

**COLLIER COUNTY
COASTAL STORM RISK MANAGEMENT FEASIBILITY STUDY
ADVISORY AD HOC COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES
JULY 26, 2023**

LET IT BE REMEMBERED, the Collier County Coastal Storm Risk Management Feasibility Study in and for the County of Collier, having conducted business herein, met on this date at 1:00 PM in REGULAR SESSION at Collier County GMD Building, 2800 Horseshoe North, Naples, Florida, with the following members present:

CHAIRMAN: Scott Schultz
VICE CHAIRMAN: Joe Schmitt
Joshua Maxwell
Alexander Garland, Jr.
Miles (Rocky) Schofield
Kenneth Humiston

OTHER MEMBERS:

Christopher Mason
Howard Critchfield
William Lang

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS

Mr. Blonna
Ms. Worley
Ms. Olson
Mr. French

1. Introduction of Committee

- **Christopher Mason:** I will call the meeting to order. This is your Coastal Storm Risk Management Advisory Committee. This advisory committee was established by Resolution 202364 and that was done in April of this year; also 202399, that Resolution appointed the Members to this Board.

2. Committee Roll Call – Member Introduction

- **Alexander Garland:** I am a local marine contractor with my family's business which has been here since 1965. I've been doing marine construction since about 1990. I am a licensed general contractor and marine contractor.
- **Ken Humiston:** I am an engineer and have been in Naples for about 40 years. I was one of the founding partners of Humiston and Moore Engineers and have been retired for about five years.
- **Josh Maxwell:** Professional engineer with Bellingham Marine. Have resided here in Naples all my life. Family came down in the 1950's on a fishing trip and never left. I've been consulting locally for about 15 years on coastal projects and recently took a position with Bellingham. So now I specialize in floating docks, but have a long history playing on the coast on projects beside Mr. Humiston.
- **Joe Schmitt:** I am a retired Colonel, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 30 years in the Army, troop assignments as well as assignments at headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. My last assignment, I was the Commander of the Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Came here to Collier County and was the county administrator for Community Development and Environmental Services which is what they called it back then. Held that job until about 2010 when I went off to Afghanistan and did work for the government again. Built and operated 46 bases in Afghanistan and Southern Afghanistan, spent a year in Kandahar and then in and out of the Middle East for the next five years. Came back here and now I'm on the Planning Commission. I have a Masters Degree in Civil Engineering.
- **Rocky Scofield:** Am a lifelong resident here. Been in marine construction since I got out of school in 1975 and worked for my father's company way before that. My father was instrumental in dredging a lot of the waterfront communities in Naples and a lot of beachfront construction throughout the years. I then went into consulting work after I retired from the construction company in marine and environmental engineering.
- **Christopher Mason:** I want to state for the record that we have met quorum for this meeting.
- **Scott Schultz:** I was running around trying to inform people that this thing was going to happen. They kept telling me it's not going to happen and to just stop chasing after it and it didn't really ever go away until it finally did. But we put on conferences in Naples Cay and with different groups in town, Republican clubs. I've been working on this for about three years, engaged with Florida Wildlife, I went to the Conservancy and they wouldn't return calls, the Audubon Commission also wouldn't return calls. I was visiting with different Commissioners because our group in Naples

Cay was in favor of the project but none of the neighbors wanted that. So the HOA just said this is what we're going to go do. They spent over \$10,500 of our money to go get lobbyists and consultants in Tallahassee. And I thought that was a waste of money. So I just picked up the phone and reached out to the Commissioners and made life's work of it. I've been involved directly and indirectly for three years. I've got more papers than anybody should have. And it's caused a lot of anxiety with different people in the community. So I'm just glad to be a part of it and hope to work with you all in a good way.

3. Sunshine Law Requirements

- **Christopher Mason:** When we sent out the agenda, we sent out a training video through YouTube from our County Clerk's office regarding Sunshine Law requirements and all the members have acknowledged that they have received that information.
- **Joe Schmitt:** We're not a quasi-judicial entity. Why are we encumbered with the Sunshine Law? Is it the attorney rendered an opinion on that? We are an Advisory Board. I am puzzled as to if we wanted to discuss a matter, why that we would be prohibited because of the Sunshine Law.
- **Christopher Mason:** I reached out to the County Attorney with this question, if it was required, and they responded back that advisory boards are subject to the Sunshine Law.

4. Committee Chair/Vice Chair Selection

- **Christopher Mason:** Resolution 2023-64 states that in the first meeting that the committee has to select a chair and a vice chair for this committee.
- **William Lang:** We'll need two motions and then an approval or non-approval. A motion for anyone to volunteer for the chair?
- **Scott Schultz:** Made a motion for Chair.
- **Joe Schmitt:** Motion to approve.
- **Joshua Maxwell:** Seconded.
All in favor – aye.
- **Joe Schmitt:** Made a motion for Vice Chair.
- **Joshua Maxwell:** Motion to approve.
- **Scott Schultz:** Seconded.
All in favor – aye.

5. USACE Feasibility Study Process

- **Joe Schmitt:** I had asked to give the group an overview of the Army Corps of Engineers. Full disclosure, I am a senior advisor for a company called Dawson and Associates. They are in Washington, DC. It's not a lobbying firm but we do assist clients through the federal permitting process. Many senior officials from government are involved in Dawson Associates, so I just want to state that up front.

