



Legislation Text

File #: 17-1117, **Version:** 1

TO: Honorable Mayor & Members of the North Port Commission

FROM: Peter D. Lear, CPA, CGMA, Interim City Manager

TITLE: Update on the protection of Orange Hammock Ranch

Recommended Action

None

Background Information

The 5,744-acre Orange Hammock Ranch (OHR) is located in the southeastern area of Sarasota County (County), east of I-75 and adjacent to the City of North Port (City). The property, formerly known as Isles of Athena and the McCall Tract, is currently owned by Orange Hammock Ranch LLC (Attachment 1).

On June 30, 2014, the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (CFGC) submitted a *Florida Forever* project proposal to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. *Florida Forever* is Florida's premier conservation and recreation lands acquisition program. The proposal, titled Myakka Island Conservation Corridor, includes OHR, and was reviewed and ranked by the State's Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC). The project was ranked 5th on the *Florida Forever* Priority List under the Less-Than-Fee Projects category. No funding was received.

On January 26, 2016, the County Commission sent a letter of support to Christine Johnson of the CFGC. The letter also noted that the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Oversight Committee (ESLOC) recommended the acquisition of the property on October 7, 2010 (Attachment 2).

On July 15, 2016, Sarasota County Administration and staff met with representatives from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) to discuss the potential acquisition, use and management of OHR. Discussions included both agencies' desire to acquire the property in partnership with others.

On July 19, 2016, CFGC hosted a "kick-off" meeting to explore opportunities to purchase OHR. In attendance were representatives from CFGC, Sarasota County, SWFWMD, the City of North Port, Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. During the meeting, the history of the property was discussed, followed by a synopsis of the work done to date toward the protection, and scenarios for protection, management and use of the property. In addition, a designated point person was established from each agency attending the meeting. The agencies represented at the meeting were in agreement, and dedicated to work towards the goal to conserve OHR.

On September 12, 2016, Ms. Johnson gave an update to the Board and City Commission on the status of the acquisition of OHR at the Joint Commission Meeting. She stated that the property owners want significant movement before they extend the Option Agreement which expired October 4, 2016. She indicated that significant movement meant that there is a sincere conversation regarding funding commitments. On October 3, 2016, CFGC submitted a request to the property owners of OHR to extend the Option Agreement 90 days.

On November 8, 2016, County staff provided the County Commission with an update on the potential purchase of the acquisition of OHR. The update included a list of other acquisitions and start-up projects being considered through ESLPP and the funding availability. Additionally, staff informed the Board of ESLOC's support of the use of ESLPP funds for Orange Hammock providing that the County retains capacity for other acquisitions and that it is consistent with the enabling ordinance. ESLOC encouraged the Board to support the OHR acquisition.

On March 20, 2017, with the support of the County, SWFWMD sent an offer letter to purchase the property in the amount of \$18M on behalf of the County and SWFWMD. Subsequently, a letter was received from Dykes Everett, the owners' representative, on April 3, 2017 with a counter-offer of a cash purchase in the amount of \$22M with a closing date of September 30, 2017.

On May 5, 2017, SWFWMD and the County agreed to obtain revisions of the current appraisals, as they are now over a year old, and to continue to analyze after receipt of the revised appraisals.

RELEVANT PRIOR BOARD ACTION:

1. January 26, 2016 - The Board voted unanimously to send a letter of support to the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast regarding the Orange Hammock Ranch property (5-0 vote).
2. September 12, 2016 - The Board of County Commissioners and the North Port City Commission considered an update on the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast efforts related to the Orange Hammock Ranch property. (No action was taken.)
3. November 8, 2016 - The Board requested the County Administrator continue to negotiate the purchase of the Orange Hammock Ranch property and work with stakeholders to reach an acceptable purchase price and develop a plan for use, management, maintenance, and public access to the property; **develop a proposed agreement for the Board's consideration; preserve the money for the Walton Ranch and Deer Prairie Creek Preserve Improvement Projects, as scheduled to go forward, not putting a cap on the dollar amount; and to include preserving the Old Myakka Preserve Davidson Parcel cost (5-0 vote).**

ANALYSIS/NEXT STEPS:

The County understands that the Option Agreement with the Conservation Foundation expired and was not extended. However, the County and SWFWMD (as lead negotiator) continue to work in collaboration on exploring options to acquire the OHR. Both agencies are working to identify any other funding sources. SWFWMD indicated they potentially have up to \$9M toward conserving the property. They have noted that their policy is to only pay 90% of the appraised value.

Strategic Plan

N/A

Financial Impact

N/A

Procurement

Attachments:

1. Aerial Map
2. Letter of Support to the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast

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