

## **BOATING ACCESS TASK FORCE**

**MAY 26, 2005**

**5:00 P.M.**

### **Members Present:**

Susan Latvala	Board of County Commissioners
Stephen M. Spratt	Pinellas County Administrator
Jake Stowers	Assistant County Administrator
Capt. Doug Metko	Representing Florida Guide Association
Judy Geiger	Representing Central Marine
Doug Speeler	Representing Florida Marine Contractors Association
Terry Tomalin	(arrived 5:12 p.m.) and sat in the audience
Bill Stokes	Involved With Alliance for Livable Pinellas
Mark La-Prade	Marine on Tyrone and Bay Pines Boulevard
David Dunbar	Boater, Banker, Homeowner on the Water
Will Wilkins	(arrived 5:17 p.m.)

### **Absent:**

Bill King  
Capt. Dave Markett

### **Also Present:**

Jewell Cole	Assistant County Attorney
Marv Siple	2225 Ashbury Drive, Clearwater 33764
JoAn Totty	Resident
Ralph Wolf	2334 St. Charles Drive, Clearwater 33674
Tom Calahan	1194 24 <sup>th</sup> Avenue North, St. Petersburg
Dudley Scott	325 Barbara Circle
Paul Trunk	1583 Bud Leigh Street, Clearwater 33756
Steve DeMerrly	120 108 <sup>th</sup>
Michael Duncan (?)	2670 Woodring Drive, Clearwater
Cpl. Kevin Grissinger	Pinellas County Sheriff's Office
Deputy Bret Mowatt	Pinellas County Sheriff's office
Will Davis	Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management
Darryl Ogden	Hurricane Pass Marine
Sidney Crawford	Resident
Paul Cozzie	PCPR
Stephen Siebert	Resident
Susan Foote	Resident
Gwen Smith	Resident
Sam Lowrry	Resident
Jim Spencer	Resident
Rachael Heiser	Rep. Berfield's Office
Roxanne Evanina	Fox 13
Carol Lushear	City of Dunedin, Environmental Quality
Bruce Stott	10975 109 <sup>th</sup> Street North, Largo
Gordon Beardslee	Pinellas County Planning Department
Liz Freeman	Pinellas County Planning Department
Carolyn Kuntz	Pinellas County Planning Department/Recorder

### **INTRODUCTIONS AND PURPOSE OF THE TASK FORCE**

Commissioner Susan Latvala called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. and asked everyone at the table to

introduce themselves, including their background and who they represent.  
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Chairman Latvala then welcomed everyone in the audience and indicated those interested would be allowed to speak at the end of the meeting.

Mr. Jake Stowers followed with an overview, including some of the issues/concerns and background information, regarding boating and waterfront access. He noted the members had a packet that included this information and handed out available packets to some of the attendees. He noted, for those in the audience, there is web page access for the State Statutes he referred to.

Waterfront access is an issue around the State, according to Mr. Stowers, and the County is concerned about preserving access. In fact, a Culture, Education, Recreation and Leisure Master Plan being developed by a consultant for Pinellas County is looking at it as a countywide issue. That Plan will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners in approximately three weeks at a public meeting/workshop. Overall, it discusses the need for waterfront access by Pinellas County recreation and commercial interests, but also emphasizes protection of the natural environment, including seagrass and manatee protection. Pinellas County has a lot of boats and activities related to fishing, diving, and recreation as well as commercial fishing.

Mr. Stowers provided an overview, via powerpoint, of current conditions, including the number of registered boaters in Pinellas County, the number of existing boat ramps (map and inventory), existing marinas (map and inventory), and discussed the issues associated with competition for the land and environmental considerations. He indicated his powerpoint presentation would be made available on the County's website.

As an introduction to the powerpoint, Mr. Stowers reviewed the purpose of the Boating Access Task Force, from the staff's perspective. That purpose is to:

- Identify the obstacles for access, such as economics, the cost, and limited supply of waterfront properties;
- Determine how can public access be maintained or enhanced, due to the high cost of private access;
- Develop recommendations for consideration by the elected officials on the best way to implement the legislative changes; and
- Encourage boating interests to be partners with local governments on solutions.

