

**February 2022  
NEWS**  
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### ***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.



### Do you wonder: **What's Wrong with Us?**

**Does Power and Greed Outshine Service:** Have you read about Councilman Mark Gregg? First it was Gimpy Gulch so many years ago. Now is he benefiting from his position once more? Read about what the Islamorada Community Alliance has learned. [Click here.](#)



**What's the Real Problem:** Islamorada is now looking for its 10th manager in the 23 years since incorporation. And there were quite a few years when there were temporary "acting" managers. Have we picked the wrong candidates? Or does our Village have a problem? Why did we ask departing manager, Greg Oravec, and prior manager, Seth Lawless, to sign agreements to not make "public statements disparaging the Village." Is there something being concealed?

Shouldn't we address any significant problems before hiring manager #10?

**Why not an Exit survey:** Understanding why managers leave may assist the Village in learning if something is wrong in our Village. Why don't we want departing managers to talk? It is clear, Islamorada may have a problem that needs to be acknowledged, not concealed. If we know what the problem is, we can work to fix it.

**What divides us:** Despite their diverse views, people within Islamorada live, work, and intermingle with each other. However, when controversial issues come up, people can get distraught. Polarization has become so intense that many people no longer trust anyone with a differing perspective.



**Environment versus Development:** Developers believe they cannot be denied the right to growth that has become so very lucrative because of the extreme popularity of our environmental masterpiece—the unique and fragile Florida Keys.



The environmentalists say—go somewhere else for your lucrative profits. "We have a treasured but fragile environment and limited resources to protect." They believe in the doctrine "Better, Not Bigger."

"Find your passion. Work at it. Don't give up. Don't ever give up." These words are the career [advice](#) of Alex Rodriguez, who was lauded as one of baseball's greatest hitters — that is, until he was busted in one of baseball's most notorious scandals.

Let's not allow scandal to cloud our love for Islamorada. It is our passion at *Islamorada Community Alliance* to have a great community. Let's all work together, with passion, to make certain Islamorada is the best it can be, the goal we should all have in common.



# THE VILLAGE OF ISLAMORADA

## "THE FILLS" VISION MASTER PLAN | WHAT'S NEXT?

### What Is Next at the Fills? After decades of intense controversy, is a decision imminent? Show up, Speak up: Feb 17

Is Islamorada headed for even more heated conflict, delays, and a divided constituency over a unreasonable \$55,000 rendering of a master plan. The question remains: A narrow roadway or a park? Perhaps even more critical: Who pays for the suggested amenities? The Council is scheduled to decide the future of the Fills at their **Feb 17, 2022** meeting!

#### Show up and speak up.

At the Feb 17 Council meeting, CPH hopes the Village Council will vote to approve one of two park visions they developed over the last 4 months. Follow this link to see the presentation: [The Fills Master Plan](#) . Or watch the archived meeting video from Feb 3 on the Village website.

**Who is going to pay?** Remember, no matter what is decided, the taxpayers of Islamorada will be responsible for significant portions of the costs of the improvements. What about daily operations and maintenance? The trash? The proposal to be presented calls for **pavilions, guardrails, restrooms, trolley, kayak launches, picnic tables, benches, new paved parking areas, underpasses, moving the location of the Heritage Trail**. Grants **may** pay for a few improvements. What will Islamorada taxpayers pay?

Budgeted expenses in the Village General Fund this year with minimal use: \$323,900; last year, with Fills closed: \$110,000. Capital expenditures anticipated: \$300,000 for future engineering expenses to complete the Master Plan.

**We expected at least three options. We got two.** Both visions for the Fills that were presented by the consultant, CPH Inc, to the public on February 3, were for a public park. Attendance was poor, very poor, for such a controversial topic. Those speaking against both visions: 5 residents who are local taxpayers. Those in favor: 2, a representative of the Islamorada Chamber of Commerce and one from the Florida Keys Scenic Corridor Alliance, a Key Largo resident. Those watching via zoom were not given an opportunity to speak, as promised. The meeting ended an hour and 15 minutes sooner than advertised, those trying to zoom in after work hours missed out. In spite of the extra time available, speakers were not given more than 3 minutes.



