

**Environmental Science Forum**  
**Minutes – Monday, June 26, 2006**  
*Approved by Forum at August 10, 2006 Meeting*

The Environmental Science Forum held its first meeting on Monday, June 26 at Heritage Village's Pinellas Room. Of the 21 invitees, 13 attended as well as key County staff (see website for a complete list). Press attendees included Channel 8, Pinellas 18 and the St. Petersburg Times reporters/videographers.

The Forum members were selected by DEM and are a mix of individuals with environmental science backgrounds and environmental advocacy groups such as Audobon Society and Sierra Club.

Two co-chairs were selected: Holly Greening, chief scientist of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and Darden Rice, Sierra Club. The group will meet again on August 10, October 5 and December 7.

Elizabeth Warren, Assistant County Administrator, and Will Davis, Director of Environmental Management, welcomed the forum attendees to the meeting.

County Administrator Steve Spratt opened the forum by saying that the environmental science group will be an "independent, transparent entity that will offer scientific assessments of the issues." Spratt conceived of the forum in May after plans to expand the concessions at Fort De Soto Park and pump water from Brooker Creek Preserve to private golf courses met with public resistance.

Spratt began the meeting by explaining his vision of the forum to the members. Projects and sometimes policy that are proposed for the county's environmental and park lands will be brought before the group for study and discussion. The forum discussions and findings would be relayed to Spratt, who would share those findings with the Pinellas County Commission.

Will Davis described how the forum might operate and suggested that a chair and co-chairperson be selected. DEM's Andy Squires was designated as communications point person, and Pinellas County Communications as the web team for posting key information. Links to ESF site were posted on [www.itsyourtimes.com](http://www.itsyourtimes.com) as well as county websites—Communications/Media Central, Parks and Environmental Management.

Information would be posted on [www.pinellascounty.org/scienceforum](http://www.pinellascounty.org/scienceforum). That information would include meetings, topics under discussion as well as background materials on each topic and synopsis of the issues. An email list of all key participants was compiled.

The group discussed communication methods and forum protocol.

Spratt outlined his suggestions: "For purposes of reaction, we've given you guidelines as far as approaches to projects and guidelines for decorum. Some of these issues might be highly emotional and there might be spirited debate. We are very flexible as far as the type of meetings—whether they be recorded—but we will keep all of this as a matter of public record."

Other measures discussed included:

- Listserves, secured forums and message boards were all discussed. The goal is to make all discussions and research public. Warren designated Communications to meet with IT and present options.
- Meetings could be Robert's Rules or informal, but the need for respect for all ideas in a civil manner was discussed.

- All agreed that a chair and co-chair would be a good idea, and suggested that the those individuals have no conflict of interest with the issues and topics in the initial list.
- A synopsis of each topic was discussed, and will be posted on the web as well as emailed to each member.
- Both the notebooks provided by DEM and Utilities were to be posted on the web, as well as all future documents shared by the group.
- Key articles about the topics and the Forum would be linked from the website.
- Future forums will hopefully be filmed by Pinellas 18 and posted on the websites.
- The forums would be taped and archived.

Other key issues and outcomes discussed included:

- The importance of communication all majority and minority findings to Spratt and the BCC, no matter what the outcome of the recommendations.
- Topics may be prioritized according to timelines and key decisions that may be imminent.
  - Said Davis: “As we bring the projects to you, we want to bring them early on. Some of them may be sensitive projects, some of them might be perceived as problematic. There's lots of opinions out there and we want to hear them all. We want you to decide how you want to review each project and how to present your findings.”
- The Forum would not be limited to projects the county submits for review. A member can bring an issue they deem worthy of attention to the Forum for discussion and recommendations to County officials.
- The Forum members were encouraged to challenge the concept, logic and science of each topic and project.
- The Forum may reach beyond discussion and research of environmental topics into policy issues.

Among the topics that were touched upon:

- Spratt: “Lake Tarpon is under considerable review, tested and permitted. That one might be a sleeper. It is a well project in a park. We want to make sure you are briefed on it. Others are very, very early and no decisions have been made.
- The Blending Facility is a hot topic. Site preparation has been done.
- The group heard Utilities Pick Talley describe the history and issues with pumping into Brooker Creek Preserve as rehydration of the wetlands project.  
The Forum unanimously recommended that the project proceed.