



Hutchinson Island Master Plan

Prepared for: Martin County Commissioners

Prepared by: Hutchinson Island Coalition

September 8, 2011; Updated - May 31, 2013 (all updates in this color)

Executive Summary

Objective

The Hutchinson Island Coalition is a volunteer organization that consists of members from the Martin County (MC) Hutchinson Island community of homeowners, organizations, and businesses. Our mission is simply to make recommendations and provide any type of assistance to the county in making improvements, ranging from the aesthetic in nature to safety type issues. We want Hutchinson Island to be the most beautiful island in Florida that entices tourists and visitors to designate Hutchinson Island in Martin County their vacation destination.

Goals

The goal of this proposal is to provide the MC Commissioners with a list of priority items to be incorporated in a Master Plan for the Island. *We want to keep the Island's quaint style and natural ambiance. However, we have a great opportunity to make this an even more unique and beautiful place - the jewel of Martin County. The Island provides amenities that no other island can boast; the new Elliott Museum, the expanding Florida Oceanographic Society, the House of Refuge, and quiet beaches that are accessible at many locations (and for free) - what a great asset!*

Solution

We would very much like to work with the MC Commissioners and other groups, such as the Tourism Development Council in defining these items in a more actionable plan as well as help determine funding solutions.

The following is an update of the original Master Plan priority list developed by the Coalition in conjunction with the Martin County Engineering department. The original Plan included projects for the traffic signal at the intersection of Florida Oceanographic and Stuart Beach, St. Lucie Inlet dredging, and Beach Restoration. These items were eliminated because they have been completed; although, St. Lucie Inlet and Beach Restoration are continuing issues and we appreciate the Commissioners continued support of these projects. They will fall out of the scope of this Plan.

1. **Landscaping along A1A.** There are many areas along A1A that is in need of landscaping. In particular we would like to see landscaping in the areas on both sides of A1A from MacArthur Boulevard to the Elliott museum, the area before the new Oceanside Resort to Jensen Beach, and coming onto the Island from the Jensen Beach Causeway to the Roundabout. A master template of the types of landscaping would need to be developed. A master landscaping plan would give a template to use for businesses, organizations, and condo associations considering landscaping along A1A and would bring consistency to the Island. This would especially be important to have with those projects we currently have in development such as the new Oceanside Resort, Elliott and Galleon on the River.

Action Plan:

- Lucido & Associates (with input from Gene Barnes, our resident Landscaping Architect) will make a master “theme” landscape plan for the Island. Approval by the MC Commissioners and Coalition. Lucido has come up with a master landscape plan with a plant and tree palette that will be used on the Island. The Coalition has approved these plans. We await the Commissioners’ and FDOT approval.
- Meet with the Elliott Museum and Holiday Inn team to discuss landscape plans to determine if they have changes to the master plan and can implement with their development plans. Unfortunately, the Elliott Museum had already installed their landscaping. However, for the most part, they are using the plant/tree palette that the Coalition has approved. Lucido is also designing the landscaping for Oceanside Resort and will use the plant palette for the Island.
- Erik Ferguson (MC Engineering) and the Coalition to determine where on the island we would like landscaping improvements. Erik and Lucido will need to determine if

there are any FDOT requirements, such as easements or set backs that will need to be considered. Jane Krebs (Lucido), Erik and a couple of members from the Coalition had an initial meeting with the FDOT and went through the plans for Phase 1. There were a couple of items that needed to be changed, but for the most part, the plans are ready for submission to the FDOT for permitting. The FDOT did not follow-through on their promise to landscape the area referred to as the “swamp” after they removed the “exotics,” nor have we been able to get a transfer of the right-of-way for the area. This needs to be resolved soon. Currently, both county staff and a MC consultant have spent time determining if the “swamp” area is truly a protected wetland or a drainage ditch. This is an important question that will greatly affect what improvements we can make and the design cost.

- Get cost estimates for each project. Lucido has provided an estimate for the Phase 1 portion of the project.
- Prioritize the different projects. The “swamp” area and the east side of A1A from MacArthur to the Elliott have been identified as the highest priorities. Once we know the amount of dollars that are available, we can add to the items that will be completed.
- Find funding. We need to find additional funding sources, such as grants, that can be acquired.

2. **Enhancements to the Roundabout at Jensen Beach.** This project entails widening A1A at Jensen Beach to allow a turning lane coming south from St. Lucie County turning right to go off the Island and a turning lane coming east from the causeway to turn right onto A1A. It would also be beneficial to work with Oceanside Properties (new owners of the old Holiday Inn) to determine if they could help with funding to make a second lane to turn right into Jensen Beach.

