

Little Gasparilla Advisory Committee Meeting September 9, 2005

Call to Order—Bob Hill, Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. at the Charlotte County Community Development offices, Room 205 in Port Charlotte, Florida.

Public Notice—Notice of this meeting was posted on the Charlotte County website.

Determination of A Quorum—A quorum was met. The committee members present in person were Bob Hill, Dick Stickle, Rande Ridenour, & Barry Hurt. Ken Bonds, Mac MacCarthy & Jimmy Lewis were not present. Martina Kuche, Community Development Liaison, was present. Jan Rogers, Community Development liaison, was not present.

Approvals of Minutes— Corrections to the minutes were identified. Rande Ridenour made a motion to approve the minutes of August 12, 2005 as amended. Barry Hurt gave the second. All present voted to approve.

Introduction of Guests: Bob Hill introduced Sheriff John Davenport, Major Mark Karo, and Lt. Kenville. Lt. Kenville is in charge of our area. Bob also introduce Charlotte County Fire Chief Dennis Didio. Each will be discussing what services their respective departments provide to Little Gasparilla Island.

Discussion of with Sheriff John Davenport: Sheriff Davenport acknowledges his understanding that residence of Little Gasparilla Island would like to see a stronger presents from the Sheriff's office to improve public safety on the island. In the past, the department has tried to provide an officer's presence on holidays. Recently, Lt. Kenville has assigned an officer to LGI on a full-time basis. He will be retired shortly, but a replacement is being sought. It should be noted that this position is not budgeted as a regular position. However, the department is committed to keep an officer on the island. The area has not been a "high-crime" area. None the less, the department hopes to help out with some quality of life issues, such as golf cart use. Bob Hill asked for introductions to the new officer when he is on staff and offered to have one of the committee members show him around the island. Bob also informed Sheriff Davenport that he is willing to provide a lot that can have a small structure built on it to provide a base for the officer. It could even be built with a small sleeping quarter. Bob has already gotten an agreement from the water utility company to waive the hook up fees for this building. The floor was opened for questions:

Barry Hurt asked where the sheriff has jurisdiction on the waterway? The Sheriff has jurisdiction on any State of Florida waterway. There are three officers that patrol Charlotte County waterways. Greg Sutton is the officer in our area.

Barry Hurt asked how frequently the Florida Fish & Wildlife patrols? FWC patrols four or five days a week. There are two officers covering our area.

A guest asked what the law was about boaters cutting propeller tracks through the shallow water grass flats? The FWC would respond to this type of complaint. They are primarily responsible for non-criminal enforcement. The Parks Department also patrols the waterways in their boat. The Marine Advisory Committee another organization dealing with this issue.

Barry Hurt pointed out that 25% of our tax dollars are dedicated to the County Sheriff's department. Many on the island have the desire to see a greater presence from the sheriff's department.

Rande Ridenour commended the Sheriff's department for bringing in the forensics team when several golf carts were stolen over the Fourth of July. Rande pointed out that this served to put the message out on the island that golf cart theft would not be tolerated.

