

BOATING ACCESS TASK FORCE
JUNE 16, 2005
5:00 P.M.

Members Present:

Susan Latvala	Board of County Commissioners
Jake Stowers	Assistant County Administrator
Stephen M. Spratt	Pinellas County Administrator
Bill Stokes	Sierra Club, Alliance for Livable Pinellas
Jim Moore	Home Port Marina
Capt. Doug Metko	Florida Guides Association
Will Wilkins	Clearwater Real Estate Group
Mark La-Prade	Thunder Marine
Judy Geiger	Central Marine
Bruce Stott	Interested Boater
John Landon	Landon, Moree & Associates, Inc.
Doug Speeler	Speeler Enterprises

Absent:

Bill King	Galati Marina
Capt. Dave Market	Florida Guides Association
Walter Miller	City of St. Petersburg
Frank Hubbard	John's Pass Marina
Jim Reid	Home Port Marina
Bill Morris	City of Clearwater

Also Present:

Jewell Cole	Assistant County Attorney
Sidney Crawford	Ozona
Dave & Diane Steinke	Gulfport
Mike MacDonald	2342 Penbrook Drive, Clearwater, FL 33764
Dudley Scott	325 Barbara Circle, Belleair
Rich McGimick	605 Orange Street South
Mark Pichard	2670 Woodring Drive, Clearwater
Frank Dave	407 Leeward Island, Clearwater
Susan Foote	Dunedin
Will Davis	Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management
Gene Quinn	Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management
Nicole Elko	Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management
Tom Calahan	1194 24 th Avenue North, St. Petersburg
James Donahue	13621 87 th Place North
Susan Trauls	3248 Masters Drive, Clearwater
Steve Kinnear	690 Harbor Isle, Clearwater
H. Maggaro	Representing Rep. Kim Berfield
Doreen E. Saccardo	31 Baywood Drive, Palm Harbor
Wayne Cathel	806 Ponce DeLeon Boulevard, Belleair
Roland Martens	10580 68 th Avenue North, Seminole 33772
Angela Delgado	2560 Gulf-to-Bay Boulevard
Sam Lowry	Resident
Anoy Nickolson	PO Box 285, Safety Harbor 34695-0285
Richard Selleg	3824 Cattail Marsh Ct, #252
Cpl. Kevin Grissinger	Pinellas County Sheriff's Office
Deputy Bret Mowatt	Pinellas County Sheriff's office
Stephen Siebert	2100 Mangrum Drive, Dunedin

(Continued)

Gordon Beardslee
Liz Freeman
Chelsea Ross
Carolyn Kuntz

Pinellas County Planning Department
Pinellas County Planning Department
Pinellas County Planning Department
Pinellas County Planning Department/Recorder

• **Introductions and Re-Cap**

Commissioner Susan Latvala called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and asked everyone at the table to introduce themselves.

• **Quick Review of What Other Counties and Cities Are Doing**

Chairman Latvala welcomed everyone in the audience and noted that Jake Stowers took on the task of gathering information from the last meeting, including programs and concepts from other counties and cities, information on available grant programs, a summary of recent legislation, and information regarding potential sites.

Capt. Metko indicated HB 955 and HB 989 were signed, and HB 759 that will streamline the permitting process still needs to be signed.

Mr. Stowers gave an update as to what other counties are doing, noting that other areas have the same issues. He also reviewed the County's water navigation control and authority role, with the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) permitting docks and dredge and fill. He also noted the Board's role in review of land use cases, adding that Hubers Marina will be on the next BCC agenda as they have sold to a developer for condominiums. Also discussed were dockominiums (where dock spaces are bought individually), and rackominiums (high and dry where rack spaces can be purchased). Mr. Stowers gave a quick overview of other counties (refer to handout for more details):

- ❖ Palm Beach County – voters passed \$50 million bond to buy marinas or developer rights;
- ❖ Lee County – purchased a marina;
- ❖ Monroe County – temporary moratorium;
- ❖ Charlotte County – voters approved the use of a sales tax for use in land acquisitions, and impact fees from developers where money is placed in a fund for land acquisition for boating;
- ❖ Other counties are looking at more restrictive and more defined zoning categories.

Mr. Stowers then gave an overview of the local municipalities' initiatives, including:

- ❖ Clearwater – in process of hiring a consultant to look at this issue, looking at high and dry possibilities (including seeking grant money for the Seminole Boat Ramp), off site facilities such as the Jack Russell Stadium, downtown redevelopment CRA that the County has granted money (tax increment financing) to restore downtown with the possibility of including this issue;
- ❖ Safety Harbor – will keep up their marina;
- ❖ Tarpon Springs – large working waterfront with shipping industry; they are looking at carefully to maintain, including asking the County for assistance to keep it from being converted to another use; and
- ❖ St. Petersburg – large active marina.