According to the icons on the renderings presented by CPH, the park vision demonstrates the possibility of up to:

- 18 pavilions
- 10 kayak launches
- 1 boat ramp
- 6 trolley stops
- 4 pedestrian crosswalks across U. S. One
- 6 pedestrian underpasses under U.S One at the bridges
- permanent restrooms



**Continued on Page 3**



## THE VILLAGE OF ISLAMORADA "THE FILLS" VISION MASTER PLAN | WHAT'S NEXT?

### The Fills Vision

Continued from Page 2

#### So many concerns!

- Both CPH visions include using a **trolley** to bring more people to the Fills to offset Village goal of very limited parking. The consultant did not understand the parking limit was to avoid a mass of humanity at the Fills on weekends. Why provide this alternative?
- Note that the proposed new boat ramp location will remove significant mangroves. Who's idea? On just this small portion of Indian Key Fill there are 4 icons for pavilions and 4 icons for kayak launches.
- Having trolleys exit and re-enter a two-lane U.S. One at six trolley stops, potentially every 30 minutes, as suggested, is a huge problem on a dangerous congested highway. And where would the trolley riders park to board the trolley? Whose expense?
  - CPH says that FDOT will require guardrails to protect the people using the "Heritage Trail" that runs across the Fills. Why didn't FDOT install guardrails themselves years before our lease? What about the rest of the 110 mile Trail and the Keys 43 bridges?
  - Why Invite so many people to a fragile marine environment, when so many have historically damaged the seagrass beds with jet skis, cut mangroves, left huge amounts of trash?
  - On Jan 11, 2022 the Council held a Special Call meeting to establish the Islamorada priorities for the County U. S. 1 Transportation Master Plan. The Council voted 5-0 itemizing priorities to "improve traffic flow, alleviate congestion, improve safety and assist in improving the level of service on U. S. 1." Approving a park on the Fills would absolutely contradict those goals.
  - Public participation: Many residents are frustrated after decades of no action and the recent repetitive surveying. Participants must select one of the consultant's options, Vision A or B in the latest survey. No opportunity to say "no" to both. This distorts the statistics significantly and unfairly.
  - The current Council apparently understands the ramifications associated with overuse of Village facilities as they agreed to close two Village owned public boat ramps in 2021 for the 4th of July weekend, Labor Day weekend and mini lobster season.
  - The resolution approving and directing the work of CPH stated: "The Village requires a Fills Master Plan incorporating these elements for consideration and approval by FDOT and FDEP pursuant to the respective lease agreement" referring to 14 items on a controversial "wish list" that unnecessarily included wishes that perhaps few if any councilmen or residents ever wished for.

[Click here to see Wish List.](#)

**PLEASE COUNCIL: JUST SAY NO!**

The two pages on the Fills represent the opinion of the Islamorada Community Alliance:

**The Fills, it's a causeway not a park.**





## Islamorada's Red Light District

We have a red light district at about MM74.5 on Lower Matecumbe! Yes there are even red street lights illuminating U.S One at Sea Oats Beach.

Normal lighting can affect sea turtle behavior at nests, even discouraging female sea turtles from coming to the beach to nest. Beachfront lighting also negatively affects sea turtle hatchlings, which are lured inland instead of to sea. Inland at Sea Oats Beach is just feet away from busy U.S. One. Red lights have been shown to have a lesser effect than white lights.



Unfortunately, there is virtually no beach left at Sea Oats Beach—and no sea oats. During the 2021 turtle nesting season there were no nests at all on Sea Oats Beach.

It takes 20-30 years for a sea turtle to reach sexual maturity. When a female is ready to lay eggs, she returns to the nesting beach where she was born, even if she has not been there for 30 years! Some females then nest every year until the age of 80. And so we try diligently to protect their birthplace so they can return.



## Seagrass at Risk?



A controversial bill harmful to our protected seagrass was sponsored by local representative in the Florida Senate, Ana Maria Rodriguez, and approved at the committee level by local Representative, Jim Mooney. Was this a mistake? Who is looking out for us in Tallahassee?

