

External Affairs August September 2009

We're happy to report that, as a direct result of the E-mail campaign of the gated communities East of I-75, the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD), Governing Board has now expanded their planned flood study to examine more options, including flooding in the Bonita Springs area. Previously, this study was aimed at the Estero & Brooks areas and did not include the Bonita Springs area. Hunters Ridge formulated, composed and initiated both a massive E-mail campaign and a petition drive that supported expanding the flood study to alleviate flooding in Bonita Springs. Fred Forbes, Mary Copeland, and Dolores Sykes were the "hands-on" drivers of this effort. We could not have successfully accomplished the E-mail and petition campaign without the full support of Sandi Morgan, President, and Don Huprich, General Manager. The support Chris Durfey and the administrative staff provided was a key element in our results.

While the communities east of I-75 were represented at SFWMD's June 11 meeting, it was Mayor Ben Nelson who presented our petitions, along with the support from the Bonita Springs City Council. As a result of this effort, SFWMD agreed to expand their study and publicly stated that the tipping point in their decision was the overwhelming amount of written public comments.

This process has greatly increased the visibility, creditability, and stature of our organization to make our position more forceful in future community issues.

Mayor Nelson punctuated our efforts and process with the following message; "I've never been prouder of a group of citizens. Your conduct, comments, and demeanor during the e-mail campaign and at the meeting were perfect. I would encourage you all to build on this positive momentum, creating a reputation, culture, and identity of positive activism and excellence for the East Bonita Communities. Please let me know how I can be of service in the future. Most impressive! Signed, Ben." Since this communication, Mayor Nelson has let us know that he has received further input from SFWMD and that he now believes that "very good news is coming our way." In addition to Mayor Nelson's and the City Council's recognition of our successful efforts, Hunters Ridge's leadership was mentioned in four different front page articles in both the Naples and Bonita Springs newspapers.

On the noise front, your External Affairs Committee sent a letter to the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) on June 11 requesting more information on the design criteria for the noise barriers along I-75. We received an extensive reply on June 25 that will take some time to study and analyze to determine our future actions. We will keep you informed on our progress.

Another issue with the City of Bonita Springs that came up recently was the City Council's announcement that they were considering placing a user tax on public utility services such as phone, cell phone, cable TV, dish TV, water and sewer (including HR Utilities), electric, trash, etc. It was unclear whether the Council intended for this to be a continuing tax or only for a specific, defined time frame. This was the City Council's reaction to lower revenue resulting from projected lower real estate tax revenues.

Our concerns and question on this whole issue were presented to the Mayor and all City Council members in a written communication. Mayor Nelson responded that that proposed tax increases were still on the table, that all the information was not in, and that the City Council was still considering the possibilities.

At that point, we launched an email campaign urging all Hunters Ridge residents to email City Council about these proposed tax increases. In addition, Worthington, Palmira, San Remo and Village Walk made the same communication to their residents. In addition, Fred Forbes was able to convince Southern Pines, Citrus Park and portions of Highland Woods to forward our email to their residents for distribution. Numerous emails opposing the potential tax and/or user fee increase were received by the Mayor and Bonita City Council. A second email was sent out alerting residents that this matter was going to be an Agenda item on the July 21st Council Meeting. Again there was a flurry of opposition emails, and the Naples Daily News and the Fort Myers News Press did front page stories on the increasing tax issue and

our email campaign on the morning of the July 21st meeting. A number of Bonita Springs residents spoke out in opposition to any type of tax or user fee increase. Both Mary Copeland and Dolores Sykes made public comments to that effect. The City Council overwhelmingly voted not to increase the tax rate or user fees. To all Hunters Ridge residents who sent the City Council emails, we thank you for making your position known. Numbers of people and emails count. We are convinced that our residents and members, had we not taken the actions we took, would have been paying an extra \$125-\$150 per year per household.

The External Affairs Committee will continue to stay on top of this, and any other issue that affects the City of Bonita Springs.