

Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative



Newsletter May 2022

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HIPI HOSTS ANNUAL MEETING AT ELLIOTT MUSEUM

The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative (HIPI) held its 2022 Annual Meeting on March 30 at 7:00 p.m. at the Elliott Museum. We send our thanks to Elliott Museum CEO Rob Steele and the Elliott Museum staff for generously donating the meeting space and for being such gracious hosts.

Over 75 people were in attendance to hear the presentations from our four speakers: Deputy Martin County Administrator, Don Donaldson, Director of Martin County Public Works, Jim Gorton, Stuart Mayor Merritt Matheson and South Florida Water Management District board member, Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch.

Mr. Donaldson and Mr. Gorton discussed current and planned Martin County projects related to Hutchinson Island, including the new fire station, inlet dredging, renovations at the House of Refuge, the current condition of our beaches, beach renourishment, kayak and paddle board access across from Jensen Beach beach, the new sea wall at Bathtub Beach in 2023, repaving and elevating MacArthur Boulevard from Bathtub Beach to Sailfish Point, and the Hutchinson Island MSTU, a special tax only for Hutchinson Island properties. For more information on the MSTU, please see "HUTCHINSON ISLAND MSTU" on page 2 of this newsletter.

Mayor Matheson discussed current and planned projects in Stuart to improve water quality and help the local environment, including stormwater projects to reduce nutrients flowing into the rivers, living and buffered shorelines in downtown Stuart and Shepherd Park, the East Stuart tree project, and a pilot composting project. Mayor Matheson also shared a link to a page on the Martin Metropolitan Planning Organization website that shows growth and development throughout Martin County: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b1364d1c59e44fdb9189918c8158816e>.

Ms. Thurlow-Lippisch discussed what she called a profoundly important cultural shift in the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) in 2018 when Governor DeSantis appointed the first truly environmental board in the District's history. She described the current legislative issues, including Bill 2508, the status of the revision of the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM), current and planned SFWMD projects including the C44 reservoir in western Martin County, the first of the planned stormwater management reservoirs to be completed, and the triad of agencies responsible for water quality in South Florida.

A question-and-answer session with all speakers followed the presentations. To view videos of the entire 2022 Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative Annual Meeting, please visit our website: <https://www.hipimartin.com/>

Hutchinson Island Beautification

Category	Non-concurrency
Project Number	2028A
Location	Hutchinson Island
District	One
Project Limits	Beautification, traffic enhancements and safety improvements based on 2012 Master Plan and a Community Strategic Plan approved by the BOCC
Related Projects	
Lead Dept/Division	Public Works/Capital Projects
Year Project Initiated	2012



DESCRIPTION

The Hutchinson Island Coalition is a volunteer organization that consists of members from the Hutchinson Island community of homeowners.

HUTCHINSON ISLAND MSTU

Martin County Hutchinson Island property owners pay two Metropolitan Service Taxing Unit (MSTU) taxes: the first tax began in 1995 to collect local taxes to contribute to the cost of beach renourishment. The second tax was requested in 2011 by the Hutchinson Island Coalition (HIC) to fund island beautification, designated as Project 2028A in the Martin County Capital Improvement Plan.

The HIC asked the County Commissioners to double the Hutchinson Island MSTU for five years to pay for projects they wanted to complete on the island. That request was granted, and by March 2018, \$640,000 in MSTU dollars had been spent on A1A beautification near the entrance to MacArthur Boulevard.

For the complete history of the Hutchinson Island MSTU, please visit our website:
<https://www.hipimartin.com/hutchinson-island-mstu>

By November 2018, the Hutchinson Island Coalition ceased to exist. The group's authority to speak for or represent all island HOAs and property owners was discredited when island residents successfully protested the HIC-requested street lights along Northeast Ocean Boulevard.
<https://www.tcpalm.com/story/opinion/columnists/gil-smart/2018/06/12/island-residents-mobilize-kill-lighting-project-gil-smart/690389002/>

<https://www.tcpalm.com/story/opinion/readers/2018/07/04/victory-common-sense-island-lighting/753905002/>

Even though the HIC no longer exists and the requested tax increase was supposed to end in 2017, Hutchinson Island property owners continue to contribute \$106,650 annually to fund the HIC's plans. In 2022, that portion of the MSTU is scheduled to increase at Commissioner Smith's request.