Read about why seagrass is so important to our environment . [Click here.](#)

## Extend 2023 Buildout or Not?



December 16, 2021, the Village Council was unanimous in their interest in extending the 2023 buildout date after Henry Rosenthal had been bringing it up meeting after meeting.

A primary goal is to have a few extra years of grant funding available for land acquisition, time to review and change regulations, all to reduce the buildout impact and the number of expensive “takings” lawsuits if property owners are deemed to have the right to build and there are no permits available.



Village Attorney, Roget Bryan, said the Council would have to make changes to the Comp Plan and LDRs. All five members of council now were in agreement with Rosenthal and directed Bryan to begin that process so it could be accomplished in the first quarter of 2022.

It's February and we haven't heard a peep yet but we are waiting and watching.



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

**Departing Manager Employment Amendment:** On January 27, the Council approved an amendment to Greg Oravec’s contract agreement providing terms for his departure. His last day was January 27, however he will be paid until March 31, including retirement benefits equal to an additional 39% of his pay, his monthly housing allowance of \$2000, vacation and sick leave. Perhaps in exchange for receiving pay beyond his last day at the Village, he agreed to not make any public statements disparaging the Village.

**New Manager Selection Process:** The Council hired Colin Baenziger & Associates in February of 2021 to provide services in finding a manager to replace Seth Lawless. There were 80 applicants and eventually the Council selected Greg Oravec. Because Oravec stayed less than a year, Baenziger’s contract provides that he will do another search free of charge. Not all members of council wanted Baenziger back. But because he could greatly reduce the time until a new manager can be onboard, they agreed to have him provide a short list of candidates quickly. In the interim, Finance Director, Maria Bassett, will be the acting manager as well as the head of the finance department.



**Demolition of Silver and Spice building:** At their Jan 27, 2022 meeting, the Village Council passed a resolution hiring J.A. LaRocco Enterprises to demolish the structure on the newly acquired property. The cost of \$53,400 includes: Demolition and disposal of existing concrete and wood structure on site and filling and compacting within the footprint of the building. Closing on the property took place on December 17, 2021—\$2,750,000.



**More about the Fills:** The Fills is currently on our minds. If you’d like to know more about the Fills and see some old photos, click here: [The Fill Before](#)



Did you know that prior to the 1960 hurricane, there was a restaurant, Blueberry Hill, accessible from the Fills. And there was a drawbridge at MM78 forty years ago! Historians suggest that the 1935 hurricane was impacted by the fact the Fills was solid land with no bridges then, thus acting as a dam causing excessive flooding on the ocean side of Islamorada. Until the mid-eighties you could see the above ground water line that brought water from the mainland to the Keys. Now the water line is suspended

under the bridges. The sewer line is buried deep (55’ deep) under the bottom of channels passing through the Fills.



Islamorada, Village of Islands

# Islamorada Nature Walks & Talks

With Program Leader: Susan Kolterman,  
Florida Keys Naturalist

If you haven’t participated in one of the Village’s nature walks, you are really missing a great chance to get to know just how special the environment of the Florida Keys is.

To reserve a space on a walk, call the office at Founders Park: 305-853-1685



**Plantation Tropical Preserve:** Have you been to this lovely 3.5 acre park near Tavernier Creek owned by the Village? There is a kayak launch, Childrens Memorial Garden, walking trails and convenient parking. A conceptual design for improvements was recently presented to the public. Proposal includes a new access point from Sunshine Boulevard, added parking, landscaping and covered pavilions.



**Priorities to Reduce Traffic Congestion:** At the Village Council meeting of November 18, 2021, representatives of Monroe County presented the draft Transportation Master Plan for US 1 and asked the Village to provide their list of top ten priorities to help reduce traffic congestion in Islamorada.



On January 11, 2022, the staff presented a list of possible priorities that was then approved by the Council. They also discussed asking the County transportation committee to eliminate several ideas listed for Islamorada. The most notable was to eliminate the idea of a bridge in front of all oceanfront properties from Snake Creek to Tea Table, allowing travelers to bypass Windley Key and Upper Matecumbe.

Councilman David Webb made a motion to modify the staff resolution. Webb discussed his four amendments, explaining that not one single recommendation in the County's document would reduce the number of vehicles in Monroe County. He said the overwhelming problem with traffic is the number of vehicles. He suggested amendments that would start focusing on strategic priorities and address the carrying capacity of the Keys.

