



*Office of the*  
**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY  
ADMINISTRATOR**

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Jason E. Brown, County Administrator  
Michael C. Zito, Assistant County Administrator

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Members of the Board of County Commissioners

**FROM:** Jason E. Brown  
County Administrator

**DATE:** May 10, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Mainland Boat Launch Joint Venture

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**DESCRIPTION**

On February 13, 2018, the Board of County Commissioners directed staff to explore a joint venture with the City of Vero Beach for a Mainland Boat Launch. Indian River County (County) Staff and City of Vero Beach (City) Staff met and discussed conceptual plans for a City Power Plant Boat Ramp/Marina.

**ANALYSIS**

County staff met with City staff to determine which entity would be responsible for each activity and cost for a joint Mainland Boat Launch. The major areas for discussion were capital expenses, Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) sublease/license, design and permitting, maintenance, and operation of the facility. City staff's position was that they were willing to provide a lease to the County for the boat ramp as well as a sublease/license to utilize the area under the 17<sup>th</sup> Street/Alma Lee Loy Bridge which is owned by FDOT. City staff states that they were not willing to participate in the cost to develop the boat ramp, assist with design and permitting, or provide for maintenance and operation of the facility. The City's rationale for this is that they already operate two (2) boat launch facilities nearby on the barrier island (MacWilliam Boat Basin Park and Riverside Park Boat Ramp). They further state that these facilities are not over capacity and seem adequate for their needs. Based upon City staff's recommendations, the County would be responsible for the design, permitting, construction and maintenance of this boat ramp facility which is within the City of Vero Beach.

County staff has some concerns with moving forward on this project as detailed below:

- **Design and Permitting:** As stated above, the City is not willing to provide design or permitting assistance for this project. Therefore, County staff would be responsible for these activities. As discussed before, this property lies within the County Manatee Protection Plan which describes the area adjacent to the Vero Beach Power Plant as a State designated manatee sanctuary of statewide importance (see attached excerpt page 44), and one of eight manatee “safe havens” identified by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in the state (see attached excerpt page 54). The area is also formally designated as a Warm Water Aggregation Area (WWAA) in the Army Corps of Engineers’ (ACOE) Manatee Key, as recognized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and FWC (see attached 2013 FWS letter and map on last page attached to the letter).

Although the Power Plant has been decommissioned and no longer discharges warm water, the area is still formally designated as an important manatee area by the reviewing agencies. Consequently, any proposed public ramp facilities in that area will be subject to scrutiny by the mentioned agencies, and a formal re-designation of the area may be required if the ramp is to be allowed. This would likely make permitting of such a project very time consuming, challenging, and costly. Public Works staff has a significant workload to design, permit, and oversee road construction projects, numerous building renovations and repairs, and other projects, from which this project would pull resources. Any permit approvals would likely require intensive mitigation of environmental impacts which would drive up construction costs.

- **Access and Space Limitations:** The Public Works Director met with City Staff at the power plant site to analyze the possibility for a boat ramp facility to be constructed at this site. Site access is a major issue for a public boat ramp. The access point is currently 60-65 feet from the intersection of Indian River Boulevard and 17th Street. This is a major site constraint as one boat and trailer stopped on Indian River Boulevard would impact the operation of the entire intersection. Looking at an alternative, the boat ramp access could be located at the South entrance to what is currently a manatee viewing parking area. This would require this access point be connected to the current drive aisle on the power plant site. With either access point, there would be no direct access from southbound Indian River Boulevard. U-turns at the Indian River Boulevard and 17th Street intersection would be necessary. This is not a safe movement with the westbound right turn on 17th Street. The site itself poses some design issues. The only feasible location for boat ramps is at the east end of the barge basin. Boat ramps accessing the boat basin from under the 17<sup>th</sup> Street/Alma Lee Loy Bridge would be a challenge. The ramp construction will require the removal of all underground piping for the water intakes that served the power plant which could be costly. See the attached power plant layout and the number of intake pipes. The existing concrete barge basin walls have exposed steel and there are some failures behind the walls which would need to be addressed.
- **Capital and Operating Costs:** The permitting challenges and site constraints detailed above would likely increase the cost to construct the boat ramp. Public Works estimates design and construction costs of over \$2 million to build a facility with limited capacity

(one ramp capable of serving multiple boats and limited parking spaces). The County would also need to operate and maintain the facility. From a policy standpoint, staff would not recommend additional costs to operate a recreational facility in the City of Vero Beach.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff is reluctant to proceed further in pursuing a joint venture with the City of Vero Beach at this location based upon the findings indicated above. Therefore, staff recommends against moving forward with a boat launch facility at the City Power Plant/Wastewater Treatment Plant location, and notifying the City of Vero Beach of this decision.

Attachments: Excerpt Manatee Protection Plan  
2013 FWS Letter and Map  
Power Plant Layout