

FREE

Indiantown CURRENTS

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BARBARA CLOWDUS

Time to change Village charter?

Changing Indiantown's elections and giving up some of the Village Council's responsibilities are apparently high on the council's priorities.

In October, the council voted to propose three changes to the Village's charter, the governing document that defines Indiantown's powers, function, rights and obligations. The charter was approved by the state legislature and ratified by Indiantown voters in their decision to incorporate in November 2017.

This time, voters will decide March 17 if they want to make the changes to the Village's charter now proposed by the Village Council.

continued on PAGE 3

Comp Plan seeks Council approval at Dec. 12 mtg

The first major objective of the Indiantown Village Council will be reached at its Dec. 12th meeting – approval of the Village's first Comprehensive Growth Management Plan.

And it's a year ahead of the state's schedule, which requires a newly incorporated municipality to have a state-approved plan to guide its land use and growth policies within three years of incorporation.

Of particular concern to some residents... continued on PAGE 5

Village faces big decision

Few residents within the Indiantown urban services district disagree over the need to resolve issues regarding the 68-year old water-and sewer-plant, Indiantown Company. Many even like the idea that the Village Council wants to buy the plant.

But by Jan. 31, 2020?

That's the date by which the council agreed to sign a purchase agreement with Indiantown Company, closing no later than March 31, 2020, in return for excluding all other potential buyers in the meantime.

The speed at which they were making the decision prompted public comment during the Nov. 7 special meeting at the Indiantown Civic Center, particularly since only two meetings, Dec. 12 and Jan. 9, are scheduled prior to the January 23 vote to approve the purchase.

"I just want to add a note of caution, since it appears to be fast tracked and with a sense of urgency to get this done," said Scott Watson, owner of Indiantown Marina and former president of the Indiantown Independence organization.

With a purported asking price of

around \$8 million plus approximately \$25 million in capital improvements, it's a major decision that "could tax the bonding, the borrowing capability of the village," he explained.

Watson also cautioned the council that time was needed "to absorb the reports," the first one being the summary to be given that day, before the council moves to the next phase of the acquisition, urging them also to be "fully transparent" with the public about the purchase.

"I'm not saying it's not a good idea," added Watson. "It's just that I don't think it's urgent that we get it under contract by January or March...because the last thing we want to do is to get in over our heads."

TWO STUDIES COLLIDE

The council hired a utilities and engineering consultant, Gerald Hartman of Winter Park, on Sept. 26 to appraise the value of the water plant, assess upgrades, find sources of funding, and summarize the feasibility study prepared by the Kimley-Horn engineering firm for Martin County less than three years ago.

The consultant's contract includes six phases that began with the summary of the Kimley-Horn study, then progresses through additional phases that include preparation of the purchase and closing paperwork at an estimated total of around \$99,000.

Kimley-Horn's report showed that an investment of \$27.3 million above the sale price would be needed to bring the plant up to standard, thus Martin County lost interest in pursuing the purchase at that time.

"Those are Martin County standards ... We don't need to bring (the plant) up to Martin County standards," Hartman told the council. "We can bring it up to standard for far less."

In addition to summarizing Kimley-Horn's findings, part of Hartman's contract is to research grant and loan possibilities for which the Village is now qualified as an incorporated municipality with various state and federal designations as a rural and distressed community.

Those had not been previously avail-

continued on PAGE 3

Introduction	3
Village gets new logo	7
Council Corner	11
Village Life	13
Calendar.....	13
Youth advisor arrested ..	14
Chamber parade	16

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Village faces major decision

continued from PAGE 1

able to Indiantown Company as a private utility.

Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas and Vice Mayor Janet Hernandez both clarified with Hartman and reiterated that the funds to purchase the plant would not come from the Village's property tax revenues; however, whatever loans are required would need to be repaid by Indiantown Company's rate-payers, Hartman said, although at a low interest rate.

CAUGHT BY SURPRISE

Although Nov. 7 had been called as a special meeting by Village Manager Howard Brown, no mention of Hartman's presentation or request to extend his contract to the next two phases of study had been mentioned at the council's Oct. 24 meeting.

Brown, instead, told the council and the audience that the special meeting was to continue the discussion of the council's priorities and to hear a presentation by consultant Jim Caras on the Village's new logo and slogan.

It was not until a few days prior to the special meeting that the posted agenda showed both the exclusivity agreement with Indiantown Company and Hartman's presentation of his summary report as agenda items.

After Hartman outlined the next two phases for his study, Indiantown businessman Kevin Powers urged the council "to slow down," reminding the councilmembers that they were rushing into a purchase with an estimated \$25 million in upgrades on top of the purchase price.

He pointed out Hartman's failure to produce a summary report, as had been listed on the agenda, and that no one on the council had asked any questions of the consultant, of other potential buyers, or of Powers, who had served for eight

years on the governing board of the South Florida Water Management District, which regulates water supply permits for all utilities for 16 counties.

He requested a copy of the summary, for which the council had paid \$6,500.

ALL AGREE ON ISSUES, DISAGREE ON PROCESS

Vice Mayor Janet Hernandez responded to Powers, repeating that grants and loans will be used for its purchase rather than property taxes. She acknowledged that the council members themselves may not be knowledgeable, but their consultant is.

"Have you seen his resume?" she demanded of Powers, adding that the village's water and sewer issues were of high priority to residents, and she was "elected to be in this seat to be their voices."

Powers responded that he agreed "110 percent" with her concerns regarding long-standing sewer and water issues; however, he objected to the swiftness of the council's decision-making, their lack of effort in seeking an understanding of the possible impacts of their decisions, and their apparent unwillingness to seek the input of locals with history and expertise.

Mayor Guyton Stone followed up by asking Hartman for the summary report, which he provided orally in part, stating that the plant itself would be used as collateral for the loans. He also said that a major difference between Kimley-Horn's feasibility study and his own assessment of the plant's needed upgrades were the 12 lift stations, which he does not believe need to be replaced.

The council voted unanimously to proceed with the next two phases of Hartman's feasibility study and appraisal.

The written summary report was made available to the public on Nov. 15, and can be obtained from the city clerk, Susan Owens, via email: sowens@indiantownfl.gov. ■

Village Charter

continued from PAGE 1

Indiantown activist and businessman Brian Powers cautioned council members during the October meeting about changing their guiding document so early in Indiantown's history.

