

# Georgetown East Association, Inc.

May 11th, 2021 Special Meeting

**Board Members via webinar:** Gerard Bribiescas, Tom Geraci, Sam Gray, Alison Thompson, Sheila Goodwin, and Jean-Paul Antona

**Ameri-Tech Community Management Present:** Robert Kelly, LCAM

Gerard Bribiescas called the Special Meeting to order at 6:30 pm: A full quorum established with Alison and Tom on the webinar and Sam, JP, Sheila, and Gerard at the Ameri-Tech office conference room. Proof of Notice was postmarked April 27, 2021 in accordance with Association ByLaws.

## Certifying Proxies & Established Quorum:

1. Gerard: The State of Florida has stated that a quorum of no more than 30% is sufficient. We are close to 40%. The State of Florida is permitting us to meet via webinar and count those people as well.
2. Gerard: Tonight is a process of information sharing. Please be respectful and kind. We are a community.
3. Gerard: we certified the proxies and we have established that we have a quorum of lots represented (30 proxies; 12 on-site; 18 via zoom webinar).

## Opening Comments & Reason for Meeting - Karen Bartoszek:

1. Karen: Thank you for the opportunity to kick-off the meeting. The meeting is a testament to our HOA documents and how they are working as they should. In March we had a group of homeowners who came forward with the following questions. We have some concerns around dredging and why it is needed. We understood at that time the reason for dredging was planting. All the other questions stemmed from that: what would the impact be on homes and animals. Understanding the problem that the board is trying to resolve is our key question. Gerard did a great job. He sought out resources and arranged for a resource from Pinellas County extension to answer questions about retention ponds and dredging with an expert who has been with Pinellas county for 30 years; grew up in Pinellas County. What we learned from that walk was that Georgetown ponds appear to be in good health. We talked. Dredging is not necessarily needed for planting plants. He took a look at the pond and said planting proper water plants can help with water filtration. He looked at the current slope of the ponds and said it would be ok for plants to take root. His thought was that dredging could make it harder for the plants to take root. He also mentioned that it could cause further bank erosion. He said we need to install the right plants and properly maintain those plants to ensure they don't overgrow. Considering that and the package of information we received this morning was

very comprehensive and the letter from Steve Green from Florida Aquatic it appears that dredging is off the table. Without the exception of the 2021 list of projects and some discussion around retention ponds and the plants, talking amongst ourselves, it really seems the reason for this meeting has been resolved provided that dredging is off the table. Thank you for your time.

### **Reserve Study Information (2013 & 2021):**

1. Jack Majewski was not present to present.
2. Jean-Paul Antona (JP): I will walk through the 2013 and 2021 reserve study, focusing on the Stormwater drainage retention pond information. On page 6 of the 2013 reserve study, we see a very limited definition of stormwater retention. The report only identifies aerators and pond dredging maintenance for a total cost of \$44k. Then on page 22 of the 2013 they provide more detail on the pond ditch and dredging maintenance. At that time it was noted that the condition was good and consistent with age. The notes indicate a remaining life span of 19 years. Some dredging was done in 2012 with the next dredging due in 2032 with a projected cost of \$78k. But what you'll notice is a very limited definition of stormwater system: no discussion of the connectors between ponds, the weir structures, or curvelets. Which is very different for the 2021 reserve study, where there are two separate line items: one for **dredging and erosion control** and the other for **storm drainage, inspection, and repairs**. We've got \$240k spent for both of these line items over 30 years. So it's a different analysis than the 2013 reserve study. For instance, the 2021 indicates a remaining useful life of 3 years. So they are talking about something different: not just dredging ponds but also about bank restoration, installation of rip raps, replacement of sod and plant material. A much greater level of detail from the 2013. The 2021 reserve study, in fact, estimates spending \$8k every three years, just for the first line item. The second line item is also estimated spending \$8k every three years for the connectors between the ponds, the underground piping, the inlets, the culverts, etc. It's a more complete view and understanding of the retention and drainage systems. In that sense, I think the 2021 reserve study has a more complete understanding of our costs and responsibilities. Clearly, what we know there are risks with not dredging and repairing these systems. A lot of costs have been included in the reserve study to do maintenance on these systems for the purpose to avoid flooding in our neighborhoods. The more sediment builds up in these ponds, that is less capacity for water to flow in during large storms, and we have a lot of those, and some people would say we should expect more storms. And the systems between the ponds, if these are not maintained, then there are definitely risks with not maintaining the retention ponds and the systems between them. And that is in fact why FPAT (Felten Professional Adjustment Team, Inc) is allocating so much of our reserve budget to address these costs. I asked FPAT about these line items and the answer indicates that most of the cost is to control erosion rather than dredging. The reserve studies definitely indicate dredging needs to happen but there is no indication that we are currently in the time and space when it is necessary. There are still a lot of things we need to maintain in the meantime.

