

Waterways Plan for Martin & St. Lucie Counties

Waterways Forum 5: Recreational, Cultural & Educational Facilities in and Along the Waterways

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2014

2:00 P.M.

Port Salerno Community Center, 4950 SE Anchor Avenue, Stuart, FL 34997

Forum arranged by the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC)
as part of the Waterways Plan for Martin & St. Lucie Counties.

NOTE TO READERS: This document reflects general meeting notes and key questions and points of discussion raised during the Forum on Recreational, Cultural & Educational Facilities that occurred on Wednesday, March 12, 2014. General meeting notes were prepared by TCRPC.

General Meeting Notes

The meeting was opened at 2:08 p.m. by Dr. Kim DeLaney, TCRPC. Meeting participants introduced themselves (copies of the forum sign-in sheet are included with these notes). The members of the Steering Committee identified themselves.

(NOTE: Each speaker utilized power point slides, and a copy of the power point presentation is included with these meeting notes.)

Project Overview:

Dr. DeLaney provided a brief introduction on the Waterways Plan project. The project covers the waterways in both Martin and St. Lucie counties (about 120 miles of waterways, including roughly 44 miles of Intracoastal Waterway, 25 miles of St. Lucie River, and 25 miles of canals). The plan is funded by the Martin Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), St. Lucie Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), and Florida Inland Navigational District (FIND). Each organization is responsible for guiding long-term transportation and capital investments with a goal of maintaining high quality of life, high level of mobility, strong economic development, and sustainability.

This was the fifth forum in a six-forum series. The forums are intended to broaden the general knowledge of waterways-related issues – for the project team, the steering committee, and the general public – and help inform the development of the Waterways Plan.

Dr. DeLaney reviewed the upcoming series of educational forums that will take place over the next couple of months, and she provided an overview of the pending charrette public workshops, additional opportunities for public input, and the project schedule. Information on the project is posted on the TCRPC website at http://tcrpc.org/special_projects/Waterways/waterways.html

The one remaining forum is scheduled as follows:

<i>Forum 6</i>	Economic Development	May 2, 2014 (9:00 a.m.)	Fort Pierce – Historic City Hall 315 Avenue A Fort Pierce, FL 34950
<i>Table reflects most current schedule as of 3/12/14</i>			

Dr. DeLaney pointed out the series of public input workshops scheduled for May 7, 8, and 9th. Each workshop will be identical in format and run from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., with an opening presentation summarizing what has been learned to-date and early indicators of opportunities and challenges, followed by table sessions with maps so participants can provide input as to different ideas for the development of the plan.

<i>Public Workshop a</i>	Public Input Workshops Open to the Public Identical Formats, Presentations, and Public Input Opportunities	May 7, 2014 Wednesday (1 PM)	Port St. Lucie Civic Center 9221 S.E. Civic Center Place Port St. Lucie, FL 34952
<i>Public Workshop b</i>		May 8, 2014 Thursday (1 PM)	Indian Riverside Park 1707 NE Indian River Drive Jensen Beach, FL 34957
<i>Public Workshop c</i>		May 9, 2014 Friday (1 PM)	City of Fort Pierce River Walk Center 600 North Indian River Drive Fort Pierce, FL 34950

Following the workshops will be a five-day public design studio with a multidisciplinary team assembled which will take place at the regional planning council office. The charrette is scheduled the week of May 19th. There will be an opportunity where the public and steering committee come together, see where the process is, and provide additional input. The goal is to have an initial plan together by the end of May ~ a “work-in-progress” ~ to bring back to the various organizations who are participating.

Dr. DeLaney introduced the panel and provided an overview of the recreational, cultural & educational facilities and resources along the waterways of Martin and St. Lucie Counties. She noted the format as follows:

- (1) each panelist would provide a 3-5 minute overview describing their organization’s role in the protection and enhancement of recreation, cultural & educational facilities, including a description of the biggest challenge faced by their agency; and
- (2) the audience would have an opportunity to ask questions of the individual panelists. Dr. DeLaney noted at the end of the panel discussion, time permitting, there would be a five-minute break, after which the Project Steering Committee would meet. The public would be welcome to attend the Steering Committee meeting.

Recreational Facilities Panel

Jim Lopilato, Parks Superintendent, Martin County Parks & Recreation

Mr. Lopilato described the role of the Martin County Parks and Recreation Department, and the County's broad role in providing and maintaining facilities. He noted Martin County manages 75-plus parks, many of which are along the waterways. Activities offered include fishing, boating, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, and any activity you can do on the water. The County's park and recreational facilities are also locations for fishing camps, surf camps, paddle board camps, and similar water-sports camp activities. He noted that the Martin County BOCC adopted a resolution to create a waterways trail, with 32 different sites along the trail. Along with the Martin MPO, the County has created a bicycle/pedestrian committee which has focused on this concept. The key challenges to the County are educating the public about the opportunities available, pollution (water quality and litter), and expanding the network.

