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BOARDROOM REPORT

News from recent REIS board meetings

Luncheon Programs:

Lee County Economic Development Director Jim Moore will present the annual report on economic development at the February luncheon. Sponsored by [Gulf Coast Business Review](#).

The March 13 luncheon will feature a report on Lee County's new JetBlue Stadium project by project manager Robert Koenig, president of Manhattan Construction (Florida). Sponsored by [Gora/McGahey Architects](#).

John Manning, chairman of the Lee County Board of Commissioners will discuss county goals and objectives for 2012 at the April luncheon, sponsored by [Henderson Franklin Starnes & Holt, PA](#).

REIS welcomes suggestions for programs from members. Please convey your ideas to [Steve Hurley](#), 239.337.3330. Sponsorships for future luncheons are available. Contact [Jean Gruss](#), (239.275.2230) for details.

Scholarship Programs:

The 15th annual Paul Sands Slaw Dog Invitational golf tournament raised \$2,000 for the Paul Sands Memorial - REIS Scholarship at Florida Gulf Coast University. REIS is actively seeking applicants for scholarships. Details are at the [REIS website](#).

Seminars & Workshops:

Steven P. Kushner and Karen Miller are co-chairing the Education Committee. They are currently developing concepts for programs and welcome ideas from REIS members. Contact [Steven](#) (239.433.7707) or [Karen](#) (239.936.4003)

Marketing Ideas:

Present your firm to the key players in Southwest Florida's real estate and development industry by advertising on the REIS website or the *REIS REPORT* newsletter. Contact [Bill Burdette](#) (239.936.1404) for details.

LEE IMPACT FEES TO BE REVIEWED

Lee County impact fee studies have just been updated for school, fire/EMS, and park fees. The studies propose:

- Schools: Decreases of 5% to 25%
- Fire: Decreases for the majority of fire districts for all categories except retail and office uses, which would increase
- EMS: Decreases for most categories except for hotel/motel and warehouse uses, which would increase
- Community parks: Remains basically unchanged
- Regional parks: Increases of 5% to 13%

The Local Planning Agency (LPA) will consider the proposals at a public hearing Monday, Feb. 27, at 8:30 a.m. in Chambers. Commissioners are tentatively expected to hold their public hearing March 13. Check the events calendar on the REIS website for latest schedule. The executive summary of the studies includes the proposed fees and the entire reports are available at www.lee-county.com/dcd.

COUNTY AUDIT RAISES LAND ISSUES

The final audit of Lee County government land acquisition procedures criticizes appraisal practices and cites the need for greater disclosure. The audit is available at the Lee County Clerk of Courts website: www.leeclerk.org
The audit challenges the "highest and best use" method for appraising land which the County does not intend to develop. The recent review of County acquisitions has also raised questions about the transfer of impact fee credits and development rights on acquired lands.

Court Clerk Charlie Green and Lee County Commissioner will discuss the issues, as well as the 20/20 conservation lands program, at the February 22 meeting of The Tiger Bay Club of Southwest Florida. The luncheon meeting is open to the public but reservations are required. Details and registration at www.swfltigerbay.org



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MARKET WATCH 2012

The annual review and forecast for Southwest Florida real estate takes place February 23 at Harborside Event Center in Fort Myers. Former REIS President Stan Stouder, CCIM, will assess commercial market sectors; Realtor Denny Grimes will offer an overview of residential trends, and REIS member Randy Thibaut will report on land and development. www.marketwatch2012.com

SEMINAR ON CHANGING REGULATIONS

The changing roles of state and local regulatory agencies will be discussed in a half-day seminar in Fort Myers on February 22. Speakers include Herschel T. Vineyard, Jr., Secretary of Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection, and Melissa L. Meeker, Executive Director of South Florida Water Management District. Presented by the [Chamber of Southwest Florida](http://www.chamberofswfl.com).

LEGISLATIVE ISSUES TO WATCH

Legislative action of particular importance to the business and real estate community continued to advance in week 5 of the 2012 Legislature:

Tangible Taxes - Joint resolutions HJR1003/SJR 064 and HB1005/SB1062 would put a constitutional amendment on the November ballot that would empower the Legislature to increase the corporate tax exemption from \$25,000 to \$50,000, reduce the Tangible Personal Property Tax paid by business owners, and exempt any business with less than \$50,000 in tangible personal property from paying the tax. The resolution has passed the Finance and Tax Committee.