Mr. Speeler noted he attended a Legislative Committee meeting in Delray Beach where these issues were discussed, with the conclusion that this is a major issue for the State that needs to be resolved. The permitting issue needs to be relaxed or Senator Jones indicated the Legislature would mandate that it be eased. He noted there needs to be an emphasis on the joint effort between the private and public sectors.

Mr. Stowers noted Pinellas County is working directly with the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) on this right now, hoping to eliminate them from the review process since Pinellas County performs a thorough review of those seeking permits through the Water and Navigation Control Authority.

Mr. Spratt noted Charlotte County is requiring funding contributed by the developers that are impacting the availability of water access – like impact fees. He suggested talking to Charlotte County and seeing if this potential revenue source can help solve the problem – like a water access fee. Mr. Stowers responded that would be further researched.

Capt. Metko indicated Sarasota County authorized \$1.4 million to repair and upgrade boat ramp facilities and to research new facilities. He noted the Governors Boating Advisory Council met today to deal with the subject of water access issues and he would get more information.

- **What Types of Things Need to be Considered Before We Can Expand or Build a Ramp/Marina?**

Mr. Stowers noted the things that need to be considered include looking at the compatibility of surrounding properties, land use, and zoning; the environmental compatibility permit ability; and availability of upland support facilities (i.e., restrooms, bait and tackle, parking, etc.).

- **Input From Task Team – Ideas on How the County Might Help the Industry Address Obstacles and Regulatory Issues**

Mr. Stowers asked for input regarding specific obstacles. Input was received as follows:

- ❖ the development boom (competition for land),
- ❖ there is a contract or deal pending for every prime waterfront property;
- ❖ two categories: 1) coastal high hazard area where properties cannot be converted to condos but are being upgraded or building rackomonioms; and 2) properties that can be built based on vesting or land use;
- ❖ impacts every boat sale because people want to know where they can store their boat before closing a deal;
- ❖ issue with zoning, and need deep water access
- ❖ impact on wet slips and high and dry facilities;
- ❖ need higher racks that are capable of holding a heavier boat higher in the air;
- ❖ the time (over two years) and cost of getting a permit for a marina;
- ❖ mitigation ratio issue with the conversion of an old marina to a high and dry facility;
- ❖ problem with land development regulations and the cost of parking a trailer with a boat at a marina;
- ❖ policies requiring paved parking areas, which generate stormwater runoff, landscaping codes, setbacks, etc.

Mr. Stowers indicated staff would bring the issues to the next meeting with potential solutions and how other counties are addressing these issues.

It was strongly emphasized that the municipalities need to be included on the Task Force.

Mr. Speeler noted that several municipalities are considering marinas - we need to look at St. Pete Beach, Treasure Island, Madeira Beach, and those that have a basin. Mr. Stowers responded staff would look at this. Mr. Speeler indicated 1,000 slips, combination wet and dry, are currently needed. The Gulfport marina has a wait list of 200 people for 2 ½ years. It was also indicated that there is a wait list of 5 years for a slip in the St. Petersburg Municipal Marina.

David Steinke stated the municipalities need to be included in the discussions, especially in light of the fact they charge lower fees than the private marinas, which could put a private marina out of business. They also charge lower fees for gas. There needs to be a level playing field. Mr. Stowers responded this is another issue that could be looked at. Mr. Speeler noted that the municipalities are in the process of raising their fees.

Frank Dave, member of the Clearwater Marine Advisory Board, indicated The Advisory Board performed a study this year and raised their rates; however, they are faced with the problem of providing access to Clearwater residents at a reasonable price while the private marinas are increasing their fees. There is a proposal to look at the possibility of a marina that would include 150 slips that would be located in downtown Clearwater, adjacent to Coachman Park.

- **Dialogue on Funding Options, New Legislation, and New Ideas**

Mr. Stowers briefly reviewed various options that could be considered, such as:

- ❖ Regulations that would allow appropriate development quicker;
- ❖ Grants, tax incentives;
- ❖ DRI exceptions;
- ❖ Partnerships;
- ❖ Mooring ordinances; and
- ❖ Use of the extension of the Penny for Pinellas (which would go to referendum in 2007).

