

Dear Commissioners:

While I had serious reservations at the start of the Canal Advisory Committee (CAC) process, let me begin by saying I do feel some good things came out of this and the related Study: we now have a realistic price for the Canal clean-up. We learned it is not the \$100 million plus bandied about previously by assorted County staff and former BOCC, but a mere \$15million for the entire project (\$1.5million/year over 10 yrs). I also do agree with much of what Jack Berlin said in his letter to you. I mainly and most adamantly disagree about 3 things: 1) how the CAC process went, 2) how responsibility for siltation and overgrowth of the canals was determined, and 3) how clean-up should be funded.

First, the entire CAC process was very subjective, County biased, and lead entirely by the facilitator (Martin Montalvo) who is County Stormwater Management Department staff. The County selected the CAC members, the County made the meeting agendas, the County set the meetings time and dates (if there needed to be a delay it was per the County schedule and too bad for citizens...we had some input, but it was mostly about our facilitator and room availability), and meetings were held in the County building. Our County facilitator spent most of the time talking...presenting what he (and County staff leadership) wanted presented. No citizen from the CAC ever presented anything substantive and our suggestions, like having someone from City of Cape Coral speak to us about their canal maintenance program (a City funded program, but Sarasota did present (a MSBU funded program)) were ignored. Sub-committees reviewed materials instead of the whole CAC, so only a few people had opportunity to comment on important things. The voting on the CAC was also problematic. More County representation was added to "balance" citizens (in reality override citizens) and those voting County members changed frequently throughout the process, while citizen representatives could not change and any citizen alternates could not vote. It was, largely, a circus, and people grew tired of fighting for a simply fair process.

I know many on the CAC voted for the MSBU plan because they were lead to believe that was the only way to accomplish the clean-up. Other possibilities were listed and dismissed by our facilitator without meaningful consideration or discussion. I and others requested review of realistic measures that would share the funding burden for cleaning up our public waters. Examples include a county wide \$1 (or other minimal amount) tax per house per year to be put toward cleaning up public water areas, a County boaters registration fee (minimal) and use of assorted available grants. Several such measures could be used simultaneously to achieve sufficient funding. In the end, the only funding mechanism being put forward is the MSBU, which places a high tax rate on waterfront homeowners only for many years to come. This creates a disturbing inequity in Hillsborough County. Many of those living in waterfront homes are people who have had these properties for many years - they are elderly and on a fixed income and/or not wealthy by any means. Dramatically raising their taxes will likely force them from the homes. This is disgraceful and certainly not the desired outcome of this process. One of my long time neighbors came literally crying to me just this week upon learning the CAC recommendation..."how can I afford this" she said, "how can this happen". I have no answers...but you do.

The MSBU plan will take about 5 years before the first shovel of muck is removed from the canals. By its nature, the plan implies that only the 4011 homeowners on the public canals are primarily responsible for and should thus pay for the clean-up, with the County paying little of the actual cost, given all the allowable "credits" and the cap. Waterfront homeowners are not primarily responsible for the silting in the canals. The Study does not indicate they are. In fact, the Study says little about responsibility because County staff defined the scope of the project before the CAC ever met. The basic questions most of us wanted answered are not answered by the Study. They were not built into the scope.

Here is my main message: ultimately, the County should step up and take responsibility for the public waterways that many boaters and fishermen use. When the County has a sewer main break, where does the spill go? Into the canals! Of the 120,000 septic tanks permitted by the County, where does the overflow from defective systems eventually go? Into the canals! When it rains, where does the stormwater carrying the debris from the roads go? Into the canals! These are not waterfront homeowner only contributions.

A pilot project in Baycrest collected, in just 39 sewer filter baskets, 5,282 pounds of debris that would have gone into the canals. This figure alone, plus that the waterways are PUBLIC, under County jurisdiction, indicate there is significant County responsibility. No County services or funds have been allocated to the canals in the last 50 yrs! I simply cannot believe that there is "no money" for this important project.

The BOCC has funded the Sunshine Trail for about \$15 million and recently funded maintenance of the Trail for \$1million/year to benefit how many people? There are far more than 4011 taxpaying citizens who would benefit and get use of clean canals every day for about the same cost. I'll bet far less than 4011 people use the trail every day (was a study done to determine its use before the project was initiated?).

The BOCC is elected to spend our money wisely, responsibly and for the greatest good. I recommend that the County take care of a significant portion of the clean-up and maintenance of the canals and water areas by putting a line item in the next available budget specifically for this project and use a more just method than only requiring those living on the water to shoulder most of the burden. I'm sure that over the next 5 budget years, you could find money to clean up the entire canal system. The MSBU approach, which requires waterfront homeowners to agree to a dramatic tax increase for the next 20 years, will fail. Most people will vote it down as it is unfair. Under this process, it will take at least 5 years before the clean-up is started and cost significantly more than the estimated \$15 million because of bond and financing issues. Even one of the County Attorneys sitting in on the CAC said there were legal issues involved. MSBUs are a bureaucratic mess!

Overall, I ask you to be proactive and take the initiative and responsibility to clean up our waterways. Fund it with a budget line item or use some of the CIT funds along with a more just approach than a MSBU.

Lastly, the CAC also voted on how to best spend the \$500,000 set aside to implement the Study recommendations. Most of it went to help defray the costs of an MSBU. Rather, I think the money is best used for another matter. The health department doesn't comprehensively test our waters, so there is no way to determine the safety for human uses (boating, fishing, swimming). Dr. Harwood of USF has proposed a study for \$220,000 which would examine whether fecal coliform counts (the indicator used by the Florida Department of Health to close Ben T Davis Beach nearly every summer) are from animals or humans. This would have been a much better use of some of the \$500,000 set aside.

Respectfully submitted, Bruno J. Schmidt, Representing Essex Downs on the CAC

PS. I apologize for the small font and spacing... I was limited to just one page for my dissenting opinion!