Action Plan:

- Currently the engineering department has almost completed it’s design plan for this project. Once they are finished, they will send it to Michael Walwerk, who is the “expert” on roundabouts, to review. Once Michael gives his approval, then the engineering department will meet with the Coalition on finalizing the plan. Timing for final review is November. Funding has already been approved for the project. The

roundabout schedule is on target to implement in May, 2014. Our consultant has submitted plans and MC Engineering has met with South Florida Water Management District to discuss wetland and mangrove issues. This meeting went well and it is not anticipated that environmental permitting will delay the project.

3. **Pedestrian Crossings.** This project requires that a visible indicator (e.g., stamped asphalt) across A1A be installed from condominiums (e.g., Hutchinson House and SandPebble), developments (e.g., Joe's Point) or public facilities (e.g., beach parking at Stokes beach) on the west side of A1A to the east side. This is seen as a safety issue. It will not only slow traffic down on A1A (which people typically are driving over the speed limit), but provides a safe place for people to cross a busy roadway. The design phase of this project is high priority and needs to be completed as soon as possible because we have projects that are in progress and require crossings.

Action Plan:

- MC Engineering and members of the Coalition will determine the materials and look for all crossings. Since A1A is a state road, we will need to get approval for crosswalks that are more visible to vehicular traffic (such as colored, stamped asphalt) and possibly a landscaped median, providing for a "safe area" for people crossing up to four or five lanes of traffic (which includes turn lanes).
- MC Engineering and Coalition to determine where we should place the crossings and prioritize the projects. MC Engineering has made one crosswalk study and found that Hutchinson House, indeed, is in need of a crosswalk. There are still areas, suggested by residents, that need studying. We are hoping that these studies can be identified and scheduled in February or March of 2014.
- Any crossings across A1A would probably need the approval of FDOT; MC Engineering would need to prepare permitting process. MC Engineering had a meeting with FDOT to define the scope of the crosswalk project and provided FDOT with crash data for A1A. We are waiting for FDOT feedback.
- Once a "look" is finalized, we would probably need to **immediately** talk to FDOT regarding the Stuart Beach/Florida Oceanographic/Publix crossing since traffic signal is due to be installed sometime this year - which has already been approved and ready to go, but does not meet the crossing requirements of the Coalition. Since the

original Master Plan was submitted, the FDOT has installed the traffic signal at this location. However, nothing was done to help identify the crosswalks to vehicular traffic. Once a material has been established that can be used on A1A (e.g., stamped asphalt), this area will need to be revisited.

- Meeting with the new owners of the Oceanside Resort would also need to be included in talks because they will have a pedestrian crossing for their “extra” parking requirements on the west side of A1A. Several meetings with the FDOT and Oceanside Properties have occurred. The results of those meetings have not been finalized. However, we would possibly want to use their crosswalk(s) as a prototype for the Island.
- We received several comments from residents at the Open House regarding the speed limit of 45 mph on A1A and the safety of those trying to cross A1A. Out of all the comments we received, all but one, wanted the speed limit reduced. One of the problems with the current speed limit is that people feel that the “maximum” speed limit is 55 mph (10 mph over the posted speed limit) and we find people continually going at high-speeds. A study needs to be done to see if the current speed limit is safe and if FDOT determines that 45 mph is a safe speed, then it needs to be enforced.

4. **Landscaped Medians.** Lucido has provided a sample of what a landscaped median would look like as well as identified the areas in Phase 1 where landscaped medians could be placed.

Action Plan:

- Waiting approval from FDOT.

5. **Signage to the Island.** This signage would be more of monument type of signs that would welcome visitors to the Island and be a visible recognition of the island. We also need to consider lighting for the signage. Signage should be placed for the best entry and exit visibility.

Action Plan:

- MC Engineering to determine whether there could be placement of signs in a median. If there is not a place in a median, then determine the location on the side of A1A that could accommodate a sign at each entrance to the island. Lucido and Associates has identified several areas where signage would be appropriate and possible “looks.” The residents of Hutchinson Island have made it clear that they do not want anything that is too large (e.g., one of the ideas from Lucido was a 25-foot sign that could be seen from the top of the causeway). The residents identified several different spots that would be acceptable to them.
- Coalition and MC Engineering, depending on the location, get artist rendering of options that would be acceptable and the cost of signage. No definite idea was a “real winner” from the Open House. We will need to pursue different ideas on how to come up with the best “branding / logo” to identify our Island (e.g., professional organization, artists).
- Find funding. Perhaps through Public Arts dollars, Visitors and Tourism Bureau, and/or grants. It is obvious that the MSTU increase alone is not going to accomplish all that needs to be done with safety, landscaping, etc. We will need the Commissioners to help in identifying the money that should be spent on signage for the Island and how signage can be funded.

