

Jack Berlin

April 2, 2007

Honorable Members of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners

Dear Commissioners:

Nearly two years ago, an eclectic group of citizens got together to study the sediment complaints in canals across our great county. Waterfront homeowners, government employees, environmental experts and other volunteers joined with two dedicated county project managers to tackle an issue that had been argued and fought about in front of the County Commission for nearly fifteen years.

When we first met, the only thing we could agree on was that we were in the same room. I, for one, am incredibly proud of what we overcame and what we accomplished. Every canal was different. Every person's view of the situation was different. The causes of the sediment were varied and inconsistent. But, the group found some traction and stayed focused on how to provide a countywide solution.

Is a lot of the silt from natural causes? Absolutely. Did county stormwater systems contribute to silting in these canals? Absolutely. What percentage was naturally occurring and what percentage was from stormwater systems? Well, that is the multi-million dollar question and we only had a couple of hundred thousand to spend, and even with millions more spent on studies an exact measure is still not possible. And again, every case is different. There are silt problems in Hillsborough County that are certainly mostly naturally occurring and others where it is obvious that much, and perhaps most, of the issues are from County causes.

Yet, solving the problem areas on a case by case basis is what has bogged the process down for years in the first place and is contrary to the goal of a countywide solution. Suffice it to say that this was a bitter pill for many of us to swallow, but swallow it we did. Yes, the waterfront homeowner benefits a great deal, but these waters are open and used by anyone that wants to enter for fishing, crabbing and recreation. Ultimately, cleaning these canals will benefit everyone. Law enforcement patrols these waters, so there is at least some acknowledgement of partial responsibility. How much is fair? We finally agreed upon 50-50, and moved on. This is the very nature of compromise.

Am I happy? No. Am I satisfied and proud of our efforts on your behalf? Definitely! Compromise means everyone gives some toward the greater benefit. The shared responsibility of these waterways will bring shared value to this entire county.

I urge you act swiftly and not allow government bureaucracy to kill our effort and progress. Don't require super majority votes to establish the MSBUs; 51% is a majority and is enough. Don't require future studies, just show resolve and put this in motion. If the process is short a few dollars, find them. We have come to a historic place for this county, so please seize the moment and make this county a better place through our combined efforts. Say to the waterfront citizens: "Why are you holding things up?"

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully submitted,



Jack Berlin
Chairperson