3. Victoria Romero: Now that we know the cost of the 2021 study, are we going to adjust our budget to allocate funds as the years go on to address the erosion and dredging.
4. JP: Yes, we had the results of this study last year. So in our budget cycle for planning, that is why we increased the homeowners fees, to ensure we could address all known future costs.
5. Ann Kanuck: Flooding is a big concern. Have we ever had any flooding into our streets that came from our ponds?
6. Karen B: Back in 2012 Hurricane Debbie was sitting off the coast and just stalled. One of the bands stopped in northern Pinellas. All the streets did flood and receded into the ponds. Within a couple hours of the storm leaving, the ponds all went back down to their normal capacity. The drainage system worked.
7. Ann Kanuck: I'm reading this email from Steven Green, he seems to suggest dredging being such a high cost item, it seems to not be a priority for us.

### **2021 Budget & Project Priorities - JP:**

1. This is our YTD Operating Budget for 2021, showing what we estimated to spend over the entire year, and where we are YTD. We projected we would receive \$64k income by April. We exceeded that because some people are paying ahead of time. In terms of expenses, we overall have underspent in our expenses except for some overspend in Landscaping and Contracted Services (lake maintenance).
2. Our operating balance is currently \$153k and Reserve balance of \$112k.
3. Ruth Fruge: All this extra money in the budget that seems to be spent in every direction. Where do I see that we have a budget for storm disaster. I'm not concerned about the retention pond or drainage. What is going to happen when we have a storm? We don't need to dredge because the storm is going to dredge the pond.
4. JP: There are two parts of that: insurance and our surplus. We are steadily paying insurance to cover for emergency. Surplus can cover the rest.
5. Ruth: Do we have to spend all of the surplus?
6. JP: No, we are only using \$20k out of \$120k.
7. Gerard: The \$20k was allocated for the beautification and celebration of our community. \$5k to address our governing documents, and \$15k for landscape beautification. The board made sure we are saving the remaining \$100k operating surplus. We are keeping it in Operating so we have more flexibility to use it in situations like a storm emergency.
8. Joe: Was that decision documented?
9. JP: We made a motion on it in the meeting minutes.
10. Ruth: to beautify the neighborhood, there are other things that take priority over the drainage, like the fencing.
11. JP: We will address fencing in future meetings. The special meeting will stay focused on Dredging and Stormwater drainage.
12. Cindy Huffer: Does the state require us to put some kind of label on large sums like \$100k?
13. Bob: No. There is no law that requires a cap to our operating account.

14. Gerard: If we lock it into reserves, we wouldn't ever be able to use it for catastrophic storms. By keeping it in Operating, we have more flexibility to respond to uncertainties. This board agreed on keeping the \$100k for a rainy day fund.
15. Victoria: We need to allocate money to cover all known expenses for the pond and stormwater on a monthly basis.
16. JP: Yes, that's what we do. Currently, we have \$112k in our Reserve total. \$12k of that is reserved for stormwater drainage costs and \$800 for dredging. We are contributing to those on a monthly basis. Our most active costs are keeping the stormwater drainage system optimized.
17. For the 2021 Project Priorities, there is currently a lot of discussion and planning on Walls & Fences. We are planning to bring a plan and vote to the community by the end of the year. Also, currently a lot of consideration for keeping the water flowing in the ditch and all the boundary issues that go with that. The third item is the dredging and the ponds. The word dredging is causing confusion but what this really means is keeping the stormwater systems optimized and addressing erosion and planting. Other projects include tree analysis. And we are looking for a new landscape maintenance company this year.

