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<http://www.HomosassaRiverAlliance.org>

CITIZEN'S ALERT!

JOIN US ON APRIL 14, 2015, at 5:01 pm

IN INVERNESS AT THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

**HALLS RIVER RETREAT/HALLS RIVER
DEVELOPMENT**

**IF YOU LOVE THE WATER AND IT IS ONE OF THE REASONS YOU
CHOSE TO LIVE HERE – TAKE NOTICE. THE PROPOSAL LOOKS
QUITE DIFFERENT BUT WILL HAVE THE SAME EFFECT ON THE
HOMOSASSA RIVER AND ALL WHO LIVE AROUND IT. WE ASK THAT
YOU PLEASE READ CAREFULLY THE FOLLOWING SO WE CAN ALL
SPEAK FOR A RIVER THAT CANNOT SPEAK FOR ITSELF.**

**DOES A 110-ROOM HOTEL proposed for Halls River beside the bridge FIT THE
neighborhood PROFILE (WITH AT LEAST FOUR STORIES plus fill below) OF
RESIDENTIAL Homosassa?**

**Can it possibly be a welcomed addition when we are still fighting to increase and
protect the water flow level in the Homosassa River while also ending its current
polluted status? Halls River flows into the Homosassa just a few lots away from this
site. The potential for damaging runoff impacting social and commercial boating
pleasures and our commercial fishing industry is too high.**

**In keeping with our purpose to protect and restore the Homosassa River and its
springs and tributaries, please make every effort to attend this meeting.**

HISTORY:

YEAR 2000 – HALLS RIVER RETREAT:

Eleven residential acres were purchased by a Mr. F. Blake Longacre on the north of the Homosassa River which was zoned residential. This property was marked as a High Hazard Area and mixed use. He made an application in 2000 to change it to recreational, wanting to put fifty-four condominiums in a residential area. It was passed by the Board of County Commissioners. The project was taken to court by the Homosassa River Alliance and Protect Our Waterways groups because it was far more intense than the Comprehensive Plan allowed.

In the Comprehensive Plan, a PDO (planned development overlay) is a way to get around the Comprehensive Plan, per se. It allows for changes to be made to a piece of property regardless of the Plan if it is deemed that these changes can enhance/benefit said property (that can be a matter of opinion). Communities often use overlay zones to protect special features such as historic buildings, wetlands, steep slopes, and waterfronts. Overlay zones can also be used to promote specific development projects, such as mixed-used developments, waterfront developments, housing along transit corridors, or affordable housing. In the end, the case went to court and the conservationists won. In the transcripts of the court hearings the Judge makes it very clear to the County that the ruling is worded exactly as he intended and the effect should be as intended, that development orders must be consistent with the Plan. The project exceeded the Comprehensive Plan. At that time, the property remained residential.

YEAR 2011 – HALLS RIVER DEVELOPMENT:

New name, same issues. In spite of the clear language of the Court in the Halls River Retreat rulings, a new proposal for this property was presented to the county. It was a slightly different name and a slightly different project, but we had the same objections: the proposed project was not consistent with the Citrus County Comprehensive Plan. The Halls River Development proposed a 3000 sq. ft. waterfront restaurant, a waterfront “resort” with a manager’s residence, 20 one-bedroom cabins, 10 two-bedroom cabins, a marina (boat rentals), and other amenities. All of this to go on an 11-acre waterfront home site that is riddled with wetlands and zoned for 1 home.

In spite of the opposition from a group of concerned citizens who lived near the property, it was changed from residential to recreational. The plan was for 31 cabins of one-story height, a manager’s house and a 3,000 square foot restaurant. The approval was challenged in Circuit Court. The case was still winding its way through the judicial system when in late 2012 the developer quietly submitted an application to former Development Services Director Vince Cautero seeking his approval of a downsized project. Without any public notice or public hearings, Cautero approved the new application stating the new site plan met all requirements for setbacks and other regulations and he concluded no public hearings were required. Based on Cautero's in-house approval of the new downsized site plan the Court dismissed the pending case.

PRESENT TIME:

The latest proposal is to change the use designation from recreational to commercial in a planned development of a 110-room hotel, a pool, and a 2,500 square foot restaurant.

