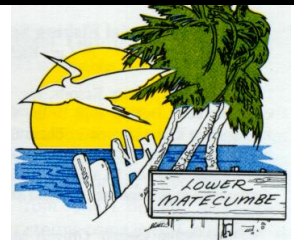


Matecumbe Neighbors



Newsletter of the Lower Matecumbe Key Association

February 2009

February Meeting of LMKA

Where: Boy Scout Sea Base MM73.5

When: 7:00 PM Mon Feb 16, 2009

Speaker: Capt Skip Bradeen...

Program: "Keys Fishing—Yesterday and Today"

For generations the Florida Keys have been a destination famous for its fishing. But boy has the fishing changed over the decades. Join us for an enlightening look back at the changes in fishing techniques, equipment, costs, and the actual types of fish caught, their sizes, limits, and quantities.

Our guest speaker, Captain Skip Bradeen, will be sure to add plenty of color to the stories of old! Skip has been fishing here for over 40 years and has seen changes both good and bad! The skipper of the Blue Chip Too out of Whale Harbor, Skip is a legend in the fishing community. His contributions to our community are endless. Don't miss his entertaining program!

Business

We will also conduct a brief business meeting with the election of the 2009 Board.

On the slate this year are returning board members Gordon Hadley, Ann Haber, Donna Gleason, Gretel Duncan, Ted Blackburn, Claire Johnson, Pat Gaetjens and new volunteers Ron Winget and Hermine Zavar. Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor.

Volunteer to help with the newsletter, committees or events. It's a great way to get to know your neighbors and to make our island even better!

2009 Membership Fees Due \$20 per family/ \$12 for singles

The Lower Matecumbe Key Association understands the dire economic times we are facing.

Through our volunteers the association will continue to provide outstanding services to our members. The membership fee has not been increased since the organization was formed over 20 years ago!

The Association is committed to being an informed and forceful voice for its members, looking out for the concerns of the residents and property owners of the island.

The Association is committed to providing information to its members to help all stay informed about the topics of concern to all of us. Whether you are fulltime or part time residents, you can count on the Association watching the issues when you can't.

Please:

If you haven't already, renew your membership for 2009 today!

Invite your neighbors to our meetings... ask them to join!

Provide your email address so we can save mailing and printing costs and contact you with alerts and reminders!

Vacation Rental Licensing is Here

Over the last 5 or 6 years, the Vacation Rental policies of the Village have been challenged in court by property owners who thought they were too restrictive and also by property owners who thought they were not restrictive enough. After facing those challenges, some modifications have been made and the ordinance is now in affect! The ordinance applies to short term rentals in mobile homes, single family homes, multi-family homes and condos. It prohibits rentals of less than 7 days in all cases!

Once each year during the designated registration period (Jul-Aug-Sept), property owners must apply for a Village license at an annual cost of \$1000 if they intend to do any rentals of 28 days or less. The total number of vacation rental licenses allowed in any one year is capped at 331. During the first year, licenses could be issued to homes in Residential Medium (RM) zoning (like Port Antigua, Safety Harbor, Tollgate Shores etc.) No new vacation rentals can be licensed in RM zoning after this first year, though renewals are allowed. Licenses are not transferable to new owners.

Vacation rental homes can be identified by a sign along the street in front of the house with the Islamorada license number on it. Significant rules apply to these rentals, including limitations on occupancy (no more than 2 adults per bedroom, with children over 6 being considered an adult), parking, total length of vessels (not exceeding width of lot along water). It is illegal to rent or advertise a rental of 28 days or less if it is not licensed by the Village.

In the initial application period, the Village received 164 valid applications. 106 have received licenses as of Feb 1, 2009. Some have not yet passed their final inspections (fire standard requirements may not have been met yet). Of the 106 licenses already issued approximately 50 are for single family homes. Of the 106 licenses issued to date 1/3 are on Lower Matecumbe—24 for homes and 11 for condos at Bay Harbour.

Lower Matecumbe Key Association Statement of Purpose

The Lower Matecumbe Key Association, Inc. shall actively work to preserve and enhance the quality of life and environment through participation and democratic process by the residents.