- **Preliminary Discussion of Locations for Development or Expansion and Citizen Comments**

Mr. Stowers reviewed the potential sites that were discussed from the last meeting, including a preliminary staff assessment for each. These are as follows:

- ❖ *Turtle Club/Airport (approx. 10 acres)*
 - not available due to a lease on the property
- ❖ *Sand Key Park (101 acres)*
 - might be able to make a basin, put in a boat ramp, with an access to the Clearwater Pass
 - initial discussion with staff and they feel it is workable
 - existing County park
 - possibility of support facilities
 - needs to be discussed with the Board of County Commissioners
 - few environmental and neighborhood issues
 - owned by the County and State (County manages it) with Clearwater owning the jetty
- ❖ *Fort DeSoto Park (1,038 acres)*
 - proposal to BCC for construction of support facilities
 - potential for slips for day use
 - could create a legitimate mooring facility
 - expansion of existing facility
 - expansion of overflow parking on grass

- ❖ *War Veterans Park (120 acres)*
 - staff in process of reviewing jurisdictional line to see if there is the possibility of moving further south to allow expansion
 - might require one more ramp, which would require dredging
 - marked channel to Boca Ciega Bay
 - not sure how much space because it's on the edge of the mangroves

- ❖ *Wall Springs County Park (185 acres)*
 - County owned
 - BCC had earlier anticipated a marina but there was strong community opposition
 - shallow water
 - \$24 million investment for waterfront property
 - will have extensive canoeing and kayaking activity, with formal opening on July 4, 2005

- ❖ *Travatine Island (82 acres)*
 - good possibility
 - Park Boulevard boat ramp
 - County owned
 - spoil site for Intracoastal Waterway
 - heavily wooded with exotic vegetation
 - 15 – 20 feet of lime rock on the west side
 - environmentally okay
 - need bridge to island from property; County owns upland
 - possibility for support facilities
 - could create parking
 - located near major roads
 - performed analysis 8 – 10 years ago so information is available on the property
 - endangered, threatened species live on the island
 - wildlife uses the island
 - salt barrens
 - could be designed to maintain existing environment

- ❖ *Honeymoon Island (544 acres)*
 - Commissioner Latvala is in continuing discussions with the Department of Environmental Management (DEP)
 - look at location where ferry goes to Caladesi Island
 - idea to expand parking
 - addition of four lanes
 - no impacts on seagrasses
 - deep water channel
 - some neighborhood and environmental opposition
 - currently in planning stages with the State to check on its viability
 - site previously looked at 15 years ago but it was felt it was not needed at the time
 - County would perform the planning and permitting with the State's involvement
 - BCC could look at building the facility and obtaining the permits

- ❖ *Memorial Causeway*
 - with the new alignment, there would be raw land that could be utilized
 - FDOT property
 - near deep water

- citizen noted that originally, under a special deed, the Causeway was deeded to the County and could be reverted back to the State, 1,200 foot strip, the reverter clause has not been triggered, and City ownership would be involved – Mr. Speeler noted as long as it remains as public domain, the reverter clause is not enacted
- citizen noted that owners at either end could not be affected and their were issues that need to be clarified
- Capt. Metko noted the edge of the beach on the north side has a local access corridor to deep waters
- citizen noted a major gas line is in the corridor and fiber optics is located on the north side
- suggestion that this could extend over to the marina Clearwater is considering for Coachman Park
- early discussion stages but would have to work with Clearwater

- ❖ *Hurricane Hole*
 - owned by St. Petersburg College
 - some uplands
 - good access
 - not far from John's Pass and Gulf of Mexico
 - not bad water access from an environmental perspective, depth of water, etc.

- ❖ *Bay Pines Veterans Administration (259 acres)*
 - Federal property
 - water may be too shallow along the property
 - not very viable

- ❖ *Clearwater Bay Marina is being developed into condos*

- ❖ *Seminole Boat Ramps*
 - City looking at possible high and dry
 - looking for funding to make that happen
 - possibility of increasing capacity
 - looking at the parking issue
 - discussions of transporting boats to the ramps, possibly from Jack Russell Stadium
 - consultant hired to look at issues

- ❖ *Stauffer Superfund Site (131 acres)*
 - was Stauffer Chemical Plant
 - located on Anclote River
 - superfund site, property closed, in final remediation
 - good waterfront property
 - only some hotspots, with most of the property not negatively impacted by the contaminant
 - opportunity to create large high and dry, marina, slips, etc.
 - in discussion with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
 - residential will not be allowed, along with many businesses not allowed
 - EPA will only allow something compatible with the site
 - EPA tells owner how to fix the site to take care of the property to make it viable and useful
 - plan should be finalized at the end of the year
 - a lot of community issues regarding the site
 - located in unincorporated Pinellas County
 - possibility of property being sold to someone other than the County

