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BOARDROOM REPORT

News from recent REIS board meetings

Luncheon Programs:

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 board has elected to award 3 scholarships of \$1,000 each from the REIS Scholarship Foundation and 1 from the Paul Sands Memorial - REIS Scholarship. The recipients will be introduced at the April luncheon. 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.

Membership Opportunity: 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-swf.org.

LEE IMPACT FEES TO BE REVIEWED

Lee County staff supports changes to impact fees as proposed in recent studies, while the Local Planning Agency (LPA) recommends a 2-year suspension of impact fees for schools, parks and emergency services. Real estate, building and economic development leaders are actively supporting the recommendation to suspend fees.

County Commissioners will hold a public hearing at 9:30 am, April 10. 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 executive summary of the studies includes the proposed fees and the entire reports are available at www.lee-county.com/dcd.

REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN FORUM

Florida's Dept. of Economic Opportunity - Division of Strategic Business Development (DEO) is conducting a Regional Forum to gather input on strategies and accountable action steps for Florida's 2012-2017 Statewide Strategic Plan, scheduled to be adopted in May. This Regional Forum sought to determine strategies and accountable action steps reflective of Southwest Florida. The goals of the statewide plan are to increase Florida's global competitiveness, promote it as a destination of choice for business and industry, and to facilitate business development through world-class customer service. Further information is available from the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council at www.swfrpc.org.



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WATER QUALITY REGS IN LIMBO

Tough new standards for "numeric nutrient criteria" have been delayed again. In 2009 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a mandate that Florida implement stricter rules on water quality. The EPA later agreed to allow Florida to develop its own rules, which have been prepared by Florida Dept. of Environmental Regulation (DEP) and approved by the governor. Meanwhile, environmental groups sued the EPA to require the federal standards. Last month a federal judge ruled that the state must implement a portion of the federal criteria by March 6 but on March 5 the judge delayed the deadline to July 6 to allow EPA to decide again whether to allow the state to use its own criteria. The stakes are high. The EPA's economic analysis puts the annual cost of its rules at \$135.5 to \$201.1 million. The state DEP estimates its version to cost \$51 to \$150 million annually. On March 6 the National Research Council reported that its analysis reveals that the EPA has underestimated the cost of the rule change.

NORTH PORT IMPACT FEES DROP

North Port is placing a 2-year moratorium on impact fees for transportation and solid waste. Fees for parks, emergency services, and general government are reduced 50%. Impact fees for single-family homes drop from \$7,850 to \$1,137 and shopping centers greater than 50,000 sf from \$7,488 to \$675 per 1,000 sf.

LEE SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

Lee County Commissioners adopted the "sustainability assessment" prepared by the Office of Sustainability, formerly known as Smart Growth. The Office of Sustainability, the Community Sustainability Advisory Committee, the Lee Green Team, and other working groups appointed by the team will now develop goals based on the assessment. report at [Lee County's website](#).

LEE BUYING CONSERVATION LAND

Lee County's Conservation Lands Program ("20/20") has over \$43 million in its land acquisition fund and is actively accepting nominations and reviewing lands suitable for acquisition. Information, property criteria, and forms to submit properties for review are at the [20/20 website](#).

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LEGISLATIVE ISSUES TO WATCH

Legislative action of particular importance to the business and real estate community continued to advance in the final week 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 resolutions are in Budget Committee.

Property Taxes - House and Senate efforts to revise last year's proposed amendment that would expand homestead exemption and reduce the caps on annual increases (HJR 1289, SJR 314) has been temporarily postponed. Other resolutions would allow property tax relief for military families (HJR 93) and low-income seniors (HJR 55).

Property & Casualty Insurance - House and Senate 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. The bills are now in budget review.

Growth Management - Senate Bill 1180 would allow cities and counties to opt out of the state's Development of Regional Impact review process if they wish to provide faster approval for projects. The bill also requires counties to approve land use changes for agricultural properties that are largely surrounded by industrial, commercial or residential uses.

CONGRESSIONAL FORUM

Candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives District 14 seat, representing Southwest Florida, will convene at Harborside Event Center in Fort Myers on March 26 to present their credentials and positions on key issues. Over 10 candidates are seeking the office, currently held by Connie Mack, who is running for the Senate. The Forum is presented by the Tiger Bay Club of Southwest Florida. Details and registration at www.swfltigerbay.org

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Maximizing Values Via Water Conservation

By Jason Salmon

Today, more than ever, smarter water management plans are required at properties across the SW Florida region. Property owners and managers must examine all aspects of a budget to find ways to maximize the value, yet still achieve the highest standards of operational performance. Water efficiency programs can help create value, improve the environment and produce impressive results for the bottom line.

For many owners and managers, water conservation is a fact of life. But for others, water may not be perceived as a precious resource simply because it seems to be plentiful in their area. Even though water is relatively inexpensive, it is a limited natural resource. As the population increases, the earth's available fresh water remains constant, thus as demand increases, so too will the price. Adopting a smart water management program now is a critical component to operate a building at peak efficiency at all times, not just when irrigation restrictions exist.

Cutting costs through sustainable practices makes financial sense as well. Property owners and managers throughout the country are learning that landscape management can enhance the bottom line in a number of ways, including making the grounds more aesthetically pleasing and more sustainable, which plays a role in improved tenant retention.

WHERE TO START

Smart water conservation programs could include adopting more ecologically friendly landscape programs and reducing landscape operating costs at the same time. A good starting place is to create a landscape management plan that focuses on three components: horticultural improvements, reducing water consumption and sending less waste to landfills. Initially, that means determining water consumption and maintenance costs

required to sustain the current level of landscape, identifying plants that require the most water, and determining fertilizer needs – all of which can reveal some opportunities for improvement.

The landscape program may also encompass a plant density reduction plan, resulting in the removal of some plants that required significant amounts of water. Plants that required watering five days can be replaced with shrubs requiring only two days of irrigation.

TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE WATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Water-conserving drip irrigation systems can be systematically installed and properties can be retrofitted with smart, weather-based controllers, which lowers irrigation water usage on average 24 percent a year. Despite the initial investment, programs can contribute significant reductions – for instance, we helped a customer save more than 81 million gallons of water on one large campus.

At a different property, significant savings were realized as a result of the installation of 70 ET (Evapo-transpiration) irrigation controllers. The owner also installed subsurface drip irrigation on 86 stations and converted nearly 163,000 square feet of high input plants to sustainable native plants. Other water smart measures included practicing hydro-zoning, converting onsite tree trimmings into natural mulch, converting shallow-rooted ground cover into drought tolerant shrubs with a drip rather than spray irrigation system, and reducing turf areas under canopy trees.

These tips and examples show that positive results occur when managers treat their property's landscape as an asset and practice sustainable principles such as water and waste reduction. The value of the landscaped asset increases, spending on maintenance decreases, less water is used and more environmentally-friendly processes are integrated into standard operations. Ultimately, a smart water management program can help a building run more efficiently, which is good news for the environment and bottom line.

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 . .

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