"In more than 200 years," he commented, "the U.S. Constitution has been amended, has been changed, only 27 times, and here you're talking about making three changes before Indiantown is even two years old."

The motion to create a third amendment – to elect the mayor – was defeated in a council vote of 1-4, with Councilman Anthony Dowling the only council member voting in favor of the amendment. Since it was defeated by the council, this amendment will not be on the upcoming ballot.

The other two proposed amendments approved by the council will be decided by voters March 17.

One amendment changes the process for electing council members. Instead of electing council members from a pool of candidates with the top two vote-getters winning council member seats on the council (as in Indiantown's first election) to an election with separate contests for each seat, which is how federal, state and county elections typically are conducted. The seats are numbered, one through five.

"That means that the top two vote-getters might be going for the same seat," said Councilman Anthony Dowling, who was the lone vote against putting the amendment on the ballot. "I think the people of Indiantown want those with the most votes to be on their council."

Dowling also said that he feared that having a separate contest for each numbered seat would lead to drawing districts, which might undermine the concept that each council member serves the entire village.

When there's a pool of candidates, citizens vote for any of the candidates for each seat. The charter states: "The village council shall be divided into five separate council seats to be designated as seats 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, to be voted on a village-wide basis, with each qualified

elector entitled to vote for one candidate for one seat."

No election for a council member seat is required if there's only one candidate for the council member seat.

The other amendment will remove the power of the council to determine and approve employee benefits, giving those decisions to the village manager to make at his sole discretion and eliminating the need for the council to pass an ordinance.

The changes will be listed on the ballot as questions, and registered voters will choose "yes" or "no."

QUESTION #1

Ballot Proposal: The ballot title and ballot summary for Question #1 are as follows:

VILLAGE CHARTER AMENDMENT CLARIFYING COUNCIL ELECTION PROCEDURES

Shall the Indiantown Village Charter be amended to clarify that candidates for Village Council shall run for individually numbered Council seats in separate contests, with the candidate receiving the most votes for each seat winning?

Yes
 No

QUESTION #2

Ballot Proposal: The ballot title and ballot summary for Question #2 are as follows:

VILLAGE CHARTER AMENDMENT CONCERNING VILLAGE PERSONNEL POLICIES

Shall the Indiantown Village Charter be amended to provide that the Village Manager, rather than the Village Council, shall establish and maintain a system of personnel policies for the administration of Village employees?

Yes
 No

The proposed charter amendments will be on the Presidential Preference Primary on March 17, 2020, when voters choose whom they wish to represent their political party in the Nov. 3 general election. The last day to register to vote is Feb. 18.

The Indiantown election for two council member seats will be August 18. ■



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Cambios propuestos a los estatutos de Indiantown

Al parecer, cambiar las elecciones de Indiantown y renunciar a algunas de las responsabilidades del Consejo del Municipio es una de las principales prioridades del consejo.

En octubre, el consejo votó para proponer tres cambios a los estatutos del Municipio, el documento que define los poderes, la función, los derechos y las obligaciones de Indiantown. El estatuto fue aprobado por la legislatura estatal y ratificada por los votantes de Indiantown en su decisión de incorporar en noviembre de 2017.

Esta vez, los votantes decidirán el 17 de marzo si quieren hacer los cambios a

los estatutos de la comuna ahora propuestos por el Consejo de la Municipalidad.

El activista y empresario de Indiantown, Brian Powers, advirtió a los miembros del consejo durante la reunión de octubre acerca de cambiar el documento sustancial tan temprano en la historia de Indiantown.

"En más de 200 años," comentó, "la Constitución de los EE. UU. Se ha modificado solo 27 veces, y aquí se habla de hacer tres cambios antes de que Indiantown tenga incluso dos años."

La moción para crear una tercera enmienda, para elegir al alcalde, fue rec-

continued on PAGE 4

Village Charter

continued from PAGE 3

hazada en una votación del consejo de 1-4, con el concejal Anthony Dowling como único miembro del consejo que votó a favor de la enmienda. Dado que fue derrotado por el consejo, esta enmienda no estará en la próxima votación.

Las otras dos enmiendas propuestas aprobadas por el consejo serán decididas por los votantes el 17 de marzo.

Una enmienda cambia el proceso para elegir a los miembros del consejo. En lugar de elegir a los miembros del consejo de un grupo de candidatos con los dos principales candidatos para obtener el voto que ganan escaños en el consejo (como en las primeras elecciones de Indiantown) a una elección con concursos separados para cada asiento, eso es cómo las elecciones federales, estatales y del condado típicamente se llevan a cabo. Los asientos están numerados, del uno al cinco.

"Eso significa que los dos principales candidatos podrían obtener el mismo asiento", dijo el concejal Anthony Dowling, quien fue el único voto en contra de poner la enmienda en la boleta. "Creo que la gente de Indiantown quiere que aquellos con más votos estén en su consejo".

Dowling también dijo que temía que tener un concurso por separado para cada asiento numerado conduciría a la manipulación del mapa electoral, lo que podría socavar el concepto de que cada miembro del consejo sirve a toda la comunidad.

Cuando hay un grupo de candidatos, los ciudadanos votan por cualquiera de los candidatos para cada escaño. El estatuto establece: "El consejo del municipio se dividirá en cinco escaños separados del consejo que se designarán como escaños 1, 2, 3, 4 y 5, para ser votados en toda la comunidad, con cada elector calificado con derecho a votar por uno candidato a un puesto".

No se requiere elección para un puesto de miembro del consejo si solo hay un candidato para el asiento del miembro del consejo.

La otra enmienda eliminará el poder del consejo para determinar y aprobar

los beneficios de los empleados, dando esas decisiones al administrador de la aldea para que las tome a su exclusivo criterio y eliminará la necesidad de que el consejo apruebe una ordenanza.

Los cambios se enumerarán en la boleta como preguntas, y los votantes registrados elegirán "sí" o "no".