HIPI has asked why the tax continues, why the tax will increase in 2022, and why the Martin County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) continues to cite the Hutchinson Island Coalition as the guiding organization for the expenditure of these funds. We still are waiting on answers to those questions and will share that information when we have it.

As of March 30, the Project 2028A fund had a balance of \$418,000.

Please monitor our website and social media for continued information about this MSTU.

UPDATE: RURAL LIFESTYLE AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Despite emails from high-profile Discovery Land Company clients like Tom Brady and Michael Strahan urging commissioners to support the Atlantic Fields project, the Martin County Commission voted on April 19 to table the requested change to the Comprehensive Plan to allow for a rural lifestyle land designation.

Lucido and Associates on behalf of Becker Holding Company and Discovery Land Company had requested the change. “Tom Hurley, of Becker Holding Co. wants to build 317 single-family homes and an 18-hole golf course on 1,530 acres in Hobe Sound, on the north side of Southeast Bridge Road, one mile east of Interstate 95.

But under the current agricultural land-use designation, density would be limited to one home per 20 acres. Additionally, water and sewer service would not be available to the property, which is located outside the county’s urban service areas.

To address these hurdles, a consultant for Hurley and his development partner, Discovery Land Co., suggested Martin County enact a new land-use designation —rural lifestyle.” <https://www.tcpalm.com/story/news/2022/02/23/martin-county-could-ok-new-land-use-category-rural-lifestyle/6851113001/>

What might happen next isn’t clear, but based on Discovery Land Company’s history, the company will not be so easily dissuaded to abandon the project. Discovery Land Company’s business is the development of “slow-moving, time-consuming residential developments in resort communities.” Its first planned development in California took 18 years to build 28 homes on 30 acres. Discovery Land Company’s owner Mike Meldman “learned how to develop through every possible environmental roadblock, at a time when environmental guidelines were not as exhaustive as they are now. That experience would serve him well on future developments with larger stakes.” <https://csq.com/2020/06/how-discovery-land-companys-mike-meldman-develops-the-worlds-most-exclusive-private-clubs-and-resort-communities/- .YpHTcy-B00o>

Meldman also is one of the founders, with George Clooney and Rande Gerber, of Casamigos vodka. The three sold Casamigos in 2017 for \$700 million plus \$300 million in future brand performance. Meldman and Discovery Land Company have very deep pockets, no debt, a foundation that pours money into children’s charities in its resort communities, and a laundry list of celebrity clients. History shows Meldman to be a patient and persistent developer, so we shouldn’t be surprised to see the Atlantic Fields project on the County Commission agenda soon.

Please use the link above to read a detailed article on Mike Meldman and the history of Discovery Land Company. <https://discoverylandco.com/>

Changes to HIPI Board of Directors

We were sad to say goodbye to HIPI founders and board members Sue and Jim Foley, but wish them much happiness as they move cross-country to live closer to their family. While Sue and Jim can never be replaced, we are delighted to welcome Mary Jo Askew to the board of directors. Mary Jo is a part-time resident of Hutchinson House and has a passion for Hutchinson Island. Please join us in welcoming Mary Jo!

FROM OUR LAST NEWSLETTER: UPDATES ON SENATE BILL 2508 and HOUSE BILL 349

<https://www.wptv.com/news/political/to-the-point/south-florida-environmentalists-react-to-sb-2508>

Lawmakers amended Senate Bill 2508 “a controversial water bill...after several people, including Governor Ron DeSantis, voiced opposition.

Senate Bill 2508 sought to ensure existing legal users of water from Lake Okeechobee didn't have their supplies diminished. The bill was amended in the Florida Senate to make it clear the environment is a priority, left the 2017 water resources law untouched and tweaked language that may have hindered the South Florida Water Management District.”

