



MINUTES – April 15, 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, April 15, 2025

9 members/6 for quorum

1. Call to Order

Chair Roland DeBlois called the April 15, 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:

Samantha McGee	District 1 Appointee
Janice Broda	District 2 Appointee
Daniel Bott	District 3 Appointee
Patrick Pitts	District 4 Appointee
James Connaughton	District 5 Appointee
Heather Stapleton	Natural Resources Representative (virtually)
Roland DeBlois	Planning or Engineering Representative
John Orcutt	Real Estate or Finance Representative

Members Absent:

Jeff Beal	Natural Resources Representative
Joseph Earman	Commissioner, BCC Liaison

Others Present:

Wendy Swindell	Conservation Lands Manager
Beth Powell	Director - Parks, Recreation & Conservation
Kimberly K. Moirano	BCC Recording Secretary
CE Swindell	Public

Minimum Quorum requirements were met.

3. Approval of Minutes:

a. March 25, 2025 -- Regular Meeting

ON MOTION made by Daniel Bott and SECONDED by Janice Broda, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel approved the Minutes of the March 25, 2025, meeting.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

4. Discussion Items

a. Staff follow up on minimum criteria for Period 2 nominations number 4, 5 and 7

Mr. DeBlois stated there is a revised list of the nominations. Ms. Wendy Swindell stated that with respect to the two parcels that are just north of the Wabasso Causeway the question that they could not respond to at the last ELAP meeting was whether or not there was some thought that perhaps these were common owners, but it appears that there is not. They are two separate parcels so whether or not they meet the minimum criteria that they will need to that will have to be discussed by this group and determined whether or not you're going to direct staff to move forward or what your evaluation is relative to the minimum criteria for those.

Number 5 - Two Dollar Bluff properties – one next to the bridge

Ms. Swindell stated that they spoke to the owners, and they are willing to sell.

They discussed the three properties in great detail in order to make a determination whether they meet the minimum criteria or not and if they don't, then they could move on. Mr. DeBlois felt the only real factor is essentially that its waterfront but even there it's fairly minimal. Ms. Beth Powell stated that they're getting ready to make some improvements to the Wabasso Causeway. They have a Florida Inland Navigation District Grant to do some shoreline improvements, and they see that as an opportunity to do some resiliency work in the area. She felt that this parcel might provide benefit if you think of it in the context of how that overall project might shape up. If you're doing improvement along the shoreline improving that area, it's very sandy and it's got Australian pines and Brazilian peppers so there might be some opportunity to improve that area. You've probably got untreated stormwater coming off that road. From the lagoon health benefit, she could see possibly working with the property to include eventually some treatment and improving the shoreline for sure.

ON MOTION made by James Connaughton and SECONDED by Daniel Bott, the Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel made a determination that Period 2 nomination number 5 meets the final determination of minimum criteria satisfaction.

The motion PASSED unanimously.

Number 4 – Old Wabasso Grove Property

Mr. DeBlois stated it's not part of the Blueway so that criteria would not apply. Ms. Swindell stated if you zoom in on the aerial you could clearly see in the upland soil type that there are opportunistic species of palms and pines, but staff has not been on the site to verify the extent. If it used to be flatwoods and they

cleared it for grove, there would be something in the seed bank coming back but there's a lot of invasive stuff in there as well. She agreed with Mr. DeBlois that the vegetation to the east is the pine and there probably was some mangrove but it has been severed from the connection to the lagoon and been invaded by pine but there's probably still some wetland plants in there. Mr. DeBlois stated to him it looks like the site meeting the minimum criteria would boil down to the factor supporting five or more acres of native community. Mr. Bott stated it seems like we don't have enough information to really make a true judgment at this point. He felt that this should be tabled until we do have further information. Mr. DeBlois stated that we will hold off on any determination pending further information.

Number 7 – A1A Gamma Property (oceanfront piece north of Tracking Station)

Mr. DeBlois stated that it was determined that it did meet the minimum criteria. Ms. Swindell thought the feedback we got was just to move forward and obtain more information.

