

November 2021 NEWS

Islamorada Community
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**ISLAMORADA
COMMUNITY
ALLIANCE**
Advocacy For Residents, Education and Preservation

Headline News for November

We're having a Watch Party!

You're invited to an Islamorada Community Alliance Watch Party! Thursday at 4:30 pm Nov 18 . [\(Page 2\)](#)



New Director of Planning: New Hope

Daniel Gulizio has been hired as head of planning and development services for the Village. His first day is Dec 1. We can all welcome him at a meet and greet before the December 16 Village Council meeting. [\(Page 2\)](#)



Be Sure to Submit the "Fills" Survey?

Deadline is Nov 19. Make your voice heard! [\(Page 3\)](#)



What about the Sign Ordinance?

We have a sign ordinance but is it enforced? [\(Page 3\)](#)



Do we Really Need the TDC?

How much do we need to spend to attract more tourists? [\(Page 4\)](#)



Mega Complex May Spell Disaster for Keys

Plenty to worry about. Keep informed! [\(See page 5-6\)](#)



Mark Your Calendar: Dec 2 Special Call

Important land use issue is on the agenda! [\(See Page 6\)](#)



CONTENTS

Pg

Watch Party	2
New Dir of Planning	2
Fills Survey	3
Sign Ordinance?	3
TDC	4
Mainland Mega Complex	5
Sea Breeze MH Park	6
Special Call Meeting	7

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 develop-

You are Invited to Our Watch Party!

The Islamorada Community Alliance is having a **WATCH PARTY** Thursday November 18 at 4:30 pm. Please join us to discuss and then watch the Village Council meeting together. It should be loads of fun! There will be snacks, laughter and learning! We can zoom in for public comment.

The agenda has some interesting issues— Yes, TRAFFIC! There will be the U.S. One master study presentation, Monroe County presentation regarding their ideas for lessening the impact of buildout coming in 2023, the new Dog Park design. And much more.

The Watch Party will be at the Alliance office at 91655 Overseas Highway, oceanside, (old Reporter Building). Explore and analyze Village issues with us! Together we can impact the future. Enjoy some camaraderie with others in the community! Reply to info@islamorada.org if you plan to attend.



Welcome Daniel Gulizio!



On December 1, 2021, Dan Gulizio, a new head of planning and development services will begin work for the Village, addressing the challenges the Islamorada community faces regarding the sustainability of our community, the environment and our limited infrastructure and resources.

Mr. Gulizio, with 25 years of planning experience in larger communities on Long Island, NY, comes to Islamorada with a long history of efforts to protect the environment and particularly water quality.

His experiences on Long Island, not unlike Islamorada in many ways, may give him a head start understanding our local concerns. Here are some comments he made about his area in New York:

By any objective measure, the thirst for economic development has overwhelmed the capacity of our environmental resources. Reversing these trends won't be easy, but it is not as difficult as one might think. Here are three simple steps to get started.

Science-Driven Policy. Environmental quality and the protection of our precious water resources must be guided by science, not special interest needs and petty politics.

Tougher Sanitary Standards. It is time to take the politics out of the region's water quality and enact more effective standards.

Improve the Regulatory Process. Fighting individual development projects has proven to be ineffective. Civics have won individual battles but are clearly losing the war. We must begin to focus more attention on making changes to the regulatory process.

[Click here](#) to listen to a "Water Matters" presentation Mr. Gulizio made. We think you will be encouraged that there is a bright future for Islamorada land use with Mr. Gulizio leading our planning efforts.

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The Fills—A Survey: Do you have an opinion about the future of the Fills between Upper and Lower Matecumbe? Should we invest in major improvements and amenities to create a park or should it just be a causeway connecting the two islands? The Village wants to know what residents think. If you haven't already taken their survey, do it now. It only takes a few minutes to answer a few questions and then write a few sentences to express what you think should be built and who should pay the bills.

In the current budget, the Council approved \$324,000 of taxpayers money for personnel and operating expenses to manage the Fills. Any capital improvements will be in addition to that.

[Click here](#) to take the survey. The deadline is November 19.

December 1 Fills Meeting: Results of the survey and one on one interviews with stakeholders will result in suggested proposals that will be presented at a public meeting tentatively scheduled for December 1. While there have been public meetings after public meetings for decades to develop a plan for the Fills, we are hopeful that this time we will see an acceptable plan implemented. Do not miss the opportunity to be part of the process. Your voice is critical. Take the survey, attend the meetings.



And Where is Code Enforcement? At the construction site on the oceanside of Plantation Key at MM87.3, former site of Sea Breeze and San Pedro mobile home parks, there are several hundred feet of signs cluttering the Old Highway. Why is this allowed? What happened to our sign ordinance?