Mr. Stowers also reviewed a document entitled *Working Waterfront* given to the Senate in November of 2004. This document is the basis for some of the legislation passed this year. Mr. Stowers also reviewed the boating trends. In Pinellas County, there are approximately 1,200 commercial boats and the trend remains the same; however, pleasure boating has increased from less than 40,000 in 1986 to 56,700 registered boaters in 2005. Including the surrounding counties, there are between 150,000 to 160,000 registered boaters and these other communities frequently use Pinellas County's facilities. The water access issue is not just important from a local perspective but also from a tourism and economic perspective. The number of wet boat slips in 1996 was 5,143 and 5,032 in 2005, and the number of dry boat slips in 1996 was 4,031 and 5,034 in 2005. Only one-third of the number of wet slips are government-owned. One concern is that a number of marinas are being developed into condominiums and, although there might be wet slips available, it might cost \$100,000 -

\$200,000 to have a slip. Mr. Stowers noted these numbers did not include Huber Marina or the Clearwater Marina High and Dry since they have already been sold for some other type use. He reviewed the maps that depict the boat ramps around the County; however, he noted the maps don't differentiate between locations with one lane versus those with more than one.

Mr. Stowers then reviewed several issues. For example, economic conditions and land scarcity are facilitating the redevelopment/conversion of boat ramps/marinas; and significant local marine access facilities are either in the process of, or under the threat of, conversion. He noted environmental and land use considerations including the fact that new boat access facilities or expansion of existing ones dependent on environmental and land use factors, and require protection of marine resources (manatee congregation, seagrass protection), maintenance of water quality, and compatibility with adjacent land uses.

Mr. Stowers also briefly covered certain regulations, policies, and legislation, including: Future Land Use and Zoning Regulations, the Water and Navigation Control Authority, the Comprehensive Plan and then discussed the new Working Waterfronts legislation and the Waterfronts document in the handout.

Mr. Stowers indicated that the Coastal Element and Future Land Use Element of Pinellas County's Comprehensive Plan discuss water dependent uses. A condominium located on the water is not a water dependent use. Water dependent uses include, for example, a high and dry facility that puts boats in the water, or a yacht club that takes large boats out on the water to repair them. The question is whether the County has addressed water dependent uses enough in the Comprehensive Plan. Staff will be looking at these things when updating the Comprehensive Plans.

Pinellas County has locally a Special Act that allows the BCC to sit as the Water Navigation and Control Authority to approve and permit all docks, marinas, etc. Mr. Stowers noted this gives them more local control than the State.

At this time, Mr. Stowers introduced Steve Spratt as the County Administrator.

Mr. Stowers then reviewed the *Working Waterfronts* document and indicated staff would make this document available to anyone who would like a copy. This document includes a lot of statistics and information about the boating industry, including its recreation value and economic value, which is in excess of \$15 billion annually to the State of Florida. Following development of this document, the Senate created new legislation. This document created two bills. The Working Waterfront legislation was sponsored by Representative Kim Berfield of the Pinellas County Legislative Delegation. Mr. Stowers noted it's still too early to know how requirements from the bill would be implemented. He then briefly reviewed some highlights from House Bill 955:

- Creates Florida Waterfronts Program to help the local communities revitalize and look at how they will handle the conversion of waterfront property, how they will address recreation, as well as commercial, interests on the waterfront;
- Expedites wetland and environmental permitting for marinas that reserve 10% of their spaces for public use;
- Requires Comprehensive Plans to encourage the preservation of recreational and commercial working waterfronts;
- Requires Comprehensive Plans to include access to waterways;
- Instructs the Internal Improvement Trust Fund to encourage the use of sovereign submerged lands for water dependent uses and public access, which is owned by the Governor and the Cabinet;

- Instructs Department of Environmental Protection and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Boating Access Commission to conduct a study on the use of State lands for recreational boating, with a report to the Governor and the Senate and House by January 1, 2006.

A citizen in the audience questioned why the City of Clearwater was able to close the marina without letting the public know they were going to do this. She also thought that there were actually more boats in Pinellas County than is documented. She also noted the basic issue is why the City doesn't have an access to the water for boating. She felt a Task Force should have been formed sooner to discuss this issue.