The applicant's lawyer says the commercial designation and his Planned Unit Development is "compatible" because there is a campground (Nature's Resort) to the south and west (RVP). Nothing is high rise in the RV park. To its east is a two-story steel framework for Margarita Grill restaurant, on fill and floating docks, listed as commercial (CLC) and residential with mobile homes (CLR). The applicant would double the height of Margarita Grill, sticking it well above the tree tops.

So once again, F. Blake Longacre is trying to change all the rules governing land use in the Coastal High Hazard Area (CHHA) by changing the current designation from recreational to commercial. He wants us to ignore the fact that he would have to pump water uphill to a holding area (wetlands) to prevent stormwater run-off from entering our Outstanding Florida Waters. If the County Commissioners approve this, there is no way to stop other commercial ventures to come into other Coastal High Hazard Areas.

Message From the President:

I recently attended a meeting of the Planning and Development Commission (PDC) and watched a strange thing happen. The item I was interested in was an application to build a four-story, 110 unit hotel on the Halls River – on the North side of the Homosassa River, West of the Halls River Road bridge. It is on the same side of the Halls River as Nature's Resort. The site is arguably the most environmentally sensitive area in the entire county.

In my opinion the staff did at best a perfunctory review of the application and unbelievably recommended approval. The application itself is incomplete and inaccurate. One person spoke in favor of the development. A dozen or so of us voiced our objections. Although only one person spoke in favor, the chairman of the committee stated that he was required to speak for "all" of the citizens of Citrus County and endorsed the proposal. Where were "all" of the people of whom he spoke?

None of the commission members asked a single question directly related to the many issues raised by the opposition. The vote was 6-0 to recommend approval. Was "The Fix" in? Sure smelled like it to me.

There are some serious troubling issues raised by these proceedings. The PDC's handling was inept and brings into question among other things the current make-up of the PDC.

The application will come before the Board of County Commissioners for a final decision on April 14th. I hope that as many of our members who can attend that meeting. Let's find out what is really going on here.

ON FEBRUARY 15, 2015, THE HOMOSASSA RIVER ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS VOTED TO PUBLICALLY ANNOUNCE THAT IT OPPOSES THE HALLS RIVER DEVELOPMENT.

Jim Bitter

NOTICE – MONTHLY MEETING CHANGE

The March 12th meeting of the River Alliance will begin at 7:45 P.M. instead of 7:00 P.M. at the Homosassa Civic Center. Members will be attending a Town Hall Meeting with Commissioner Ron Kitchen from 6-7:30 P.M. at the Homosassa Public Library.

SAY NO TO THE HALLS RIVER PROJECT

By The Staff - Citrus County Chronicle, Thursday, January 1, 2015

THE ISSUE: County to decide future of planned resort on Halls River Road.

OUR OPINION: In keeping with its goals, county should reject plan.

The long journey for developer F. Blake Longacre and his plans for a resort on Halls River Road may make yet another stop before the Board of County Commissioners.

Longacre’s latest plans for the endeavor calls for a 110-unit hotel/ motel, replacing earlier plans for a 3,000-square-foot restaurant and 31 resort-style cabins at the juncture of the Homosassa and Halls Rivers. Those plans were approved by the BOCC in 2011, amended after Longacre’s approved plans for a 52-unit condominium resort were successfully challenged in court as being inconsistent with strictures the county has in its Comprehensive Plan - something the board would do well to remember when considering the development’s latest revisions.

Furthermore, going from 31 resort cabins to a 110-unit hotel/motel is a huge reach, and would indelibly alter the aesthetic residents and visitors to Old Homosassa appreciate and seek out. Such increased density brings with it its own host of problems: The area is an environmentally fragile, high-hazard coastal area, and the proposed resort’s visitors may ultimately do more to tarnish the area’s natural beauty than the resort itself would. Such development would also likely be prone to huge transportation headaches, both for the resort’s visitors and area residents.

