

**Public Meeting Notes**  
**Shell Key North Pass and Grand Canal Feasibility Study**  
**Stakeholder Meeting #2**  
**November 13, 2019 6:00-7:30 p.m., Tampa Bay Watch**

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**MEETING SUMMARY**

The notes provided herein summarize the agenda items covered including questions and comments by attendees and responses by the Aptim project team and County staff. This information is being provided for general documentation purposes and is not intended to be a comprehensive account of all the details or verbatim discussions from the meeting.

**Meeting Agenda Items**

1. Welcome
2. Introduction of APTIM & County Staff
3. Project Overview
4. Morphology Modeling Summary & Results
5. Feasibility Level Engineering Alternatives
6. Overview of Environmental Regulations
7. Preliminary Permitting Agency Input
8. Estimated Costs of Alternatives and Funding Options
9. Next Steps
10. Q&A Session

**County Administrator Welcome**

County Administrator Barry Burton opened the meeting at 6 p.m. by welcoming the attendees and thanking them for being part of the process. He turned the meeting over to the Aptim project team to provide the results to date the feasibility study.

**Introduction of Aptim Project Team & County Staff (Slide 4)**

Tom Pierro, PE, D.CE, introduced himself followed by introductions to Tara Brenner, PE, PG, João Dobrochinski, M.S., and Beau Suthard, PG, representing the consultant project team. Mr. Pierro also recognized the County staff present in the room: Barry Burton (County Administrator), Rahim Harji (Assistant County Administrator), Tom Almonte (Assistant County Administrator), Brian Lowack (Assistant to County Administrator), Kelli Levy (Interim Public Works Director), Andy Squires (Interim Environmental Management Division Director), John Bishop (Coastal Management Coordinator), and Steve Harper (Division Manager, Parks & Conservation Resources).

Mr. Pierro began by providing an overview of the project and the objectives. He noted that the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis report was in progress and that the Final Presentation of findings will be presented to the County Commission in February 2020. The preliminary results of the numerical modeling task will be presented today.

Slides (8-9) were presenting as a review of Stakeholder Meeting #1 that covered the primary sand migration processes. Next, summaries of more recent work were presenting that included the June 2019 bathymetry survey (slide 10), recent changes in morphology (slide 11), the sediment budget (slide 12), net sediment transport (slide 13), changes in bathymetry (slide 14), and initial identification of engineering alternatives (slide 15).

The 11 conceptual management alternatives were presented that included:

1. Grand Canal Dredging (slides 17-18)
2. Grand Canal Dredging + 240 FT Groin (slides 19-20)
3. Grand Canal & Advanced Maintenance (slides 21-22)
4. Grand Canal & Deposition Basin A (slides 23-24)
5. Grand Canal & Deposition Basin B (slides 25-26)
6. Grand Canal & Deposition Basin C (slides 27-28)
7. Grand Canal & Deposition Basin D (slides 29-30)
8. Grand Canal & Deposition Basin D + 150 FT. Groin (slides 31-32)
9. Grand Canal & Deposition Basin D + 380 FT. Groin (slides 33-34)
10. Grand Canal & Deposition Basin D & Interior Canal (slides 35-36)
11. Grand Canal & Interior Canal (slides 37-38)

An overview of environmental regulations applicable to permitting one or more alternatives were explained. They included Florida Department of Environmental Protection's regulatory authorizations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) authorizations, as well as the state, federal, and local resource agencies that would be involved. The main permitting considerations were listed such as rules for Outstanding Florida Waters and Aquatic Preserves and environmentally sensitive and/or protected wildlife and their habitats (for example: shorebirds, Piping Plover, and sea turtles).

A conference call between state and federal permitting agency staff, Pinellas County staff, and the consultant team was held October 2, 2019. The main takeaways were:

- Need to clearly identify and state the project's "Purpose and Need,"
- Project must be clearly in the "public interest,"
- Project must be consistent with Shell Key Preserve Management Plan (2019),
- Phased approach of implementation would be favorable,
- Privately owned land considerations (regulatory and proprietary, funding), and
- Mitigation for environmental impacts required (e.g. seagrass, shorebirds, mangroves).

Agency staff emphasized the importance to demonstrate that the "Public Interest" can be supported and justified as noted below.

- Projects in OFW or aquatic preserves must be clearly in the "public interest" (Ch. 373.14 FS),

- “Public Interest” is defined as “demonstrable environmental, social, and economic benefits which would accrue to the public at large as a result of a proposed action, and which would clearly exceed all demonstrable environmental, social, and economic costs of the proposed action...” (Ch. 18-20.003(46) FAC),
- Projects may be approved that have benefits to the public or to the quality of the preserve (e.g. public navigation, eliminating safety hazards, eliminating stagnant waters), and
- Projects must be consistent with aquatic preserve management plans (Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve Management Plan, draft 2019; Shell Key Preserve Management Plan, 2018).

The estimated cost and relative level of difficulty were presented (slide 45) showing preliminary cost estimates ranging from \$528,000 to \$6.6 million plus mitigation costs. The costs presented are from conceptual plans and are primarily for comparison purposes. The permitting level of difficulty was rated as low (alternatives 1, 3, 4), medium (alternatives 2, 5, 6, 11), and high (alternatives 7-10).