Discussion of with Fire Chief Dennis Didio: Chief Didio is charged with fire and rescue response in Charlotte County. He reports that in a medical emergency call is responded to on a multi-agency basis. Those involved are Hideaway Bay Beach Club Condo Association, the Sheriff's Department, Englewood Fire Department, and Charlotte County Fire Department. The Florida Marine Patrol is sometimes involved. The reason for involving all the condo association and the other agencies is the need for boats. The Hideaway Bay Beach Club ferry is used. The Sheriff's boat is used if it's in the water. Englewood Fire Department has a boat on a trailer. The Charlotte County Fire Department has two boats. One is a 29' boat that will pump 750 gallons of water and can transport six medical emergency patients. It requires a 2.5' draft. It is fully set up with a marine team of 15 fire fighters and 3 officers. The crew is trained by the Coast Guard, and is currently taking swift water rescue courses. That boat is kept in the Lashley Park near Charlotte Harbor. It can be in this area within 40 minutes. The second boat is being put in the water by Leverocks Restaurant. That boat has a 350-gallon per minute water pump. Its draft allows access to shallow water. There is no one assigned to crew the boat yet because terms have not been negotiated with the firefighter's union and training is not completed. In addition to the boats, there are two new rescue stations on the mainland. One is on San Casa Dr. and the other is on Placida Road. Three of the fire fighters on duty there are licensed as three-ton tugboat captains. They are all paramedics that were born and raised here. They know our waterways. The Hideaway Bay Beach Club Condominium Association Inc has offered their ferry to the Charlotte County Fire Department. The captains there know the waterways to all the docks. A helicopter is available to respond in the emergency cases that need more immediate response. Chief Didio stressed that all medical emergency calls will be responded to. Island residents pay for this service through the ad-velorum tax that is part of the general fund. He also noted that the Charlotte County Fire Department is working with the County to develop GIS maps to help locate houses on emergency calls.

Chief Didio stated that fire response is another matter. Between 7-10 years ago, the fire tax was eliminated for Little Gasparilla Island because adequate protection could not be provided. Chief Didio mentioned a fire brigade that started on the island a few years back. They will have access to a defibrillator to assist a heart attack victim. They have a small mini-pumper (donated by Charlotte County Fire Department) and an old military truck with

a tank on it. One in the group is a fire fighter, EMT. They are trying to get recognized as a state fire district and are trying to secure funding through a new taxing district. The Chief pointed out that the state is trying to eliminate these types of departments and it unlikely that they will be successful in getting the state status. Bob Hill added that there is also a movement to eliminate the independent taxing districts. Chief Didio has given the brigade a radio and twelve pagers. A page goes out to those with pagers and they can use the radio to determine the nature of the emergency. The group can be useful to the responding fire departments by giving directions to the location of the emergency, and by setting a strobe light on the dock that provides the most efficient access to the emergency site. This group uses a floatable pump that can draw water from the gulf, but the pump can expect to become stalled if it flips over or if it gets wet. The floor was opened for questions:

Rande Ridenour asked what is needed to make the existing fire hydrants usable. Chief Didio answered that they hydrants alone would not be enough to receive a fire rating for homeowner's insurance purposes. There would have to be a fire station out there and a "class-A" fire truck. The flow needed to actually fight a house fire is not sufficient. They do provide some water and that is at least something. The best that they can hope for is to save the house next to it. There is the possibility for damage to lines feeding the hydrants and some homes if the pumper truck sucks the lines dry.

Barry Hurt asked how far the county boats could pump water onto the island. Chief Didio answered about 200-300'. He doesn't know for sure yet because the boat had not been put in the water yet.

Bob Hill asked if it would make sense to have a county fire station on the island with a paid chief? Chief Didio responded that a firehouse would cost \$2.5 million to build and a truck costs about \$400,000. A six-man staff would run about \$500,000. Road would have to be cut to allow access. He normally looks at the number of actual emergency calls and the response time when considering a new fire station. The whole barrier island including Little Gasparilla Island, Palm Island, and Don Pedro Island had only 7 medical emergency and fire call between June 1st through September 7th.

Rande Ridenour asked how the Don Pedro Fire Department operates. Chief Didio responded that they have their own taxing districts. The monies in that district are only for that station. The annual assessment was \$75 a home, but it is expected to go up to over \$100. Condominium properties are assessed by area. The operation and staff falls under the management of Chief Didio. Their fire exposure is similar to Little Gasparilla Island, but they get more medical calls. They also want to make the fire house a shelter during storms.

Barry Hurt asked if Little Gasparilla Island should be part of the County Fire Department plan in the future. Chief Didio stressed again that he would not consider including Little Gasparilla Island without having roads. Bob Hill recalled from prior discussion the need for a shell road capable of supporting a fire truck at Grand Avenue, Rum Runner Road, and one or two roads at the wider part of the island. Chief Didio admits that he can get a vehicle down roads now, but it is damaging to the vehicle.