Goals shall include:

- 1. Monitoring activities such as zoning and construction.**
- 2. Communicating with all members to alert them to potential problems or opportunities.**
- 3. Coordinating the efforts of the individual neighborhood associations on common objectives.**
- 4. Providing an open forum for presentation and discussion of issues.**
- 5. Taking appropriate action on behalf of the membership.**

Board of Directors:

President Gordon Hadley: 305-664-0621; gordo0621@aol.com Vice Pres Donna Gleason
Treasurer Ted Blackburn Secretary Claire Johnson

Board members: Ann Haber , Glenn Taylor, Dave Elbaum, Pat Gaetjens, Gretel Duncan

Wastewater.... It's Coming and it is not Cheap...or Fair

If you've never understood wastewater, for your pocketbook's sake, it's time to learn!

In spite of very grim economic circumstances around the globe, Islamorada plans to proceed with sewerage the entire Village by the end of 2012:

- whether or not we get financial help previously promised by the state of Florida;
- whether or not low interest rate loans are available to municipal governments;
- whether or not the residents and businesses of Islamorada can bear the additional financial burden

The 3 massive counties to the north of us (Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach) have until 2025 to reach the same standards of wastewater treatment.

Estimates for the Islamorada project run anywhere from \$100 million to \$150 million.

The tax bill property owners received in November 2008 included an assessment of \$631 per improved property. That was to generate \$2.3 million to fund expenses for this year's wastewater "planning" currently underway. Additional assessments are anticipated in November 2009 to begin to fund the actual design and construction phases.

On September 11, 2008, the Council decided on the formula it will use to divide up the enormous cost of the sewer among property owners. Few in the Village or on the Council understood what that formula meant! Because of questions and complaints, the Council is taking another look at the formula. But the Village Manager and staff are warning the council that changing the formula will create unnecessary complications.

According to figures provided by the Village staff, if the formula is left as is, based on the volume of wastewater generated, a single family home will pay.....

- 4.4 times as much as a unit in a 20 unit condo;
- 3.2 times as much as a medium to large restaurant;
- 3.6 times as much as a medium sized motel.

No other area of the Keys has used a formula for allocating wastewater costs that penalizes single family homeowners so dramatically as Islamorada! And still there are large resorts and condominiums who could upgrade their existing systems cheaper than hooking up to the Village system and then re-use their own treated effluent for landscaping, saving even more and being "green."

The actual numbers being quoted by the Village staff for design and construction costs are \$6391 for a single family home. But this will only generate a small fraction of the total cost of the system. Expect the REAL cost to be as much as 3-5 times this "down payment."

If you don't pay in cash, you can pay over time, but you will also have to pay finance charges (add on about 10%) and interest at whatever interest rate may be available at the time for municipal loans.

And this is not the end either. We will still be paying monthly for the operation and maintenance of the sewer system based on our actual water usage—another \$1000 per year or more for single family homes!

The Village will be making final decisions soon. Let the council know you are concerned!

Your Islamorada Tax Dollars At Work

Economic times are grim worldwide, but there has been no talk of cutting government expenses locally. Rather Islamorada continues to look for ways to borrow more funds to do massive capital projects and to pay for shortfalls in operating income.

By December 2008, the marina at Plantation Yacht Harbor was running almost \$500,000 short, just months after this year's marina budget was approved by council. The expenses are expected to significantly exceed income for at least the next three years.

The North Plantation Key wastewater project was \$1.45 million over budget for construction costs and is nearly \$2 million short in covering operating expenses.

Village budgeted expenses for this year are up \$250K over last year. Yet for the first quarter of this fiscal year, Village revenues collected are \$133,656 less than what was collected last year. The Cheeca closing had not yet been felt. Cheeca has about 15% of hotel rooms in Islamorada and is a major contributor of bed tax. Their guests will be missed by many businesses.

In Jan village manager, Ken Fields, got a controversial \$11,000 pay increase, a portion of which was made retroactive to October 1 with a 3-2 vote of council! He now makes more than \$165,000 plus a significant benefits package. Fields has promoted the idea that these difficult times are a perfect opportunity for the Village to undertake major building projects because *people are willing to work for less*. The concept does not seem to hold true for the employees at Village Hall.

The Keynoter reports that County Commissioner Kim Wigington was the lone vote against approving Jim Callahan's hiring as Monroe County Fire chief. She's been vocal in not supporting \$100,000 plus salaries for county employees. In August of 2008 Islamorada had 3 employees making \$100K or more... plus they all get 10% retirement funding or more, medical and life insurance, and numerous other perks! There were another 6 employees making over \$70K plus fantastic benefits. And there have been salary increases since then! Several of these higher salaried individuals also use village vehicles to get back and forth to work.