PREGUNTA #1

Propuesta de boleta: El título de la boleta y el resumen de la boleta para la

Pregunta # 1 son los siguientes:

ENMIENDA DE LAS MINUTAS DEL MUNICIPIO PARA ACLARAR LOS TRÁMITES DE ELECCIÓN DE CONSEJO

¿Deberá enmendarse la Carta de la comunidad de Indiantown para aclarar que los candidatos al Consejo del municipio se presentarán individualmente asientos numerados del Consejo en concursos separados, con el candidato que recibe la mayor cantidad de votos por cada escaño ganador?

___ sí
___ No

PREGUNTA # 2

Propuesta de boleta: El título de la boleta y el resumen de la boleta para la

Pregunta # 2 son los siguientes:

ENMIENDA DE LAS MINUTAS DEL MUNICIPIO SOBRE POLÍTICAS INDIVIDUALES DEL MUNICIPIO

¿Deberá enmendarse las MINUTAS de Indiantown para proporcionar que el administrador del MUNICIPIO, en lugar del consejo MUNICIPAL, establecerá y mantendrá un sistema de políticas de personal para la administración de los empleados de la comuna?

___ sí
___ No

Las enmiendas propuestas a los estatutos estarán en la Primaria de Preferencia Presidencial el 17 de marzo de 2020, cuando los votantes elijan a quién desean representar a su partido político en las elecciones generales del 3 de noviembre. El último día para registrarse para votar es el 18 de febrero.

La elección de Indiantown para dos escaños de miembros del consejo será el 18 de agosto. ■

New chamber director excited about Indiantown

Kelly Catania, the new executive director of the Indiantown Chamber of Commerce, greets new acquaintances and old friends with the same broad smile. It makes everyone she meets feel important.

Likely no other attribute could be more effective in her mission to grow the membership of the Indianown Chamber and to help create economic growth in the Village.

In her first address to the chamber Nov. 21 at the Seminole Inn, she talked about her first impressions of Indiantown during a three-hour tour with former Chamber President David Powers.

"Everywhere I looked, the one word that kept coming to my mind was 'potential,'" she said. "There is just so much potential in Indiantown, and I can't tell you how excited I am to be a part of this."

She gave a nod to Stuart/Martin Chamber President and CEO Joe Catrambone, as "one of the best chamber leaders in the community," learning from him as she served as events coordinator, prior to joining the Indiantown Chamber.

Prior to moving to Florida in 2016, she also got some chamber experience as president of the Elizabeth City Area Chamber of Commerce in North Carolina. The move was prompted by her marriage to Filadelfo "Fil" Catania, she said, who manages Treasure Coast Toyota and Treasure Coast Lexus.

While in North Carolina, she hosted her own radio show titled "Chamber Chat" which she created and co-hosted at the local university.

"Moving to Florida and marrying my husband is like a dream come true," she said, "and getting to lead a chamber in this beautiful area makes my life complete!"

In her role for less than a month, she created a new online newsletter and new



In addition to a new executive director, the Indiantown Chamber of Commerce also unveiled its new logo, a window on Indiantown's culture, business and future.



Kelly Catania
Executive Director
Indiantown Chamber

networking and sponsorship opportunities, as well as taking on the role as a Christmas elf for the Indiantown Christmas parade.

During her time in Martin County, she put her education in public relations, advertising and graphic arts to work serving many boards and marketing for non-profits, including The United Way, Catch the Wave of Hope, and the Vi-

sionary School of Arts.

In North Carolina, she did the same for the U.S. Coast Guard, Habitat for Humanity, Red cross, Salvation Army, VFW and SPCA, where she adopted her Chihuahua, Jake.

A graduate of Youngstown State University with a bachelor's degree in business administration, she credits her education at the John Maxwell Institute in NC, the Institute of Organizational Management (IOM), the most influential in her success.

As well as being a graduate of Class 28 with the Martin County LEADERShip program of the Stuart/Martin Chamber of Commerce.

She may be contacted at 772.597.2184 for more information about chamber membership and benefits, as well as information about the 54th Annual Installation & Awards Banquet on Jan. 16, 2020. ■



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Counting all Indiantown residents to begin soon

The actual population of Indiantown seems to be a moving target. Two years ago, the statistical analysis for incorporation was 6,000 residents. Village Manager Howard Brown most frequently says it's more than 8,000. One of the Village's consultants estimated that 15,000 people had to be living in Indiantown, because a grocery store the size of Hitchcock's could not be supported with fewer than that.

No one really knows, but we're about to find out. The US Census will begin the count in just a few months.

The Village Council appointed Vice



Vice Mayor
Janet Hernandez

Mayor Janet Hernandez to head Indiantown's Complete Count Committee to increase awareness and motivate residents to respond to the 2020 Census.

"She's the right choice," said Mayor Guyton Stone, "because she's the only one who can get into our Spanish-speaking neighborhoods." Hernandez is the only bi-lingual council member.

The council recognizes the importance of active participation in the census. Every person counted represents around \$1,000 that comes back to that community in federal and state programs, particularly important to a newly

formed municipality.

They also recognize the fear of Indiantown's immigrant communities that their legal status may be challenged if they submit information to the federal government. Officials from the U.S. Census Bureau assure citizens that their information will remain confidential and is never shared with any other government agency. Their only concern is the count.

The census, which has been conducted every 10 years since 1790, determines the number of seats each state has in the House of Representatives. States and counties also use the totals to redraw their legislative and school districts.

The Census Bureau must submit state population totals to the President

by December 31, 2020. The population totals will affect funding in Indiantown, and data collected in the census will show the council how Indiantown is changing.

Different procedures have been designed for the 2020 count:

- A more accurate address list and automated field operations
- For the first time, residents can fill out their form online, by phone, or by mail.
- As a result, fewer in-person visits will be required.

To volunteer to serve on the CCC with Hernandez, or to host a workshop at your workplace, contact her at jhernandez@indiantownfl.gov. ■

Comp Plan

continued from PAGE 1

dents, the Village's wetlands, endangered species and rare upland habitat will be preserved, and current Village property owners will not lose any of their existing property rights.

The Village's Future Land Use Map establishes land patterns to reflect the Village's history by protecting established neighborhoods, while recognizing the Village's need to create opportunities for economic development and growth for residents of all income levels.

It also provides a framework to create a town center area that encourages compact, mixed-use urban development and supports transit. The density for urban residential office zoning is a maximum of 15 units per acre, with a mini-

'Can you believe this? We all agree about what we want. That's something that doesn't happen very often.'