- ❖ *KOA Campground (35 acres)*
 - shallow water but might have deep water access
 - small boat ramp/launching site located on property
 - private property located on water
 - not sure if property is on the market
 - Boca Ciega Bay located nearby
 - height restriction due to the location of the Pinellas Trail

- ❖ *Maximo Park (36 acres)*
 - City of St. Petersburg park
 - State owned preserve land nearby
 - underutilized
 - could work with the City on water access
 - security issues

Mr. Stowers indicated the idea was to get consensus on these sites and then gather additional information for each.

A citizen suggested studying the north side of the Dunedin Causeway near the bridge. Mr. Stowers responded the north side is high energy (waves and wind) and would be a difficult place to launch boats during the winter. He indicated there might not be enough room for parking spaces. The County had looked at the south side but the City of Dunedin didn't feel it was a good idea. Mr. Stowers indicated staff would look at this site. Chairman Latvala noted Dunedin had looked at this and suggested getting information from them.

A citizen indicated there was a channel across from the Eckerd College, under the bridge from the Huber property, that would make a good wet slip area, especially since it is a protective area. The citizen also noted that the discussions have been focused on boat ramps instead of marinas and boat repair facilities. It was suggested that Eckerd College be included in discussions with this site.

Capt. Metko queried if Mr. Stowers contacted FDOT regarding the ramp on the Skyway. Mr. Stowers noted FDOT did not want to address the ramp on the south side.

Capt. Metko suggested contacting the bordering counties, Manatee, Hillsborough, and Pasco, to see if they had potential sites to help take the strain off Pinellas County. He indicated he had received suggestions that the hours of the boat ramps be expanded and off loading docks be added as staging areas. This would help with more people being able to use the facilities.

Mr. Speeler noted there needs to be a balance with the environmental community and there needs to be an easing of environmental plans. He noted there is a problem with maintenance dredge projects with the State moving too slow, which is creating a critical situation.

Capt. Metko stated the NIMBY (not in my backyard) mentality needs to cease since the subject has a countywide affect.

Mr. Dave indicated the Clearwater Marine Advisory Board has been looking at the sewer treatment plant on the Courtney Campbell Causeway as a possible location for boat ramps. This could relieve some of the pressure from the Seminole boat ramp due to the number of people who use it from Hillsborough County. The advisory board is considering recommending this location to the Clearwater City Council. He suggested that the focus should be on how to stop developers from buying the marina properties and building another use.

Chairman Latvala responded they hoped there would be recommendations that would go before the BCC and the various municipalities to give tax relief or financial incentives to marina owners to stay in business. She suggested notifying all the marinas of the objectives of the Task Force and not to sell until they have called the County first.

There was a comment that people are not aware of the EDC hearings for the sale of the marina properties. Chairman Latvala and Mr. Stowers both responded there is a website and email capability to send out information. He noted that everyone who signed in with an email or hard address would be kept updated and notified of the EDC hearings.

There was a suggestion to look at how to assess the developer for each slip the developer has removed. There was another suggestion to include a boating access or marina requirement in the County's Comprehensive Plan so there is a long term consideration of marina facilities as a priority, including input with the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC) for changes.

Mr. Stokes commented he agreed the process needs to move quickly; there needs to be dialogue with the municipalities so all of these discussions are not fruitless, and the need to address the demand for the slips and ramps by expansion of County facilities and be able to partner for acquisitions of private property. The primary concern of the conservation community is to not jeopardize the value of public land and there needs to be a visionary planning with each of the municipalities. He suggested inviting a marine biologist or scientist to sit on the Task Force, as well as a commercial fisherman. Chairman Latvala responded staff is working on expanding the Task Force.

Ms. Geiger suggested looking at the Gandy Bridge as a possibility. Mr. Stowers responded the County did a study, design, and were ready to permit improvements to the south side of the Gandy Causeway, which would include a boat ramp on the east and west sides. FDOT would not lease the land to the County because the Federal Highway Authority (FHWA) policies indicate that road improvements cannot negatively impact recreation uses. Therefore, if there are no recreation uses on Gandy Boulevard, FDOT can design the road without being constrained. Mr. Stowers noted the County waived that issue for Belleair Causeway so the Causeway could be built. Mr. Speeler noted that Senators Jones and King are very interested in this issue and suggested inviting Senator Jones to the next Task Force meeting. Ms. Geiger noted there is already an existing ramp at that location.