- a. Update on bond consultant background and a summary of their current coordination with Tier 1 landowners

Ms. Wendy Swindell stated she had talked to Colliers, and they gave her some information. They are currently working on a \$30,000,000.00 bond with the City of Fort Lauderdale primarily driven more towards active parks. Colliers experienced working through the bond process. They do have experience with another project in Port Orange that was apparently fairly large called Riverwalk. They have done quite a few parcels in the County and in the city of Tamarac they're working on a large economic development project. She thought as far as governmental coordination they have a lot of experience. Staff is going to let you see Colliers' spreadsheet that they've put together and how they're contacting property owners. Appraisals can take anywhere from 45 to 90 days. Staff recommends using appraisers on a DEP approved list that have experience appraising environmental lands. Mr. DeBlois suggested that, to save time and effort, the County could do a little bit of due diligence beforehand so that the appraiser isn't wasting time looking for things that staff may readily have available. There may be institutional knowledge that a parcel was put in for development 15 years ago but there was a problem with the project. Mr. DeBlois also explained, for example, that a parcel may be zoned for multiple housing units, but legal access may restrict the use to one unit, which could affect the highest and best use value. Ms. Swindell indicated that staff has a meeting in-house this week to do their due diligence and collect information for the appraisers and then Ms. Swindell is going to spread out the parcels to different appraisers. Staff has also scheduled a meeting with three ranch owners to have a discussion about what they're looking for in an easement. Staff want to try to understand better what they're willing to agree to and that way they can come back and have some more information that the appraiser is going to need as well.

The ELAP discussed whether a property that's good value and is a fee simple purchase would make the Board more interested in going back to the other adjoining properties where the easements are adjacent. Ms. Swindell stated that that would be something to discuss at a future ELAP meeting. Ms. Powell stated that ELAP can make any recommendation to the Board at any given time. There are no parameters around that ELAP could have a meeting today and have a change of heart one way or another. Let's say that we're stalled out on half of the Tier I properties and we're a year or two out. At any meeting ELAP could make a recommendation to have staff go back to the board and make a recommendation to pursue Tier II properties. Tier I, Tier II and Tier III it's just a matter of priority in terms of where staff is spending its time, energy and effort to make acquisition happen. While properties are ranked in an order, they're all qualified for purchase. This is a malleable process.

Ms. Swindell stated they are taking an item to the Board on April 22nd for the Environmental Consultant to be able to continue doing the assessments because their contract agreement is up for renewal. Assuming that the Board is okay with amending that agreement with Water & Air then staff will go ahead and move forward and release them to start doing the assessments on the properties that meet the minimum criteria.

Given the small number of them, we should be moving at a much faster pace than we did in Ranking Period 1 relative to getting the reports back. Mr. DeBlois stated that right now this is pretty much the full list of Period 2. Ms. Swindell stated that they have sent out letters which are the same letters that they had sent before if they weren't able to get in touch with someone directly. At the last meeting the question came about the ones that we never reached in the first cycle they're also sending out letters again to them. They're trying to keep as much feedback as they can.

6. **Public Comment:** There was a request for a list of the Tier I properties and the timeframe for the Tier I properties. Ms. Swindell stated at this point they don't have a defined timeframe because it really depends a lot on the seller how truly willing, they are to negotiate. The appraisal process has been explained to her that it should take anywhere between 45 to 90 days. There's a lot of data to collect and information to analyze and they have to get a minimum of two appraisals for each property so that takes a little bit of due diligence. Staff certainly are trying to have things move as quickly as possible, but they can't really control everybody else's schedules.

7. **Next Meeting:**

The next scheduled meeting of ELAP is May 20, 2025, at 5:30 PM in Building B, Room B1-501.

8. **Adjournment:** Chair Roland DeBlois adjourned the meeting at 6:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly K. Moirano

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