

Wastewater board to vote on public records procedures

BY CHARLOTTE TWINE
Free Press Staff

KEY LARGO — The sewer district's five-commissioner board was scheduled Dec. 1 to take action on procedures for public records requests as well as a construction project at Paradise Point Senior Living Center.

The Tuesday meeting took place after press time.

During the Nov. 17 board meeting of the Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District, a public records request by former General Manager Margaret Blank was discussed. Though Blank no longer works for the district, she often writes about it in her blog, *The Real Poop*, where she contends she still has an interest in district news due to still owning a home in Key Largo and being a taxpayer.

Blank had written an email to the board members pointing out that she had been charged by district staff for making a public records request, and the commissioners questioned whether the charge was fair or necessary.

The record request in question had to be conducted by consulting accountant firm Bishop, Rosasco & Co., and so it

incurred a charge of \$46.15

General Counsel Ray Giglio noted at the Nov. 17 meeting, "The board, in a situation where we've determined that there's been an extensive use of staff time or information technology, we can impose a charge."

"We have consultants that get hourly rates," Commissioner Andy Tobin said. "We have public documents, which may be in the possession of a consultant. I don't know why those documents are not in our possession."

Tobin said he didn't feel that the public should be charged for requesting a record that the staff decides to seek from a consultant who makes \$150 an hour, when "Margaret claims [it] is easily accessible."

Commissioner Steve Gibbs agreed.

"I think this discussion is good because now I think staff understands, more than ever, we want you to be as understanding and gentle with the public as possible," he said. "Don't allow anyone to abuse the system."

Tobin made a motion to waive Blank's charge but then withdrew the motion and said he would bring up the topic again when

all commissioners are present. Commissioner Robby Majeska was away in Tallahassee during the Nov. 17 meeting.

In the Nov. 3 meeting, the construction project at Paradise Point was discussed. The senior living center is in the Stillwright Point neighborhood behind Winn-Dixie, at mile marker 105, and it needs a dual buffer tank to be installed.

The buffer tank acts as a collector for sewage coming from the facility. There are buffer tanks installed through the district's service area when a property's flow exceeds what a typical vacuum-pit system could take. This is the case with the Paradise Point property, staff said.

Gibbs, who was concerned about the cost of the construction to the district, asked how many dwellings there were in the center. "There's enough to require a buffer tank?" he asked.

"This development in question here is 43 units," explained General Manager Paul Christian. "We're going to have assessment money we're going to be making on that ... [and] billing. So, in a way, this is kind of an investment. You know what I mean? We'll get this money back."

According to the Dec. 1 meeting agenda, the staff will recommend that the board give them authority to execute a contract with Homestead-based Redland Company Inc. for installing and connecting a dual buffer tank for \$34,000.

The board's next meeting is scheduled for 4 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 8, at its office in the median at mile marker 98.8.

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