- Two years ago, I presented this briefing to the Board of County Commissioners. I wanted them to clearly understand the difference of what the Corps of Engineers is with regard to both civil works and military programs. Civil works involves these programs: hydropower, emergency management and regulatory navigation, flight control. It's been part of the Army Corps of Engineers history since the birth of our nation, predominantly right during the Civil War timeframe. The only engineering school in the country was West Point and they were deemed the federal engineers. That's how the Corps of Engineers came to be and how they got these responsibilities.
- The Corps of Engineers is divided up into civil works districts. The districts are predominantly divided by watersheds. The Army Corps of Engineers, the Civil Works side, is divided by and defined by watershed.
- These are the programs all over the Country. Coastal navigation projects, studies, emergency operations, dredging that take care of our rivers and harbors, significant work on the inland rivers, specifically the Mississippi River, even have the locks and dams that they control. But the difference between the Department of Interior and the Army Corps of Engineers, the Corps builds dams mainly for flood control, but the Corps even has paid Park Rangers and National Park Service. I just wanted folks to understand that's what the civil works side is.
- Next slide is the military programs. This is military construction. They briefly discussed that's the way they're organized by district and regionally for military programs. Those are projects to construct facilities on Army and Air Force bases through the Congressional Authorization Process. But they also are involved in operations and maintenance work, specifically as hired by various Wing Commanders.
- They are authorized construction projects and contingency operations, support consistent contingency operations, specifically similar to the work we did in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also fully constructed authorized projects. The Corps doesn't go out and build these. These are all contracted and the Corps manages along with other program managers. They seek the funding and go through the funding process.
- The Army Corps of Engineers is pretty much divided. It has 37,000 personnel across the world. There are only 550 military. About 200 of that military are in this organization called Prime Power, where they provide emergency prime power. In fact, they even have nuclear power plants, mobile power plants for contingency operations around the world. About 350 military officers. The rest of them are all civilians. It is the largest construction organization in the world, commanded by a Three Star General. And then it has basically a 41 district spread around the world.
- The civil works process is a 21 step process. It is a very methodical and linear process in the civil works study process which we're involved in right now and we're part of this. But that is what is called the civil works feasibility study 21 step process.
- The feasibility report – once the chief of engineer signs the report and forwards it to the chairperson it will go both to the Senate Committee on Environmental Public Works and in the House of Representatives. And eventually it goes and gets involved

in what is called the programmatic process. If it is authorized, it'll go up into the next bill, which is the funding process which is the appropriations. It has to go through the authorization process first and then it gets identified and put into the presidential budget. It actually goes through what is called the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Army for Civil Works. That is not a cabinet level position, but is almost treated like it is because it is competing and somewhat equivalent to the other federal agencies all competing for the dollars.

- The intent of the Congressional authorization, if it's approved, ends up going into the Water Resources Development Act. The Act is every two years. The next Water Resource Development Act is 2024. This is when, as we go through the study process, once it's done it gets signed off by the Chief of Engineers. When they're finished with the study process, as they begin to seek money for the next phases of the studies, then they seek what they call a local sponsor. And in this case, the local sponsor would be required for cost sharing, they have to be able to provide access from the standpoint of lands, easements and rights of way, but they also have to provide and agree to be what they call the non-cost sharing, non-federal sponsor or cost sharing sponsor and could be both the county or the city or maybe even both. That is yet to be decided on how they proceed with this. I have no idea what this study is going to do in regards to who they're going to seek as the non-federal sponsor. The other key aspect of this in what killed the last study was the cost benefit ratio. There has to clearly be a cost benefit. The cost of the properties and lives protected, but primarily the properties protected have to far outweigh the cost of the project.
- The feasibility report, as I said, the local government, the non-federal sponsor has to have the capability to acquire the necessary real estate. One of the keys in the last study, when I briefed the Commissioners and became a major issue with the City Council, was to allow beach access. If federal dollars come in here to build federal projects they will most likely have to provide beach access for taxpayers elsewhere in the county, and that was a critical issue, especially with the City. So those are one of the things we probably will have to address in regards to what will we give up. We, being the county, will give up if we become the local sponsor and because there are federal dollars. There's going to have to be parking, beach access and other things that will be associated with it which was a major issue. This study will get to what is called a 10% design. It is nothing more than that. It's a conceptual product that will then go on to preconstruction and engineering design. Once it gets through, and they agree with the non-federal sponsor then it starts going through the authorization process.
- Now the only other thing I really want to stress to my fellow colleagues because of my experience in this. Authorization does not mean we're going to build it. You can get a project authorized, it can go all the way through and get congressional authorization, and then it sits in the budgetary process. Then you have to get the dollars appropriated to pay for the construction. In any given year, there are probably over 1,000 authorized projects in the budget that have yet to be funded. So I just want

to make sure you understand that authorization does not mean it's going to be built. Then you have to get the political wherewithal, the backing of both Senate and Congress, to push through the appropriation process and that is a very important piece. I'm going to just give you my two cents on the study. The Corps of Engineers works on what is we always used to call OPM – other people's money. So the Wilmington District, which is the district that is doing this study, basically it's satellite and out of Jacksonville District, which is the district responsible for most of Florida and of course Puerto Rico and some of the Caribbean islands that we oversee, but it is deferred to the Wilmington District. The reason they do that is because of workload sharing.