A guest asked if a second mini-pumper (like the one already donated by the County) would be possible. Chief Didio cautioned that a false sense of security should not be developed by the service of the mini-pumper. It is the equivalent of using a garden hose on a two-story home on stilts.

Bob Hill pointed out that the Advisory Committee is responsible for developing a community plan, which will consider topics of fire & EMS. Bob asked Chief Didio to be available to contribute in that planning. The Chief responded that he has many ideas that could be implemented on the island and would be happy to participate.

Rande Ridenour questioned if the Chief interacts with the fire brigade. Chief Didio responded that he is in communication with Gene Surdam once a month. He can not provide any training to them because that would create a liability situation for Charlotte County. He can however let the brigade know when equipment is being discarded by the county and offering it to them.

Barry Hurt asked when the County could consider assuming responsibility for fire response on Little Gasparilla Island. The Chief can help us with many ideas and stresses that we need to start considering these possible plans now.

Barry Hurt questioned the level of expertise of a paramedic or EMT. These credentials can be obtained through Edison College. Re-certification has to be done every three years. However, you have to be under a medical director to practice. The County staff has a medical director for their staff. The Chief explains that the Good Samaritan Law applies to an individual rendering first aid. Attorneys have found many ways around this law. Also, the Good Samaritan Law does not apply to those that “should know better.” What this means regarding the fire brigade is that Gene Surdam has no medical clearance and can apply a Band-Aid and operate a defibrillator. He has been instructed not to move someone if he is not sure of suitability to transport. The County should make this determination.

Interim Report of Right-of-way subcommittee: Rande Ridenour reported that he has opened a dialog with the people that would need to grant access for a north-south access road. The easement would involve a five-foot strip from the owners on each side of the road. Rande reports that no one opposes the concept of a road. All have asked what their liability exposure would be to allow such an easement. They also wanted to know if the granting of an easement could be retracted at a later date. Rande contacted the County Attorney for a response to the former question. The advice was that it would be nearly impossible to retract that easement once granted. Rande also pointed out that the current value of the lots made it unlikely that an easement could be purchased from the owners due to their high land values. Rande followed up on a suggestion from Janet Hill that an agreement might possibly be reached with the County Tax Appraiser to allow a tax incentive on the property tax bill for the individuals who agree to an easement. The County seems receptive to this possibility. Ultimately, this would have to go to the Charlotte County Board of Commissioners in order to implement it. Rande has another thought that maybe the zoning department could give a guarantee that a lot would not be considered un-buildable due to lot size by the granting of an easement. It appears at this point that there

are about 24 lots that would need to grant easements. Bob suggested that the next meeting be dedicated to this issued. The County contacts from zoning, legal, the tax appraiser, and our county commissioner.

Selection of Consultant for LGI Community Plan: Martina Kuche advises that two responses have been received from consultants from the RLI mailing. A recommendation of one of those two was forwarded back to the purchasing department. The director of purchasing, Jan Rogers, & Martina Kuche will sit down with that applicant to review the RLI. Terms will be negotiated and an offer to secure their services could be extended at that time. A meeting date has not been set up yet. Dick Stickle reminded Martina of her prior commitments to this committee that they would be involved in the selection process. Martina advises that the County Purchasing Department dictate the process based on legal restrictions. The candidates are judged solely on how they will go about completing the drafting of the community plan. Bob Hill pointed out that State Statute mandates that the public is included in this process. Martina was not certain of how this law is interpreted or implemented with respect to the selection of the consultant.

Items of Concern for Future Board Meetings: It was suggested that the Department of Environmental Protection be consulted regarding right of ways.

Items from Board Members: No other items were brought up.

Next Meeting—The next meeting will be held on September 26, 2005 in room 229 at the County Administration Building at 11:00 AM.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dick Stickle, Secretary