

## August 2021 NEWS

Islamorada Community Alliance

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## What a First Month For Oravec

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On Thursday July 1, 2021, Greg Oravec was sworn in as Islamorada's tenth manager since we incorporated 23 years ago. And the Village welcomed Greg with open arms and jubilant optimism. But did we have to make his first month so challenging?

In Greg Oravec's own words:

In reflecting on my first month, I am filled with gratitude, excitement and hope. I am also reminded of the truth in the old proverb, "the best laid plans of mice and men," as my first three days in office saw a declared state of emergency for tropical storm Elsa, my first Monday saw three employees test positive for COVID, and my third week was made more dramatic by a surprise resignation. So, in other words, I experienced a "normal" month in the life of a public servant and responded to emergent issues in addition to prosecuting a long to-do list which includes getting to know the community, the people, and the organization; assessing our community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; preparing the FY 21/22 Budget; and so much more.

I look forward to meeting more of our citizens personally in the days and weeks ahead and invite them to contact me directly at 305-570-9105 or [Greg.Oravec@islamorada.fl.us](mailto:Greg.Oravec@islamorada.fl.us).

Now, more than ever, I'm certain that Islamorada can be one of the world's best waterfront communities and that we can realize our Village's great potential by working hard, smart, and together.

### ***Our Mission:***

***To provide*** Islamorada residents with information about events occurring in our community that will impact our quality of life, preservation of our native ecosystems, land development, lawful and transparent governance.

# Go to [Islamorada.org](http://Islamorada.org) For Breaking News

## Possible Village Purchase



As soon as the “For Sale” sign went up at the property owned by Walgreens, Islamorada officials and residents began conjecturing “What now?”

Who didn’t love having the old Island Silver and Spice, and before that Irene and George, right in the heart of downtown Islamorada?

What will be next? The retail store building has been sitting empty and deteriorating for years. The Fire Department has used it for training drills. No restoration is possible.

Calculations indicate the property would generate serious traffic if developed into another retail store right at a location that has the most significant traffic problems in the entire Florida Keys. There are significant building rights that go with the property. At least one local property owner would like to buy the site just for the building rights, not the land.

The Village has discussed the possibility of creating municipal parking or affordable housing. But clearly, the Village would, at least, like some control over what happens next at that central location.

The Council directed the manager to make an offer to purchase. And now we wait to find out if Walgreens is willing to sell the property to Islamorada. What would Islamorada do with it? Will it be the centerpiece of downtown sometime soon?

## Founders Park



And think about Founders Park! Less than one year after voters decided to incorporate Islamorada 23 years ago, the first five brave councilmembers voted 5-0 to spend \$9 million to purchase Plantation Yacht Harbor. They had no money in the bank.

It was all borrowed money, with not even a dime of grant funding.

Now Founders Park is the gem of the Keys. Perhaps soon we will have another gem in the heart of our business district.



# Welcome to Islamorada Community Alliance

## Surprise Resignation



Just three weeks after the new manager started, Ty Harris, the Director of Building Services called it quits after serving Islamorada since September of 2018. Harris was the head of three significant areas within the Village: Planning, Building and Code Enforcement.

ing and Code Enforcement.

A month earlier Senior Planner, Craig Southern resigned. A search is underway to replace both Harris and Southern.

## Zoning Map Change Requests

Following our 1998 incorporation, the Village inherited the County Future Land Use and Zoning maps. It took several years for Islamorada to develop its own maps, based on the vision of a balanced community, controlling growth and protecting our environment and resources.

Now, 20 years later, there have been numerous requests for map amendments. Most often the changes would provide significant monetary benefit to the owner.

In a small town it is extremely difficult to separate what is right based on our regulations from what we'd like to do to help our friends. But the law is the law, and must be applied equally no matter who is involved. The staff, LPA and Council cannot base decisions on which land use consultant or attorney is hired or who the property owner is.