- I call the study process, and I'll use the term the self licking ice cream cone, because that's about what it is. I was so concerned about the fact that we spent \$3M on the last study. Now they went back and got another \$2.97M. I'm going to take my engineer hat off and we, as taxpayers, are paying for the study process. I had some very serious misgivings when I spoke to Commissioners last time. You're raising your hand to do the study. Are you really, really interested in becoming a non-federal sponsor and having this project go forward; otherwise to me they were wasting \$3M. Now we may waste another \$3M. This is of interest to the Wilmington District because if they can land a non-federal sponsor and proceed with design and engineering, it's more work for the Corps. So there is a motive, both from an engineering perspective for the Corps to certainly want to do what they think best for shore protection and the project, but at the same time it also ensures more work for the district. So, I want you to really understand that the motive behind this is both—from a self-preservation standpoint from the Wilmington District and probably even from the Jacksonville District for funding of the staff that's involved in this. It is \$3M but my concern is that we as a committee go through all the motions and then the Board says no we're not going to do it. Then the study sits on the shelf. Now, we may get all through the study process and it may sit on a shelf again for years before any money is appropriated.
- **Kenneth Humiston:** You mentioned that the first study that was done was \$3M and now there's another \$2M. When was the first initiative?
- **Scott Schultz:** It was in November of 2018 where the head of the HOA at Pelican Bay, Naples Cay, Seagate, GSAC and I believe Moorings all directed letters to the Army Corps, saying they wanted protection from climate change and all these letters mysteriously went out on the same day from these different locations in Collier County and Naples in particular. So they were the ones to start pushing it and then Jackie (?) went in with the Commissioner and she had put together a committee of approximately 22 people. It was just unwieldy and they met one time. They couldn't get a quorum. So it just sort of went a different way.
- **Joe Schmitt:** There's both the past administration and this administration that have been pushing resiliency. A year ago, in fact, I had a conference call with the Mayor of the City of Miami over the same kind of study being done on the East Coast. He was looking for some advice and counsel on how to proceed with it because what he saw very much of significant concern – high 12-foot walls, etc. In this study, the first

thing the Corps is going to do, and as professionals, we understand you have to protect, so you have to construct to protect and then they'll start backing off from that. But the reason the last study didn't go anywhere is because they realized they had to redo the entire cost benefit analysis – the cost of construction and all the other aspects of it. I never went back and really looked at why it folded other than they had questions on the cost benefit analysis. It's all on public record.

- **Scott Schultz:** There was a phrase that stuck with me that you shared – the Corps job is to make work for itself.
- **Joe Schmitt:** The Corps job is to get the authorization to do the study then it's a self-promoting aspect of it, because if they do the study they're looking to do the work. Just like if you were running a construction company, you put a proposal in, you're hoping you win the work so you can keep your folks employed. The Army Corps is no different. They work on continuous funding of projects and this is just another example.
- Further information regarding:
 - Commissioners being serious about this
 - Don't want a new study to sit on a shelf
 - The need for a non-federal sponsor
 - Areas protected and areas written off
 - Areas of surge or too expensive to protect
 - Outside the protection area
 - Short and long-term protection but how obtrusive
 - Non-structural alternatives
- **Christopher Mason:** The previous study from 2020 can be retrieved online from the Army Corps site.
- **Joe Schmitt:**
Further information regarding:
 - Protect the cities
 - Give and take about aesthetics and future development
 - Sound engineering design
 - Public aware of benefits
- **Joe Schmitt:** This is about a 2 ½ year study and if it goes through the authorization process with the Water Resource Development Act, it probably won't be until 2026.
- Once it gets to a 10% design, it will be presented to the community and then the Board will be faced with a decision. And who will agree to become the local non-federal sponsor – either the city, Marco Island, or the County as a whole – somebody has to agree so that there's a tax revenue entity that can raise revenue which will be a ratio of 65/35. To go from authorization but then to get the appropriations is a tremendous struggle.
- **Kenneth Humiston:** The Corps of Engineers did a study for Collier County back in the 1970's which was discontinued because of requirements for beach access.

- **Joe Schmitt:** Most of the work for coastal resiliency over the years has been pretty much shore protection projects and berms. Along the entire Atlantic Coast, whether in South Carolina, Jersey Shore or wherever, that's beach re-nourishment and shore protection projects. There have been numerous books written about it, pros and cons, and the amount of money being spent versus how long it lasts. But those are the typical shore protection projects. Now we've gotten into these where we're actually looking at hard structures similar to what was constructed, and best equate it to along the Mississippi River, that type of removable walls to close streets off – those type of things to protect against whatever they deem to be the flood event they want to protect against.
- **William Lang:** The next part of the presentation is the staff report. It'll put into perspective current status on the alternatives which might help the discussion. Mr. Humiston, I've written your questions down. We've got a virtual meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer. We can definitely bring that up as far as the historical study and how it impacts the future one.
- **Scott Schultz:** Part of the process last time I was able to get 1700 page copy of the proposed study and I have it in hard copy. I can forward the e-mail to you. It's got highlights in it where you can highlight them and it will pop up and bring more to it. But there's a whole lot there if you'd like to get that. So anybody here wants to see that just give me your e-mail address when the meeting is done.
- **Alex Garland:** Are we allowed to quietly say anything to each other? Does everything have to be on recorded?
- **William Lang:** You are at least able to communicate here with one another. But yes, generally you want to try to put it on record.