Mr. Stowers responded those are part of the reasons why this Task Force was formed. He responded that not all of the marinas are gone, there are still some available and some that are privately owned so hopefully it is not too late. The citizen was concerned specifically about the Seminole Marina and the City of Clearwater. Mr. Stowers correctly indicated that Seminole Marina is owned by Clearwater and not Pinellas County – and clarified for her that the meeting was being conducted tonight by the County.

Mr. Stowers continued with highlights from House Bill 955:

- Allows for changes in fee structures where fees from a boat registered in Florida can go back into grant programs for access; and
- Creates a tax deferral incentive program for owners to maintain working waterfronts for the public (this requires the BCC to adopt an enabling ordinance).

Mr. Stowers then briefly reviewed highlights from House Bill 989, which looks at issues relating to general permitting:

- Department of Environmental Protection is adopting a general permit that would allow local governments to construct, operate, and maintain public marina facilities, public mooring, public boat ramps, and associated upland parking; and
- Exempts such facilities from a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) review as long as they comply with the local Comprehensive Plan and the facility obtains a clean marina status and is not over 50,000 square feet, destroy wetlands, or is over open waters.

A question was raised regarding the Belleair boat ramp. Mr. Stowers noted the boat ramp would be closed while the bridge is being built; however, it will be rebuilt at the same spot with the slips moving slightly. Upon query by a citizen, Mr. Stowers responded that the number of parking spaces would remain the same or slightly increase. Staff will be reviewing this to see if/how parking can be increased. Mr. Stowers also indicated that responded construction for the Belleair Bridge would begin in 2007 and last approximately 18 months to complete. It was noted that partial parking could not be kept open because the bridge is being built to the north of the existing bridge, which will require staging.

Mr. Stowers then moved on to an overview of the boating industry today, and briefly reviewed the statistics for the boating industry, including an increase in the number of registered boats, that access continues to decrease due to conversion, that less than half of the marinas are open to the public (15% statewide, 31% Pinellas County), that there are 63 identified boat ramps, with 41 government owned; and 77 identified public access marinas, with 10 government owned. Mr. Stowers then concluded his presentation by asking where do we go from here, and indicating the information presented tonight would be included on the County's website.

Commissioner Latvala indicated her desire to hold a few meetings and develop recommendations for action by the County Commission. She noted there needs to be discussion as to how best to utilize everyone's time and if more information is needed.

At this time, comments from the Committee members and members of the audience followed:

- Mr. Speeler – a more accurate count is necessary since more slips have been lost than shown in the presentation (several are currently under contract);
- Mr. La-Prade – John's Pass has sustained damage from last year's storm;
- Mr. Speeler - with the loss of wet slips, wet slips will only be available to those who can afford them, we're losing high and dry marinas that won't be replaced, the situation is very bad and continues to worsen, noted that the boating industry is second only to the tourism industry;
- Mr. La-Prade – in response to a citizen requesting information about people who want to buy a boat but don't have a place to keep it, Mr. La-Prade responded that there are some areas in the Country that if there is not a slip for a boat, a boat cannot be sold (California) and Pinellas County is coming to that point where boat sellers are having to secure slips for mid size and larger boats before selling the boat;
- A citizen commented that Pinellas County should look at the efficiency of what is already existing (facilities sitting idle) to see if there is the possibility of increasing utilization and queried who to contact in person with potential solutions without costs involved since it will take a public/private solution– Commissioner Latvala requested he give staff his contact information;
- Capt. Metko – the key is a public/private partnership;
- Mr. La-Prade – idea of high and dry facilities being built away from the water and transporting the boats back and forth to water access can be done in cooperation with the County and private operator - would work with the smaller boats but not for the larger boat industry;
- Mr. Speeler – what about the potential for property owned by the County at the St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport to have a joint public/private venture for a marina, also the Bay Pines Federal Basin at the Bay Pines Hospital should also be explored;
- Ms. Geiger – problem with availability of parking spaces and that the State Park system is looking at potential available lands for parking and queried if this is something Pinellas County could also look at (Charlotte County just bought a ramp with an RV park next to it) – Commissioner Latvala responded the County would buy property if there were any available – Ms. Geiger questioned the source of funding - Commissioner Latvala responded that they need to develop solutions and not get bogged down by funding;
- Mr. Spratt was interested in how could the County provide incentives to for private solutions and what are the public solutions – need to organize and have assignments;
- Mr. La-Prade responded that soft costs are huge and it would be helpful in those areas, such as tax incentives and noted that a joint venture is an excellent idea where the County could offer the land for long term leasing options, the County would have a tax base, the County could collect rent, the operator could charge the public, the public would have access to the water, there is the possibility of the County collecting a management fee, and appreciation from the land – he added that waterfront property is appreciating to the point where an operator can't afford to buy a site for a marina, and then noted the costs associated with everything required to get it approved, environmental constraints, etc. – need help with all that.
- Mr. Stokes – Sarasota County is in the process of buying a small marina and suggested Pinellas County talk with them to get more information since the opportunity to do something is now before the window of opportunity is completely lost (Mr. Spratt will call the Sarasota County Administrator);
- Mr. La-Prade indicated Charlotte County has purchased a transient RV park for development of a boat ramp with access to the water;
- Mr. Spratt noted he has asked staff to look at marinas for potential acquisition and suggested coming back with options to the next meeting with a list of County properties that has potential for development and private properties for potential acquisition;