Mark Nelson, Park Manager, Jonathan Dickinson State Park

Mr. Nelson provided an overview of Jonathan Dickinson State Park, which is a full-service state park that comprises approximately 10,500 acres. The park averages 200,000 visitors a year and offers a myriad of opportunities, including hiking, biking, equestrian trails, canoeing, kayaking, and boating among others. The park is considering expansion of its concessions and camping facilities. There are seven miles of federally designated wild and scenic rivers and an education center with a visitor center. Mr. Nelson noted they are also involved with the Martin County Environmental Studies Center.

William Miller, Refuge Manager, Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge

Mr. Miller provided an overview of the Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, which is one of twenty-nine in the state of Florida. The Refuge was established in 1969 with 1,035 acres. He highlighted two tracts of land – the mainland, which is across from Jonathan Dickinson Park, and the Jupiter Island tract. Primary habitats on the Jupiter Island tract are mangroves, coastal hammock, beach and dune, and the focal species include sea turtles and shorebirds. The primary habitats on the mainland tract include mangroves, coastal hammock, and sand pine scrub, and the focal species are gopher tortoise, Florida scrub jay, and Lakela's mint.

Mr. Miller noted the Indian River Lagoon is abutted by the Refuge, but the Refuge does not have jurisdiction in the Indian River Lagoon. There are ten miles of coastal resources managed by the Refuge. The Refuge offers wildlife-dependent recreation and environmental educational opportunities, which includes a curriculum focused on the biotic communities of the Indian River Lagoon. The Refuge averages 60,000 visitors to the wildlife refuge headquarters and the Hobe Sound Nature Center. The Hobe Sound Nature Center's focal areas are adult education, children's presentations, family oriented events, visitor contact, and sea turtle walks.

Some of the biggest challenges faced by the Refuge are a lack of focus on the waterways, access to the Lagoon, funding and capacity, engaging non-traditional users, and lack of a Lagoon partnership network.

Mr. Miller pointed out opportunities such as enhancing public awareness through media and increased messaging, the development of a lagoon partnership group, and increasing awareness of Indian River Lagoon recreational attributes.

John Lakich, Park Manager, St. Lucie Inlet Park & Seabranck Preserve State Park

Mr. Lakich provided an overview of St. Lucie Inlet Park and Seabranck Preserve State Park. He explained the park's mission statements and described the parks' services. Mr. Lakich noted the recreation at a preserve was different than what users expect at a full service state park. He pointed out they manage 920 acres of Seabranck preserve south of Cove Road and 946 upland acres of the St. Lucie Inlet Preserve State Park, noting the Inlet Preserve Park is accessible only by boat or kayak. He noted the biggest issue is access. The parks average 15,000 visitors per year. Mr. Lakich provided imagery in his presentation that denoted the unusual access facilities at St. Lucie Inlet Park, with a docking facility, thirty-slip boat ramp, floating dock, and ten-foot wide boardwalk that goes half a mile across the park through the mangroves towards the beach.

Alan Jenkinson, Executive Director, U.S. Sailing Center of Martin County

Mr. Jenkinson provided an overview of the U.S. Sailing Center of Martin County, which is a community sailing center offering recreational, competitive, and learn-to-sail opportunities for youth and adults of all ages. The Center is a membership-based 501(c)3 non-profit organization, promoting sailing through camps and education. The Center also works with the children of the ARC, Boys at Samaritan, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and any other organization that comes in and wants to get involved. Mr. Jenkinson indicated the biggest challenge is public awareness regarding the Center. The facility is located at the north end of Indian Riverside Park. He said another challenge is shoals and shallow areas and would like these areas to be marked or even eliminated. Dr. DeLaney asked how his organization was funded, and Mr. Jenkinson indicated user fees and donations fund the operations.