Despite the changes, environmental and clean water advocates continue their objections and have urged Governor DeSantis to reject the bill that continues to protect the interests of big sugar. Gil Smart, the policy director for Friends of the Everglades, stated, “...we still got a lot of questions. The base line is why are politicians in Tallahassee meddling in south Florida water management water shortage rules?” <https://www.wqcs.org/2022-03-11/legislature-approves-final-version-of-sb-2508>



Florida House Bill 349 co-sponsored by Martin County's state representative Toby Overdorf, “would allow coastal developers, — whose projects would have ‘unavoidable impacts’ on the ecosystem, such as seagrass destruction — to buy credits and fund seagrass restoration elsewhere. The principle behind mitigation banking isn't new. Developers already do it for wetlands. And polluters can buy carbon credits to offset their emissions. But because the bill doesn't address enforcement or a crackdown on nutrient pollution plaguing the Indian River Lagoon, it was met with criticism during a Dec. 1 House Environment, Agriculture and Flooding Subcommittee meeting.” Max Chesnes <https://www.tcpalm.com/story/news/local/indian-river-lagoon/2022/01/05/florida-legislature-2022-environment-bills-manatees-seagrass-bacteria-sugar-pfas-particle-emissions/8980876002/>

The bill was widely opposed by conservation groups, including HIPI, and was indefinitely postponed and withdrawn from consideration in March.

Update on Army Corps of Engineers and Lake Okeechobee

Paul Laura, HIPI Environmental Officer

The Army Corps of Engineers has announced that their Environmental Impact Study draft will be released within the next few months. This draft should address cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) issues and other environmental impacts that the new regulations (including SB 2508) could/would affect.

The Corps is still studying how best to control lake levels and discharges. That review should be released by the end of the year when the dike upgrades are completed.

The new LOSOM (Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual), replacing the current LORS (Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule), is scheduled to come into effect in April 2023.

One of the advantages of LOSOM is that there will be more flexibility to reduce lake levels. This flexibility will be enhanced when the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) reservoir is completed, giving the Corps the ability to send more water south into the Everglades.



Hutchinson Island Presidents’ Council of Martin County
John Hodge, HIPI Board Liaison to Presidents’ Council

The Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative (HIPI) is pleased to announce that we have initiated steps to encourage the formation of the Hutchinson Island Presidents’ County of Martin County. A similar organization, Presidents’ Council of St. Lucie County Hutchinson Island, is currently operational in St. Lucie County. The mission statement of that group is to work together to seek to maintain and enhance the lives of the owners and residents of St. Lucie County Hutchinson Island. HIPI envisions the Presidents’ Council of Martin County would be a group that would serve as a resource to one another, working together on common concerns and projects.

To support this initiative, the following has occurred:

- Three meetings have been hosted which have been positively received by those in attendance.
- Conversations between those attendees have commenced with positive feedback to date.
- During the last meeting on May 11, attendees requested that HIPI share their email information so that the conversation could continue beyond the scheduled meeting

HIPI will always serve as a resource to the Council, but our goal is to provide leadership and administrative support until the Council is established and can operate independently. The next meeting of the Council is tentatively scheduled for August, as many participants will be away during the summer months.

John Hodge and Ralph Jones are now serving as the HIPI board members helping guide the Presidents’ Council. Please feel free to contact them at hipi.stuart@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Upcoming Martin County Commissioners Meetings and Martin MPO Meetings

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 6/2 9:00 BOCC joint meeting with school board | 8/9 9:00 BOCC |
| 6/7 9:00 BOCC | 8/16 9:00 BOCC |
| 6/20 9:00 MPO | 8/19 9:00 MPO |
| 7/12 9:00 BOCC | 9/13 9:00 BOCC |
| 7/18 9:00 BOCC Budget Workshop | 9/13 5:00 BOCC 1st Budget Hearing |
| 7/19 9:00 BOCC Budget Workshop | 9/27 9:00 BOCC |
| | 9/27 5:00 BOCC 2nd Budget Hearing |

All meetings will be held at the Martin County Administrative Center, 2401 SE Monterey Road, except the 6/2 joint meeting with the school board, which will be at the Blake Library.

HIPI ASKED THE QUESTION THAT MAY SAVE TAXPAYERS THOUSANDS

Taken from a letter submitted by Stuart attorney, Virginia Sherlock



Many Martin County residents have sent e-mails and made phone calls to Martin County Commissioners and staff about the unpublicized plan to re-locate at least 18 gopher tortoises and to bulldoze 26 burrows on County-owned property at Witham Field, where an \$8 million Fire Rescue Training Center is to be built.

