over \$44 million and lasted just 41 minutes, most of which was staff description of the budget process. Just three members of the public spoke, three more than at the budget workshop August 4.

### We Are Watching!

Deciding who to vote for is an important privilege of participating in a Democracy. It should not simply be a popularity contest. We know you’d sometimes rather be fishing than watching council meetings. So the ICA has been watching them for you. We check the different councilmembers’ positions on issues of greatest concern in Islamorada. Our scorecard may be extremely helpful to you as the next Village election nears.

There are many critical decisions being made by our elected officials. If we don’t pay attention, it is easy enough to elect the wrong candidates. The next election is barely a year away. It is critical for the future of Islamorada to get it right.

### The Village Noise Ordinance



Amendments to the noise ordinance are expected to be considered at the October 14 meeting of Council. The negative impacts of noise on the quality of life within the Village neighborhoods is the focus.

The changes are expected to adjust the time of day and days of the week that certain types of noise-producing activities should be better regulated. The primary focus will be construction and lawn maintenance activities.

This will be an opportunity for residents to show up, speak up and have a voice. [Click here](#) to see the Sept 2 discussion item.

### Lower Matecumbe Culvert Project

At their September 2 meeting, the Village Council heard a presentation by Woods Environmental on the Lower Matecumbe Culverts project. They have completed an initial feasibility study and asked for council approval to move on to the next phase. Below is a map showing proposed culvert locations.



[Click here](#) to see the complete culvert presentation with more detailed maps. There is also a link to a complete report from Woods

regarding the status of the canal restoration project.