

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendation to approve the Coastal Advisory Committee Water Quality Sub-committee recommendation and provide direction for further investigation to improve the Coastal Water Quality within Collier County.

OBJECTIVE: To address recurring Coastal Water Quality conditions within Collier County.

CONSIDERATION: On June 11, 2019 (Item 17F), the Board of County Commissioners (Board) amended the Coastal Advisory Committee (CAC) Ordinance to provide authority for the CAC to provide Coastal Water Quality coordination, education, oversight and outreach for all of Collier County including the City of Naples, the City of Marco Island, and Everglades City. In 2021, the CAC established the Water Quality sub-committee to study the issues and report back to the CAC with recommendations. The Water Quality sub-committee recommends that the CAC approve the following recommendation:

Vertical Oyster Garden (VOG) Program:

Oysters are marine bi-valve shellfish organisms native to Collier County and its surrounding coastal and estuarine waters. Oysters are natural filter feeders which remove harmful excess nutrients and pollutants from the waters as they feed on microscopic algae. A single oyster can filter 20 to 50 gallons per day, while groups and colonies of oysters can filter millions of gallons of water every day, naturally. By removing excess nutrients and pollutants from coastal waterways with compromised water quality, oysters can support healthy coast lines by improving water clarity and water quality. Oyster propagation has been used successfully and extensively throughout the state of Florida, as well as much of the United States as a means to improve water quality.

The ability to improve water quality should make a VOG Program a priority for water quality conservation efforts in Collier County. A VOG program could be a Collier County initiative working with local conservation organizations to organize community-based groups of citizens to collect, assemble, and distribute the VOGs. A VOG is simply a string of recycled seashells that can be locally sourced, strung together, and suspended vertically in seawater to provide structure and habitat for new oysters to attach and grow.

To achieve such an initiative, the Water Quality sub-committee recommends that the sub-committee consult with community groups including The Conservancy, Rookery Bay, and the Estuary Association and contact representatives of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources Department, and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program for additional information on the successful VOG Programs in each community. The subcommittee will identify a proposed budget and resources needed to implement the VOG Program and report back to the CAC for a recommendation of approval to forward to the Board of County Commissioners.

FISCAL IMPACT: No fiscal impact will result from this study at this time.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS: The Coastal Advisory Committee will review this item at the May 12, 2022, meeting.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS: This item is approved as to form and legality and presents no legal issues at this time. This item requires majority vote for approval. – CMG

RECOMMENDATION: For the Coastal Advisory Committee (CAC) to approve the Water Quality sub-committee recommendation to address the Coastal Water Quality within Collier County and proceed with further investigation into the budget and community partners.

Prepared by: Water Quality Sub-Committee

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