

# Matecumbe Neighbors



Newsletter of the Lower Matecumbe Key Association

September 2008

## Lower Matecumbe is Special!

Lower Matecumbe Key is special...nestled between azure blue ocean and the fishing wonderlands of the back country. But it is the people here that contribute the most, making Lower Matecumbe a fabulous place to live!

Nearly 25 years ago the Lower Matecumbe Key Association (LMKA) was formed so all property owners could join together to assure a better future for the island. The Association became a formidable and effective voice, working diligently on a wide range of projects including the following efforts:

- Developing Annes Beach
- Creating the first bike path in the Keys
- Getting the right-of-way landscaped
- Providing an EMS/Fire Station on Lower Matecumbe
- Organizing an annual walk+so residents can brainstorm with local officials
- Eliminating an unsightly billboard on Sea Oats Beach
- Acquiring much private land on Sea Oats Beach as public conservation lands
- Holding regular candidate forums prior to Village elections
- Working with local governments to help establish long range planning
- Keeping property owners informed through the newsletter, Matecumbe Neighbors
- Holding monthly meetings during the winter months to provide educational programs and an opportunity to get to know neighbors.

**If you aren't already a member of our association, we hope you will join.**

But don't just join, we'd like you to get involved! There are so many ways we can all make a difference.

LMKA is such a great way to make new friends. Friends that share an island and a goal to make our community even better!

## JOIN LMKA TODAY!

Your \$20 check for a family membership in the Lower Matecumbe Key Association may be the best investment you can make for 2009!

The LMKA newsletter will help you stay informed about issues that impact Lower Matecumbe and you!

Attending meetings is a great way to learn about the area and to get to know your neighbors!

Having a group voice about local concerns is often a more effective way to accomplish goals.

Volunteer to serve on the Board, to write newsletter articles, to help with beach clean-ups. Suggest meeting programs or be one!

**Send a note to let us know if there's something you can do to help!**

**Tell us what projects you think LMKA should undertake.**

## *In this issue:*

- Letter from Islamorada Mayor Cathi Hill
- LMKA Association Information
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- Vacation Rentals
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## **As a courtesy to the Village:**

**Information from the Village Wastewater Steering Committee has been inserted in this issue.**



## SEA OATS BEACH UPDATE

By Ann Haber

Most of us on Lower Matecumbe are aware of efforts made by FDOT to protect the beach as part of the US 1 roadway improvement project earlier this year. We watched all spring as the large machines created the artificial dune and held it together with concrete and pavers. This done in an effort to keep US1 open and accessible to residents and businesses in the event of a major storm.

LMKA members and other volunteers participated in a vegetation planting and beach cleanup that spanned the entirety of Sea Oats Beach on April 12, 2008. By the end of the day, 6,000 plants were in the ground and numerous bags of trash were picked up. These 6,000 plants were an integral part of the US1 stabilization plan. We felt very good about our efforts and involvement in maintaining the integrity of Sea Oats Beach. As of August 16 we thought our efforts had paid off. Despite drought like conditions we had "greened the dune" along US1. New plants appeared healthy.

However, August 18th brought "tropical storm" Fay. The ocean reached the black turtle fencing, and carried enough seaweed and debris to cause the fence to collapse in places. At places 3-4 ft high erosion banks were left in the wake of the storm.

From the jetty, to the north end of Sea Oats Beach, we had roughly 22 turtle digs and 11 nests, of which the majority had not hatched and were likely destroyed. Our 6,000 plantings vanished in the waves. The Atlantic has gulped up every plant, leaving huge mounds of seaweed. The waves reached the peak of the artificial dune, but did not spill onto US1.

The village press released a quote the next day, "Sea Oats Beach did not sustain significant damage". Obviously, this was an inaccurate drive-by observation, without seriously investigating the damage to the beach. We understand the Village's enthusiasm. Since the highway remained passable, the Village maintains that the FDOT project is a success. This presumption needs further evaluation!!