Since there are no licensed gopher tortoise preserves in Martin County and no licensed preserves could accommodate the tortoises within the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FFWCC) required 100 miles of the gopher turtles homes, staff planned to move the tortoises to a preserve in Desoto County--at a cost pf more than \$1110,000 to Martin County taxpayers.

Faced with strenuous objections from residents and a request from Commissioner Heard for a public presentation at a BOCC meeting to answer questions, staff responded that the FFWCC's restrictions left them no alternative, but they planned to look into alternatives for future gopher tortoise re-locations.

Kudos to the Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative (HIPI), whose president contacted the FFWCC gopher tortoise team and learned that it may be possible to get an exception to the re-location regulation for the airport gopher tortoises. Martin County staff had simply failed to ask for that consideration.

After Martin County staff was asked to explain why that alternative was not pursued, staff finally called FFWCC. The gopher tortoise team representative reports that she has now directed staff to resources that may provide an alternative to re-locating the airport tortoises out of Martin County. That would not only save this environmental resource -- gopher tortoises are identified as a threatened species in Florida -- but could also save taxpayers the huge cost of re-location.

If it weren't for concerned residents who care about our environment, our tax dollars, and our quality of life, the gopher tortoises and commensal species that share their burrows might forever be lost to Martin County. Citizens should continue to demand answers and action from staff on this issue.

HIPI picked up the gopher tortoise ball and ran with it. Let's not let staff drop it.

REQUEST A SPEAKER

Does your group want to know more about the Hutchinson Island Preservation Initiative?

Email hipi.stuart@gmail.com and one of our board members will be happy to attend your group's meeting and give a very brief presentation on HIPI's history and current work.

Is there a topic or issue you or your group would like to know more about?

Email hipi.stuart@gmail.com and let us know what topics you or your group are interested in. We want to bring speakers to the island to address the concerns of all island residents.



Join HIPI!

There's strength in numbers! We need your help!

When developers tried to make changes to Hutchinson Island that threaten the four story, 40 foot height limit, or endanger our animals and waters, HIPI was instrumental in preventing those changes.

Our efforts stopped the 2018 project that would have installed hundreds of lights along A1A. Our questions and website and social media posts also prevented new construction on Hutchinson Island that would have included a 50+ ft tower. We were able to stop these changes to our beloved island because of the help of thousands of supporters who love Hutchinson Island and who publicly denounced these changes with us. When we speak together, our collective voices are loud and clear.

Your membership in HIPI allows us to show that you, too, care about preserving and protecting Hutchinson Island in Martin County. Your membership adds your contact information to our data base, so we can send you information about activities on the island that may affect Hutchinson Island. And, most importantly, you will be the first to know when we issue or endorse an urgent call to action. Dues are only \$20/per person/year and help pay for operational costs, facilities rental and other expenses.

If you're already a member of HIPI, THANK YOU! Please renew your membership and continue to help us preserve and protect Hutchinson Island in Martin County.

Visit our website, www.hipimartin.com, to pay online or mail the membership form below.

*First Name _____

*Last Name _____

*Email _____

*Membership Category

_____ HUTCHINSON ISLAND MARTIN COUNTY RESIDENT MEMBER

_____ MARTIN COUNTY ASSOCIATE MEMBER

_____ NON-RESIDENT ASSOCIATE MEMBER (INCLUDES SEASONAL RENTERS)

_____ HUTCHINSON ISLAND MARTIN COUNTY BUSINESS ASSOCIATE MEMBER

_____ BUSINESS ASSOCIATE MEMBER

*Name of HOA (or please type private residence) _____

Name of Business, if applicable _____

Address _____

Condo or Unit Number, if applicable _____

*City _____ *State _____ *Zip _____

*Member Opts in for Emails _____ Yes _____ No

Phone _____

Interested in Serving on Committee? _____ YES _____ NO

*Payment Type: CASH _____ CHECK # _____

*Name on check if different than member's name: _____

Please mail dues payments of \$20/member/year to

HIPI

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