-- Joe Walsh
Marina owner on Okeechobee Waterway

mum of three units. Within only the Village's urbanized, mixed-use core is the maximum density allowed, 20 units per acre maximum with five units per acre minimum.

"I believe that together we've created a really good comprehensive plan," said Village Community Development Director Bonnie Landry, of Landry Associates, during a September Village Council meeting.

Landry was contracted by the Village to write the plan as one of its first official acts in March 2018. "We've had a few bumps along the way," she acknowledged, "but now I think we all can be proud of what we've accomplished."

What was submitted to the state for approval, however, did not remain unchanged. The state's changes will be explained to the public at the Dec. 12 Village Council meeting. ■

What's next now that Comp Plan is done?

Next for the Village is to create the specific rules for implementing the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan, called the Land Development Regulations (LDRs).

Five firms submitted proposals to the Village, and the top three made presentations to the council July 25, including Calvin, Giordano & Associates, The Mellgren Planning Group, and KCI Technologies.

The consultant chosen to write the Village's rules is Calvin, Giordano & Associates (CGA), who might be familiar to Village residents already since the company also handles Indiantown's code enforcement.

One of the Village's new staff employees also is a former CGA employee, and the company worked previously with Village Manager Howard Brown at the City of Opa-Locka. CGA "completely overhauled" Opa-Locka's comprehensive plan and land development regulations, according to their presentation to the Village Council.

They were the top choice of the Village staff, comprising Brown, Village Attorney Wade Vose, and City Clerk Susan Owens, awarding the group 266 points, in part because they had the lowest cost with shortest timeline (around \$100,000 with a timeline of nine months). The Mellgren Planning Group was \$15,000 more costly and awarded 248 points, and KCI Technologies earned third spot with 225 points.

Councilwoman Janet Hernandez commented that they all were equally qualified, judging from their work histories and impressive presentations; however, the shortest timeline at the lowest cost won CGA's nomination by Councilman Guyton Stone, and the majority agreed.

Little did they realize that four months would be added to the front of the nine-month timeline, since CGA's work could not begin until mid-November.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP LAUNCHES LDRs
Calvin, Giordano & Associates attended

the Nov. 14 council meeting to officially launch the "listening" portion of the project, getting these initial directions from the council, all of which were similar:

- keep the rules simple, easy to understand
- keep Indiantown's small character, thus tailor the LDRs to Indiantown
- keep from creating non-conformities
- simplify the maps
- be consistent with the Comp Plan
- keep transparency throughout the process

A public workshop the following Saturday in the Civic Center was led by CGA's Alex Davis, who revealed his nervousness about the nine-month timeline; however, planner Sylvia Vargas, also attending, expressed confidence that it could be done.

They had hoped to adopt some of Martin County's LDRs to shorten the timeline, she said, but the 30 or so participants attending the workshop rejected all of the county's code, calling it "too restrictive."

The only exception was their agreement to maintain the county's restriction to four stories for all buildings (except industrial uses) with the caveat that the height limit still would allow design elements to make the building more attractive.

"There's nothing worse than having a building have an ugly flat roof to stay within that 40-foot height limit," said Scott Watson, who serves on Martin County's Local Planning Agency that reviews all major development applications before they go to the Board of County Commissioners.

"Basically," he added, "we just want you to use some common sense."

Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas remarked that she was encouraged by Vargas' comment that they are approaching Indiantown's rules "with fresh eyes."

Vargas added "to provide a solution, you must know what the problems are." She also explained that CGA is not "bound by anything," and asked the public to imagine what they wanted to accomplish.

The responses included:

- codes that make efficient use of the land
 - to find innovative ways to deal with Highway 710, which divides the community in half
 - to be golf-cart friendly, including creating a golf cart path from Indianwood to the Village shopping center, adding bridle paths, as well as walk and bike paths
 - a simple form-based, illustrative code that does not require land planners or architects to interpret
 - rules that cannot be interpreted in multiple ways
 - be less restrictive on which and how many trees are required in landscape plans; allow Florida-friendly trees for landscaping, not just native species
 - allowing flexibility in the plan, create options for compliance
 - include plans for tiny homes, a truck stop, more live-work options in the core, and define "walkability"
 - do not exceed state and federal guidelines
 - do not create separate designations for light and heavy industrial, just make it all industrial to allow market options
 - include rules for hospitals, assisted living facilities and FPL, including its solar farms
 - ensure that the site plan review process will not exceed 60 days.
- Vargas concluded the session by saying "We know good practices and best practices that are proven."
- She also assured participants that "we've heard very clearly" from the city manager, his staff, the council and now the public.
- CGA will proceed by creating "modules" that will be presented to the Village Manager to post for public review as they proceed, instead of waiting until the end to present the entire document at once.
- "Can you believe this," asked marina owner Joe Walsh. "We all agree about what we want. That's something that doesn't happen very often. ■"

— Barbara Cloudus

How did one Village get two mission statements?

One of the state's criticisms of Indiantown's new Comprehensive Growth Management Plan was the lack of an introduction and the need to state the Village's mission.

How can you chart a path without knowing and understanding the path you want to take?

The council's consultant, Bonnie Landry, complied with the state's comments by including the Village's mission statement approved by the Village Council in August 2018. It reads:

The Village of Indiantown is dedicated to creating a sustainable community with friendly neighborhoods, civic engagement, and economic prosperity while proudly maintaining our small-town feel and sense of community.

Throughout the public involvement process, Landry explained, workshop participants communicated their desire to retain the "hometown feel," which aligns with its mission statement, and to seek opportunities for more affordable and rental housing, as well as economic development.

The Village's Mission Statement was the result of a strategic planning workshop in May 2018, conducted by Dr. Kim Delaney, of the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council for the Village Council and the public. They also developed the Village's vision statement, a list of community values and a strategic plan. The council called them a "blueprint" for them to follow..

The Vision Statement at the time read as follows:

We envision an economically vibrant, diverse, and welcoming community with friendly neighborhoods, quality education, and a healthy environment that celebrates its small-town feel, heritage, and rural character.

