

**FORT MYERS BEACH  
TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING  
CONGESTION/MITIGATION STUDY OPTIONS REPORT  
MAY 14, 2004  
Town Hall-Council Chambers  
2523 Estero Boulevard  
FORT MYERS BEACH, FLORIDA**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** A special workshop meeting of the Fort Myers Beach Town Council was called to order on Friday, May 14, 2004 at 6:30 P.M. by Mayor Bill Thomas.

**Members present at the meeting:** The attendance was not announced. Mayor Thomas, Vice Mayor Garr Reynolds, and Councilman Don Massucco spoke near the end of the meeting.

**Excused absence from the meeting:** Councilman Howard Rynearson, Councilman Bill Van Duzer.

**Staff present at the meeting:** Town Manager Marsha Segal-George.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** All those present assembled and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**III. INTRODUCTION BY WORKSHOP MODERATOR – AL VAN HORN:**

Mr. Van Horn came forward and explained the purpose of the workshop. He recalled that he has been a property owner on Fort Myers Beach for 18 years and a resident for 12 years, and is a member of each of the 3 organizations that will participate in this workshop, as well as other committees including the incorporation committee which created the Town. He referenced a recent memo from Town Manager Marsha Segal-George that followed issuance of the study report. He said there was a clear need for better communication and public input. The 3 participating organizations were contacted and asked to create a subcommittee for the purpose of reviewing the study report and asked to select several issues out of the 1,100 page document that were deemed worthy of further study and review, and provide some recommendations. This workshop is the result. He explained that the Traffic Committee operating under the auspices of the Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce had been in existence prior to incorporation; the Civic Association has been in operation since 1990 and has several hundred members; and the Condominium Association has at this time over 30 condos as members, representing over 3,000 unit families. These committees selected several issues, with focus on short-term solutions, some of which will overlap and some of which will conflict. He asked that questions and comments be withheld until after the presentations and established ground rules for conduct of the workshop.

**A. PRESENTATION BY THE FORT MYERS BEACH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, TRAFFIC COMMITTEE – TOM MYERS:**

Mr. Myers was recognized by the moderator and came forward, advising he is Chairman of the Traffic Committee. He announced the names of those who served on this Committee, observing that there were many with experience and expertise in traffic issues. He recalled that it took 4 years to implement the alternating lights, which required revision to the County's traffic manual, and 3 years to install flex stakes to stop cars from speeding down the left turn lane, pointing out that persistence has produced results. He repeated a suggestion from Mr. Van Horn's opening remarks that Council direct all 3 groups, which have up to now met separately, to meet together to determine the best and most workable solutions.

He read a 3-page report from his Committee which referred to specific portions of the CRSPE report and the Committee's opinions and recommendations.

Specific recommendations were made pertaining to the Crescent St. and 5<sup>th</sup> St. area with respect to crosswalks, synchronized traffic signals, and left turn lane.

The Committee recommends adding 3 more trolleys for next Season, bringing the total to 6 trolleys, and the Next Bus system should be included as planned. He gave cost breakdowns for additional trolleys, with the increased trolley cost for 2005 estimated by LeeTran as \$131,789.00.

The Committee recommends that the Tram and Trolley Lane study proceed, but that the 6 trolley system be implemented and further investigation of safety and other issues be made before any physical changes are undertaken. He expressed concern with access for emergency vehicles.

The Committee also recommended a system of large electronic signage and a system of 4 live TV cameras be utilized to provide travel time estimates and visual information about traffic conditions along the Island. This information can be fed to the Town TV Channel and/or various websites and cable systems; Florida DoT has expressed willingness to install the cameras. The Committee obtained cost estimates for purchase at approximately \$1,000.00 each, or a \$4,000.00 investment by the Town for 4 cameras, which would be placed at specific sites. This information would provide the public with current conditions and help them decide whether or not to travel at a given time.

The Committee strongly recommended that Council assign a competent Staff person to have overall responsibility for traffic mitigation for Fort Myers Beach to work with the committees. It is not recommended that an additional position be created for this purpose.

The Committee also recommended that alternating light signage should be improved. Mr. Myers advised that the alternating light is in the process of being installed permanently; the major issue at this time is that the support structure be sufficient to survive storms.

Mr. Van Horn added that the alternating light has been accepted by the public this year.

