



MINUTES – August 15, 2023

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND ACQUISITION PANEL (ELAP)

Minutes of the
Environmental Land Acquisition Panel
Indian River County Administration Complex,
Building B, Conference Room B1-501
1800 27th Street, Vero Beach, FL
5:30 PM Tuesday, August 15, 2023

9 members/7 for quorum

1. Call to Order

Joseph Earman, Board of County Commissioners Chairman & Liaison to the Environmental Land Acquisition Panel, called the first meeting of the Environmental Land Acquisition Panel (ELAP) to order at 5:30 PM.

Commissioner Earman gave a brief background on the development of the ELAP Resolution 2022-016 which called for a bond referendum which states in part that ‘the county may acquire and permanently preserve environmentally significant lands to restore the Indian River Lagoon, protect water resources, natural areas, wildlife habitat, drinking water resources, and construct public access improvements related thereto’. Commissioner Earman introduced staff members present and invited the members of ELAP to introduce themselves today as part of the “Roll Call”.

A full recording of this meeting is available in the office of the Board of County Commissioners.

2. Roll Call

Members Present:

Sammy McGee	District 1 Appointee
Janice Broda	District 2 Appointee
Daniel Bott	District 3 Appointee
Peter O’Bryan	District 4 Appointee
James Connaughton	District 5 Appointee
Jeff Beal	Natural Resources Representative
Heather Stapleton	Natural Resources Representative
John Orcutt	Real Estate or Finance Representative
Roland DeBlois	Planning or Engineering Representative

Also Present:

Joseph Earman	Commissioner, BCC Liaison
Wendy Swindell	Conservation Lands Manager
Beth Powell	Interim Assistant County Administrator, Parks & Rec Director
John Titkanich	County Administrator
Michael Zito	Deputy County Administrator
Andy Sobczak	Interim Community Development Director
Susan Prado	Deputy County Attorney

Minimum Quorum requirements have been met

3. Election of Officers

a. Chair

*Roland DeBlois made a MOTION, then SECONDED by Janice Broda, to appoint **Peter O'Bryan as CHAIR** of the Environmental Land Acquisition Panel.*

The motion passed unanimously.

b. Vice-Chair

*John Orcutt made a MOTION, then SECONDED by James Connaughton, to appoint **Roland DeBlois as VICE-CHAIR** of the Environmental Land Acquisition Panel.*

The motion passed unanimously.

4. Presentations

a. Public Meeting Rules & Government in Sunshine – County Attorney's Office

Deputy County Attorney Susan Prado gave a brief presentation on public meeting rules under Government in Sunshine and how they apply to local municipal board, committee, and panel members. Attorney Prado also gave a brief talk regarding public record requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

5. Discussion Items

a. Overview of Previous Bonds

Wendy Swindell, Conservation Lands Manager provided a brief overview of the two previous bond processes from 1992 and 2004 which included a power point presentation.

The 1992 Resolution was signed by the BCC on August 18, 1992. The total amount was to not exceed \$26,000,000. The purpose (in part) was to finance the cost of acquiring environmentally significant land to protect water quality, open spaces, and wildlife habitat.

The 2004 Resolution was signed by the BCC on June 22, 2004. The total amount was to not exceed \$50,000,000. The purpose (in part) was to finance the cost of the acquisition of lands to protect water resources, drinking water sources, environmentally significant lands, historic sites, agricultural lands, open spaces, and/or wildlife habitat in Indian River County. Some of the acquired properties such as Wabasso Scrub and North Sebastian C.A. have an ancillary benefit of protecting habitat for scrub jays, in furtherance of the County's Florida Scrub Jay Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)..

The first acquired site prior to the 1992 and 2004 approved bonds, was the Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area which finalized on August 21, 1991. To date, 12,268 acres of land have been acquired through two bond referendums. They range in percentages (high to low) to include pine flatwoods, freshwater wetlands, ruderal, estuarine wetlands, xeric scrub, maritime hammock, hardwood hammock, and coastal strand. Sebastian Harbor was one of the last parcels acquired. Ms. Swindell opined that the site is actually one of the prettiest pine flatwood areas in the county. It's a unique acquisition with spectacular wetlands. The County is working on some of the public access improvements to the site including trails and boardwalks.

Ms. Swindell also discussed navigating the current IRC website and the new website that will be launched in the near future. Environmental Lands will have its own "dashboard" with various levels of authorization such as public, ELAP, Staff, etc...

b. Environmental Lands Program Guide Review Process

Ms. Swindell summarized that the current bond, which this panel is charged with overseeing, will be focusing on the Indian River Lagoon, water resources, natural areas, habitat, and drinking water resources, also allowing for funding to construct public access improvements. There are no cultural or historical elements in this bond referendum. The draft Environmental Lands Program Guide has some nuances that are different from the 2004 and the 1992 bonds in terms of the review criteria.

The initial task of the ELAP is to review and make recommendations on finalization of the Environmental Lands Program Guide (Guide). ELAP recommendations will be compiled and reviewed by the BCC and once approved, will allow for the initiation of the parcel nomination process.

c. Establishing ELAP Meeting Frequency & Time

ELAP will meet on the third Tuesday monthly at 5:30 PM in the same location, IRC Administration Complex Building B, Room B1-501, 1800 27th Street, Vero Beach, FL 32960 pending confirmation that this room is available.

d. Commissioner Matters

None

6. Adjournment

Chair Peter O'Bryan adjourned the meeting at 6:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Maura Stokes