6. Study Status – Staff Report

- **Christopher Mason:** So to just provide a brief history here. We heard through the grapevine that this really kind of started in 2007. That was when the initial request was, but it wasn't until 2018 that Collier County agreed to become the non-federal sponsor for this three-year coastal storm risk study.
- **Joe Schmitt:** They are not paying anything. There's no money going to the feds from the County as they had just agreed in principle. There is potential they will be a non-federal sponsor.
- **Christopher Mason:** In our weekly meetings and all interactions with the Corps, they call us, Collier County, non-federal sponsors for the study.
- Move on to 2021, the feasibility study was paused because it was waiting approval for time and funding, an exemption request, basically. In August of 2022, the study was reinitiated and approved for another three years. April of 2023, public meetings were hosted by Collier County and we had three days of planning charrettes. Lastly, the committee was formed here in April of 2023. We had public meetings in June as well – Marco Island, Collier County Unincorporated and then also the City of Naples. So this is the range of what is being studied here. There are six planning areas, the Wiggins Pass area, Clam Pass, Doctors Pass, Naples Beach and Naples Bay, Upper

Gordon River and Rock Creek, and Marco Island and Goodland. So what's very interesting about this is during the charrettes, that's when the stakeholders came together and professionals like yourselves sat down and tried to start thinking about what types of measures could be employed to protect the coastline from storm surge such as flood proofing, critical infrastructure, elevation of residential homes, beach and berm nourishment, mangrove restoration, updating building code ordinances and oyster reefs were listed as high strong acceptance for resiliency measures to combat storm surge. Discussed but not favored were: inland flood walls; levees east of Clam Pass Park; a Doctors Pass storm surge barrier; acquisitions of property; a Tamiami Trail flood wall; floodgates in Marco Island at Caxambas Pass in Collier Creek or a breakwater south of Caxambas Pass.

- So we move forward as of today with all the meetings that we've had up to last week with the Army Corps of Engineers this is what is left on the list. They are trending towards focusing on critical infrastructure elevations, beach berm and vegetative dune nourishment.
- The breakwater south of Caxambas Pass is staying in place at the moment. As of yesterday the City of Marco Island Collier County and the Army Corps had a meeting to discuss a number of topics about certain measures for shoreline protection and storm surge protection in Marco Island.
- This is what we're looking at now. It's very likely that when we talk about critical infrastructure, we're going to talk about critical infrastructure that's located in the coastal fringe going to be your coastal areas. Elevations are going to be talking more about what they call EJ communities, which are environmental justice communities, which could be communities on the lower socio-economic scale that are older properties, the design of homes are slab on grade, things that are very low lying. Then we have the beach berm and vegetative dune nourishment. These are what the Corps are looking at and the reason they're looking at these is because it's based on the budget remaining and also the timetable for this project. They believe that this is going to be the most probable study path to move forward. And this is also based off of stakeholder acceptance in these public meetings.
- **Joshua Maxwell:** I recall when this was briefed by the Corps, some of the things you lined out there, the recommendation, Collier County update, the building code ordinances as you well know the County doesn't have building code ordinances.
- (We follow the Florida building code.)
- **Joshua Maxwell:** It's actually called the International Building Code (IBC). That was kind of strange to me. But the elevation of homes is in part governed by the flood insurance rate maps and the base flood elevation as defined on the FEMA maps. Was the other piece of this to actually go in and provide federal funding to actually raise/lower...?
- **Christopher Mason:** Yes, when we're talking about elevations, we're talking about elevations of existing structures -- acquisition and demolition.
- This is trending more toward what they would consider an NNBF (Natural and Nature-Based Features) solution. There's really no type of hardened or manmade

structures – like floodgates or flood walls in this equation. This is the direction that the Corps is moving based on availability of funding, the timetable and public input.

- Further information regarding:
 - Approved for three years at \$2.97M.
 - Current total scope was 3 ½ years and \$4.7M
 - No Federal funds are available exceeding the \$2.97M
 - Analyze solutions to complete a Chief's report within the approved time and funding
 - Likely a beach and non-structural NNBF analysis
 - Water Resources Development Act 2022 – 8106 is utilized to incorporate compound flooding
 - Most likely not going to be pursued but not off the table; perhaps a future study
- **Joe Schmitt:** The Chiefs Report is the final report prepared by the staff. It goes to what's called the Army Chief of Engineers, who was a three-star general. Typically, those guys rotate in and out every three years. He signs the Chiefs reports then it goes off to, here it says two committees, but it also goes through the ASACW, which is the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. That is a senior civilian and SES position and is responsible for basically overseeing the Civil Works Program within the Army Corps of Engineers. Basically, it coordinates the study process as it works its way into both the House and the Senate for approval. That will be also be in connection with the agreement to proceed with the next phase, where the County would agree to become the local non-federal sponsor to begin the next phase where then they'll start contributing money for the next phase of the engineering and design.
- **Christopher Mason:** This is what we call the study path forward. You have August 2022, the time and funding exemption requested was approved for the additional three years and \$2.97M. By April of 2024, the Corps looks to have a tentatively selected plan milestone. In between let's say now and April of 2024 the Corps is going to be starting their modeling of their storm surge, inundation levels, expanses, things of that nature. They have to have that done before the tentatively selected plan can be completed. After the tentatively selected plan, you have the draft feasibility public release which has a 45-day formal comment period. After that you have an agency decision milestone. And that would be in November of 2024 and by June of 2025, so a little less than two years from now a final feasibility report would be released for a 30-day formal comment period. If that's accepted, then we would go to a signed Chiefs report and the feasibility study would be completed. And this would be where the array of alternatives we were talking about earlier will be captured in this timeframe.
- **Kenneth Humiston:** I know that the cheapest solution is not always the best. In fact usually it's not. Would there be a time during the study of taking a little closer look at some of those things that might otherwise be eliminated because of cost?
- **Joe Schmitt:** In the study process, you can actually ask to have more protection than what they're offering and more significant engineering solutions, rather than just berms and beach re-nourishment. But then the Corps would either have to go back

and probably ask for more money for the study, or there'd be other ways to do that. But as the non-federal sponsor, we can offer opinions and guidance.