The Village's value statements also were listed:

- Celebrating Authenticity and Heritage
- Promoting Healthy, Safe Neighborhoods
- Preserving a Family-Friendly Community
- Implementing an Action-Oriented Government
- Encouraging Collaboration and Sustainable Investment

- Advancing Thoughtful, Well-Planned Growth & Development
- Preserving an Independent, Self-Reliant Citizenry

After Village Manager Howard Brown arrived in January 2019, he sought approval from the Village Council to retain a consultant to help the council members formulate what he called a "Strategic Priorities Action Plan."

They adopted a second mission and vision statement a month later in February 2019, after a Saturday workshop led by Jim Anaston-Karas, of Community Marine & Water Resource Planning. They also wrote a new strategic plan tailored to the new mission statement, and each council member listed his or her own priorities and "initiatives."

This is their final version of their second Mission Statement:

"Realize and grow the local economy and business core, thereby building the Village's financial foundation, and subsequently attracting housing reinvestment and expansion."

And this is their second Vision Statement:

"Find business and learning opportunities plentiful for all in this historic countryside village where you'll warmly greet your neighbor passing on Mainstreet."

Although the tones are totally different, when they used the mission statements to develop their strategic plans, both workshops listed the need to immediately write the Village's Comp Plan and Land Development Regulations at the top of the Village's priorities.

After those points, the strategic plans diverge.

The Karas' plan lists the development of a logo, slogan and marketing plan next, which would be completed this year. Delaney's plan also listed the development of a slogan and marketing plan, but not until after the Comp Plan and the LDRs are written, which would be in the third year after incorporation.

Delaney also did not lobby for the Village Council to pay her to design the logo, write the slogan, and produce the video. The Council Members, however, authorized a contract with Karas, paying him \$63,000 to do just that.

With two mission statements and two strategic plans written within the first two years of incorporation, the question of how to chart a path without knowing which path to take seems to remain unanswered. ■

--Barbara Clowdus

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Village's new marketing logo and slogan chosen

The Village is close to adopting a logo and slogan. The work done thus far by the Village Council's consultant for marketing and messaging, Jim Karas of Community Marine & Water Resource Planning in Ft. Lauderdale, was presented at the Nov. 7 special meeting of the Village Council.

He indicated what he called, "a preferred logo and slogan," and touched on briefly the need to consider soon how the Village wanted to proceed in implementing its marketing strategies.

Melissa Corbett, president of the Indiantown Chamber of Commerce, questioned Karas as to the timing.

"Don't you think it's a little early for marketing to businesses," she said, "since we don't have either the Comp Plan or the LDRs (Land Development Regulations) ready yet? I mean, what are we going to say to them?"

Karas responded that the logo and slogan could essentially "be put on a shelf," and pulled out when the Village is prepared to go forward.

Only two members of the council's appointed steering committee attended, and neither commented, although the committee had not made a clear choice of its preferred logo. In fact, the committee members had expected to meet again to follow up with their initial suggestions; however, Karas' contract called for only the presentation to the council members Nov. 7.



The colors and design of a logo that reflects Indiantown's cultural heritage seemed to excite the members of the standing committee appointed by the council; however, Jonnie Flewelling of the Seminole Inn cautioned about using a Seminole symbol without knowing its meaning. She was unable to make contact with the Seminoles, according to designer Jim Karas, so the logo was eliminated.



The favored logo by the Council members and Karas was the one that adopts the shape of a digital map marker, showing location, with a design that encompasses the "grow" theme, representative of the Village's agricultural heritage. The logo will be used on stationery, bus stops, signs, and flags, as well as on marketing brochures.

Although Karas has favored the logo that looks like a map marker with leaves, the committee members seemed to favor one at the time with a more historical, Seminole design, colors and flavor.

Karas did comply with their suggestion that the 'I' in Indiantown be capitalized instead of a lower case letter, as was

in the first draft of the logos; however, he ignored their suggestion that "broad-band" be included in the hyperlink beneath the logo.

Instead, Karas explained, he "distilled the key economic analyses" identified for targeting business sectors.

In other words, he changed the hy-

perlink line from "Beckoning business through US Opportunity, Florida REDI, and US Free Trade Enabled zones," to "Beckoning business with world-wide connectivity and state/Federal economic incentive programs."

The hyperlink would be directed to the Village website to explain the economic incentives included fiber-optic internet capacity, the Florida REDI program, Foreign Trade, and Opportunity Zones, all of which mean real cost savings for businesses that choose to locate in Indiantown.

The slogan, Where Great Things Grow, along with the image reflective of its agricultural heritage was the combination preferred by Karas and the Council.

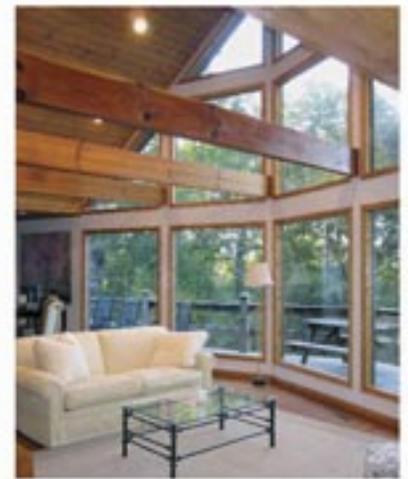
"We favor the 'grow' theme for a slogan that captures the community's essence," Karas said, "and its theme implies measured growth that can apply to many other meanings" including growth of a young village, in learning opportunities, growing families, as well as in agriculture. It also means growth of existing and new businesses, he said, which is the Village's target audience.

