



Volusia Forever Advisory Committee Listening Session Minutes



Wednesday, May 5, 2021

Beach Safety

515 S. Atlantic Ave., Daytona Beach, FL 32118

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Mary Anne Connors, Chair
Wanda Van Dam, Vice Chair
Gerald Fieser
John Gamble
Derrick Orberg
Suzanne Scheiber
Steve Crump
Derek LaMontagne (online)

STAFF PRESENT

Clay Ervin, Growth and Resource Management Director
Dona Butler, Community Services Director
Brad Burbaugh, Extension Services Director
Ryan Ossowski, Chief Financial Officer
Ginger Adair, Environmental Management Director
Tim Baylie, Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Director
Russ Brown, Senior County Attorney
Danielle Dangleman, Special Project Coordinator
Nick Dunnam, Land Management Activity Manager
Sarah Presley, Administrative Coordinator

Call to order:

Chair Connors called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Presentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUOCP7ag48k>

Public Participation

Kelly McGee, Executive Director of the Riverside Conservancy, stated she would like to urge the Committee to continue the small lot acquisition program, and expand it to include waterfront areas to promote clean water. She stated that there partnerships that can leverage Forever dollars. She suggested there might be synergies between Volusia Forever and the ECHO programs to explore.

Chair Connors asked Ms. McGee what she thought the waterfront area priorities were.

Ms. McGee responded that priorities, conservation and acquisition differs depending on location. She said that priorities would be public properties, riverside conservancy and helping property owners.

Ms. McGee stated that the purpose of her organization was to make it cheap and easy to do the right thing. She said that they go after grants to restore living shorelines, oyster and clam beds. She explained that in order to accomplish those tasks you must have access to the land, so there was a need for conservation easements on living shorelines.

David Hargrove, Conservation Chair for Halifax River Audubon, informed the committee that the Halifax River Audubon would celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2 years.

Mr. Hargrove said that the Halifax River Audubon worked very hard back in the early 1970's to preserve the Loop and other endangered lands in our county, explaining that they did not have a program like Volusia Forever on which to draw in order to save the lands they worked to preserve.

He said he feels that we need to maintain the organizational structure of Volusia Forever like it has been since its inception, saying that the oversight committee should assure that properties under consideration for purchase are consistent with the purposes and goals expressed in both the ballot language and council resolution.

Mr. Hargrove stated the implementation and procedures should be based on objective standards for environmental values, management decisions and considerations and the potential for partnership and independent appraisals. He believes that every effort should be made to partner with other state and federal entities in seeking matching funds for land purchases.

He said the availability of this funding offers a unique opportunity for Volusia County to complete its Volusia Conservation Corridor. Mr. Hargrove provided a written statement which can be found as part of the meeting minutes.

Chair Connors reported the state has come through in a big way this year, and she believes the opportunities are readily available. She asked staff what maps or documents are used by the county to develop priorities.

Ginger Adair, Environmental Management Director, said that when they were working on the reauthorization, staff looked at a GIS analysis to identify gaps particularly in areas where we have large conservation acreage.

Ms. McGee stated that there are many resources available, including maps, webinars etc. She said the more that you could match up with partners the smoother the process will be.

Chair Connors asked for an explanation of what guides the committee in terms of overlapping goals and purposes so that we are able to determine available partners and common benefits.

Ms. McGee advised that there were many tools that can be used, such as GIS which can look at anywhere in the state of Florida and has the capability to zoom in to find out things such as nutrients, at risk areas for water quality and many more.

Chair Connors would like explanation of small lots and the benefits.

Kellie McGee states that these are parcels with no access. The only way to develop the parcel is if an entity came in and acquired all of those rights. Once the rights are acquired then you could do long range planning.

Member Fieser asked how to identify and put a value on those environmental properties and qualities that other properties in a comparable analysis may not have.

Kellie McGee replied that you could identify the properties by looking at what has been done historically.

