

**MANATEE COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS MANAGEMENT AND ACQUISITION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ELMAC)
REGULAR MEETING
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER, 5TH FLOOR, MANATEE ROOM
1112 Manatee Avenue West
Bradenton, Florida
January 6, 2025**

Present were:

Mason Gravley, Chairman
Terry L. McKamey, Vice-Chairman
Mike Burton
Scott Childress
Kate Horne
David Landers (entered during meeting)
Jonathan Lynch
Brian Searcy
Scott Tussing

Absent were/was:

Chris Conley
Randy Cooper
Craig Copeman
Barry Grooms
Richard Larsen
Lorraine Prosser

Two seats are vacant.

Also present was:

Commissioner Carol Ann Felts
Bryan Parnell, Deputy County Administrator
Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director
Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager
Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager
Vicki Tessmer, Board Records Supervisor, Deputy Clerk, Clerk of the Circuit Court



Chairman Gravley called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

AGENDA

EL20250106DOC001

1. **WELCOME**

Chairman Gravley welcomed Members and guests.

2. **MINUTES**

A motion was made by Member Tussing, seconded by Member Childress, and carried 8-0, with Members Conley, Cooper, Copeman, Grooms, Landers, Larsen, and Prosser absent, to approve the minutes of September 9, 2024, and November 4, 2024.

3. **TREE COUNTY USA APPLICATION/UPDATE**

A presentation was not made.

5. **MISCELLANEOUS UPDATES**

Debra Woithe, Environmental Lands Division Manager, displayed the County calendar which features County wildlife.

Bond Fund

Ms. Woithe used a slide presentation to review the status of the budget for the Conservation Referendum, and Financial Management is working on getting an additional \$15 million.

EL20250106DOC002


Capital Improvement and Work Plans


Ms. Woithe continued the slides to discuss the work plans for the Crooked River Preserve, Emerson Point Expansion, and the Triple Oak Preserve.

Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director, explained there is a restoration element to the work plans. There are Capital Improvements that include access and hard structures to enhance the public's enjoyment of the property.

Mike Elswick, Resource Management Division Manager, used a slide presentation to review grant opportunities related to Crooked River Preserve, Florida Communities Trust (FCT) Recreational Commitments, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Recreational Trails Program Grant, \$2.5 million for vehicle accessed amenities and \$500,000 for non-motorized trail improvements, grant cycle begins February 1, 2025, these grants are for amenities, not towards the purchase, and grants are a 50/50 match.


EL20250106DOC003

 Brian Purnell, Deputy County Administrator, noted the millage can be used for matching funds for grants. Commissioners have been briefed on the environmental lands program. They are projecting up to \$10 million this year, to pay the debt service on the bond, and the additional funds can go towards restoration.

 Mr. Hunsicker explained staff strives to remove exotics, and replace those with native species and new Florida friendly habitat, to ensure the preserve survives, which will in turn create lower maintenance costs.

Ms. Woithe stated it makes more sense to use the bond funds for acquisition, although they can also be used for some improvements. The land must be maintained and restored after purchase. A presentation was made to the League of Women Voters, and the Chairman will begin to present reports to the Commissioners.

4. **CONSERVATION ACQUISITION CANDIDATE PROPERTIES**


 Ms. Woithe continued the slide presentation reviewing Crane Park addition, the property is along the Myakka River, and would allow expansion of the park. There is flooding at the park, potential for wetland mitigation, future use as a park (managed by the Sports and Leisure Services), and Big Waters Land Trust (formerly Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast) has an Option Contract until the end of March. The price works with the appraised value.

Charlie Hunsicker, noted the park is usable for about seven months out of the year, and this would allow the park to be used more.


Discussion ensued regarding this property is partially in the flood plain, there is a raised area that might allow recreational uses in the upland area, potential for water quality improvement, there are no structures on the property, and the property is in the Coastal Heartlands Estuary Program.


 Brooke Langston, Director of Land Protection, Big Waters Land Trust, noted purchasing the property would prevent further development, which is a benefit for the Myakka River.

Ms. Woithe continued the slides to provide updates on 15 properties in the acquisition process, need to have a public meeting regarding Crooked River Preserve, access to owners at Emerson Point Expansion access and right-of-way and still working with State on purchase, property being surveyed, 15 properties are in the acquisition process, three properties acquired, there are still new nominations and pursuing willing sellers, large agricultural properties that could be used for easements, and further candidate property prioritization.

 Mr. Hunsicker suggested there could be another voter referendum to acquire more funding for additional acquisitions.


Discussion ensued that having a few more acquisitions would help to have a second referendum pass, larger properties may have a bigger impact, connectivity is important, add a small millage for parks, ELMAC has turned down properties, other counties have multiple referendums, is there other revenue source that can be found, costs other than new acquisitions, budget needs, there are enough properties to exhaust the funding that exists, and development pressure is a key factor.

 Ms. Woithe provided further insight into a few of the properties to assist with prioritization, and noted the Anson owner is motivated.

 Discussion continued regarding how to prioritize, estimated schedule of purchase, Rattlesnake Key has been considered for three years, negotiations and appraisals are kept confidential, and a decision does not need to be made tonight.


6. **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

Merrie Lynn Parker, Manatee Fish and Game, spoke to events they take part in, and stressed the need to promote tours, there is a fundraiser at the Palma Sola Botanical Park on January 23, 2025, and noted Manatee Fish and Game advocated for the referendum, and it took time to get it on the ballot. She encouraged the purchase of Crane Park.


 Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Director, recognized Roy “Chick” Parker for his contributions to ELMAC, Manatee County, and conservation lands, such as Duette Preserve.

There being no further citizen comments, Chairman Gravley closed citizen comments.

7. **PRIORITIZATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

 A motion was made by Member Tussing, seconded by Member Burton, and carried 9-0, with Members Conley, Cooper, Copeman, Grooms, Larsen, and Prosser absent, for staff to pursue acquisition of the Crane Park addition.

8. **NEW BUSINESS AND COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

 Commissioner Felts hopes to be able to promote ELMAC and Natural Resources to the Commissioners.

There was no new business.

9. **ADJOURN**

There being no further business, Chairman Gravley adjourned the meeting at 7:52 p.m.
Minutes Approved: _____