The council accepted the report, without authorizing an expansion of Karas' services as yet. After this phase of the marketing plan is completed, the council will consider a wider scope of marketing services. ■

--Barbara Cloudus

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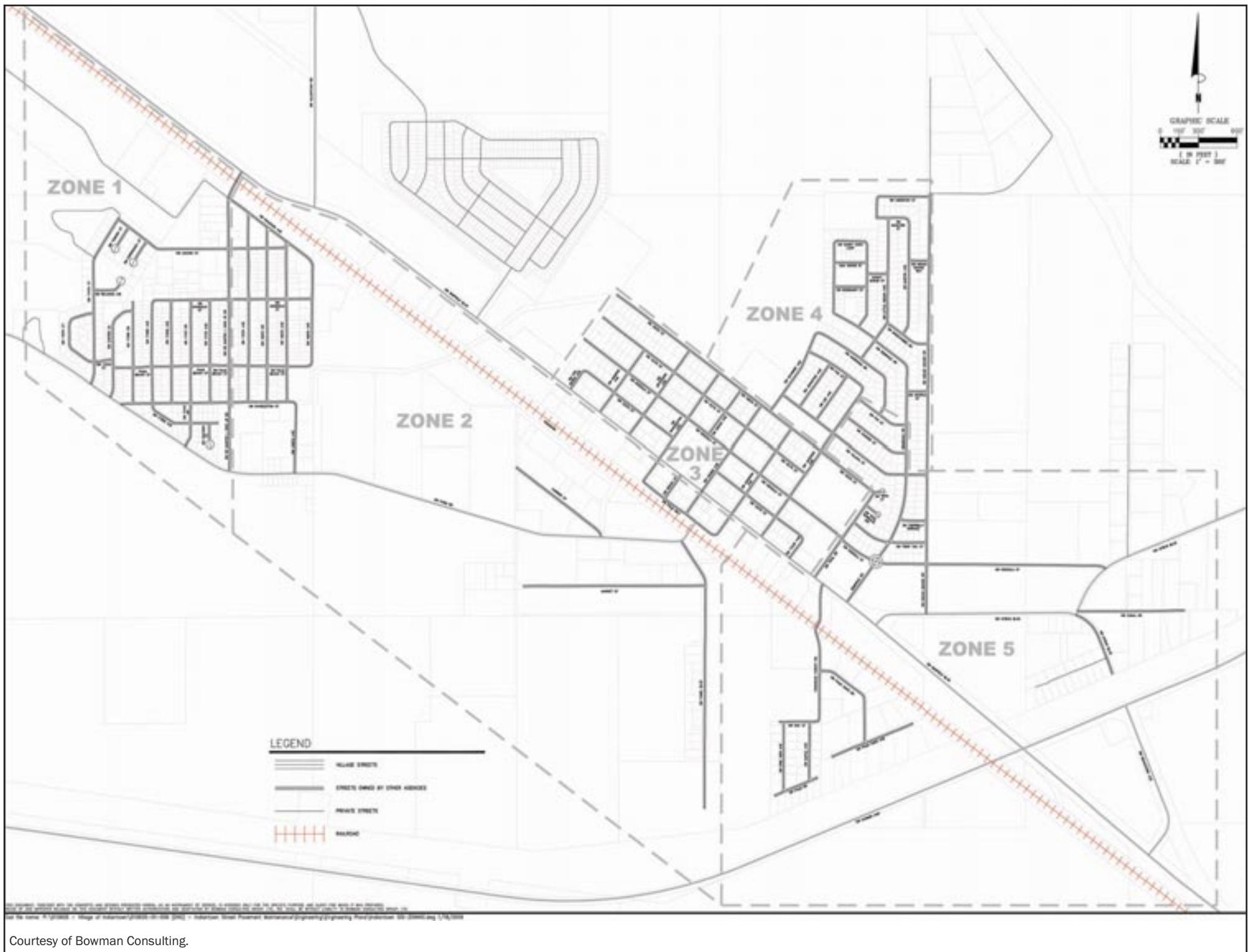
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Courtesy of Bowman Consulting.
Since sufficient funds are unavailable to meet all the roadwork needs of the Village, zones were created to tackle projects. Roads in Zones 1 and 3 are completed until more funding is obtained, and now the work has progressed to Zones 2 and 4.

Making slow, but steady, progress on roads

You can almost hear the anguish in the Village's Public Works Director/Village Engineer's voice when talks about the roads in Indiantown. The Village needs millions to fix them all.

Bill Archebelle, of Bowman Consulting with whom the Village contracts its engineering services, attends every Village Council meeting. He often is seen perusing Village streets.

He reported at the Nov. 14 meeting that the repairs to the roads in Zones 1 and 3 had been completed, but not all of them.

"You know that our strategy is to make the money we get spread as far as we can," he told the council once again. It's a familiar refrain.

Some roads need to be completely replaced.

"To do that would blow our whole budget on one road," he said, "so some are going to have to wait, like Lincoln. It's going to have to wait for another disbursement."

Also on the "wait list" are Tyler, "one of the worst," Archebelle said, now that the county replaced Farm Road shortly before incorporation, and Trail, which is a short road.

Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. has been accepted into the Florida Department of Transportation's plan, according to Councilman Anthony Dowling, the Village's representative on the Metropolitan Planning Organization, responsible for area transportation. Although it's encouraging to know the road will be replaced, it will not happen for a minimum of five years.

Archebelle requested a disbursement of \$340,000 to begin work in Zones 2 and 4, and an additional \$33,000 fee to go to Bowman Con-

sulting for its services. The council approved the request.

In addition, steps were taken to begin the process for applying for federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), which are used for major infrastructure projects that small cities cannot tackle alone. Special consideration is given also to distressed areas, such as Indiantown.

In the Village's five-year plan, \$3 million has been earmarked in the 2020-21 budget year for roads. ■

--Barbara Clowdus

Editorial: Frustration led to testy moments

Public comment at Indiantown Village Council meetings, if any, usually is rather sedate. Not so at the Nov. 7 special meeting at the Indiantown Civic Center, in part because the public had expected a workshop, not a special meeting requiring official action.

The council would be asked to sign an agreement with Indiantown Company, the Village's water and sewer services provider, to have a purchase agreement ready by Jan. 31. (They agreed, by the way.)

During public comment, Indiantown businessman and native son, Kevin Powers, stepped on a few council members' toes when he told them "to proceed with caution" in their pursuit of ownership of the Indiantown Company.

He did not object to the acquisition itself; however, he warned that the Village could be taking on more than is wise at this early stage of their incorporation, particularly with estimates ranging from \$16 to \$27 million to bring the aging utility up to standards. No need to rush into an acquisition without giving themselves ample time to understand fully the ramifications of their decision.

Council members, particularly Vice Mayor Janet Hernandez, rejected Powers' comments, because only loans and grants would be used for the purchase and because they have a qualified con-

sultant to advise them.

They seemed unable to recognize that the loans would be repaid by the utility's 1,800 customers, whose rates would increase. Ratepayers also are taxpayers.