We’re not opposed to developers’ attempts to attract tourists and their business to Citrus County, but these embattled plans have been so for good reason. As earlier stated, the county has enshrined in its Comprehensive Plan an edict to reduce density in environmentally sensitive areas, and granting approval for this development would be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

The revised plans will go before the Planning and Development Commission for review on Feb. 6 and, if approved by that board, on to the BOCC. We’re grateful the BOCC said no to the development plans at Pirate’s Cove, and should the amended designs for the Halls River project make it to the board, we feel it would be correct for commissioners to reject them as well.

NOTE: On February 6th, the Planning and Development Commission reviewed the plans, giving its approval to go before the Board of County Commissioners. It is here that we are asking for community support. It is not enough to write or call your public officials expressing concerns. Your presence at the meeting on April 14th is crucial. Please make every effort to attend.

THE JOURNEY OF WATER - THE FLORIDAN AQUIFER

To understand Florida's springs and their importance as natural resources, we must first understand the water cycle and aquifer that sustain them. Contrary to popular belief, Florida's springs are not the source of fresh water; they are but one step on water's long journey through what is known as the Floridan Aquifer, the underground water source for 60 percent of Florida's residents.

The journey begins in the sky, where the state's abundant **rainfall** recharges the Floridan aquifer, our underground water source. Over 150 billion gallons of rain falls in Florida, more than any other state in the nation except Louisiana.

Water's journey through the water cycle begins with a process called **evaporation**. Water stored in lakes, rivers and the ocean is converted into water vapor by the heat of the sun. This warmer, wetter air is drawn upwards and comes in contact with cooler, high atmospheric air. It eventually **condenses** back into water droplets which form clouds.

A significant percentage of water released into the atmosphere is by trees and plants in a process called **transpiration**. Plants absorb water from the soil and then transpire this water back into the atmosphere through their leaves and stems.

In areas where soil is resistant to water, as in the case of clay, **runoff** occurs where water will flow into lakes, rivers, wetlands and the ocean. In Florida, has loose sandy soil and porous limestone so rainfall usually soaks directly into the ground.

Rainfall seeps underground through a process called **percolation**, whereby water travels downwards through the tiny spaces between rocks and soil particles, and within the "Swiss cheese" structure of the limestone. The water eventually saturates the underlying limestone in much the same way water fills the tiny holes of a sponge. It is this process of percolation that allows Florida's abundant rainfall to replenish the immense volumes of water flowing from the springs.

Though the first step of water's journey to the springs begins in the sky, the water cycle itself is a never-ending process, and no single step is more important than any other. Evaporation, transpiration, condensation, rainfall, run-off, and percolation all play a critical part in ensuring that water is consistently available for both natural processes and human use.

Without all of the above, springs would not exist and this is the most crucial part. Why? Simple – the source of our drinking water and the crystal clear water in springs is the Floridan Aquifer. It is nature's underground water storage system.

You can go to www.floridasprings.org for an interactive presentation of the water cycle and the flow of water through the aquifer to gain a better understanding of Florida's springs.

BUSY WEEK IN TALLAHASSEE

On Wednesday, February 18, more than 400 Floridians gathered on the state Capitol in Tallahassee to rally for Clean Water and Amendment 1. With an incredible host of speakers spanning the width and breadth of Florida, conservationists from across the state demanded that their voices be heard by Florida lawmakers. Chants of "Amendment 1 is not a slush fund!" and "Save our springs!" could be heard from the crowds while media outlets interviewed activists as lawmakers and their aides looked on.

"The incredible show of support for water and land conservation really helps set the tone for the 2015 legislative session," said Aliko Moncrief, Director of Florida's Water and Land Legacy. "Between the rally and engaging with legislators in the hours that followed, I think our supporters did an amazing job of reminding our elected representatives what voters intended when they overwhelmingly passed Amendment 1."

After the rally, activists took to the halls of the Legislature to meet with lawmakers and encourage them to honor the intent of Amendment 1 and fund the conservation programs that will protect our waters at the source. Dan Hilliard spoke to the Chairman of the Senate Environmental Committee and others during the afternoon on our behalf.

Legislative Update

On the heels of the rally, the Senate Environmental Preservation Committee met to address the series of bills relating to Amendment 1. The bills make "structural" changes in order to ensure transparency and accountability in implementation Amendment 1. Will Abberger provided testimony on behalf of the Amendment 1 coalition, reiterating that the amendment language clearly provides funding for existing programs, such as Florida Forever and Everglades restoration.