- Mr. Stowers noted staff would get with the various cities and counties to see what they have done;
- Mr. Speeler - Pinellas County owns the submerged lands at the Turtle Club property, which would seem to make it feasible for boat ramps;
- Citizen – questioned if research has been performed on the use of Pinellas County facilities by nonresidents – Mr. Tomalin responded yes; the citizen suggested charging more for non-county residents to use the facilities – Mr. Stowers noted a lot of the information is included in the GIS maps and could get more detailed information;
- Mr. Stokes – questioned the status of the Stauffer site on the Anclote River – Mr. Stowers responded this is a superfund site and they are in the final stages of creating a consent order or mitigation plan; as they move forward with that plan, certain activities will be determined to be okay and consistent with the mediation. They are a few months from finalizing the plan; however, since the site is located on water, it could fit into the mix of a marina or water access – staff is in discussions with them – it's an excellent site on a significant waterway;
- Capt. Metko – suggested statistics on registered trailer boaters (including size of trailers), as opposed to registered boaters, because they are two diverse groups – Mr. Stowers responded he would try to get that information (although someone indicated that trailer registrations probably do not specify boat vs other purpose);
- Ms. Geiger – suggest looking into the purchase of RV parks or other commercial properties that could be converted;
- Capt. Metko – parking is more of a problem than the ramp facility itself in a lot of locations, which is something that also needs to be considered;
- Commissioner Latvala - Tarpon Springs has asked the County to work with them on the north side of the river to develop an overlay as an incentive for the property owners to keep it commercial fishing, boat repair, etc., since this is another area that is being lost as much as the waterfront;

Upon consensus, Commissioner Latvala set the next meeting for Thursday, June 16, 2005 at 5:00 p.m. at the same location (Swisher Building).

Commissioner Latvala asked that each member develop a list of recommendations for the BCC to consider and a list of challenges the County faces. Mr. Stowers added he would attempt to get the requested information to the members before the next meeting so they have additional background. Mr. Spratt also asked the members to provide feedback on ways to address the consideration of environmental concerns since there would be a lot of opposition to adding boat slips and boat ramps.

Upon query by Mr. Speeler regarding Wall Springs and Honeymoon Island, Commissioner Latvala responded they were going to perform an environmental impact study. Mr. Stowers added they are still in discussions with the State and performing an analysis of environmental issues. The boat ramp idea for Wall Springs was turned down because of the neighbors' opposition and environmental issues. Commissioner Latvala noted there were issues with dredging seagrasses but the main problem was that people didn't want it because they had their own boat slips.

It was noted there needs to be a balance and that science and not emotion needs to determine the balance and that no one wants to see the environment ruined.