- **Christopher Mason:** This committee will be tasked with making recommendations to the Board based on the study information provided.
- **Scott Schultz:** The last time this process was going around it was estimated between \$50M-65M a year for 50-60 years for ongoing maintenance. There was no indemnification from the Corps – if something fails, they can wash their hands and walk away. So there was a lot of angst over that. If you hire, for instance, an electrician and they screw it up, they don't say sorry and walk away. So that was a big issue. And another issue was the berm size and one of the proposed sea wall was digging down along where the sand and the vegetation meet and pouring down 15 feet of concrete and then ten up. Made for a lot of anxiety, angst and heartburn.
- Further discussion regarding:
 - Non-structural versus true structural alternatives
 - Protect at what level
 - Money
 - Critical infrastructure and residential elevation
 - Community may want to again look at the other alternatives
 - Level of protection – more versus less and how intrusive
 - Engineering perspective
 - Storm surge and high tide and how they affect canals versus water coming from the beach

7. Future Meeting Scheduling

- **Christopher Mason:** Tentatively we're looking to schedule meetings on Wednesdays. We are stalled with the Army Corps because of no new data. This Board is really going to be a product of when new data is available for us to discuss going forward. As far as today, this was really our inaugural opening showing you the array of alternatives, where the programs are and projects headed at this point in time. As soon as we receive new information or something that would be warranted for the committee to review, we would go forward and schedule the next meeting.

8. Public Comment

- **Joe Schmitt:** From the standpoint of your job from the County, so we understand the relationship with the City and the City of Marco Island, is this a joint effort or is this just being pursued by the County separate from their input?
- **Christopher Mason:** The City of Naples and also Marco Island are stakeholders in this. They are separate entities but are also at the table to talk about this, be included in this study and see it through how they how they see fit.
- **Joe Schmitt:** They would be included in the study, but at some point it's the other two jurisdictions to determine whether they're going to be part of this or not from the standpoint of from a non-federal sponsor. They are certainly subject to County taxes, but I'm just trying to figure out is this a mutually supported effort or will it be contentious. Because obviously from the standpoint of protection, there are going to

be areas in the City that are going to be considered written off to protect other areas and likewise of Marco Island.

■ **Public Comment – continues:**

■ **William Lang:** Ground rules – generally we do 3 minutes for speaking but we could push up to 5 minutes right now.

■ **Rich Blonna** – Audience Participant

The folks at Marco Island do not agree with the Army Corps recommendations and I am going to fight to get some of those hard structural items in place. I was on Marco Island during Hurricane Ian. I live two miles from the beach. I do not live on a canal. I live center island and our street had water within 6 inches of my garage door. It came from Caxambas because we don't have a flood gate. The surge came through Caxambas through Roberts Bay went two miles North to the canal along Barfield Bay, hung a left, went one mile West and then came South towards my house. The water traveled three miles and when it came over the sea wall it was that high. That would have all been prevented with sea gates blocking the entrance to Caxambas. Similarly on Collier Creek, which is on the San Marco River, where the other half of the island is exposed, the water came through Collier Creek and flooded the whole internal part of the island. So the idea that we're just going to solve Marco Island's problem with soft solutions is nonsense. Now I know there are ecological considerations, and we're willing to address them and work through them, but I am not going to stand here as an elected official – our island was valued at \$15B worth of real estate and a lot of that is at risk because of the weakness of this plan. It's one thing to ask citizens to upgrade/add a couple of feet to their sea walls. Our building codes were all built at least nine and a half feet above sea level. We are doing our best construction-wise to make our houses as seaworthy as possible. But there are certain things we just need the help of the federal government and I think the Army Corps is letting us down tremendously and I am going to make all of my elected officials know that starting with the Commission, Donalds, with Rick Scott all the way up to the president. Will we work with this coalition? Of course, we're stakeholders. We want to be involved. We've had representation from our Director of Public Works. We've had direct representation from Moe, who is a very involved citizen, coastal engineer with 25 years plus of experience and we really feel that we are being let down tremendously by this program, not only with the structural barriers, but also with the lack of continuous protection along our beach. We are with you in this fight, but we're not going to stand by and just accept what's being offered to us.

■ **Joe Schmitt:** So you're basically saying, not the answer.

■ **Richard Blonna:** They are taking away all of our protection.

■ **Joe Schmitt:** I have to agree with you from an engineering standpoint, if you want the protection you put up with the inconvenience of the protection. And that's the alternative.

■ **Richard Blonna:** What I'm hearing from this is the reason the Army Corps is not further examining the feasibility of these flood gates is that they spent their money in

an ill advised way and they're running out of time. To me why should we suffer for their inefficiency in the way they've been conducting their study?

