

**MANATEE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS MANAGEMENT AND ACQUISITION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ELMAC)
REGULAR MEETING
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER, 5TH FLOOR, MANATEE ROOM
1112 Manatee Avenue West
Bradenton, Florida
July 1, 2024**

Present were:

Mason Gravley, Chairman
Terry L. McKamey, Vice-Chairman
Scott Childress
Randy Cooper
Kate Horne
David Landers
Richard Larsen
Jonathan Lynch (entered during meeting)
Brian Searcy
Scott Tussing

Absent were:

Mike Burton
Chris Conley
Craig Copeman
Carol Ann Felts
Barry Grooms
Keith McMahan
Lorraine Prosser

Also present was:

Commissioner Jason Bearden
Bryan Parnell, Deputy County Administrator
Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager
Hannah Turbiville, Environmental Lands Program Coordinator
Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager
Aedan Stockdale, Education and Volunteer Division Manager
Vicki Tessmer, Board Records Supervisor, Clerk of the Circuit Court

AGENDA

EL20240701DOC001

1. Chairman Gravley called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. **MINUTES**



A motion was made by Member Tussing, seconded by Member Landers, and carried 9-0, with Members Burton, Conley, Copeman, Felts, Grooms, Lynch, McMahan, and Prosser absent to approve the minutes of May 6, 2024.

3. **STAFF REPORTS**

EL20240701DOC002


Crooked River Preserve



Aedan Stockdale, Education and Volunteer Division Manager, used a slide presentation to review the Educational and Volunteer programs in Natural Resources, and reviewed sneak peek photography and bioblitz tours of Crooked River Preserve. There are several different native species on the property.

 Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager, stated they hope to have the funding to execute improvements for the Preserve in the fall.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP)


 Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, used a slide presentation to discuss the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) (Southwest Florida Groves to Gulf) which is a regional program intended to be a fast track, pre-qualification program, Manatee County pledged \$7.5 million over five years, as a match for acquisition land interests held by Manatee County and another entity such as the State of the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast. She distributed information from the Board agenda approved on June 20, 2024.

EL20240701DOC003

Referendum Considerations

Ms. Woithe noted there was interest in increasing the 2020 referendum bond capacity from \$50 million to \$250 million with no change to the millage. The Board took no action. The millage generates \$8 - \$9 million per year, and the ability to purchase more property is not hindered by not having a referendum on the ballot this year. She noted there is a chance for reimbursement for funds that have already been spent. An updated spreadsheet was distributed, and spending is still under the \$50 million. If the County proceeds with certain purchases, they will still be under the \$35 million.

Bryan Parnell, Deputy County Administrator, clarified the \$7.5 million from the RCP could be used to double the capacity of what can be purchased.

 Ms. Woithe explained there are a couple of properties that could be purchased with the pledge.

 Ms. Woithe introduced new Member Kate Horne.

4. **CONSERVATION ACQUISITION CANDIDATE PROPERTIES**

Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, continued the slides to provide an update on candidate properties.

Discussion ensued regarding septic/utility issues with the City of Palmetto in relation to the Emerson Point Expansion, and wetland determination and septic are conditions to the closing in late July.

(Enter Member Lynch)

Sweet Bay Property


Ms. Woithe continued the slides to review the property which could be a regional natural preserve, and to protect rare and native habitat. The property is 26 acres on Erie Road, with 17 acres of native upland, five acres of wetlands and a four-acre nursery. The property is along the Florida Gulf Coast Trail. There is a sidewalk along Erie Road adjacent to the property. The property is surrounded by existing/future development, and the County would initially have a conservation easement, and eventually a fee simple County Preserve. There is potential for the site to be used as a trailhead and a nature park.

 Discussion ensued regarding the benefits of old growth trees on the property.


North Pine Island

Ms. Woithe explained the parcel is on the north end of an island in the Braden River, adjacent


to property already managed by the County (Pine Island Preserve). The site is 76 acres, with 13 acres of wetland and the rest water. This would be a fee simple purchase that benefits natural resource management and public access.


 Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager, noted public access is limited to visiting by watercraft, and this would be a good spot for primitive camping on the raised berm of the railroad track.