The council voted unanimously to amend the resolution and to submit the list below for inclusion in the County Master Plan. They did not submit a request to delete issues they found objectionable.

1. Conduct an Access Management Study along U. S. 1 for the length of the Village to determine the need for turn lanes and/ or other access management improvements. Study should include review of possible improvements to the Old Highway to better serve as a frontage road.
2. Purchase property to create a Park-n-Ride hub parking area to promote alternate modes of transportation within Islamorada and serve as base for potentially expanded Freebee services.
3. Convert Snake Creek Bridge to a high-level fixed bridge.
4. Extend two lanes southbound on U. S. 1 another half mile to approximately San Pedro Church passed Planation Key School to alleviate backup and congestion at Woods Avenue light near Coral Shores High School and PKS.
5. Resurface U. S. 1 through entirety of Islamorada to repair areas further damaged as a result of Hurricane Irma.
6. Install shelters at designated bus pull-off areas and stops along U. S. 1.
7. Move FDOT weigh station to alternate location.
8. Add bike paths/walkways on bridges within Islamorada to increase safety for bikers and walkers to get from one island to another.
9. Add raised medians in the middle of U. S. 1 at certain locations to facilitate pedestrian crossing and safety, especially on Upper Matecumbe.



## Islamorada vs Marathon: An Interesting Comparison

Link to State website: [Local Government Application - Create Reports \(fldfs.com\)](https://fldfs.com)



### From Florida Division of Accounting and Auditing 2020 Totals from State Records

| City            | Islamorada    |            | Marathon      |            |
|-----------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
|                 | Totals        | Per person | Totals        | per person |
| 2020 population | 6280          |            | 8984          |            |
| Debt            | \$ 74,608,563 | \$ 11,880  | \$ 47,796,772 | \$ 5,320   |
| Expenditures    | \$ 38,878,688 | \$ 6,191   | \$ 35,192,667 | \$ 3,917   |
| Revenue         | \$ 23,420,258 | \$ 3,729   | \$ 15,514,794 | \$ 1,727   |



Note that while we calculated per person figures it is not to imply that all expenditures and revenues are paid or received from individual residents. The purpose of the calculation is to show the financial discrepancies between Islamorada's budget and Marathon's budget based on population served.

Marathon incorporated just after Islamorada, put in a central sewer system, bought a large city park,, and is very much like Islamorada in many ways, though serving a larger population.

Marathon has approximately 5 times as many deed restricted affordable homes as Islamorada.

### Closer look - some samples of Revenue and Expenditure Categories

| City                                  | Islamorada                | Marathon                  |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Significant Revenue Categories</b> |                           |                           |
| Ad Valorum Tax                        | \$ 11,517,945 3.0 millage | \$ 6,847,271 2.77 millage |
| Sales Surtaxes                        | \$ 1,934,203              | \$ 2,697,272              |
| Fed Grants etc                        | \$ 2,590,000              |                           |
| Other pub contrib                     | \$ 2,402,066              |                           |
| interest                              | \$ 136,282                | \$ 889,503                |
| <b>Expenditures by Department</b>     |                           |                           |
| Manager                               | \$ 1,172,231              | \$ 251,920                |
| Finance                               | \$ 1,384,903              | \$ 633,471                |
| Legal                                 | \$ 603,500                | \$ 594,375                |
| Planning                              | \$ 1,613,018              | \$ 421,109                |
| Law Enforcement                       | \$ 2,339,462              | \$ 1,770,618              |
| Fire Res/Protective Svc               | \$ 5,758,594              | \$ 5,662,824              |
| Oth Gov svc (garbage?)                |                           | \$ 2,119,732              |
| Garbage                               | \$ 1,873,028              |                           |
| Wastewater                            | \$ 8,361,651              | \$ 10,239,572             |
| Stormwater                            | \$ 95,116                 | \$ 1,483,448              |
| Public Works                          | \$ 3,067,579              | \$ 2,416,848              |
| Parks and Rec                         | \$ 1,808,184              | \$ 2,026,856              |