#### **Stormwater System History and Information:**

1. Joe Mallozi: I did a lot of research. Most of this area before development was wetland. The retention pond system allows us to take on a surge of water. Every community in Pinellas County has a pond (and alligators!). These systems have pluses and minuses. My planting concerns... I think there are positives and negatives. The benefit is that a lot of these aquatic plants do some filtering. The negatives of plants is maintaining them, and how invasive these plants can be. Two of our ponds are rather small. How well will the plants do when there isn't water in them? Kensington pond has the most organic matter than can fall into the pond. We did some planting in Roxbury. I think it would be prudent to evaluate how well it does over 2-3 years before we invest more and decide how applicable the planting is to the smaller ponds. Once you put them in there, they are hard to get out. Dredging is an invasive thing that you do to a pond. The guidebooks on when to dredge: want to dredge when the mud builds up to halfway. Our ponds are not anywhere near that. Also, I think dredging is going to be more costly than we can imagine: like where do we put the mud we dredge? Our ditches and ponds work very well. There has been a lot of diligence on keeping things mowed. If we start getting quotes to see how much it will really cost, then we don't do this prematurely. We need a baseline, where we are, and then really start planning the funds of how we are going to pay for it. The key is that we should get more educated and there are more proactive things we can do: how we mow, how we sweep the streets, etc. Many things we can do so we don't have a larger cost later. Aerators are an important part of reducing the organic matter in the ponds. Let's save money and get smart on this stuff so we can have a good plan.
2. Amy Swisher: Is there a breakdown on the \$12k in the Reserves of exactly what that covers?

3. JP: The reserve study guidelines list several components we need to address. But the study doesn't breakdown how much of the money is needed for each of those things.
4. Ann Kanuck: Mr. Green said dredging is not necessary. Are we deferring then, at this time, dredging. Plants in the pond can be a big pain: maintenance is constant and hard work. Whatever we plant should be good plants, not die out in the winter, and not require us to do any maintenance.
5. Gerard: We are still in conversation about dredging.
6. Michelle Higgins: Read about how blowing of the grass into the ponds is a problem. But plantings around the perimeter, does that not take up space for the flow of water, and how much water can be retained. That's the job of the pond, and the planting detracts from the function of the pond.
7. Ruth: Is there any documentation that dredging can cause sinkholes?
8. JP: No, otherwise everywhere you see a retention pond, there would be sinkholes.
9. JP: Do the different water levels in the ponds indicate a drainage problem between the ponds?
10. Joe: the level is determined by where the weir structure is relative to the water level. Currently, for instance, the water levels are all below the outlets. It doesn't drain between the ponds until the water level gets high enough. Where we have issues is with the steepness of the banks.
11. Gerard: The HOA is responsible for our stormwater system. We were established as a community in 1985, 35 years ago. We are dictated by the County of Pinellas not SWFWMD (Southwest Florida Water Management District). In 1996 we received an environmental report from SWFWMD. We are 26 acres with about 1 acre of ponds. We are in the Mullet Creek water basin. The soil map shows Wachula sand. SWFWMD has our provisional documents on their web site. We also have the As Built Plans from the City of Safety Harbor. We have to know where we were originally so we know where we are now. We are responsible for upkeep and maintenance of the common area ponds and drainage system.
12. Joe M: The \$12k seems like a drop in the bucket for all the expenses we need for this?
13. Gerard: We don't know what the total costs are. We are still getting information to know if that's enough or not enough.
14. Gerard: Article 5 of our Declarations and Covenants, the purpose of the monthly maintenance fee is exclusively for the health and safety of the community and maintenance of the common areas. Not personal property, but HOA common areas. Stormwater system is common area. The ditch is part of the stormwater system but not all of the ditch is part of the common area.
15. Roth Block: when looking at the As Built Plan, it does look like one of the outlets goes across Beacon to the pond across the street.