Discussion ensued most of the property is water, are there submerged land rights, and the legal description is very short.


 Ms. Woithe noted there are other islands in the Braden River, and the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast was contacted about two parcels. These other islands would be low priority.

5. **ELMAC TREE ADVISORY ROLE**


 Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, continued the slides regarding ELMACs tree advisory role which is to develop a tree management program for the care of trees on County owned property. Each year there are Arbor Day events.


 Member McKamey stated he wants ELMAC to be more involved with trees around the County and suggested an ordinance to protect the old growth trees in the County.

 Bryan Parnell, Deputy County Administrator, noted the Board is in favor of ELMAC, and he recommended ELMAC propose an ordinance similar to something successful in another county.


 Discussion continued regarding the benefits of old growth trees, and older trees have been taken down for development. EL20240701DOC004


6. **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

 Tom Heitzman addressed trees on the Sweet Bay property, other benefits of the potential purchase, wildlife, and wetlands.

 Ingrid McClellan, Palma Sola Scenic Highway, distributed a brochure, and discussed the management plan, and requested native trees planted in the medians on Perico Island be protected, rather than be replaced with sod and palm trees. The proposed plantings do not meet the requirement of the Scenic Highway program. The Tree Board for the City of Bradenton supports keeping the native trees. EL20240701DOC005

7. **PRIORITIZATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BCC**

 Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, explained the next steps if the County proceeded with the acquisition of the Sweet Bay property.


 A motion was made by Member Landers to ask the Board of County Commissioners to authorize staff to continue to research and develop conservation easement terms and get an appraisal for purchase of a conservation easement for the Sweet Bay property. The motion


was seconded by Member Searcy and carried 10-0, with Members Burton, Conley, Copeman, Felts, Grooms, McMahon, and Prosser absent.

A motion was made by Member Larson and seconded by Member Tussing to recommend staff proceed with due diligence in anticipation of purchase contract for the North Pine Island property for review and approval by Board of County Commissioners. The motion carried 8-2 with Members Landers and Searcy voting nay, and Members Burton, Conley, Copeman, Felts, Grooms, McMahon, and Prosser absent.


Discussion ensued regarding voting nay since the property is not a high priority, and it would cost money to pursue the purchase, access would be limited, see what the owner wants for the land and if it is less than the appraisal, and put minimal work into the research for Pine Island.

A motion was made by Member Landers and seconded by Member Cooper for ELMAC recommend to the County Commission that they support the management plan of the Palma Sola Scenic Highway management entity for the medians on Perico Island.


 Member Tussing suggested amending the motion for the County and the Scenic Highway group work together to find an agreeable solution.

 Discussion ensued that the County plan is to remove the established trees and replace them with palms, and what is the reason to replace the trees.


Mr. Parnell explained there is a median beautification program in the County, and staff has been seeking approval for the medians from all entities involved including Florida Department of Transportation and the City of Bradenton.

 Discussion ensued regarding established plants being removed, and there could be some type of compromise.

Member Landers withdrew his motion, and Member Cooper agreed.

 A motion was made by Member Cooper, to support the plan by the Scenic Highway committee to reach a compromise with the County on a landscape plan. The motion was seconded by Member Lynch.

Mr. Parnell suggested if they want the Board of County Commissioners to vote on something, they need to have a plan to present.

 Discussion ensued regarding all the entities involved in the medians, the proposed plan does not incorporate saving any of the trees already planted, Scenic Highway does not want the trees removed as they are native, fully established, and do not require irrigation, new plantings will require maintenance, there is no way to re-establish the oaks and other trees, not sure ELMAC is the proper entity to offer guidance to the County Commissioners, there is direction to complete the median plantings, ELMAC can give an opinion, and it is worth it to come to a compromise between the two entities,

The motion carried 10-0 with Members Burton, Conley, Copeman, Felts, Grooms, McMahon, and Prosser absent.

8. **NEW BUSINESS/COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

The next meeting is set for September 9, 2024

9. **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Chairman Gravley adjourned the meeting at 7:49 p.m.

Minutes Approved: September 9, 2024