Ed Stout, Owner, South River Outfitters

Mr. Stout provided an overview of his business, South River Outfitters, as well as that of a water sports concessionaire. South River Outfitters rents canoes, kayaks, and bicycles at Halpatokee Regional Park in Stuart, Florida. The company provides a positive recreational opportunity for everyone to come out and experience the last four miles of the south fork of the St. Lucie River. The business averages roughly 1,400 visitors per year. Mr. Stout noted the company partners with Martin County Parks and Recreation, and they offer five summer camps per year. Their biggest challenge is the water quality and accessibility, and Mr. Stout also noted the need for a parking lot with a sandy beach. He suggested a better time to participate in a forum like this would be a weekend or at night so others could contribute their ideas. Dr. DeLaney pointed out the challenge of trying to figure out the best time to get everyone together. Mr. Stout also noted that their business suffered a 25% loss last year due to the releases. Dr. DeLaney mentioned trying to engage a meeting with the ACOE but has not managed to have any staff that is available.

Steve Fousek, Environmental Lands Coordinator, St. Lucie County

Mr. Fousek provided an overview of St. Lucie environmental, parks, and recreational opportunities. He noted nineteen sites on the North Fork that are managed by the County, primarily including beach sites and sites fronting the inlet. Mr. Fousek discussed the available educational facilities/programs, hiking trails, boat slips, cultural/historic sites, fishing piers/docks, canoe launches, observational towers/decks, interpretive trails, birding, and picnic facilities. He pointed out all the public sites that are adjacent to the waterway and discussed the County's proposed paddling trails. Mr. Fousek described the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which is the state's official document regarding outdoor recreation planning. Every five years, the Florida DEP inventories, develops interviews/questionnaires, and evaluates trends using census data. Mr. Fousek also provided an overview of select educational facilities on the waterways, including the Backus Gallery, Manatee Center, Smithsonian Marine Station, and Seven Gables.

Dylan Gavagni, Park Manager & Wren Underwood, Park Services Specialist, Savannahs Preserve State Park

Mr. Gavani provided an overview of the Savannahs Preserve State Park. He discussed the management plan for a large portion of the North Fork of the St. Lucie River that is inaccessible as far as the portion of the North Fork of the St. Lucie River at this point. The park averages 45,000 visitors a year. The Savannahs also has an environmental education center, and the park offers canoeing, kayaking, and fishing. They manage endangered habitat along the Atlantic Coastal Scrub Ridge and the largest intact freshwater marsh in Southeast Florida. He pointed out the challenges such as funding, maintenance and access.

Opportunities and Challenges

Dr. DeLaney asked the panel to discuss the opportunities that could be provided by the Waterways Plan as well as the challenges individual organizations and programs face. She noted the challenge of the plan in balancing the environmental qualities of the waterways resources with a desire to further communicate these assets to the public. She further noted that funding and a lack of resources has been noted consistently through the forums.

Mr. Lopolito suggested the Plan could help inform users about the interconnectedness of the waterways. For kayakers, the Lagoon offers the opportunity to put-in in Martin County and paddle into St. Lucie County. The Plan can identify stops and informational opportunities along the way so users can experience different things. Kayaking on the Lagoon could be a more developed experience that could bring in users from around the state and nation who would want to stay for several nights to experience different aspects and experiences on the Lagoon and in the waterways.

Mr. Nelson suggested the Plan could provide an opportunity to educate the community in the two county areas to our different mission statements. The Plan can include emphasis on preserving these areas for future generations so the kids can come and see the manatees, birds or other

wildlife. Further, the Plan could help establish a clearinghouse about environmental qualities, resources, and different available recreational opportunities.

Mr. Stout suggested the Plan can help with funding and access. With improved access, more people can utilize the waterways, which will provide economic value, which can help provide funding to help maintain the health of the waterways.

Mr. Fousek indicated the economic split between active and passive recreation, and both counties need to protect green spaces as well as increase the opportunity for active recreational boaters.

Mr. Nelson also emphasized the opportunity for the Plan to indicate connectivity among the various waterways destinations, with maps how connections occur. Dr. DeLaney noted the Plan's ability to include multi-use trail connections as well as potential access through easements.

Dr. DeLaney questioned the impact of the East Coast Greenway through Seabranck Preserve State Park, noting the mention of doubled attendance since the installation of the greenway. Mr. Lakich indicated although the attendance had increased substantially, with many more park attendees riding bikes to and through the preserve, there had not been significant impacts thus far.

Participants also asked about environmental education programs, discussing the environmental curricula in the school systems of both counties. Participants indicated there would be benefits from consistent environmental education programs in both counties, to track kids from kindergarten forward, using the public parks and preserves as a basis for that education.

Dr. DeLaney thanked the Recreational Facilities Panel. The meeting forum adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

Cultural & Educational Facilities Panel

The meeting started at 4:15 p.m. Dr. DeLaney introduced the panelists, who proceeded with presentations about their organizations and areas of interest.