Now reports suggest that while winds from Hurricane Gustav, passing 300 miles to the west of Islamorada, were not significant, additional seaweed and beach erosion is significant - perhaps a cumulative affect. While Fay and Gustav brought tropical storm force winds and may not have done damage to the project on the US1 side, we are certainly looking at significant damage to Sea Oats Beach.

This narrow yet glorious stretch of beach is a vital link between Lower Matecumbe and all points south. Perhaps FDOT has yet to find a solution that will assure U.S. One is not destroyed during a storm more significant than Tropical Storm Fay. Will the next one shut off highway access from the beach south in an emergency?

It is of utmost importance that the LMKA remain involved in efforts to protect Sea Oats Beach so as to minimize the impact of future and more powerful storms. The beach is a haven for wildlife; acting as a feeding grounds for a myriad of sea birds while at the same time providing essential haven for endangered turtles. Additionally, Sea Oats Beach is one of few actual spans of sandy beach in the entirety of the Florida Keys, providing residents and visitors alike with a peaceful space to internalize the glory of the Atlantic and the beauty of our Island.

### Beach Clean-up Sept 6 and Oct 4

LMKA has initiated an informal monthly beach clean-up on the first Saturday of every month. Take a couple garbage bags and help us remove the trash from Sea Oats Beach.

Stack garbage bags and debris by the power poles, highway side, for pick-up by the Village.

While we've been told it is Village policy to let nature take its course at the beach after storms, we thank residents for doing their part to keep Lower Matecumbe beautiful!

## Lower Matecumbe Fire Rescue Station 19 Update.....

By Glenn Taylor

There have been some major changes at the construction site on White Marlin Blvd. In late July, the monthly progress meeting was held between the construction crew manager, village staff, and the architectural firm.

The following work has taken place since that meeting: The concrete floor has been poured and the block walls are 75% complete, reaching up to encompass the living area and bays for our fire and rescue trucks. In late August, the tie columns and tie beams will be completed. The electrical conduit for interior wiring is more than 50% complete. The roof trusses will be delivered to the building site during the first week of September.

As of this writing, we have survived Tropical Storm Fay with no damage. The target date for completion, end of February 2009, is about a one week delay.

## **Vacation rentals...**

### **If you rent your home short term this applies to you!**

In February of 2006, the Village of Islamorada passed an ordinance regulating short term rentals. Some thought the ordinance was too strict, some thought it was too lenient. Both sides sued. Now the courts have ruled. The ordinance stands!

Any property owner who rents their property for periods of less than 28 days ( less than 7 days is illegal) must comply with numerous requirements and get a license from the village, state and county. The new village license is \$1000/yr. There will be an annual registration period. For 2008, the registration period will end September 15.

Funds collected from the \$1000 application fee will be used for enforcement of the vacation rental regulations, including things like occupancy limits, fire regulations, vehicle and vessel limitations, a requirement that vacation rental advertising must include the Islamorada license number.

Properties in Residential Medium(RM) land use may be grandfathered if documentation can be provided proving the short term rental use has been licensed by the state and county since 2001 and state taxes have been paid. But no new vacation rentals will be permitted in RM land use. Most subdivisions on Lower Matecumbe, excluding several oceanfront or bayfront areas, are RM. Licenses are not transferable when a property is sold.

If you decide to rent your home/condo short term, you need to investigate the ramifications to your insurance, your property taxes, homestead exemption, income tax, and your mortgage. Does your condo restrict weekly rentals?

For additional information on the ordinance and an application form, go to **[Www.islamorada.fl.us](http://www.islamorada.fl.us)**

### **Sojourn... across from Sea Oats Beach**

The final Public Hearing to zone the Sojourn tract on Captains Cove as Residential High density was held August 28. The Council voted 5-0 to approve the zoning. In addition the council agreed to provide Sojourn priority in the Building Permit Allocation System (BPAS) so they will be able to get through BPAS ahead of other applicants who are waiting in line. The property owner agreed to deed restrict the property, limiting development to six homes. Now it is up to the Florida Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to confirm that this meets with their approval.

