

**MANATEE COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION
COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING; HONORABLE PATRICIA M. GLASS CHAMBERS
1112 Manatee Avenue West
Bradenton, Florida
April 13, 2021**

Meeting video link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUlgjuGhS-qV966RU2Z7AtA>

Present were:

Vanessa Baugh, Chairman
George Kruse, First Vice-Chairman
Kevin Van Ostenbridge, Second Vice-Chairman (attending via Zoom)
Reggie Bellamy, Third Vice-Chairman
Misty Servia
James A. Satcher III
Carol Whitmore

Also present were:

Dr. Scott L. Hopes, Acting County Administrator
William Clague, County Attorney
Vicki Tessmer, Deputy Clerk, Clerk of the Circuit Court



Chairman Baugh called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

1. The Invocation was delivered by Commissioner Bellamy, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA

BC20210413DOC001

Agenda Update

BC20210413DOC002

- Written public comments submitted through the online Public Comment form were added to the agenda for Item 1 and 2
- Item 2 - Environmental Millage Implementation, The PowerPoint presentation was updated and replaced

1. **ALL THINGS HOUSING**

Presentation cancelled due to Governor Ron DeSantis holding a press conference regarding Piney Point.

BC20210413DOC003

2. **ENVIRONMENTAL MILLAGE IMPLEMENTATION**



Dr. Scott L. Hopes, County Administrator, reviewed changes to the agenda.



Charlie Hunsicker, Parks and Natural Resources Director, used a slide presentation to review the timeline for the Environmental Millage including the necessary steps to set the millage for the County (incorporated and unincorporated), goals and considerations including protecting water quality, preserving fish and wildlife, prevent stormwater pollution, provide parks and preserves on environmental value and fiscal accountability, previous approvals regarding the governance of environmental lands including the formation of the Environmental Lands Management Acquisition Committee (ELMAC) who also works as the Tree Advisory Committee, program principles including willing seller transactions, purchase price established, portfolio of property priority, and distinguishing large properties from small properties, there is no preconceived list of properties, the financial plan outlined in the ballot language including bonding, funding for operations and maintenance of new properties and stewardship of cash reserves.

 Jan Brewer, Financial Management Director, provided an overview of the financial plan, and stated approximately \$6.2 million will be brought in annually, and about half of what is brought in would go to debt service. Bonding is a three month process.

 Mr. Hunsicker continued the slides and thanked the private organizations that promoted the ballot initiative. The criteria for ranking properties includes the number of listed species, proximity to surface water resources, value for stormwater improvements, complexity of management/restoration land, adjacency to existing property, risk of property conversion, level of property owner participation/discount, and other options to be determined by the Board. Goal Attainment and accountability measures include an annual Citizen's Advisory Committee Report, acres acquired in fee, less than fee acquisition, a number of listed species protected, funding committed for public access/habitat protection/restoration, and grant dollars leveraged.

 Mr. Hunsicker stated Florida Forever was able to take on projects and funding for smaller cities.

 Discussion ensued regarding the acquisition of the Ungarelli Preserve, ELMAC began in 1993 and the current membership including qualifications, and the need for ELMAC members residing in north and east county,

 Mr. Hunsicker responded to questions and described how the lands are chosen and the role of ELMAC as an advisory committee. He reiterated the Board is the only entity to approve land for acquisition. He reiterated that there are no properties designated for acquisition. The Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast seeks property to acquire for preservation, but is not part of County government. No properties will be considered until a Board protocol is adopted.

 Discussion ensued that a piece of property must meet the criteria, County staff has been working with the Southwest Florida Water Management District, and land owners have contacted the County, but a list is not being developed.

Dr. Hopes reviewed the list of ELMAC members and noted the most recent ordinance specifies the board make up.

Discussion continued that property will not be purchased just because citizens do not want it to be developed.

 Mr. Hunsicker responded that \$1.5 million is spent annually for maintenance in the parks and preserves.

 Discussion ensued regarding the debt service for bonding,

 William Clague, County Attorney, clarified that once the debt service is paid, left over funds can be used to improve and manage acquired properties. This is not just a land program. Money can be used for debt service without violating the general obligation.

 Discussion continued regarding excess cash from the millage, funding for access to the properties acquired, and show the tax payers what they are getting for their money.

 Mr. Hunsicker indicated as land values go up, the cost of acquisition for preservation land will also go up.

 Dr. Hopes explained this is an opportunity for the Board to make substantial investments in properties over a period of time.

 Mr. Clague stated the legal restrictions for the land purchases are limited by the ballot language. The funds can be used for capital and operational costs. Only \$50 million can be leveraged. The Board will need to decide how they are going to use the funds for the purposes set forth in the ballot.

 Discussion continued regarding the benefits of being a Tree City USA, preserving lands is a link to history and the future, makes sense to use ELMAC as the committee, important to have someone from every district on advisory boards, concerns regarding the land acquisition process in the County and the need to update that process, need third party appraisals for property over \$1,000,000, have the appraiser present the property to the Board, could revenue from the tax be used to improve property the County already owns (Geraldsons), gain control of submerged land to plant sea grass, and the possibility of leasing the net camps in Cortez from the State.

 Mr. Hunsicker explained submerged lands are State owned and there could be the possibility of leasing those lands. The appraisal process for conservation lands are performed by a third party, following State procedures for purchases used for environmental purposes.