It appears the Village Manager looks to the purchase of the plant as necessary to increase revenues for the Village's general fund, since rates would be adjusted to generate a profit. Those 1,800 ratepayers then would be singled out to pay what would amount to an additional "tax" to help support the Village's spending.

What we saw from Powers came as the result of frustration over the council's lack of investigation (no questions), a lack of accountability, and a lack of transparency – not only regarding the water plant, but in countless other actions over the previous year, such as:

- Limiting access to information by not posting approved meeting minutes separately since January 2019.
- Not considering the impact on the Village's credit rating and ability to borrow any other funds for other projects in the near future by acquiring Indiantown Company now.
- Limiting access to the public by opening the Village's office only two and a half days a week, which Brown promised would change when a "management analyst" was hired, yet the analyst was

informed in his employment letter that the office is only open two and a half days a week.

- Hiring consultants without comparison quotes, such as Jim Karas, who has/or will be paid \$63,000 to design a logo, write a slogan, and produce a video, who's pushing the Village to pay more to implement "the rest" of the strategic plan engineered by Karas. Other local firms would have agreed to do it for less than one third of that amount.

- Extending landscaping contracts negotiated previously by Martin County, rather than seeking sealed bids for Indiantown.

- Brown also chose the Florida Retirement Fund to provide retirement benefits for employees – including the Village Manager and all five council members – without revealing to the council the long-term financial impact on the Village, or considering 401K plans. This year's projected contribution for its handful of employees, according to the budget, is \$98,000.

- The council made themselves eligible retroactively, although the Village charter requires that no benefits to elected officials may be implemented until the year after an election.

- The Village Manager also attempted to include the council members when selecting health insurance

providers for employee benefits – rejected on a 3-2 vote, by the way – pretending he did not need insurance, in part because the Village pays him an additional \$500 monthly toward health insurance, yet signing up at the same time as other employees while still collecting his monthly stipend.

- Now Brown and the council want the Village Charter changed so that he alone decides employee benefits.

Other actions by the Village also lends to the lack of trust in their judgment. Why did the council feel justified in approving the purchase of a 15-passenger van with no needs analysis beyond the manager's assertion, "We need it."

Powers, who led the incorporation transition team between November 2017 and the first election in March 2018, said previously he had wanted to give the council the time and space to chart their own course. Obviously, he'd reached the point that he could no longer stay silent, and the council would do well to listen to his advice.

Perhaps they should be reminded that had it not been for Kevin Powers' considerable clout in Tallahassee, the incorporation would never have happened.

Like it or not, the Village's success – or failure – weighs heavily on his shoulders and impacts his credibility. No one is likely to work harder for Indiantown's success than Kevin Powers. ■

Looking to return of that Indiantown attitude



Barbara Clowdus

Unfiltered

Something's missing in Indiantown, and the best hope for getting it back is to put a newspaper in the hands of Indiantown citizens. Let them see what I see, and hear what I hear; thus, Indiantown Currents is born.

Thus, Indiantown Currents was born.

What's missing is the single-minded passion for Indiantown evident 10 years ago in the work by the all-volunteer Neighborhood Advisory Committee and the citizens who attended their monthly meetings. That determination and independent spirit re-emerged three years ago with the incorporation initiative. Now, however, we're seeing that spirit slip away.

Flowery words and pronouncements of the great strides the Village is taking remain hollow when staff obfuscates or hides information, or when Council Members fail to ask questions, fail even to make a Google search, fail to look for alternatives, or to consider the long-term impacts of their decisions.

The Indiantown spirit seems to have evaporated.

The concept of wringing every dime out of their limited revenues to shape a better quality of life for all Indiantown residents seems now lost. The 2020 budget shows that 48 percent of the Village's nearly \$5 million in tax revenues will be spent on "administrative services."

Those outside of government define that as "a bureaucracy."

Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas now calls the growing number of employees, plus the obligation that comes with them for retirement and health insurance, her own push to award elected council members their own retirement and health benefits, routinely awarding no bid-contracts, and undertaking other expenditures such as a 15-passenger van, "the building blocks" to attaining a strong village.

That's not the Susan Gibbs-Thomas we knew prior to incorporation.

It's more than just questionable spending, however. That unified sense of mission to achieve something greater than themselves is noticeably absent at current Village Council meetings.

I propose that's because none of the Village staff lives in Indiantown, a convenient tactic to ensure that their loyalty lies solely with the city manager who hired them, not to Indiantown.

Village Manager Howard Brown lives in Palm Beach Gardens, contrary to a common practice of small cities to require that their managers live within ... or at least near ... the boundaries of the

city that pays their salary. After all, those Village salaries get spent where people live; therefore Indiantown taxpayers are injecting their money into the economies of Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade, and St. Lucie Counties, not into Indiantown's economy.

We suspect that living outside of Indiantown plays a large part in Brown's decision to open the office only two and a half days a week. Most cities require that their city manager spend a minimum of 40 hours on the job. Not Mr. Brown.

He likely could not, anyway, even if required. He owns his own outside consulting firm, Local Government Consulting Group in West Palm Beach, incorporated two months prior to his coming to Indiantown.

Brown's Indiantown contract for a \$110,000 annual salary includes additional benefits that bring the total compensation to around \$130,000. It includes a \$500 monthly stipend for health insurance, which he's not changed since signing up for employee health insurance April 8. That's an ethical breach, but how deep does it run?

His contract also stipulates that he can teach and consult – as long as it does not interfere with his duties in Indiantown. Since he seldom can be found in Indiantown, we suspect he's just not around because he's working elsewhere.

Village Council Members also approved Brown's choice for Finance Director, a former employee of Opa-Locka,

Susan Gooding-Liburd, at a salary of \$10,000 a month without revealing that he had known Liburd personally, or that she has been under an FBI investigation for allegedly authorizing \$1.7 million in transfers of customers' water deposits to the city's general operating fund to make up for a budget shortfall.

How could we be confident about anyone else's previous connections or loyalties hired by Brown?

Over and over we hear former Mayor Gibbs-Thomas declare, "We want the best of the best" to explain why no Indiantown applicants qualify for Village staff positions. We won't address that slap in the face of Indiantown citizens; however, if that's truly her standard, then why was Brown hired in the first place?