### **Wastewater Update**

Islamorada has a July 1, 2010 deadline when all homes and businesses are required to meet new guidelines for wastewater. The cost to sewer the remainder of Islamorada is expected to be in excess of \$115 million. The village has approved a North Plantation Key sewer extension and a decentralized wastewater project on the upper end of Lower Matecumbe. Sewering the rest of Lower Matecumbe will be the next Village project.

Myles Milander, Director of Public Works & Utilities, has provided this summary of the Village wastewater efforts:

The Village Council has an assessment for wastewater of \$631 per property owner before them next month at public hearing. If passed it will give us \$2.5 million in funding to get started with our much needed engineering work. The decentralized project and NPK will probably be first to be completed. I believe we must jump start our engineering work and secure wastewater plant sites. Lower Matecumbe, other than the part scheduled for a decentralized system, will be next and will be done in phases. I don't have a time line but would hope to start construction towards the very end of next year once the money comes in from system development charges if passed next September by Council.

There is progress with working with the FDEP (Fla Dept of Environmental Protection) on an extension of the July 2010 date. Although we would like a two year extension, they at this point verbally have committed to one year. I believe we will get there. Realistically I don't believe we will get grant funding other than some Army Corp. money this year. We may see some from the State possibly the end of next year or the first part of 2010 if Ron Saunders keeps up the good work.

### **Decentralized Wastewater Project**

LMKA has inserted information about the Decentralized Wastewater Project which was provided by the Lower Matecumbe Steering committee appointed by Village Council. Our thanks to the diligent work of this exceptional Village committee: Charlie Kupper . Chairman; Ron Winget, Ken Gleason, Bill Parker, Bill McDonough, Martin Moe, Richard Wilson, Don Achenberg (Council liason), and Myles Milander (staff liason).

## The Islamorada Budget for 2008—2009

### .....Major preliminary tax increases approved!

In a recent editorial in the Keynoter, the editor warned taxpayers:

***“This year more than any other, it will be important for taxpayers and voters to attend budget workshops... Topping our list of keep-a-close-eye-on-spending: The village of Islamorada.”***

**Mandatory tax reform:** Florida Gov Charlie Crist promised taxpayers that their taxes would drop significantly if they voted for state property-tax reform. We did and now tax reform is here! But what will our tax bill look like come November. You just got a clue...as property owners in Islamorada, you should have received two documents for each improved property:

1. The **TRIM notice** discloses preliminary maximum ad valorem taxes
2. A **notice of non-ad valorem taxes** warns of increases in assessments for Solid Waste for residential properties and Wastewater Planning Services for improved properties.

**Ad valorem taxes** (taxes based on the value of property): Our Council, when setting a preliminary rate, increased ad valorem revenues by 14%! This is the property tax Gov Crist expected to drop significantly because of mandatory tax reforms. But the state provided an opportunity for local governments to over-ride the limits imposed on tax rates with a 4/5 vote. Islamorada used this over-ride to significantly increase revenues! Dave Boerner was the only 100% vote. The final vote is pending.

Because the real estate market is so dismal, your property's market value may have dropped, giving you some relief, unrelated to the tax reform. Homesteaded properties typically had a 3% increase in taxable value, but got a \$50,000 homestead exemption, increased from \$25,000.

\* If you think your property is assessed too high in today's market, call the property appraiser at 305-852-7130. If still not satisfied, you can file an appeal before September 15. When values go up, the appraiser usually increases the assessment. Make sure he lowers it, when market values decline!

**Special Assessments:** in addition to your ad valorem taxes, Islamorada property owners are likely to see other tax increases! The state tax reform does not provide limits on the non-ad valorem special assessments.

**Wastewater Planning Services:** On August 7, 2008, the council decided that equal wastewater assessments for all improved properties is the most equitable and efficient method of allocating costs of Wastewater Planning Services. Whether you own a large resort, a marina, or a one-bedroom cottage, the assessment approved by council was \$631 annually. If approved at the public hearings in September, the assessment will generate \$2.5 million of the projected \$22.6 million cost of the planning services for the remaining wastewater systems for Islamorada. Next year they will need to add a yearly assessment for construction costs, on top of the \$631 annual planning assessment.