- **Kenneth Humiston:** As a non-federal sponsor, you can influence that fight and you can influence the study. Now whether they're going to have enough money to do the modeling and everything else, they may have to go back for more funding through the budget, and there are a lot of other authorities that the Army Corps has and other study processes that are available for other funding to proceed to do the kind of things that you want beyond this feasibility study.
- **Richard Blonna:** I'd like to just sit and chat with you privately and kind of go over some of this stuff if you have the time and the interest. And I'm going to speak to Commissioner LoCastro about it also.
- The recommendations that you just saw presented, I mean all those X'd out lines in the amber colored structural improvement, are the things we really need. Marco is unique in the sense that we can protect about two-thirds of the island, the interior part of the island from serious flooding with sea gates. We can't do that alone with protecting the shoreline with softer strategies. The surge went about half a mile from the beach, no further. The interior wasn't affected by that beach surge. The interior was affected by water coming in through the openings to our canal system. My point is that the only way those can be blocked is through hard structures. We can't put up a mangrove forest in front of the entrance to our canals. I think to eliminate the hard structures on Marco is to say screw you, we don't really want to help you. That's how I'm reading it as an elected official, and I'm just not going to put up with it.
- **Mohammed Dabees** – Audience Participant
I represent the City of Marco in the coordination meetings which occurs over weekly updates with the Army Corps. The City of Marco and its conditions is geographically and physically in the most vulnerable position in all of Collier County. It sticks out from the South end, is heavily developed, sits within natural settings and natural preserves, and then if we look at the history over the past 20 years, all the major hurricanes landed in Marco. Marco is the bullseye and the most challenging to protect. For the previous study, the Army Corps kind of said since we cannot waterproof Marco because it's surrounded by water, let's just focus on infrastructure enhancement and raise buildings and that was not acceptable to the City. So, this time they were initially more open to let's see what else we can do to help the city of Marco. Working with the Norfolk District and the City staff during the charrettes, we came up with a plan: the first element, take the energy window or the coastal front by fortifying the coastal front in the area in green and magenta to make our coast resilient to take the wave energy out; then add gates to the entrance of the canal going North at Collier. The week following the charrette and as Chris presented, the Corps was facing the dilemma of needing double the budget and double the time, and structural alternatives will have a lot of requirements for compliance with the environmental constraints, so they were trying to focus the budget and the time on the two aspects that they think they can do, which is the beach and berm plus natural based features (NBF).

- Further information regarding:
 - The coastline would not be protected
 - The Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA); naturally protected
 - Corps wants to preserve the barrier systems that are natural; discourage development
 - Federal law prohibits using federal funds for CBRA zones
 - Read the entire CBRA and there are 5-6 exceptions
 - One exception in particular: if you're restoring natural habitats and document that it will be enhanced with no development, this exception applies to our area
 - Leave two miles to the North unprotected, the water will flow through there.
 - Basically trying to add natural based features on the North and South parts of Marco
 - Corps doesn't have the money to include gates on some of the waterways
 - Get more information on a public assistance declaration for post disaster for the infrastructure that is potentially put in place in CBRA zones
 - Overly developed barrier islands
 - Areas not developed are parks or natural preserves
 - Try to find the right answer because if you're trying to find a reason not to do something, you won't.

■ **Kathy Worley** – Audience Participant

You all have an extremely important and difficult task ahead. This could result in affecting our coastline and inland resiliency to future storms. And I say inland, because whenever you alter the course of water by whatever means it's got to go somewhere. The Army Corps study is focused primarily only on storm surge. And you really need to look past the coast. We need to understand what effects are going to result from the different resiliency alternatives, not just to the coast but to the inland areas, not just what happens from storm surge but also what happens from storm water runoff. Irma was a storm water runoff maker, whereas Ian was more of a storm surge for Collier. What if you put in a wall to stop the storm surge? If you have a lot of water coming down from the watershed, from a heavy rain maker and it hits that wall is it going to back up into the system? It's looking at things more holistically. It primarily comes down to hydrology. We're now paying for mistakes that we made in the past when we altered water flow. We altered the flow of the Everglades and now we're all paying to undo those past decisions. I believe it's important you look at the big picture when it comes to making your recommendations and not just focus on the area you're trying to protect, but also what happens to the surrounding areas as a result of that recommendation. The ability of Collier County to be resilient is not just a problem of storm surge. It's much bigger than that. And while you all are tasked with recommending resiliency strategies in concept with this Army Corps project, please don't forget about the bigger picture of all the challenges that we're likely to face in the future. Where do we resist change, where do we adapt with change and where do we direct change? This will give us the best future in terms of the

environment, the economy and our quality of life for Collier County. It's what works best where – it's not going to be the same for Naples Cay or Marco Island. They're going to be different strategies depending on how basically when it comes down to the hydrology

■ **April Olson** – Audience Participant

I just wanted to thank you all for serving on this advisory committee because it's really important and one of the biggest issues Collier County is facing today. There are a lot of people that want our coastal economy protected. They like to see nature-based solutions and there may be some appropriate areas for hardening Marco Island. I did notice on here that mangrove restoration, rejuvenation projects and oyster reef restoration projects were off the table right now, which is concerning because those are important solutions, not only for wave attenuation, but also for water quality and for providing recreational benefits. Consider putting those back on the table.

■ **Committee Comments:**

■ **Joe Schmitt:** Understand that this still has to go through the NEPA process, National Environmental Policy Act, and has to follow all the rules and regulations – Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Marines Fisheries. So, all those kind of things have to be part of the analysis as well. The Corps cannot waive any of those. Those are all in law and they have to be part of the study.

■ **Joshua Maxwell:** I don't see why we need a multimillion dollar study to tell us that we need to protect our infrastructure and raise our buildings. We already have that with FEMA and you know flood codes. It seems like we're getting a report that's common sense and our County already knows. I just don't see the point if this report is going to continue on the path it is, do we need the Army Corps to fund walls around our wastewater treatment plants, water treatment plants, our power substations? Is what we're looking for the Corps to say is here's the funding source to protect your resource so that way we can get back to normalcy as we know it after a storm? I walked miles of our shoreline after Ian and most of the resilient properties had exotics planted along them – plants that are not recommended like coconut palms. The matting from coconut palms stretched across lots in Port Royal and minimized some of the erosion that happened behind their seawalls. But we're not encouraged to plant those. If all we're going to do is plant sea oats and bring in more sand I don't see it being the resiliency we need. I saw one property that had a very thick dense hedge of sea grapes. They had almost no erosion at their small wood retaining wall that had been in place since the 50 or 60's. The sea grapes looked like hell, but they'll come back or they can be replanted. I had past clients that had sea oats, beautiful, manicured beachfront homes. They didn't know they had a wall until their entire dune was washed away by a storm. I had an old colleague that had a four foot boulder end up in his pool that was behind his seawall that was kind of helping previous overtopping. But I saw that on multiple properties where four foot boulders were tossed land side; bigger than most of our houses, tossed 100 feet into a property. So what is the Corps going to tell us that we don't already know with this report? If

we're taking off the hard resiliency that I originally saw, and there was a lot of public outcry against, then what's the point of the rest of the study?