Capt. Metko noted there were other governmental entities involved, including the Office of Boating and Waterways, the County might want to look at some of the tax incentives at the County level to help the working waterfront, there is a considerable amount of employment that should be addressed as well as the indirect economic impact of boating and fishing (purchase of ice, beverages, food, gas, etc., for boat at convenience stores) that might outweigh the direct economic impact, jobs and tourism are at stake (hotels, restaurants, etc.).

Mr. Stowers noted there might be options to purchase commercial property (or property where the land use might need to be changed) for ramps or access. Commissioner Latvala noted the possibility of the County offering incentives such as tax abatements should be looked at.

Mr. Speeler asked if the County has been looking at expanding existing facilities, such as Bay Pines. Mr. Stowers responded there is a planned expansion for Bay Pines but that it is limited. They might look at Ft. DeSoto for expansion and parking. The County is looking at the west side of the Belleair Causeway for possible launching of jet skis since they don't need a ramp. He noted they are looking at the possibility of more parking at Belleair Causeway and will be placing parking underneath the bridge.

Ms. Geiger reminded everyone to not overlook the purchase of small facilities, such as the Jungle Prada. Capt. Metko asked what the status of the land at the Memorial Causeway since it appears there might be land under the bridge. Commissioner Latvala responded they would discuss this with the City of Clearwater.

Mr. Speeler suggested asking the municipalities to be involved in the Task Force. Mr. Stowers responded he would call some of the municipalities. Mr. Stowers noted he would also attempt to get a representative from the commercial fishing industry involved.

Capt. Metko suggested talking to the Florida Department of Transportation regarding the use of land around the Skyway Bridge since there have been discussions on the Manatee side. Commissioner Latvala indicated this could be included in the list of recommendations.

At this point, Commissioner Latvala asked for Citizen comments.

Mark Siple commended the Task Force on the makeup of public and private sector representatives.

Tom Calahan noted the reduction of the wet slips is an urgent issue; this issue should have been addressed two years ago, and that government needs to find a way to put a moratorium on the condominium developers. The average family with a sailboat, the person who owns a mid-sized motored yacht, and the crawlers are the ones getting hurt.

Daryl Ogden felt the Task Force is on the right track and offered his assistance.

JoAn Totty requested that Pop Stansel Park be left alone and noted there is a problem with parking and that she was representing the children who play on the playground and stated she hopes they don't dredge.

A citizen asked about the status of Seminole Marina and if there was consideration being given to limiting the height of condominiums. Commissioner Latvala responded that Seminole Marina is owned by the City of Clearwater and the County doesn't have jurisdiction over it. But they would attempt to find the status and that Pinellas County only has jurisdiction for the unincorporated area, and the cities have jurisdiction over their own areas and make their own regulations regarding the height of condos. A citizen noted that Seminole Marina gets confused with the Clearwater Bay Marina located north of the boat launching on Seminole Street.

A citizen asked if the minutes would be available. Commissioner Latvala responded they would be on the website in a few days.

A citizen suggested staff investigate the Miami River Commission because they have a successful program in Miami-Dade County for protecting working waterfronts and also to check Palm Beach County's newly enacted development rights, \$50 million bond issue to purchase development rights.

A citizen noted the County owns Sand Key Park and suggested using the middle of the park to build a marina

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by putting in a channel to the water. Mr. Stowers responded they are looking at the restrictions that might have been included with the property that was donated as part of mitigation.

Steve Seibert commended the group but noted there is an issue with boat ramps and that he would like to see Honeymoon Island preserved and not utilized for anything. Commissioner Latvala responded they would not do anything that would harm the environment but would like the opportunity to investigate and perform a property analysis. A citizen noted it needs to be evaluated based on science and not emotions.

A citizen noted the City of Clearwater should make property available for boat ramps since they eliminated storage for boats. Commissioner Latvala responded the County has no control over the City.

Mr. Dunbar gave Commissioner Latvala and the Administrator and his staff credit for putting in their time and take responsibility for trying to come up with solutions for this issue, especially since there are 24 municipalities within Pinellas County.

**NEXT MEETING – Time and Location**

Commissioner Latvala stated the next meeting is June 16, 5:00 p.m., at the same place.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

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