Major Capital Projects planned for 2009—

Wastewater: Start of a \$100 million to \$150 million sewer project. All 4 major islands of the village are scheduled to be sewerred before Dec 31, 2012. So far, no funding has been secured so it may all rest on the shoulders of property owners.

Public Safety Complex and Administrative Offices: to qualify for \$2.7 million in FEMA funding, administrative offices must be substantially complete by Nov 30 2009. Total project cost will end up at about \$6.5 million, including the abandoned design work previously discarded. This project was hurriedly pushed forward to meet the FEMA deadline.

Anne's Beach Boardwalk—\$375K renovation, \$162,500 coming from Tourist Development Council.

As of Oct 1, 2008 Village debt was \$17,971,562, over \$2500 for every man, woman and child in Islamorada with much, much more to come!

Lower Matecumbe Fire Rescue Station 19 Update....

The new Lower Matecumbe Fire/Rescue station, also known as Station 19, has undergone a few "change orders" since we announced in the December newsletter that it was to open in March. It is now expected to open in May. Construction began May 5, 2008.

The Impact of The Economic Crisis

by Donna Gleason

All of us who live here in Islamorada, and on Lower Matecumbe in particular are well aware of the 'money crunch'. One only has to ride their bikes or walk or drive through our streets and subdivisions to see the numerous houses either on the market with no activity, or see 'for rent' signs up where the Hurricane Shutters are still closed, as well as the houses in obvious disrepair where the owner presumably has decided to 'put off repairs for now'. Many of us are 'retired' and living on fixed incomes. The services and insurances we need are costing us more and our dollars are being stretched further, forcing us to cut corners, sometimes eliminating insurance policies and taking larger deductibles on the remaining insurance policies as well as healthcare. We don't go out to eat nearly as much, and have cut back on the use of our boats due to the cost of gas. Sometimes our familiar 'bait sources' have disappeared, trying to find work farther north in our state. For this reason, I urge all of us to 'shop locally'. Our "Mom and Pop Stores" are what make our Village so unique. We have fought long and hard to keep 'formula retail' as well as 'big box stores' out. Now we owe it to our local merchants and restaurant owners to remain loyal to them and to help them stay in business. Even if it's boiled down to 'just a hamburger' or an inexpensive pair of 'flip flops' let's keep it here.

Sea Oats Beach

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has listed Sea Oats Beach as a "critically eroded" beach. Each hurricane season the beach and adjoining highway is impacted by nearly any storm that hits the Keys, including relatively minor hurricanes and tropical storms.

The Village has no plans for any beach restoration after the storms of 2008. However, at their December 18, 2008 meeting, the Islamorada Village Council approved an agreement with DEP to jointly pay for a feasibility study for the Beach. The study is intended to provide baseline information such as topographical/bathymetric survey and sand composition analysis. This type study is required for eligibility to receive funding for the engineering design and permitting that will be necessary to implement beach erosion controls after future storms. The Village is attempting to secure funding to provide the match required locally (\$44,955) for the study.

Lower Matecumbe Key Association has a Sea Oats Beach committee that works diligently to assure the debris on the beach is picked up regularly. Join in the effort!

President's Corner

[By Gordon Hadley](#)

The other day I ran into a former Islamorada elected official. He asked how things were going "down on Lower Matecumbe", and then he said "you guys should be happy, we gave you a fire station".

After we parted ways, I thought about what he said and, as often happens, I came up with the perfect belated response. So now I'm looking forward to running into him again.

So here's my new and improved answer to "we gave you a fire station".

No one 'gave' us a fire station, it was paid for by Islamorada's taxpayer money. And, the last time I looked Lower Matecumbe Key's property taxes went to the Village of Islamorada.

Lower Matecumbe Key now, finally, has the same excellent Fire/Rescue service that the rest of Islamorada has been enjoying for 7 years and the whole community of Islamorada has benefited by better service and lower fire insurance.

You did not 'give' us a fire station, we paid for it with our blood, sweat and tears.

Membership Application/Renewal

First Name(s): _____

Last Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Local Address: _____

Phone (local): _____

Other phone: _____

Email: _____

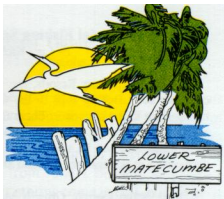
Provide your email please!

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!!!**