RALLY IN TALLY:

**SENDING A
MESSAGE
LOUD
AND
CLEAR**

IN THE NEWS

If you'd like to see the rally in the news, check out the links below!

NBC-2.com: [**Group demands lawmakers fix water quality**](#)

WUFT.org: [**Environmental Groups 'Rally in Tally' to talk Amendment 1 spending**](#)

As quoted by Rep. Clovis Watson), "We are a springs destination." "Water is our future. Without it, none of it will matter."

Even though Amendment 1 passed overwhelmingly, voters say they're keeping an eye on lawmakers to make sure they're spending the money the way it was intended...

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR MAILING LABEL INDICATES THE LAST TIME YOU UPDATED YOUR MEMBERSHIP/DUES. YOUR SUPPORT IS VERY MUCH NEEDED AND APPRECIATED.

CITRUS COUNTY SCIENCE FAIR

Students from Citrus County presented their Science Projects on February 3, 2015 at the Citrus County Auditorium in Inverness.

Karen Johnstone and Jane Perrin represented the Homosassa River Alliances as judges. There were projects relating to various areas of science but their objective was to select the best projects relating to preservation of Florida waterways.

Three projects were awarded cash prizes as follows:

Senior Division - \$100.00 each–

1. **Madison Ruble** - Her project investigated whether seawalls with glass would erode more slowly. Three sets of blocks were used as models. One set plain, another set with 5 broken bottles and the last set, with 10 broken bottles. The blocks were inserted into brackish water. After a 4 week period, the model with the most glass showed less erosion.

2. **William Merritt** – William was inspired by an article he had read about eco-friendly large solar treatment plants in Australia to purify grey water. He simulated grey water by using water, detergent and dirt. He set up a system in his yard placing his grey water in containers on sunny, cloudless days thus

evaporating the water. He collected the condensed water and sent it to a laboratory for testing. The water was tested to see if it was suitable for drinking.

Junior Division - \$50.00 –

Michelle Beno – Michelle tested the effect of different levels of copper sulfate on marine life. In particular, she compared the mortality of snails in different water samples.

Michelle will be attending the River Alliance Meeting in the near future to discuss her project.

The winners will also be given a year's membership to the River Alliance.

ANNUAL MEETING AND PICNIC

The Annual meeting/picnic will be held at Bluebird Springs on April 9th at 4 p.m.

Bring a dish to share and join us for an afternoon of fun and friendship.

**Florida Springs Council Requests
\$300 Million in 2015-2016 State
Budget for Springs Protection**

On February 12, 2015, the Florida Springs Council sent letters to thirteen key legislators requesting the State allocate \$300 million for springs protection and restoration in the 2015-2016 State budget. The letter briefly highlights past spending on springs and the termination of key programs such as the Florida Springs Initiative.

Although spending has increased for water projects such as the Central Florida Water Initiative and Everglades restoration, oversight for the spending of funds for springs has diminished along with the health of Florida's waters. As a result, regulations designed to protect our springs over the last 20 years have gone unenforced due to a lack of funding.

The Council urged the legislature to use funding "to purchase sensitive lands with high re-charge value in springsheds, to mitigate the most polluting sources with conservation easements, and to provide for well-crafted projects increasing spring flow while decreasing pollution at the source."

The River Alliance has joined this organization. Brad Rimbey attended the January 17th Roundtable as a representative of the Homosassa River Alliance and the Withlacoochee River Alliance.

During an afternoon session, Roundtable participants engaged in group discussions on ways to promote the mission and goals of the Florida

Springs Council. Minutes from the Roundtable meeting as well as handouts and presentation materials can be found on the Florida Springs Council website.. hculp@floridaspringsinstitute.org.

LEARNING CENTER NEEDS HELP

Joanne Bartell, Executive Director of the Homosassa Civic Club Learning Center is seeking volunteers for tutoring, mentoring and as a proctor. If you have some spare time, I urge you to give Joanne a call at 601-6785 or me at 628-1563. I assure you that your time will be well spent because these services are desperately needed for the Center to continue.

Jim Bitter

Homosassa River Alliance

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