The meeting concluded summarizing the next steps leading to a final public meeting presentation to the County Commission in February 2020, funding options, and a question and answer session. Funding options discussed by County staff included: USACE beneficial use of sand for nourishment, Non-Ad Valorem assessment, and appropriations and grants considered somewhat unlikely. The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Additional comments about the alternatives can be emailed to [watershed@pinellascounty.org](mailto:watershed@pinellascounty.org).

## **QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

### **Questions (Q) and Comments (C) from Attendees** **Answers (A) from Consultant Team or County**

1. Q. What are the long-term maintenance requirements for the alternatives?  
A. This is to be determined.
2. Q. Given the permitting challenges, what happens if the Grand Canal (GC) closes before the design and permitting for a canal maintenance dredging project gets done?  
A. Since the canal is not in the preserve, the permitting is relatively straight forward.
3. Q. Where is the sand coming from?  
A. There is a lack of agreement on the source, and to determine the source with any degree of certainty could take years. The task at hand is to find a solution to the sand

accumulating along the north end of Shell Key, which is and threatening to fill the GC.

4. Q. Can the north end of GC be opened to improve circulation within the GC?  
A. Opening the north end may result in new sand deposits within the canal. This is a risky alternative.
5. Q. Is the sand accumulated near GC docks included as an alternative?  
A. The advanced maintenance (Alt 3) alternative may help prevent sand accumulation along the southeast corner of the GC.
6. Q. How wide will the dredged GC be?  
A. The model used a 150' wide canal for the simulations. If the option is pursued, it may be designed for a different width.
7. Q. Why didn't we fix the system 10+ years ago before the northern opening closed off?  
Are we too late to fix the system?  
A. Since Shell Key is a "Preserve" it was left alone to natural processes and managed for the conservation and protection of natural habitats.
8. Q. Does the model include storm events?  
A. Yes, a component of the model included storms.
9. C. Sand is not moving along the western (shoreline) face of Shell Key.  
A. The modeling shows the sand is moving north, then east at the NW portion of Shell Key.
10. Q. Is Pass-a-Grille channel migrating?  
A. Yes
11. Q. Is sand from Bunces Pass moving north?  
A. No
12. C. If Irma Pass closes and the north pass is reopened sand would have nowhere to go and fill up the preserve with sand.
13. Q. Can the "no internal combustion motor" zone within the preserve be removed?  
A. No answer given during the meeting. The County can revise the boating regulatory zones if approved through the normal channels for such changes to the management plan (for example, approvals needed by stakeholder groups, FDEP, County Commission).
14. Q. Who asked for the ownership determination to be made?  
A. The question was raised in a previous stakeholder meeting, thus County staff asked for an ownership determination to be made by the State.
15. Q. How old are the deeds?

- A. Staff did not recall how old the deeds were but commented that they were “old.”
16. C. The 2019 Plan (2018 Update approved Feb 2019) is not consistent with previous plans. And the County did not update the plan every five years as required by the State.
17. Q. Can a groin north of Shell Key redirect sand out away from Shell Key?  
A. There is an existing terminal groin at Pass-a-Grille beach and extending it would not change the transport path of sand southward.
18. C. The real source of sand is coming from the north. Eliminating that source is the long-term solution.
19. Q. Is a 150' wide GC the optimal width?  
A. The 150' width was just used for modeling purposes and likely would be revised during design and permitting for a maintenance dredging project. Once a maintenance channel foot print is permitted, then it must be maintained.
20. Q. What happens next?  
A. Compile feedback from today's meeting, finish the model runs for the alternatives, write up the final report, and present to the Commission in February 2020.
21. Q. When will the GC close?  
A. Based on the modeling simulations, less than 10 years, possibly 5 years.
22. Q. If reopening the north pass is the most challenging to get permitted, what will be done first?  
A. The option to maintenance dredge the GC is the alternative with the least regulatory challenges.
23. C. When “public interest” is evaluated, the County should consider tax revenue that would be lost if the GC closes.
24. Q. If accreted sand owned by the riparian property owners blocks off docks in the GC, who is responsible to remove that sand?  
A. This would require attorneys to determine who is legally responsible to remove the sand.
25. Q. Since a portion of the GC is within annexed land now within the City of St. Petersburg, has the City been contacted to help? If an assessment is used will all properties contribute or just those in the unincorporated area?  
A. No, all the properties regardless of jurisdiction within the benefit area would contribute.
26. C. The County should use their data from nourishment projects to assess the source of the problem and take responsibility for the problem.

27. Q. If the GC was repeatedly dredged under an “assessed” project paid by the GC property owners, then would such assessments need to be made each time it is dredged?  
A. Yes
28. Q. Will the February 2020 Board of County Commission meeting where the final project results be presented allow for public comment?  
A. Yes
29. Q. Where would dredged sand be placed?  
B. That would be determined during the permitting process.
30. C. The 2000 Shell Key Management Plan stated that Shell Key needs to preserve recreational activities. The County has not done this. The problem has been caused by the County.