

Parks & Recreation

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PARKS & NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION

**POLK COUNTY LAKES ACCESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
AMENDED MINUTES**

The Polk County Lakes Access Advisory Committee (LAAC) convened Tuesday, January 12, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. at the Polk County Parks and Natural Resources, 4177 Ben Durrance Road, Bartow.

Members Present: Tom Palmer, Pablo Sologaitoa, Adam Bass, Gregg Watts, Paul Thomas, Larry Johnson, Cannon Kirby

Members Absent: Chad Allison, Arlene Ledbetter (with notice)

Guest: Bob Sheffield

Parks and Natural Resources: Mike Callender, Tracy Mullins, Brandy Gray (absent)

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Paul Thomas called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

WELCOMING OF THE COMMITTEE

Paul Thomas led the group in introductions for the new members. Mike Callender went over the mission of the Committee, Resolution for Committee structure, lakes priority listing, and the Lakes Atlas.

SUNSHINE LAW PRESENTATION

Elizabeth Voss went over the Sunshine Law (attached). Mike Callender questioned if we could still conduct a virtual meeting if the committee does not have anything to vote on (informational only). Elizabeth's response was not definite; gave recommendation to hold in person meetings. Pablo received clarification that speaking to a Commissioner outside of the meeting would in fact be a violation of the Sunshine Law. Presentations before the Board are open to the public.

Elizabeth included information about the Public Record law. She notified the committee that even personal email accounts and text messages also fall under public record.

Communication between the committee and staff using County accounts will be retained / captured by the County.

Mike Callender stated that moving forward, we will table all votes not shown on the agenda until the next meeting. Discussions can happen; however, voting will need to be tabled until notice can be made to the public.

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APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Motion: Approve September 8, 2020 minutes.
Mover: Tom Palmer
Secunder: Larry Johnson
Result: Approved unanimously (7-0)

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments.

ELECTION OF CHAIR / VICE CHAIR

Rachelle, the previous Chairperson, termed out in November. Paul Thomas, Vice Chairperson, led the discussion to nominate and vote on the new chair and vice chairperson.

Motion: Move to nominate Paul Thomas as Chairperson.
Mover: Tom Palmer
Secunder: Adam Bass
Result: Approved unanimously (7-0)

Clarification was made regarding the role of the Vice Chair; to fill in when Chairperson is not in attendance.

Pablo asked what rules / guidelines are followed when conducting meetings. Roberts Rules are followed for making motions and voting.

Motion: Move to nominate Larry Johnson be Vice Chair.
Mover: Adam Bass
Secunder: Tom Palmer
Result: Approved unanimously (7-0)

2021 SCHEDULE / MEETING STRUCTURE

Format was discussed with Elizabeth Voss regarding having in person meetings now that Covid restrictions / declarations of emergency have lifted.

Mike Callender informed the new members that the committee sets the schedule. The committee previously voted to meet once per quarter based on the lack of projects / business activity needed of the committee during that time. Pablo questioned only seeing three meeting dates listed for 2021. Mike Callender explained that it was agreed upon by the committee to skip the final quarter due to the holidays. Members of the committee noted that the schedule can change at any time; however, enough notice has to be given to the public via a Board Agenda Announcement.

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Motion: Move to approve the proposed 2021 schedule.

Mover: Pablo Sologaistoa

Secunder: Tom Palmer

Result: Approved unanimously (7-0)

Question was raised regarding funding of boat ramps. Mike explained the different forms of funding. Parks and Recreation operates using funding from the MSTU (Municipal Services Taxing Unit). Boat ramp maintenance comes from boat registration fees within the county. A separate boat registration fee is collected that goes to the State. The State then gives some of that money back to the County to be used for Capital Improvement projects only.

LAND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Tom Palmer notified the committee that the Lakes Access Overlay was passed / approved. The overlay will notify Land Development staff and Parks and Natural Resources staff when an applicant submits a development application for property along a waterbody that does not have public access. The parties will then be able to negotiate the potential acquisition of some of the property for public access.

Tracy updated the committee on the Lake Lowery project. County has the opportunity to purchase a piece of property for the purpose of installing a public boat ramp. The challenge will be that the property is located within the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern, which does not allow motorized boating. A change in the State Statute will be required to install a boat ramp. County would have to purchase property (10 acres) and demolish a two-story house on the property.

Mike Callender stated that in addition to the property being in the Green Swamp, permitting will be a major issue, along with the Land Use designation. Because of these issues, property cost has not even been discussed. Mike asked for direction from the committee on how they think we should proceed; continue looking into the possibility or focus on other efforts. Committee's direction was to continue talking to the State in general, not specifically for this parcel. If new information is provided that requires more discussion with the committee, staff will schedule an additional Lakes Access meeting and provide public announcement.

PROJECT UPDATES

Mike Callender stated that staff were able to get Lake Juliana paved.

Lake Hancock boat ramp is open. Staff are working on opening the connecting Panther Point Trail. We are having to redo the Management Plan for the trail and boat ramp, as the initial one was never adopted by the Water Management District. Part of the original Management Plan stated that canoes and kayaks could not launch from the ramp due to it being so close to the water flow structure. Parks and Natural Resources staff planned to petition that once

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the ramp opened; however, when talking to District staff about this topic and opening the trail segment, it was discovered that the original agreement was never adopted. District staff still do not agree with allowing canoes and kayaks, but County staff are still working on it.

Lake Buffum property was purchased with intent to put a boat ramp on it. Covid put some delays on getting an engineer on board to do design and permitting, but staff are moving forward with this project.

Aquatic weed control was stopped by the State for a period of time. It has since been restored (except Lake Kissimmee), but now staff must play catch up.

Parks staff installed a dock on Lake Conine through Community Development Block Grant funding.

Lake Juliana dock is still awaiting installation by internal staff. Staff are currently busy preparing the dog park and restroom slab at Northeast Regional Park.

Mike reported that the County uses the Tedder Boat Ramp system, which has proven to hold up much better than concrete ramps (lower maintenance). The Sole Source used to procure the Tedder ramps is about to expire. Procurement staff have advertised the Intent to Sole Source for an additional five-year period. We are currently in the protest period from anyone that has a similar / better product.

Question was asked about using additional grant funds for boat ramps and parks. Mike stated we use Florida Boating Improvement Program (Lake Hancock) and Land and Water Conservation Funding.

OTHER BUSINESS

Tracy mentioned that the center channel of the Peace River is mapped and cleared.

Larry asked about the status of Port Hatchineha and the private citizen that wanted to purchase it. Mike stated that we have not heard anymore.

Mike reminded the committee that David Anderson was the Friends of the Park liaison from the LAAC, but he termed out, so we are looking for another person to be the liaison. Mike will provide the meeting schedule at the next LAAC meeting. Friends of the Park is a volunteer organization that helps recreation departments with programs and fundraising. Funding from FOP recently earmarked money for the Lake Hancock kiosk.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 4:39 p.m.