Mr. Clague will meet with Bond Council regarding using the funding for properties already owned by the County and if submerged lands can be leased from the State.

 Discussion occurred regarding the net camps, there has been no funding for acquiring environmental lands, and the Board can change the membership of ELMAC.

 Mr. Hunsicker clarified that land improvements can encompass restoring property to its natural state as opposed to former farming, with native plants and recreate an environment as close to its natural state as possible.

 Mr. Clague explained the funds can be used for stormwater pollution, but not flood control.

 Commissioner Whitmore questioned why there is no longer Commissioner liaison for ELMAC.

 Discussion continued regarding being reluctant to give government too much power and the Board must be transparent as to what the land will be used for, various uses for the land, Terra Ceia should have a seat on ELMAC, applications are submitted for potential Board members for ELMAC, it may be better to have quality applicants, rather than the only qualification being where an applicant lives, best way to distribute funds for land and improvements, install natural filtration systems and build marshes along creeks to better filter water before it goes into the bay, would seeding sea grass and shell fish be considered as improving water quality, and the main focus is environmental improvement.

 Mr. Hunsicker responded that properties can be difficult to maintain. Parks and Natural Resources utilized inmates for maintenance, but that service has stopped due to cuts in State funding. He recognized staff and their role in keeping the preserves kept up. There are 10 acres at Geraldsons that are used by the extension service, and there are five remaining acres to manage, but there is a plan for the public to enjoy Geraldsons with the original agricultural intent. Sea Grass and oyster habitats are constantly being deployed using Restore Act funds.

RECESS/RECONVENE: 3:25 p.m. - 3:47 p.m. All Commissioners present with Commissioner Van Ostenbridge attending via Zoom.

 Mr. Hunsicker responded that connectivity and wildlife corridors are included in the parameters.

 Discussion ensued regarding the bond language in the referendum, Hardee County had to eliminate eight maintenance squads from the prison, and encouraged reaching out to legislators regarding funding, the referendum stated a millage, and up to \$50 million in bonds, and the stormwater component can be used toward pollution control.

 Mr. Clague clarified that the intent of the referendum was presented as an environmental proposal. Ballot language is limited to 75 words.

 Discussion continued that water quality was in the language and there is a water quality aspect to stormwater runoff, and the bond term is 20 years, but the Board could extend that.

 Mr. Clague explained the Board does not need the permission of the voters to raise the millage. There limitations as a requirement for this type of voting, as per Bond Council.

 Discussion ensued that there are many moving parts to this, options for the length of the Bond, are there real things to spend this money on, the County does not have to have a 20 year bond.

RECESS/RECONVENE: 4:01 p.m. -4:03 p.m. All Commissioners.

Mr. Clague noted it is a requirement that the Board goes to the voters to issue general obligation bonds and the limitations are required.

 Dr. Hopes clarified that the millage is actually .15 mills.

 Discussion ensued that the Board does not have to go to Bond, the ballot language provides for bonding and there could be a series of bonds, that would not require the full debt service, land will get expensive, and if someone builds on vacant, it cannot be used for environmental purposes.

 Carol Felts felt this work session is not inclusive of all the resources available and citizens should be allowed more input. She expressed concern regarding which properties should be purchased.

 Andra Griffin expressed concern regarding the lack of a plan and the amount of money being collected via the millage.

 Glen Gibellina expressed concern with the format of the work session and suggested a town hall meeting to allow citizens the chance to participate.

There being no further public comment, Chairman Baugh closed public comment.

 Chairman Baugh explained this is the first step with a new Board to determine the process for the environmental acquisition.

Commissioner Kruse responded to a specific email, submitted via public comment form, and attached to the agenda urging the Board to purchase a parcel of property to avoid development.

 Discussion continued that the millage and the bonding do not seem to mesh, work sessions are not a town hall meeting, but a means for Commissioners to get information from Staff and have open and free dialogue with each other, citizens can meet with Commissioners individually. there is sufficient time for people to comment on work sessions, the plan was laid out today with a timeline, and many components were discussed, and there were past public meetings regarding the referendum.

 Mr. Hunsicker stated the Boards suggestions are within the referendum, the county did not sponsor the referendum nor did staff have any part of it. The things discussed today, can be accomplished.

 Mr. Clague reiterated that outside advocates proposed this referendum, and they chose the numbers. The ballot language specifies the bonds are only payable by the millage.

 Dr. Hopes summarized the following directives: develop a project process, look at changes to ELMAC should that be required, present a 10 and 20 year financial plan, priority to public access and use of land acquired under this ordinance, potential inclusion of a horse park and trails, and consideration of town halls for project planning.

Commissioner Kruse clarified that if Commissioners have a passion for certain topics, those Commissioners could hold town hall meetings for those topics.

 Dr. Hopes added the following to the directives: leasing submerged lands and including land already owned by the County.

 Discussion ensued to include looking at areas for horseback riding in the water.

BC20210413DOC004

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

 Commissioner Whitmore

- Met with residents regarding the Cortez net camps, and a letter was sent to the legislature requesting the State preserve the camps. She suggested the Board send a letter to legislators asking that the net camps be placed on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Commissioner Van Ostenbridge supports the efforts regarding the net camp.

ADJOURN

There being no further business, Chairman Baugh adjourned the meeting at 4:41 p.m.
Minutes Approved: May 11, 2021