



MINUTES – March 25, 2025

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, March 25, 2025

9 members/6 for quorum

1. Call to Order

Chair Roland DeBlois called the March 25, 2025, 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:

Janice Broda	District 2 Appointee
Patrick Pitts	District 4 Appointee
Heather Stapleton	Natural Resources Representative
Roland DeBlois	Planning or Engineering Representative
John Orcutt	Real Estate or Finance Representative
Jeff Beal	Natural Resources Representative
Samantha McGee	District 1 Appointee

Members Absent:

Daniel Bott	District 3 Appointee
James Connaughton	District 5 Appointee

Others Present:

Joseph Earman	Commissioner, BCC Liaison
Wendy Swindell	Conservation Lands Manager
Beth Powell	Director - Parks, Recreation & Conservation
Chris Hicks	Deputy County Attorney
Michael Zito	Deputy County Administrator
Kimberly K. Moirano	BCC Recording Secretary
CE Swindell	Public

3. Approval of Minutes:

a. January 21, 2025 -- Regular Meeting

ON MOTION made by Heather Stapleton and SECONDED by Samantha McGee, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel approved the Minutes of the January 21, 2025, meeting as presented with the checking of the attendance.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

4. Discussion Items

a. Introduce Patrick Pitts as the new ELAP Member

Mr. DeBlois introduced Patrick Pitts as the new ELAP member who replaced Peter O'Bryan. Mr. Pitts stated he had been living in Indian River County since 1984. He is originally from North Carolina and has a pretty strong background in biology. He has a Bachelor of Science in Zoology from the University of North Carolina and Marine Biology Masters from FIT up in Melbourne. He worked for 18 years at Harbor Branch Oceanographic. Some of that was with John Orcutt and then he went to work for the US Fish and Wildlife Service and that experience is probably the most pertinent to what they're doing here. He worked on the Everglades Restoration Program. His territory was in the southern part of the system, but it was all similar as far as what biologists did in Everglades restoration, and a lot it was restoration of different habitats and so he got a pretty good knowledge of the different habitat types of what we're talking about in Indian River County.

Janice Broda arrived at 5:37 p.m.

b. Discuss Board of County Commissioners March 11, 2025, meeting

Ms. Wendy Swindell stated they did a PowerPoint presentation and went through all of the willing seller properties and did a little history for the public describing the process. Then they brought up the ranking sheet and described that process. They asked for directions on how to proceed, and they recommended that they just move forward with the Tier I properties as ELAP had recommended. They were extremely complimentary of the group and how hard the group had worked.

c. Staff discussing next steps from the Period 1 Ranking

The reason that Ms. Swindell wanted to add this to the Agenda is they've had a little bit of a change in their pathway for the negotiations with the property owners. They've retained the same firm that works with our Public Works Department to do right away acquisition as well as they acquire properties for things like fire stations and they're very familiar with Indian River County. Their name is Colliers. They're a real estate driven company. They've already had several meetings with them and talked to them. They went through the dashboard. They got on a Teams call, went through the process and they sound like they're really ready to go and move forward. They've sent out letters to all of the willing seller properties summarizing that the Board approved for them to move forward with the Tier 1 nominations, and they've already had a couple of calls back from people wanting to talk to them already. She felt that the direction is proceeding at a really good pace. She got a copy of a draft of a letter that Colliers is going to send out, but she also sent them all of the contact

information that they have emails, phone numbers, anything that they have for the owners. They have three people that are actively working on this and the way that they do it with the County is similar to what you would do in any real estate transaction. They move forward with negotiating, and they handle all the appraisals, and their fee isn't taken until the property is closed on. The link that Ms. Swindell was looking for assistance on was the actual negotiations and the appraisals and so a real estate driven firm seemed like a better choice for that part of it. So, that's what she meant by a different approach.

Mr. DeBlois stated that, when dealing with environmental lands, it is advised that someone from staff review the appraisal. Make sure the appraiser is familiar with evaluating environmental lands versus standard real estate, because there are certain nuances as far as evaluations. The appraiser needs to make sure they understand the County's land use designations and allowances or non-allowances for wetlands.

d. Staff presenting new property nominations from Nomination Period #2

Ms. Wendy Swindell stated that our GIS has downsized a lot in the last few weeks, so the dashboard hasn't been updated since the end of February. The nomination period ended on February 28th. They discussed the seven properties in full detail.

ON MOTION made by Jeff Beal and SECONDED by Janice Broda, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel made a determination that Period 2 nomination numbers 1, 2, 3, and 6 meet the minimum criteria, and that nomination numbers 4, 5 and 7 will require more information from staff before a final determination of minimum criteria satisfaction is made.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

Ms. Swindell had in her notes that she is to get more information from Colliers to give the Board more background on their environmental work as far as appraisals go and staff is going to do a little bit more due diligence on Number 4 and Number 5 relative to the ownership aspect of those two.

6. Public Comment: Mr. Earman thanked everyone for what they were doing. He welcomed Patrick to the Board.

7. Next Meeting:

The next meeting of ELAP will be held April 15, 2025, at 5:30 PM in Building B, Room B1-501.

8. Adjournment: Chair Roland DeBlois adjourned the meeting at 6:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly K. Mcirano

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