- I don't want to just push the meeting off entirely. I like to see progress. Maybe do these at most every 90 days if we're not making any progress. I've done a lot of permitting with the Corps in the past. I know how long it can take to do Corps projects. I don't want to have another meeting in six months and see that this hasn't gone anywhere. I also have a concern that we're spending an immense amount of public funds to protect private property. My grandmother's house that was here in Donna and Ian and flooded. It was fixed and it's going to flood again the next time we have a storm. The people that have bought it since she sold it in the 60's know it's in a low area. They have to have flood insurance. A lot of these things are already known. Unless the Corps is going to say here's a funding source to offset your income taxes to raise your home. Unless they're going to tell us that we need to be FEMA plus three instead of FEMA plus one. I don't see how they're going to give us any usable information telling us to elevate our houses. I mean, we've already got FEMA guidelines and a lot of my past clients were three to six inches or a foot from water coming into their house and some of those were at FEMA plus one. So do we need to look at FEMA plus two? I don't know, but is that where this study is going? I'm sure there's some maps around that can show us where the flooding was. I've seen them passed around before. There's got to be a way to overlay that, and building permits that have been issued in the last 10 years that should show us where our most resilient houses are, the ones that are built for current FEMA. How many houses in Collier County are we trying to protect now with this reduced plan because the sea oats on the beach are not going to protect the houses that are built at a plus 5 that are on the beach. So I think that's just where I'd like to kind of see this go. I noticed Everglades City and the area around the Belle Meade Floodplain were not included in the study. Back in the Obama era, there were shovel ready projects going around. My previous boss and I had ideas to try and help make Everglades City more resilient. They didn't go anywhere then and now they're not even being looked at and Everglades City floods every time we have a storm. It used to be our county seat and if we're going to protect Goodland why aren't we protecting Everglades City? So those are just some of the questions I would like to ask that could get addressed in a future agenda. We either need to tell them to stop this study because they're not going to tell us anything we don't already know or redirect them to be the study that we need. They mentioned at the public meeting I went to that raising our roads is one way that we could alleviate interior flooding. Is that what they're going to do is give us a map for that because at the second sentence after they said that that's not a federal problem. Roads are not a federal problem for interior roads around the County. So are they going to tell us what the County needs to do, what the State of Florida needs to do? It just seems like it's going to be a study that tells us a bunch of nothing and that's my biggest concern.

- **William Lang:** I am new back to Growth Management that came from Collier County Emergency Management and I am the unfortunately and fortunately still the

local mitigation strategy working group chairperson. So that particular group looks at all projects that come forward for FEMA grant monies, which historically is either a disaster grant, which is a hazard mitigation grant program, or non-disaster grants which are annual grants that are available and they're competitive. So that includes building resiliency, infrastructure and community grants, BRIC (?) grants and flood mitigation assistance. Grants that go to a point of one of your questions, which is repetitive loss properties under FEMA's definition of what that is, and basically you get put on a naughty list from FEMA after you have so many claims within a certain time period. That threshold is really low to get put on that list, but it takes a lot to mitigate obviously, specifically as you're trying to elevate for example.

- The way that I would kind of mix two of your questions is, is we'd like to say this is just another tool in the toolbox. Unfortunately, to get to the cost match opportunity, it may be a report that tells us what we already know. But we've got to get that funding availability and it's a little complicated and I couldn't explain it if my life depended on it, but there's usually a cost share option between grants and that's where it can flourish if you've got the right grant consultant on board. Generally, in those programs there's a 75/25 cost split, it was historically 50/50 with the US Army Corps of Engineers, but in this particular instance it's now 65/35.
- I've been on that committee for a number of years. I've been the chairperson for about 2-3 years. We generally don't recommend to residential homeowners to go that path. There's a lot of bureaucracy and red tape. Put it in as an option and people have pursued it. I've got one right now on Isle of Capri. She is raising her home and she's been successful to date. But it's that funding opportunity at the end of the day. Are we going to miss out on a funding opportunity at a percentage cost and can that add to an existing program where you have a cost share? That's generally the idea why the study is there. It's not the justification necessarily that it's going to provide something we don't know but it's that first step in getting that funding opportunity.
- **Joe Schmitt:** I think the only reason for the study is to justify bringing Federal dollars in, otherwise the county would have to fund it itself and do the study. But the Corps does the study that justifies bringing the Federal dollars in. The key is you can get an approved project but getting it through appropriations is the next struggle. Like I said, there are over 1,000 projects any given year that have yet to be funded.
- **Kenneth Humiston:** We are the local voice to coordinate with the Corps of Engineers on some of these things and I think it's a good opportunity to really accomplish something to make some progress.
- **Joshua Maxwell:** I've been working around the coast for a long time and you have a pretty good brain trust that's been put together. So please don't just kick the can down the line. I don't think there are any uneducated opinions being shared with you today.
- **Jamie French:** I serve as the department head for the Growth Management Community Development department.
 - Introduces the following in our audience:

