



MINUTES – September 17, 2024

ENVIRONMENTAL LAND ACQUISITION PANEL (ELAP)

Minutes of the
Environmental Land Acquisition Panel
Indian River County Administration Complex,
Building A, Commission Chambers
1801 27th Street, Vero Beach, FL
5:30 PM Tuesday, September 17, 2024

9 members/6 for quorum

1. Call to Order

Vice-Chair Roland DeBlois called the September 17, 2024, meeting of the Environmental Land Acquisition Panel (ELAP) to order at 5:30 PM.

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
Heather Stapleton	Natural Resources Representative
Roland DeBlois	Planning or Engineering Representative
John Orcutt	Real Estate or Finance Representative

Members Absent:

Peter O'Bryan	District 4 Appointee
James Connaughton	District 5 Appointee
Jeff Beal	Natural Resources Representative

Others Present:

Joseph Earman	Commissioner, BCC Liaison
Wendy Swindell	Conservation Lands Manager
Beth Powell	Director - Parks, Recreation & Conservation
Susan Prado	Deputy County Attorney
Michael Zito	Deputy County Administrator
Maura Stokes	BCC Recording Secretary
Mike & MF Womack	Public
CE Swindell	Public
Tracy Sabol	Public
Robert Adair	FL Research Center
Susan Hale	Public

Minimum Quorum requirements were met.

3. **Approval of Minutes:**

a. August 18, 2024— Regular Meeting

ON MOTION made by Janice Broda and SECONDED by Heather Stapleton, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel approved the Minutes of the August 18, 2024 meeting as presented.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

4. **New Parcel Application(s) Review**

The panel discussed new parcel applications, focusing on those meeting minimum criteria and those marked as TBD, and agreed to accept staff assessments regarding these parcels.

A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to gopher tortoise assessments, emphasizing the need for sustainable agricultural practices and monitoring of tortoise populations. The panel also evaluated criteria for gopher tortoise relocation permits and agreed to confirm tortoise presence on parcels before proceeding.

The discussion highlighted the need to ensure that agricultural practices do not interfere with the habitat of gopher tortoises, which is crucial for compliance with environmental regulations. The panel discussed the need to monitor gopher tortoise populations and ensure that agricultural operations are adjusted to protect their habitats.

The panel discussed the difference between owning a parcel outright and having a conservation easement on a parcel that is currently being used for agricultural activities which may or may not include public access depending on the terms of the easement.

The panel set a deadline of October 1st for seller confirmations and project owner responses, with plans for a follow-up meeting in November to finalize scoring and rankings of parcels. The meeting also covered easements, conservation easements, and the implications of a second bond referendum, emphasizing compliance and monitoring responsibilities.

Parcel #41 - FLARES Groves. Mr. Bob Adair added to the panel discussion that the FLARES Groves Easement was designed with stormwater retention facilities to make sure that silt, sediment and nutrients stay on side, percolate and recharge its official aquifers. Also, there was a brief discussion regarding two leveraged funding options, the first through the State Department of Agriculture Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, and the second is through the USDA for conservation easement programs.

ON MOTION made by John Orcutt and SECONDED by Janice Broda, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel approved adding #41, The FLARES Groves Easement to the list of properties for evaluation.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

After reviewing parcels #47, #48, #49, #50, #51 and #52, the panel discussed combining the six parcels into one for the purpose of environmental assessments due the parcels being adjacent to one another and the sizes being less than one-half acre each if each owner is a willing seller.

ON MOTION made by Daniel Bott and SECONDED by Heather Stapleton, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel approved the merging of the six parcels #47 - #52 also known as projects "Old Dixie GT Property 1 - 6" into one 'project' for review and evaluation purposes.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

5. Discussion Items:

a. *Comments from Staff*

The panel discussed the upcoming ranking process and a summary of the 47 parcel nominations. There are currently eighteen (18) that would be fee simple purchases.

Wendy noted that quite a few of the Water and Air reports are complete and a few in progress. There are currently ten (10) parcels that have had no conversation with the parcel owner. Discussion continued about scheduling the next few meetings to allow time for the consultant reports to be completed and holidays approaching.

ON MOTION made by Daniel Bott and SECONDED by Janice Broda the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel approved the deadline to close nominations on the first round as October 01, 2024.

Discussion continued. This does not impact ongoing applications which can be submitted at any time and be reviewed in a later round. This date would allow sufficient time for staff to reach out to the property owners that have not responded and allow time for the appropriate reports to be completed. It was discussed that there would be no meeting in October, an informational-only meeting in November and December. The January meeting would be to finalize ranking which the panel members can submit directly to staff. Then the recommendation can go to the Board of County Commissioners in February or March.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

b. *Bond Consultant Matters*

None.

c. *Comments from the Chair*

The panel discussed using the Property Appraiser's website for cost estimates on property values for the fee simple purchases.

d. *Comments from the Commissioner*

None.

e. *Other*

Discussion continued regarding fee simple purchase vs. conservation easements.

6. **Public Comment:** None.
7. **Next Meeting:** There will be no October meeting. The next meeting of ELAP will be held November 19, 2024 at 5:30 PM in Building B, Room B1-501.
8. **Adjournment:** Vice Chair Roland DeBlois adjourned the meeting at 7:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Maura Stokes

A copy of the full meeting recording is kept on file in the office of the Board of County Commissioners.