

Village approves Aguilar move, mulls pedestrian bridge idea

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ISLAMORADA — The Village Council last week unanimously approved an amended contract for Village Manager Maria Aguilar that will move Islamorada's chief administrator back into her old position as director of finance.

The amended contract guarantees her employment for two years at \$120,000 annually.

Councilman Jim Mooney, who handled negotiation talks with Aguilar and Village Attorney Roget Bryan, said there would be no reduction in staff with this new move.

Discussions about having Aguilar vacate her current position began after she received less-than-favorable reviews on her annual evaluation from Mayor Deb Gillis and Councilman Mike Forster last month.

Although Councilman Dennis Ward previous-

ly spoke against removing Aguilar as village manager, he voted in favor of the amended contract. But he said his views on her demotion had not changed.

Public comment was heavily in favor of the work that had been accomplished under Aguilar, and wanted to keep her in that position.

"There's always more than the public knows, though," Mooney said.

Aguilar was appointed as village manager in early 2014.

The council also discussed a Florida Department of Transportation pilot program that will provide a collapsible pedestrian overpass walkway to be used in certain areas along U.S. 1 to alleviate some vehicular backups during high-traffic events.

It is expected to be used for about nine events in Key Largo, Islamorada and Marathon.

"Hopefully this leads to a permanent idea, because this [one walkway] is not

enough," Mooney said.

He wanted triple the amount of structures to be shared throughout the island chain.

"If there were three, we'd be in great shape," he said.

According to Forster, one walkway costs FDOT in excess of \$3 million.

The village, along with the other two entities, has submitted a ranked list of events for FDOT's consideration. In Islamorada it includes the Giant Nautical Flea Market, Island Fest, Woofstock, Spirit of Islamorada, the holiday festival and Full Moon parties. All those events are held at Founders Park, with the exception of the Full Moon parties, which occur monthly at Morada Bay and Pierre's Restaurant in downtown Islamorada.

Other council items included:

- Announcement of a meeting on June 20 and 21 with the state Department of Environmental Protection, Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water

Management District to discuss the current state of Florida Bay as it relates to the flow of freshwater throughout the Everglades. The first day will include an on-the-water trip followed by a public roundtable discussion the following morning.

- Reappointment approval of the village's Local Planning Agency Chair Pete Bachelor and Vice Chair Amy Knowles. LPA member Cheryl Culberson was also reappointed. Because she has served more than three consecutive years on the board, approval by the council is needed each subsequent year.

- Disapproval of a neighborhood-requested tree planting near Iroquois and Sunset drives on Lower Matecumbe Key to reduce traffic noise heard from U.S. 1. It was shot down, among other reasons, because of a lack of sufficient dry ground.

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