- Jamie Cook, Director of Development Review. She also runs the Conservation Collier Program, all of the county's environmental and engineering oversight, as well as storm water review
 - Trinity, Scott, my colleague over in the transportation, coastal and airport element
 - Rich Long, from our Building Department
 - Andy Miller, worked a long time in train station design and engineering and coastal engineering
- **Jamie French:** With the building code, here's the way it works. The National Flood Insurance Program is voluntary unless you live in the State of Florida. There was a great deal of pressure put on Florida by the Florida insurance agencies that put it on the legislative body because really insurance is to indemnify, it's not to pay claims. We found at least in the State of Florida, people were using it as a tool to pay claims. In order to have a federally backed mortgage, you have to have flood insurance and the federal government backs the first \$250,000 of every commercial flood insurance policy that exists. Then they found that that's taxpayer dollars that has been used and they want to mitigate. So, the State of Florida came along and they made it mandatory to set base flood elevations. So, I serve as the Floodplain Administrator for Collier County, along with Chris Mason, Howard Critchfield and William Lang, and probably about seven or eight others, because we really do promote having that flood plain management license or certification so we're an expert county. And Collier County really is a model county for the State of Florida as well as the nation. We hold the second most in force flood insurance policies in the entire state of Florida next to Miami Dade. But our population is nowhere near Miami Dade. Our Community Rating System sits at a 5, which equates to nearly a \$9M savings for a voluntary program that's spread out aggregately amongst the ratepayers, the insurance policyholders, in the state of Florida. But there's only one place in the building code that allows the local government to influence the building code, and that's in your admin policy. And so it would be up to the local board, whether it's the City of Marco, City of Naples, the local authority having jurisdiction, we call that freeboard in the industry, and currently we just follow the minimum state code like many governments do. So, the State of Florida adopted it and it is based off the International Building Code. But then it takes three years for the State of Florida to review it; The Florida Building Commission reviews it; and every three years the Florida Building Code is adopted at the state level and it's handed down to the local authority having jurisdiction. You can make it more restrictive but only if they approve it. Any heightened restrictions than it becomes statewide. Miami Dade code – there really is no Miami Dade code, it's Miami Dade influences on the code or inserts to the code that may only influence certain regions of the state, but predominantly it influences now the entire state. We saw that as I worked the recovery for about a month and a half on Hurricane Michael because they just weren't following the Florida Building Code even though they were supposed to. So, freeboard is great but what it does it brings costs. And the benefit about freeboard is in certain areas as FEMA or as the Army Corps defines your mapping strategies and the way the topography is set, that

type of construction may also be influenced if you're in a limited wave movement area or a LiMWA area you can't add fill. It has to be predominantly on pilings or some sort of stem wall, in which case it elevates cost construction, and it may limit your footprint.

- We also take into consideration the environmental impact, how it affects those inland areas and that's one of the reasons why we created our Office of Community Planning and Resiliency, even what we're doing with economic development and housing policy – we are a policy machine here. We introduce policy to the board and to the Community for consideration in hopes that we'll get the best product out there that would be adopted that's going to balance nature against the economic benefit for our community, because we recognize that if we get it wrong, it's going to have a detriment on either side or both. We need a complete study so your involvement here, your comments back to staff, the comments you received from the public, and the recommendations you make to the board are super important. Otherwise, the board's just simply hearing from the community and they're hearing from staff. You're that balance because you were assigned and we do respect you for all of your years of experience. We're all colleagues to the cause, right? Fort Myers is probably one of the oldest cities that ever existed in the State of Florida. The construction on Fort Myers Beach, those buildings behaved as they were designed to behave because they were never designed to be hit by water. Look at the reconstructed areas along some of the areas that were hit even on the tail side going out of the East Coast up around Daytona. That area and the buildings built on grade along the side of the coast, they fall into the water whereas where we see those that are driven in by tension piles or on grade beam they perform differently. So, we've seen all that throughout the state as well as through our own area and we're very thankful for the resiliency that this board and this community has mandated and held us to because that's the reason why many of our structures and our coastline behave the way it did.
- But again, to the study, we need it and to complete it.

■ **Christopher Mason:** Do we have any further comment from public or the committee at this time?

■ **Miles Scofield:**

Further comments regarding:

- A lot of money has been spent and more to come for the continued study
- This is a long-term study project
- Figure in 50 years of maintenance
- The study needs to happen
- Two opposite sides from the public
- The number of items struck out but can be readdressed

■ **Scott Schultz:** Motion to adjourn?

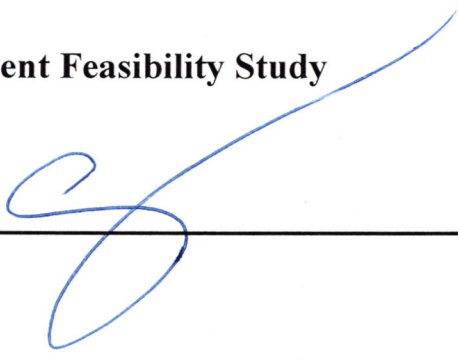
■ **Miles Schofield:** Made motion.

■ **Joshua Maxwell:** Seconded.

All in favor – aye. Adjourned at 2:55 PM.

**Coastal Storm Risk Management Feasibility Study
Advisory Committee**

Scott Schultz, Chairman



These minutes were approved by the Board/Chairman on 11/8/2023, as presented ✓, or as amended _____.