**Solid Waste:** A contract extension was negotiated with the garbage haulers. The rate per home for the coming year will be \$362.70, an increase of over 20%. It can go up to as much as \$407.50 after this year without the need to provide additional notification. Islamorada recycles 7% of its trash, an issue creating controversy with this contract.

**Your Voice:** Before the tax rate and annual special assessments are finalized, Islamorada will hold a workshop and several public hearings. The purpose of the public hearings is for Council to receive opinions and answer questions from taxpayers. Unfortunately, the detailed budget document has not been released to the council or the public as of Sept 1.

**Meetings to decide the ad valorem tax rate:** Try to attend and let the council know what you think. Budget workshop Sept 9 at 3 PM, first public hearing Sept 15 at 5:30 PM and final public hearing Sept 22 at 5:30 PM. All meetings are at the Upper Matecumbe Fire Station next to the library.

**Meeting for the wastewater and solid waste special assessments:** You have until Sept 10 to file written objections with the Village Council about these non-ad valorem assessments. You also have an opportunity to voice your opinion at the public hearing to be held at 5:30 P.M. September 11, at the Upper Matecumbe Fire Station.

### The Islamorada Village Council....tell them how you feel!

Write to them individually or send them an email through the Village Clerk  
Mailing Address: Islamorada Village Council P.O. Box 568 Islamorada, FL 33036

**Cathi Hill**  
Mayor Seat 4

cathi.hill@islamorada.fl.us

**Don Achenberg**  
Vice Mayor Seat 1

don.achenberg@islamorada.fl.us

**Jill Zima Borski**  
Councilwoman Seat 2

jill.zima.borski@islamorada.fl.us

**Dave Boerner**  
Councilman Seat 3

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**Michael Reckwerdt**  
Councilman Seat 5

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**Beverly Raddatz**  
Village Clerk

beverly.raddatz@islamorada.fl.us

# President's Corner

By Gordon Hadley

Lower Matecumbe Key Association is one of the largest and most productive civic associations in the Keys.

The list of accomplishments range from creating and landscaping an island-wide bike path to establishing our own fire station. LMKA was one of the prime movers in making Anne's Beach a reality, as well as initiating the storm water project that solved the often flooded Gulfview Drive.

These projects, and many more, came directly from the membership. LMKA's only focus is to improve our island and our lifestyle.

We are now faced with our largest and most difficult problem-a state mandated wastewater project.

The northern section of LMK is now in the midst of a complicated and expensive wastewater undertaking. All the effected property owners are concerned and are keeping their fingers crossed that this project will be successful. The remainder of LMK, from approximately Matecumbe Resort south, will be next.

This will be an extremely disruptive, costly and painful experience for all of us. It is going to affect all of LMK-our roads, our properties, our landscaping and our pocketbooks.

LMKA has been involved from the inception and will continue to be involved. But this project will need everyone's attention. Please become active in your LMKA-volunteer for committees and leadership roles. With your help, LMKA can continue to make our Lower Matecumbe Key a special place and our island paradise.

## Membership Application

**First Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mailing Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Local Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone (local):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Provide your email please!

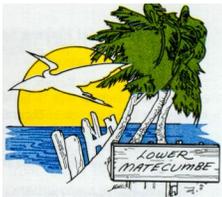
Get your newsletter faster and save LMKA printing/postage costs! We only use the email address to send newsletters, information and reminders about Lower Matecumbe.

### Make check payable to

**LMKA P. O. Box 911, Islamorada, FL 33036**

**Family \$20; Single \$12**

**Enclose a note if you will serve on the Board, volunteer with projects or newsletter or if you have ideas for making our community better.**



**Lower Matecumbe Key Assoc  
P. O. Box 911  
Islamorada, FL 33036**

**News From  
Islamorada!!!**