#### **B. PRESENTATION BY CONDO ASSOCIATION – AL VAN HORN:**

Mr. Van Horn advised that he will be presenting this report because the chair and other individuals involved are out of the area at this time. This is an association of 33 condominium boards of directors, and over 4,000 unit owners. On April 20, 2004 the entire monthly meeting was devoted to reviewing and evaluating the 5 reports as requested by Ms. Segal-George.

This committee also had specific comments and recommendations about the Crescent and 5<sup>th</sup> Street area.

Aerial tram was discussed, with the conclusion of this committee that very little reduction in traffic would result and would not be cost effective.

Water ferry and taxi report – there was much interest in a water taxi, but mostly from the standpoint of a tourist attraction rather than traffic mitigation. The committee felt that a private enterprise with support from the Town might slightly reduce traffic.

Construction of a mid-Island bridge was discussed with the result that the Committee concluded that there are so many negative issues that a mid-Island bridge could not be justified.

Parking strategies report – A multistory parking facility with direct off and on ramps from the bridge was discussed but not supported by this Committee.

#### **C. PRESENTATION BY CIVIC ASSOCIATION – TOM MERRILL:**

Mr. Van Horn introduced Mr. Merrill, who presented the Civic Association's report. He introduced Warren and Mary Ann Babcock and Susie Edington, who are also members of this subcommittee which was formed under the auspices of the Civic Association to study this specific issue of traffic. He remarked that involvement of the community in traffic mitigation indicates a big change in Town government and expressed appreciation for this workshop. He expressed disappointment with the CRSPE report as providing some action plans with rather limited goals, minimal parameters for guidance, and little cost benefit information. Some ideas offer potential for testing, such as an expanded trolley and park-and-ride system such as Mr. Myers presented, but he said a proper perspective is still needed to view the situation. Goals must be clarified, and a better consensus must be formed. In their report to Council, which can be addressed at length later if desired, the Committee offers some recommendations for enhancements. However, at this meeting they would like to have 3 big picture concepts explored and addressed as a priority.

(1) Fort Myers is a fast growing area, and people want to come to the beach, the Island is growing and adding population, and there is a changing demographic that means more cars. Therefore, a comprehensive review of demographics is needed. (2) Infrastructure is a factor, but there is no staff person with traffic responsibility, nor is there a Town traffic committee. There needs to be an all-encompassing committee that reports to Town Council, similar to the LPA, which would also review LPA decisions concerning approval of projects that would have an impact on traffic. Mr. Merrill further described duties and responsibilities of this proposed committee, as well as qualifications of its members. A qualified Staff employee was also recommended. The Committee also noted that there is no line item in the budget for traffic mitigation projects, observing that everything is handled on a case by case basis. Funding sources were discussed, with the recommendation that special events be privatized to free up funds to be used for traffic mitigation. Beach renourishment was also addressed. It was also suggested that better goals were needed. Using a chart, he provided specific suggestions produced by this committee, including alternating lights and a pedestrian island on Estero Blvd. at Seafarer's. They felt that plans for Times Square should be put on hold until a better solution can be devised, and that intensity/density in the overlay district should be investigated. They also agreed that additional trolleys would be a benefit.

Mr. Van Horn summarized the three presentations and opened the meeting for comments, questions and suggestions.

**V. COUNCIL COMMENTS:** Not solicited by the moderator.

**V. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Dave Stamper, a relatively new resident, came forward and recalled attending the previous meeting. He agreed with the suggestion of a Staff member assigned to traffic. He also asked whether it has been considered that the trolleys themselves are an impediment to traffic flow. Mr. Merrill replied that the trolley stops have been considered and in the report it is recommended that there be specific off-road stops. He pointed out that their report contains a great deal of information, but that in his presentation he had focused on 3 main issues.

Dan McGrath of San Carlos Drive came forward and asked for clarification of Mr. Myers' comment with respect to the alternating lights. It is his understanding that when they are set up for all year, they will only operate when the traffic density dictates. This was verified. With respect to the camera situation, he verified that this would be similar to those he has seen in other parts of the country which contain estimated travel time information, and suggested that if so, cameras be installed as much as a mile away from the Island to allow motorists to decide whether to continue toward the Island. He also agreed with having a plan to move traffic, observing that Lee County is the second fastest growing area in the nation, which he estimates at 7 per cent per year rather than 2 per cent. Mr. Myers advised that the cameras are now in discussion with DoT, and definitive locations will be determined by traffic engineers. He anticipates a quick decision.

Frank \_\_\_\_\_, a member of Mr. Myers' committee, came forward and described how the technology would work.