And is this going to be another enterprise using the Old Highway for regular overflow parking because there isn't room on site? What is happening to the beautiful scenic drive through Islamorada?

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The Tourist Development Council (TDC) Do we need them? Are they living up to their promises?



Based on the TDC Vision Statement, one would think their purpose for existence is to make life better for the residents of the Florida Keys!

TDC Vision Statement

The mission of the Monroe County Tourist Development Council is to manage Monroe County's tourism marketing efforts to assure long-term economic stability resulting from visitor-related revenues. *The TDC pledges to benefit residents and visitors by utilizing those financial contributions to improve Florida Keys environmental and community resources. The tourism council also prioritizes working to enhance residents' quality of life and minimize their property taxes through safeguarding the health of the county's primary industry.*

Tourists visiting the Keys and spending the night in local lodging, pay 12.5% tax on top of the lodging cost—7.5% in sales tax, **4% bed tax that goes to the TDC** and 1% Tourist Impact tax.

Bed Tax Revenue Through August 31, 2021

For the fiscal year October 2020 through September 2021, the total bed tax collected for all of Monroe County was \$53,132,386—yes that is over \$53 million with the month of September not yet reported. This total is \$12 million more than any previous year in the history of the Monroe County TDC and will go up even more when September numbers are in. The increase is likely the result of more beds filled and also the rapidly increasing rates charged by hotels, motels and vacation rentals.

Before we had the TDC, we had the Monroe County Advertising Commission. For three years, our own Henry Rosenthal was the chairman. Their budget: \$125,000 per year compared to the TDC having tens of millions of dollars per year now, a couple decades later. Is it progress?

DO WE NEED MORE TOURISTS? And More Traffic?

How is the bed tax used? Florida Statute 125.0104 allows two uses: **advertising of tourism** in the jurisdiction where collected and to fund improvements to **facilities that attract tourists**.

Don't we need to reconsider TDC regulations? \$53 million in a year is a lot of money to spend to attract tourists when many people believe there are already more tourists than can be accommodated!

Perhaps what we really need in the Florida Keys is LESS! Less people, less environmental damage, and certainly less traffic. Drastic shortages of workforce housing may eventually lead to "less."

[Click here](#) to learn about the TDC: Four Penny Revenue report with all the numbers, Annual Visitor study, Board members, Vacation Rental Report, and more.

Mega Industrial Complex on Mainland—Disaster for the Keys?

A huge industrial complex is in the works for 793 acres along the turnpike near the Homestead Air Base, expected to provide 6 million sq ft of industrial space and eventually employ as many as 25,000 workers.

And other complexes nearby are also in the works. Miami-Dade sold a parcel of land nearby for \$22 million where an Amazon Distribution Center is now under construction. A steel mill is also planned near Homestead.

In September, Miami-Dade County Commission voted 9-3 on first reading to approve a Comprehensive Plan amendment to expand the Urban Development Boundary (UDB) and amend the future land use map to turn hundreds of acres of farmland into an industrial park, creating a special district where the mega industrial complex is to be developed. [Click here](#) to learn more about this boundary.

Not everyone in Miami-Dade agreed with the commission's initial decision. Mayor Daniella Cava had this to say:

“We are a community with a history of preserving and protecting our environment and preventing encroachment into the Everglades. The area being proposed for development outside the UDB is at risk to hurricane storm surges and extremely vulnerable to sea level rise, and so the project poses a great risk to our local environment particularly Biscayne Bay.”

The UDB forms the outer edges of where companies can build housing developments, malls, and warehouses, and creates a development buffer designed to protect the Everglades and the declining footprint of farmland.

Numerous agencies review the amendment before the second reading (not yet scheduled) by the Miami-Dade County Commission. Islamorada and Monroe County both sent resolutions opposing the amendment.

On October 25 the South Florida Regional Council (SFRC) met and discussed the amendment application. This organization is tasked with the review of projects that have significant multi-jurisdictional impact. All five Islamorada Village Council members, Village Manager, Village Clerk, and numerous residents attended the virtual meeting. There was significant public comment, all opposing the project and nearly all speakers were from Islamorada. In addition, a number of emails from Islamorada residents were read into the record.

Concerns researched by the SFRC staff included **1.** whether the regions freshwater sources will be adequate with increasing water demands (same aquifer that supplies the Keys), **2.** Traffic concerns as the turnpike is an evacuation route (yes our route from the Keys), **3.** Impact on Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve, Biscayne National Park, the Everglades and numerous ongoing restoration efforts.

For Islamorada, another concern is paramount! We have hundreds, if not a few thousand, employees in the Upper Keys that commute from the mainland because of our drastic shortage of workforce housing. Every day over 900 employees come to the Upper Keys by bus. Others drive or carpool. We could lose them all to higher paying jobs close to where they live, adding significantly to the workforce shortages already hampering our businesses.