6. **Signage on the Island.** During the last couple of years, many residents have complained about the height of the Mobil and Wells Fargo signs that were erected on the Island. Although both are “legal” according to MC building and permitting laws; this type of sign is not what the residents want for the Island. To eliminate any further signs such as these from being erected, we feel that a specific sign ordinance for the Island needs to be established. The issue of sign clutter has also become an issue. For example, close to the north end of the Island, there is about 25 signs that say “No Parking” in a small area; why not have one sign at each entrance to the Island that has “No Parking along A1A roadway?”

Action Plan:

- Investigate and review other communities sign ordinances. Prepare request to Commissioners.

- Identify all signs on the the Island. Recommend signage changes to Commissioners/FDOT.

7. **Sprucing up the public entrances to the beach accesses.** The entrances to the beach accesses need some type of consistent identifier landscaping and possibly interesting pavers (or design) for the entrances. There is one entrance in St. Lucie County that has a paver entrance with a turtle design in the pavers. Perhaps we could do something similar with our Sailfish emblem or whatever becomes our “branding/logo” for the Island. Beach accesses was a topic of comment during the Open House. For the most part, the beach entrances are not very visible and you wouldn’t know they were there unless someone told you. Since our beaches are so critical to MC, we need to come up with a plan that identifies our beach entrances.

Action Plan:

- With members of the Coalition, Parks department and possibly the Visitors and Tourism Bureau, design a “template” for an attractive look for the entrances. This is a project that will be addressed once implementation of Phase 1 gets started.
- Present and get approval for the design from the Coalition. Present to the MC Commissioners.
- Find funding. Possibly Tourism bureau, grants or a combination of one or more of these options.

8. **Cleaning up the Island - Curbing/Stopping Littering.** This was a topic that was a concern of many residents during the Open House. It is a constant battle to keep our Island clean. Many residents pick up bags of garbage every day along the roadway, on the Causeways and on the beach.

Action Plan:

- We need to work with the Commissioners and Park’s department to come up with some creative methods to eliminate the littering on the Island (e.g., enforcement of fines and possibly raising the fines for littering, waste cans on the beach and on Causeways, raking the beaches, some type of education program, some type of “report a litterer” program, review other counties’ programs).

9. **Sidewalks on MacArthur Boulevard to Sailfish Point.** This project includes sidewalk from A1A to Bathtub Beach. Since biking and walking is a big safety issue once you make the turn parallel to the ocean, we might want to consider wider sidewalks in this area to accommodate both bikers and walkers. The sidewalks have already been installed from A1A to the tennis courts. We need to consider continuing this project to Sailfish Point. [This was brought up as a safety issue at the Open House.](#)

Action Plan:

- Currently we can probably continue this project to about the House of Refuge. South of the House of Refuge, we will need to get homeowners to donate some of their property for an easement so that sidewalks can be installed. Perhaps we can put a project plan and cost analysis together for Phase 2 of this project to the House of Refuge.
- Get a plan together to present to the homeowners south of House of Refuge for Phase 3 of the project. Once approval is received from homeowners, proceed with a project plan/cost analysis for this phase.

10. **Underground Utilities.** This is a project that requires all the utilities to be buried underground. With the barrier island vulnerable to high winds and hurricanes, this is a critical issue. Although the Coalition understands this is a very long-term goal, we would like the MC Commissioners to recognize that this is a project that should be considered in the future and to put it into a Master Plan for consideration over the next number of years. Especially when improvement projects come up like the Elliott Museum and the old Holiday Inn, it may be an option to put underground utilities in as new enhancement projects on the island occurs. [This was a subject that was also a concern at the Open House. MC Commissioners need to give us guidance on how this can be accomplished in the future.](#)

11. **Continue the Long-term plan for the Island.** [Once the Phase 1 plan is started, a plan for the rest of the Island needs to be continued \(e.g., identify areas where landscaping needs to be enhanced, identify added or modified crosswalks and sidewalks, a plan for the area north and across from the Elliott Museum, lighting options for the Island\).](#)

12. **Should the MC Hutchinson Island Coalition be an “official” Martin County Committee?** We need to get the opinion from the Commissioners on this question. What does it require? Does this need to be established by the Commissioners? Do we need to have regularly scheduled meetings? What is the reporting criteria?