Property Taxes - House and Senate are working on amending or rewriting last year's proposed amendment that would expand homestead exemption and reduce the caps on annual increases (HJR 1289, SJR 314). Other resolutions would allow property tax relief for military families (HJR 93) and low-income seniors (HJR 55).

Property & Casualty Insurance - House and Senate committees are moving forward with bills (HB 1127 and SB 1346) that would reform the current system by reducing the amount of potential "regular assessments" issued by Citizens Property Insurance & Casualty Corp. The assessments are mandatory no-interest loans from private insurers to pay Citizens' claims.

REIS 2012 OFFICERS & GOVERNORS



Front row, from left: Secretary Matt Simmons, President Kim Donnelly, Vice President Steve Hurley, and Treasurer Sean M. Ellis, Esq. Back row, from left: Steven P. Kushner, Esq., Jean Gruss, Lisa Sands, Robin M. Mixon, Karen Miller, and immediate past president Kevin M. Fitzgerald. Governors Amanda Brock, Esq. and Roy Hyman were not available for the group photo.

FLORIDA BUILDING CODE CHANGES

Effective March 15, building permit applications must comply with the 2010 Florida Building Code. Master plans on file with the Community Development Department must be updated to the new code. Plans submitted on or after March 15 must be certified as meeting the 2010 Florida Building Code. Details at www.floridabuilding.org.

REIS MEMBERSHIP AVAILABLE

REIS Memberships for 2011 expired December 31. If you have not renewed and wish to do so, contact Bill Burdette, bill@burdetteinc.com or 239.936.1404. A limited number of memberships are now available if you have colleagues or clients who would like to join. Membership information and application are at www.reis-swfl.org.

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Reduce Landscape Services Costs and Increase Sustainability

By Jason Salmon,

Opportunities abound for properties to respond to challenging economic conditions faced today. By proactively deploying smart landscape service managers can reduce landscape costs, while still improving the sustainable elements of a property. Applying some simple measures and best practices can provide numerous benefits.

Certainly, the economy presents a real need to be more efficient in the operation of a property, yet still be friendly to Mother Earth. The impact of a smart landscape and maintenance plan can be significant, with annual savings in the 15% to 20% range. When making decisions about how to achieve the goals of a property, an obvious starting point is to assess the existing design, systems and plantings before developing a plan to maintain, improve and enhance a property.

For example, properties constructed 20 or more years ago have common age-related elements that typically need to be addressed. First, an area to look at is the irrigation system, which usually involves deploying more advanced technology. A second area to explore is enhancements of the existing landscape with sustainable, drought-resistant plants. Finally, consider what elements of the original landscape design still meet today's standards.

Smart controllers or sensors to detect when plants actually need water didn't exist when properties were built in the 1970s or 1980s. By investing in these kinds of improvements to an irrigation system a property can generate the kind of savings that reasonably would expect to pay off within 24 months and in some cases even shorter ROI periods.

Sustainable landscape is good for the environment and can impact bottom lines as well. Replacing existing plants with those that are Florida native or adaptive to an area or are drought tolerant will help address a need for all to use water resources more wisely. A property might even be able to utilize a recycled water source.

Over time the needs of a property may change so it is necessary to examine the original landscape design and determine what improvements can be made. A smart approach considers selective removal and replanting of marginal performing or high-maintenance shrubs and trees. The region of the State in which a property is located serves as a good guide for what to plant.

Landscape services partners must drive value and serve as a maintenance strategist rather than just a contractor. For properties, it is critical in today's budget sensitive environment to count on a team of landscape experts who also understand the business side of a property because it can directly impact value. The landscape services team needs to build a relationship with a property that's based on listening, caring and acting in the property's best interest.

Knowing what can be done with the landscape, when it should be done and why a recommendation makes sense from a financial and landscape best practice is the measure of true value of a landscape services firm to a property. A landscape services partner must ensure the landscape reflects the quality and value the owner desires since it is one of the first things people see.

About the Author

Jason Salmon, is a member of the Real Estate Investment Society (REIS) and is Regional Business Developer with ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance and can be reached at (239) 410 6416 or jsalmon@valleycrest.com. ValleyCrest has 35 offices in Florida and is an integrated landscape services company. For more information, visit www.valleycrest.com.

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