Recently we have seen requests to change residential properties so vacation rental licenses will be legal, as well as requests to change conservation zoning or residential single family zoning to high density commercial zoning.

Strange that so many were so satisfied for so long. Or that property owners bought more recently, expecting favorable help from the Village? The maps are important documents, intended to keep Islamorada special.

## Be an Alliance Associate

If you received this newsletter but never signed up at [Islamorada.org](http://Islamorada.org), send us an email to subscribe so you will be able to participate and get future newsletters.

Send email to [info@islamorada.org](mailto:info@islamorada.org)

We never share your personal info  
or email address.

## Affordable Housing

For decades most people have been acutely aware of the critical need for affordable housing. And the situation keeps getting more dire. [Click here](#) for details about affordable housing problems in the Village.

On August 16, the Achievable Housing Committee will meet at 5:00 pm to discuss two issues that may improve the situation.

One is the review of a rewrite of Village affordable housing regulations by land use consultant, Rebecca Jetton. The committee has voiced concerns about problems associated with the Village regulations contributing to affordable housing compliance.

The second issue on the committee agenda is the review of two proposals submitted as a result of an RFQ looking for a developer to build 17 new affordable housing units on Village owned property just to the north side of Plantation Key School and along Woods Avenue. The Achievable Housing Committee will be acting as the selection committee to recommend a developer to the Village Council.

# Go to [Islamorada.org](https://Islamorada.org)

## Budget for 2021—2022

### And the Strategic Plan

The Village has workshops and hearings each summer to establish a budget for the fiscal year that begins October 1.

Manager Oravec has consistently stated that developing a Village Strategic Plan is a top priority and it is what should guide the budgeting process.

As a result, the budget workshop on August 3 started with a three-hour strategic planning exercise, a step towards revising a Village strategic plan last updated two years ago. Since 2019 we have an all new council, new manager, and some new ideas to discuss. Unfortunately, the strategy exercise included just two members of the public.

Oravec is hoping the Council will approve an additional expenditure in the new budget for a valuable strategic planning process. The process would include a long-term vision of where the Village wants to be in the future, as well as the steps it will take to get there, a roadmap in prioritizing objectives and initiatives.

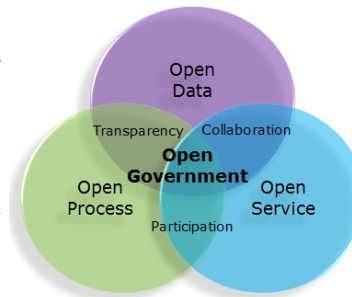
At the workshop the following day, August 4, the proposed budget was presented by the Finance Director, Maria Bassett. It contained updates and recommendations not part of the budget included in the meeting agenda, including a recommended 5% cost of living raise for employees making under \$100,000, 3% for those at or over \$100,000.

While Oravec explained that he was hoping to use the workshop to receive council feedback, little feedback was offered considering the complexity of the budget document. Council did not ask for public comment.

Trim notices will be out soon so we will know the impact of the proposed millage rate on our tax bill .

## Government Transparency 101

### What, Why, How



*The Open Government Approach*

Local governments need to view the public as partners. The more a local government can provide in the way of transparency, the more it increases trust, honesty, and integrity in the government.

Local governments that initiate processes to provide information to citizens proves that the government officials have their citizens' best interests at heart.

How frustrating is it when we learn that a significant amendment to our Comprehensive Plan, requested by a developer, is being considered in a few days? Why is the public just finding out, even though it has been in the works for months?

Consider the Monroe County information that is readily available on the County website. Under planning department, the very first menu item is "Pending Applications." The pending applications page gives access to ten different categories of planning applications, listing each application by date and applicant, with a link to the actual application. Why isn't Islamorada providing this information?

The County Clerk's website provides links to all public records but also to 17 categories of Commission documents including complete agendas, 20 years of financial records, all ordinances, resolutions, minutes and county contracts.

[Click here](#) to read more.