### **Settlement Information:**

1. Karen: The retention ponds are working as designed. When we did the roads re-surfacing, the City did a smoke test. Everything seemed to be working as designed. The weir structure behind 1206 Georgetown was replaced. The whole thought of

dredging seems to be taken off the table, but the concern is that if we start shifting soil around, could it cause settlement issues to the nearby home. Settlement is an out of pocket expense for any homeowner who has that issue because many cannot get insurance for it.

2. Gerard: We have a letter from the Yorktown property manager. Their primary issue is clay cracking. Our insurance company explained there are two types of insurance but not everyone thinks it's necessary. If we dredge and sinkholes develop, then negligence by the company would be their responsibility.
3. Seth Swisher: Do we have soil samples? Do we know that we have the same soils in our neighborhood as Yorktown?
4. Gerard: We were in the process of hiring a company for an elevation study which included soil samples before this special meeting was called. Steve Robinson's letter suggests we need to do a soil sample. It has not been done yet. We would like to do that.

### **Retention Pond Bank Erosion, Dredging & Ecosystem Information**

1. Gerard: In June 2019 we had a landscape evaluation report. The report included the ponds. Pinellas County recommends a no-mow zone around the water. Most neighbors hated it. So the Board trimmed it down again, but Laurose did not trim it down properly. So the Board paid \$1k to have it done properly and got it back to where it should be and now Laurose has been maintaining it at that level. The Oct 2020 erosion repair cost us \$5100. The guidance on Roxbury is to not allow that pond to broaden. Soil is building up in Dartmouth Pond B. Steven highlighted that we need to know what that build up is right by the inlet. Kensington pond C does not have a stable structure. SWFWMD does not have a mandate for our community to dredge. Steve Robinson's survey of the three ponds highlights that we should NOT allow the pond banks to steepen beyond permitted design. A robot study was done on the piping beneath the street but stopped where it got underwater. So we need to do a little bit more camera work. The Florida-Friendly Landscape report says we should plant to increase wildlife, improve water filtration, and is aesthetically pleasing. I've learned a lot from Steve Green's letter from Florida Aquatic Management. We will use these letters as the basis for our action items going forward.
2. Karen: What are the next steps?
3. Gerard: We can't move forward with dredging because we have so many other more important issues to address with the stormwater drainage.
4. Joe: We need a step by step plan and budget to address the stormwater drainage over the long-term.
5. JP: The report by Steve Robinson is a good place to discuss next steps because he breaks it down pond-by-pond. For the Roxbury pond the concern is ensuring the boundary doesn't expand. The Dartmouth pond, for instance, has obvious erosion occurring right in the middle. We need to address that.
6. Joe M: part of what Steve is saying is that the As Built may not be reliable and we need current assessments of these systems to be sure.

7. Swishers: Is Steve Robinson a Civil Engineer? Is he a certified PE? I suggest that a component of the next steps is to ensure that a PE review of the As Built and soil samples is done.

#### **General Comments and Questions**

1. JP: First of all, I've been on Board's where communities are not engaged on questions even more important than what we discussed today. So I want to thank everyone who reached out to the Board. I think that is a good healthy sign of the community. And reciprocally, Gerard, you made a very real rigorous effort to respond to their concerns. You left no stone un-turned. I thank you for that.
2. Cindy: Don't go with the flow and don't mess with the flow.
3. Ruth: We need to stay on top of this and keep everyone informed of the steps and progress going forward.
4. Gerard: Thank everyone for being here. A lot of effort was put into providing this information. We have a lot of work to do. The BOD will not do anything until we consult and include those who want to be included.

Motion to adjourn: 8:45 pm Gerard motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Sam. All in favor.