Nancy Turrell, Executive Director, The Arts Council

Ms. Turrell provided an overview of The Arts Council, indicating the organization provides service to visual and performing artists, arts organizations, students, and the public. She noted the region's downtowns are centers of cultural activity, and most have developed along our waterways. The Arts Council is the designated local arts agency for Martin County, and she indicated the parallel agency in St. Lucie County was undergoing some leadership shifts. She gave examples of public art - Sailfish Splash Park Murals and Stuart Beach - Mosaic Tile Mural project. She also noted that EcoArt is a new and interesting concept, which describes a condition where art, environment and community engage. Ms. Turrell gave a specific example of EcoArt with the Poppleton Creek project that focuses on mangrove plantings.

Dianne Pierce, Administrator, Environmental Studies Center

Ms. Pierce provided an overview of the Environmental Studies Center, indicating the Center has been in operation for 41 years and is primarily funded through the Martin County Public School District. The Center is used for educational programs for students in kindergarten through 7th grade, and subsequently, marine biology and environmental classes are offered to high school students. The Center includes on-site educational resources as well as provides coordinated trips into the waterways for seining, water quality testing, and other hands-on educational experiences.

Jannn Widmayer, Curator, Manatee Observation & Education Center

Ms. Widmayer provided an overview of the Manatee Observation and Education Center. She indicated the Center opened in 1996 as St. Lucie County's first environmental center and was built through the business community with individual donors and a grant from FIND. She noted that education and marine environment are the main focus of the Center. The Center averages 40,000 visitors per year. In addition, they teach about 5,500 school children from St. Lucie County (public and private) as well as students from Indian River County and Jupiter. The Center has a number of volunteers and four paid staff members. Dr. DeLaney asked if there is a regular relationship between the school district and the Manatee Observation Center. Ms. Widmayer noted that when the Center first opened, the St. Lucie County School District gave them a grant each year, but with the economic turndown, the Center no longer receives a grant from the school district. The Center also applies for other grants.

Panel Discussion

Panelists were asked to respond to a question posed by Dr. DeLaney. What is the biggest challenge as an organization that you face?

Ms. Widmayer noted two challenges: water quality and the presence of public boat ramps in the middle of the property where the center is located, adjacent to the parking area. Dr. DeLaney pointed out there are tremendous issues facing the waterways, water quality being the lead one. This type of planning document can really help explain why dollars should be allocated to remedy this problem because the waterways has a value and can be measured in these different ways.

Ms. Pierce pointed out their biggest challenge is preservation and access. She indicated that with development opportunities, it is critical to preserve some of the pristine areas that can be used for teaching our young people. Any planning that we do we have to think in terms of preserving the good nature of our natural resources, making sure we make it as easy as possible and obvious for people to clean up after themselves. Trash receptacles are necessary to make it easier for waterways users. Access to the waterways is the other key challenge.

Ms. Turrell pointed out sustainability, the seasonality of our community and I think it addresses having activities and engaging opportunities. The Plan can also try to advance community

engagement and broaden the understanding about the importance of water quality and what can be done to help it.

Dr. DeLaney asked panelists to identify the types of activities and investments the Plan could emphasize to help advance what each organization is seeking to accomplish. Panelists suggested assistance with funding to broaden access to programs, the utilization of EcoArt as a theme; balancing the tension between natural resources needing protection and the attraction of the public to experience the natural resource; the balance between different types of users (human-powered footprints versus active recreational activities); expanded access to the waterways; and opportunities for expanded environmental education, especially for kids, to build stronger environmental stewards in the future.

Dr. DeLaney pointed out that Lucie County does not have as much consistency with the environmental educational curriculum as Martin County, noting the programmatic opportunity to replicate the program where appropriate. Participants also noted Westwood High School's Marine and Oceanographic Academy of the St. Lucie County School District. The academy is located at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute.

Ms. Widmayer indicated the opportunity for a more vibrant partnership with the marine industry, emphasizing the broad range of employment opportunities and career paths with the industry. The school districts could utilize an advisory committee to help advance the discussion, detail the types of technologies, marine biology, and engineering opportunities. She suggested both the marine and boat industries would be very well served symbolically with a more formal school district relationship and broader knowledge among the students. Dr. DeLaney suggested the Plan could explore the opportunity for a marine industries career track, coordinated through the school districts.

Participants also noted there are large portions of the populations in the two counties that do not know how to swim, and the inability to swim could limit the interest or desire to learn about the water. The need of water safety classes and expanded swimming instruction was discussed by participants and the panel.

Dr. DeLaney thanked the Cultural & Educational Facilities panel. The meeting forum adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Given the volume of materials covered in the forum, the Project Steering Committee chose not to meet following the forum.