This could change the Florida Keys forever!



Double Whammy

Joe Weiselberg, was president of Seabreeze Associates, LLC, when they acquired Seabreeze Mobile Home Park March 6, 2002 for \$2.55 million. The property was licensed for a combination of RV spaces and mobile home spaces totaling 101 units. A vast majority of the spaces were occupied fulltime, most often to

people that lived and worked in Islamorada... a close-knit community. [Click here](#) to see story.

In 2015, Joe Weiselberg sold Seabreeze Mobile Home Park for \$11 million to Sun Communities, a huge publicly-traded real estate investment trust that invests in manufactured housing and recreational vehicle communities.

The place was devastated by Hurricane Irma in 2017 and is not likely to ever house many of the local workforce again. Same with the adjoining San Pedro Mobile Home park and their 39 spaces.

Both parks are now in the process of being redeveloped into an upscale community with a total of 91 transient RV spaces and 49 permanent elevated **market rate** "mobile homes." Say goodbye to those 140 previously affordable homes.

Ironically, Joe Wieselberg is now a development partner in the 793 acre mega complex in Homestead expected to employ an estimated 25,000 people when completed. Normally a huge project like the Homestead project would be a nightmare to get approved when there are so many activists fighting over-development. But this complex appears to be impossible to stop.

The application for the South Dade Logistics and Technology District states that it would provide much-needed employment opportunities in south Miami-Dade, where many residents have long commutes to work.

Miami-Dade is looking for a way to reduce traffic logjams through creation of employment centers near where residents live. A noble plan. But many of those residents that commute long distances are the ones who have been riding the bus to the Keys every day. Miami-Dade may be happy with the plan, but Islamorada lost so many affordable homes at the mobile home park. An RV resort there will be creating a need to add more folks to our workforce... and no place for them to live. On top of that, Weiselberg and partners are planning to provide an employment center close to the homes where many in our workforce live on the mainland. Could it get any worse?

We have a severe affordable housing crisis now and nearly every business in the Keys has continual "Help Wanted" signs out. Can you just imagine what businesses in Islamorada will do if even a small percentage of our commuting workers find new employment at this mega complex near where they live in Homestead.



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

Critically Important Land Use Decision: Public Hearing

Special Call Meeting scheduled for December 2, 2021

(Note that the applicant's name will not be used in this story, just "Owner." All land use decisions should be made based on the goals and policies of our land use regulations, not on personal relationships.)

7/19/2019: Owner bought two 12,000 sq ft tropical hardwood hammock lots between the Old Highway and US One on Plantation Key. The lots have had a Residential Conservation classification since the Village first approved the Future Land Use Maps (FLUM) 18 years ago. Numerous undeveloped lots in that area have the same designation.

4/30/2020: Owner's engineer and Owner received a report following their pre-application conference stating "In order to change the Zoning and Future Land Use designations, you would need to submit and have approved, an application for Map Amendment. An application ... Would not be recommended for approval by staff."

6/30/2020: Owner submitted an application to the Village for the map amendments.

6/14/2021: The amendment was on the LPA agenda. The staff report indicated that according to staff analysis the change requested was consistent with all 5 Comprehensive Policies considered and all 13 Principles for Guiding Development considered. The staff recommended APPROVAL of the map change. The LPA voted 6-0 ignored staff recommendation and recommended DENIAL

7/22/2021: The amendments were on the Council Agenda originally but were pulled by the Village Manager . He indicated he wanted to have the staff report reviewed.

11/15/2021: The map change is back on the LPA agenda with a new, thorough staff report. The new report provides additional information as to the type of native hammock trees and the type of endangered species the habitat is known to support. The report also includes the fact the property is on the Florida Forever Land Acquisition list.

The original staff report analyzed 5 Comprehensive Plan policies and found all to be consistent. This staff report analyzed 12 policies with a mix of consistent and inconsistent. The original staff report analyzed 13 Principles for Guiding Development and all 13 were consistent. This report analyzed 14 and 5 were inconsistent. A majority of those found to be consistent apply primarily to waterfront properties. The staff report recommends denial.

Why is this land use issue critically important?

- ◆ We are facing buildout. Up-zoning property in an Area of Critical Concern is not appropriate.
- ◆ Owner bought this property knowing what was allowed by law.
- ◆ We cannot continue to create added value for developers at the expense of the remainder of the community.
- ◆ There is already adequate property that is appropriately zoned.
- ◆ Our community needs to demonstrate we are committed to protecting our fragile environment.
- ◆ This would be a damaging precedent—Numerous undeveloped lots in that area have the same designation. Dozens of property owners would gain the right to do the same thing.