Paul Schneeberger, a resident since 1991 and a former Township trustee from Hamilton County, Ohio, came forward. He recalled that at a meeting he had attended on the alternating lights, someone had remarked that the Season was only 100 days, and observed that there has been an improvement in traffic recently. He also expressed the opinion that rage, to which the speakers referred, has turned to courtesy. He addressed the idea of off-Island parking by issuing copies of a report he prepared, which he proceeded to read. He cited a survey which refers to a 15-acre parcel of land on Pine Ridge Road at \$3,900,000.00 which could accommodate 500 cars per acre at an average parking space cost of \$1,100.00 per the report, or an annual cost of \$400,000.00. He suggested a joint issue of bonds by Lee County and Fort Myers Beach, giving cost and retirement figures. He also addressed the subject of crosswalks and side streets, pointing out that there are approximately 75 side streets on the Island; underground utilities and potential sewer accidents; and other improvements. He felt that boat taxi development should be studied.

Bob Peterson of 2532 Estero Blvd. came forward and complimented the reports. He recalled a previous proposal that was not mentioned tonight concerning a parking garage at Center St. He also asked whether other beaches in Lee County could be promoted as destinations rather than Fort Myers Beach.

Warren Babcock came forward and reported how he and his wife had become members of Mr. Merrill's committee. He stressed the need for a Town committee and expressed appreciation for everyone coming together at this workshop.

George Whisler, a 25-year plus winter resident came forward and expressed appreciation for Mr. Merrill's recommendations, pointing out that it is not intended to move traffic speedily, just consistently. He cautioned from his experience in the underground construction business that when pipes under Estero Blvd. are installed and/or excavated it will be expensive.

Ken Katcko, Chairman of the Board of the FMB Chamber and owner of Hammerhead Beach Gym, and a resident, came forward and referenced the diagram, observing that cooperation among the hotel owners would be required. He expressed concern about access to the various hotels if a pedestrian island were installed as an option. He also mentioned the Chamber committee's recommendation that the \$200,000.00 feasibility study continue, pointing out that in discussions with Lee County about underground utilities, this will never even be considered without this study. As a business owner and resident, he thanked the committees for their efforts. He observed that the traffic in the 100 days of Season affects his lifestyle because of the traffic.

Mr. Myers addressed Mr. Whisler's comments about underground utilities, recalling a previous group called the CRA at which time it was expected that this would be done, but that almost simultaneously FP&L sponsored legislation was passed requiring municipalities to pay for undergrounding of utilities. There was a study by John Davison of DoT which revealed problems at side streets as well as Times Square. He added the comment, "Public transportation is great – for you."

Harold Douglas of the 6600 block of Estero Blvd. came forward and advised that he has been a part time resident for approximately 25 years. He noted that there is a great deal of traffic leaving the Island between 3:00 P.M. and 4:00 P.M. He expressed the opinion that a parking garage would be a benefit. He complimented the conduct of the meeting.

Mike Mulheeren of 361 Seminole Way came forward and pointed out that no one has addressed the fact that Estero Blvd. is owned by Lee County. He suggested lobbying the County for improvements rather than continuing to spend money on ideas that will ultimately have to be approved or disapproved by the County.

Mr. Van Horn expressed the opinion that it would be beneficial for Council to meet with all 3 groups since there was some dichotomy of opinion in certain issues, also expressing the hope that this will be the beginning of a forum from which much can be accomplished. He noted that there were 3 Council members present and asked for their comments at this time.

**Mayor Thomas** noted that much good work had been done in these committees and expressed appreciation for their efforts. He said it was now time to bring the matters forward to Council for action. He asked that this be placed on the Council agenda in the near future.

**Councilman Don Massucco** quoted from his campaign brochure with respect to using talent on the Island, and said that these 3 committees were examples in action. He applauded the committees and their members and agreed that traffic mitigation should be a Council agenda item in the near future.

**Vice Mayor Garr Reynolds** also expressed appreciation to the committees. He recalled serving on the Chamber Traffic Committee in the past but agreed that it was time for the Town to be proactive. He also addressed the subject of County ownership of Estero Blvd., stressing the need to improve the road and expressing the belief that the County will be willing to work with the Town. He expressed the desire that more people attend meetings when traffic is addressed.

Mr. Van Horn made some closing remarks expressing the desire to go "full steam ahead."

**VI. ADJOURNMENT:** Meeting was adjourned at 8:17 P.M. by Mayor Thomas.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia L. Middlekauff  
Transcribing Secretary