There was a suggestion about the possibility of Weedon Island, however, it was noted the water is too shallow, there are no entry points, and it's a preserve. This area is used for canoe access.

Mr. MacDonald of the Audubon Society agreed with the discussion but noted there should not be a degradation of the environment. He suggested staff look at charging resident and non-resident user fees.

Ms. Geiger noted that the meeting dealt mostly with trailer boats and suggested the next meeting include research on issues relating to wet slips, high and dry facilities, marinas, etc.

A citizen suggested looking at the possibility of mooring fields. Mr. Stowers responded that is being considered at Fort DeSoto Park but this could be further reviewed. The citizen noted other areas that have mooring fields. There was a five-year study of the moorings that were put in at Key West over the grassbeds. They were studied very intensively and there was zero impact with use of the proper auger and enter and the proper technology for up lines and when there was one foot of clearance between the keel of the vessels and the grasses, including shading. The citizen noted the report is available and would make it

available. It was noted that Ft Myers thought it was not a good idea. Mr. Stowers responded staff would follow-up on the various comments and issues. Capt. Metko added some areas have had problems with transients, where people stay for long periods of time, vessels that are inoperable, etc., and these issues are being addressed in Venice, Port Charlotte, Sarasota, etc.

There was a suggestion that the Belleview Biltmore property should be looked at as a public/private partnership. Someone responded there was not enough room at that location.

Chairman Latvala noted there was consensus in the following areas: 1) invite Senator Jones to the next meeting and 2) more information needed on mooring fields and marinas. She noted the importance of having the legislators involved is that they could consider suggestions for legislative changes for next year to further the legislation enacted this year.

Upon query by Mr. Spratt, it was indicated that all of the proposals should be looked at as potential sites in addition to any other areas. Mr. Spratt suggested that staff could look at some of the properties, see which ones have not been bought out, which ones are vulnerable, and what could be done. Mr. Speeler volunteered his assistance to look into this subject. He felt a prime site is Hurricane Hole at Bay Pines since someone owns the submerged lands other than the State (probably St. Petersburg College). Mr. La-Prade volunteered to work with Mr. Speeler on this.

It was suggested that now is the time to bring Sand Key before the BCC for their review of its use as a boating facility. Chairman Latvala responded that would be done.

Chairman Latvala emphasized the fact that they need to get the message out to everyone that this issue is being worked so that anyone owning property would call the County first before selling it to a developer. She noted the County would be interesting in purchasing property the County feels is important and necessary.

It was emphasized that the local municipalities need to be contacted and they might be willing to partner with the County. Chairman Latvala agreed. Regarding a comment about the possibility of the County changing their Comprehensive Plan, Mr. Stowers responded that changes could be made to the Land Development Regulations in approximately six weeks.

Upon query as to how the private sector could be given incentives to keep or even expand their property, Chairman Latvala responded the County would have to issue an ordinance granting incentives (i.e., tax abatements, etc.) or could possibly pay for improvements to property that would be for a public service, such as access to the water, partner with existing marinas for improvements, etc.

It was emphasized that it would take a public/private partnership for this work.

Mr. Stowers summed up that staff would invite a representative from the commercial fisheries, municipal membership, marine biologist to serve on the Task Force. It was suggested to invite representatives from the marine insurance industry and marine surveyor also to serve on the Task Force.

A citizen suggested that someone speak before the Sand Key Civic Association and that the plans for water access be available. Chairman Latvala responded they would contact the association after it's brought before the BCC.

Mr. Speeler noted that Mr. Tomlin had indicated at the last meeting he would give this issue publicity. Mr. Stowers noted he is still interested.

A citizen emphasized there needs to be a moratorium to slow down the conversion to condos so that there is more time to address this issue. In addition, the citizen suggested an impact fee or an additional impact fee if a developer is removing facilities. He suggested that all new development should require parking for boats, RVs, etc., and they should be required to set aside a certain amount of space for parking and storage of RVs, boats, etc. He noted the problem is not just access to the water but also where are people going to have their boats repaired. Chairman Latvala noted three repair facilities have been lost recently.

Chairman Latvala noted the need to include the municipalities since they are making the zoning changes in their jurisdictions and they are looking at current tax dollars instead of the future of the County and quality of life issues for everyone.

Someone noted that Martin County is looking at a “no net slip loss referendum”.

- **Next Meeting – Time and Location**

Following discussion regarding the next meeting, Commissioner Latvala concluded the next meeting would be Wednesday, June 29, 5:00 p.m., at the same place.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 p.m.