Member Fieser asked how to get the process right in order to get the properties with environmental value.

Kellie McGee responds that it is important to have financial partners so you can get to the value; it is more than just an appraisal.

Ms. McGee stated that Volusia County received grant funding in the early 2000's and used it to hire two different consultants to do SROI analysis. In addition, the county sustainability action plan (SAP) talks about the sustainable return on investment.

Member Fieser stated there needs to be a value system for these properties.

Ms. Adair stated that the resiliency plan is ongoing.

Clay Ervin, Growth and Resource Management Director, showed an online interactive map of conservation easements.

Member Gamble asked if properties that have unpaid taxes come back under County ownership

Mr. Ervin replied in the affirmative, properties are escheated to the County and can be retained if there is a value in doing so.

Chair Connors asked for the acreage or footage of the small lots shown on the maps and what areas the committee should be looking at for preservation.

Clay Ervin, Growth and Resource Management Director, responded that we have to look at areas that will have the best use for environmental purposes.

Chair Connors asked about areas where development is imminent, whether in unincorporated area or in cities that should be looked at.

Mr. Ervin explained that an analysis was recently done of the water and sewer services, which allow for annexation into the cities and allow for development. State regulations of checks and balances have been removed and there is no longer a requirement to show a need for development to be allowed.

Member Fieser asked why developers will work with us if they are allowed to develop.

Mr. Ervin it will have to look at it to see if it is an effective tool with the willing seller requirement.

Member Van Dam noted there is a municipality that has 114 square mile service area with on 39 square miles incorporated. Discussion ensued.

Member Orberg asked if eminent domain would be used.

Mr. Ervin stated that was not something that would be allowed under the current program.

Discussion ensued regarding reintroduction of species of birds that are no longer found in this area.

With no further business, Chair Connors adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

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Statement at Volusia Forever Listening Session, 5/5/21

My name is David Hartgrove. I've been the Conservation Chair for Halifax River Audubon since 1987. Halifax River Audubon will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2 years, The man who held the post of Conservation Chair before me was Dr. Walter Boardman, for whom Boardman Lane in the Loop is named. Dr. Boardman and some of the other early environmental pioneers here, like Reid Hughes, Lee Bidgood, and Robert Haviland worked very hard back in the early 1970's to preserve the Loop and other endangered lands in our county. They did not have a program like Volusia Forever on which to draw in order to save the lands they worked to preserve.

I campaigned for Volusia Forever in 2000 and again last year for its renewal. We need to maintain the organizational structure of Volusia Forever as it's been since its inception, with a following improvements:

The oversight committee should assure that properties under consideration for purchase are consistent with the purposes and goals expressed in both the ballot language and Council resolution.

The implementation procedures should be based upon objective standards of environmental values, management considerations, potential for partnership, and independent appraisals. Decisions should be science based, not politically influenced.

Every effort should be made to partner with other state and federal entities in seeking matching funds for land purchases.

Volusia Forever should be insulated from political considerations to the fullest extent possible. County Council members should refrain from being involved in negotiations or the ranking of properties under consideration. This is the job of staff and the oversight committee. Obviously any County Council member having a financial interest in a property under review by the oversight committee should recuse themselves from all discussions involving that property.

The state legislature adjourned last Friday and for the first time since ratification of Amendment 1, there were significant funds appropriated for land conservation.

* \$100 million for Florida Forever

* \$75 million for springs, including land acquisition around springs

- * \$50 million for conservation easements within wildlife corridors.
- * \$43 million for state park improvements

and 300 million from federal COVID relief funds that have been made available for fee simple or conservation easements for wildlife corridors and linkages.

The availability of this funding offers an opportunity to complete the Volusia Conservation Corridor. We can do this by seeking partnerships with those state and federal partners that have matching funds available. It's imperative that bonding by Volusia Forever be implemented as soon as possible to begin taking advantage of these funding partnerships.

Thank you.

David Hartman 5/5/21