The council's search committee, led by retired City Manager Dan Kleban, past president of Florida City-County Managers Association, offered five top choices for Village Manager. Brown was not one of those choices. Kleban also offered two alternative choices. Brown was not one of those choices, either.

He was one of two also-applied candidates.

My hope is that the independent Indiantown spirit returns to this Village, revealing itself as passion for residents' quality of life, rather than what's best for Howard Brown and the council itself. It's time to rewrite contracts and to look at Village practices and policies through the Village's independent eyes. ■

People often ask: Where is Indiantown headed?



**Mayor
Guyton Stone**
Council Corner

Some claim the council is moving too fast, others claim we're moving too slow. I believe neither of these are true because, while development is complicated, Indiantown has a plan. Back in February 2019, the Village Council held meetings to establish a strategic action plan throughout the community. These meetings were complex and varied including the creation of Land development regulations, broadcast messaging, the composition of a village budget, retention of a utility engineering consultant, and the development of a comprehensive plan.

Since then the village has accomplished much, and will accomplish more, but I feel it is important to take a moment and explore work done to better understand the future.

PUBLIC PLANNING, UTILITY, AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENTS

Out of all the areas Indiantown is developing, growth and planning is particularly important. As such, there are several projects ongoing I would like to



Village Mayor Guyton Stone, left, founded Boy Scout Troop 818, pictured with Guyton Jr., Miguel, and Felix Jr., along with leaders Howard Brown and Ford Dwyer.

highlight here. To start, we are currently researching if the village taking over the fire department, water, and sewer utilities is possible.

Additionally, construction of the Casa Bella apartment complex has been approved. The building will take up a half acre and contain 10 units. 3 of these units are planned as mixed use live-work spaces to better attract business and grow a healthy community.

Finally, a developer has proposed the construction of an industrial biomedical park located on SW Market Street. The

company plans to manufacture eye drops, after relocating to Indiantown, and is expected to bring high-tech jobs to the area.

PUBLIC WORKS AND ENGINEERING

The Village has also made substantial progress on infrastructure. To begin with, repair to the Village's Drainage & Swale systems are ongoing to increase public safety. And, for those interested, I am pleased to announce pavement resurfacing has been ongoing, despite decades of deferred maintenance, with

more work tentatively scheduled to begin January 2020 for other areas in the community. With any luck, this change will improve travel on our roads and sidewalks.

We don't stop there however. Many of you may have noticed work around the Village's various parks. I am pleased to say park clean-up has begun and, with any luck, their beautifying processes will substantially improve community returns. Additionally, reviews are ongoing for everything from estimates for chain link fence to electrical repairs with further information coming very soon.

These quality of life improvements are the reason we incorporated in the first place. And I know, both from speaking with all of you and from my personal experience, these critical changes are what residents and stakeholders alike want the council to be doing. I know the Village of Indiantown will continue to improve and I look forward to continuing this journey with all of you together because we are a place where great things grow. ■

Council Corner will be a regular feature of Indiantown Currents where the views of the Village Council members will be expressed. The column represents the individual council member's personal opinion, and does not represent the Village Council as a whole.

El alcalde: ¿Hacia dónde se dirige Indiantown?

Algunos afirman que el consejo se está moviendo demasiado rápido, otros afirman que nos estamos moviendo demasiado lento. Creo que ninguno de estos es cierto porque, aunque el desarrollo es complicado, Indiantown tiene un plan. En febrero de 2019, el Consejo del Municipio celebró reuniones para establecer un plan de acción estratégico en toda la comunidad. Estas reuniones fueron complejas y variadas, incluyendo la creación de regulaciones de desarrollo de la tierra, mensajes de difusión, la composición del presupuesto de la municipalidad, la retención de un consultor de ingeniería de servicios públicos y el desarrollo de un plan integral.

Desde entonces, el municipio ha logrado mucho y logrará más, pero creo que es importante tomarse un momento y explorar el trabajo realizado para comprender mejor el futuro.

PLANIFICACIÓN PÚBLICA, SERVICIOS PÚBLICOS Y DESARROLLOS COMERCIALES

De todas las áreas que Indiantown está desarrollando, el crecimiento y la planificación son particularmente importantes. Como tal, hay varios proyectos en curso que me gustaría destacar aquí. Para comenzar, actualmente estamos investigando si es posible que la comunidad se haga cargo de los servicios de bomberos, agua y alcantarillado.

Además, se aprobó la construcción del complejo de apartamentos Casa Bella. El edificio ocupará medio acre y contendrá 10 unidades. 3 de estas unidades están planificadas como espacios para trabajo y vivienda a fin de que atraer mejor los negocios y hacer crecer una comunidad saludable.

Finalmente, un desarrollador ha propuesto la construcción de un parque biomédico industrial ubicado en

SW Market Street. La compañía planea fabricar gotas para los ojos, después de mudarse a Indiantown, y se espera que traiga empleos de alta tecnología al área.

OBRAS PÚBLICAS E INGENIERÍA

El Municipio también ha hecho progresos sustanciales en infraestructura. Para empezar, se están realizando reparaciones en los sistemas de drenaje y pantano del Municipio para aumentar la seguridad pública. Y, para aquellos interesados, tengo el de anunciar que la renovación del pavimento ha estado en curso, a pesar de décadas de mantenimiento diferido, con más trabajo programado tentativamente para comenzar en enero de 2020 para otras áreas de la comunidad. Con un poco de suerte, este cambio mejorará los viajes en nuestras carreteras y aceras.

Sin embargo, no nos detenemos allí.

Muchos de ustedes habrán notado el trabajo en los diversos parques de la Villa. Me complace decir que la limpieza del parque ha comenzado y, con suerte, sus procesos de embellecimiento mejorarán sustancialmente los retornos de la comunidad. Además, se están realizando revisiones totales, desde presupuestos de alambrados hasta reparaciones eléctricas, y próximamente se enviará más información.

Estas mejoras en la calidad de vida son la razón por la que nos incorporamos en primer lugar. Y sé, tanto por hablar con todos ustedes como por mi experiencia personal, estos cambios críticos son lo que los residentes y las partes interesadas quieren que el consejo haga. Sé que el Municipio de Indiantown continuará mejorando y espero continuar este camino con todos ustedes juntos porque somos un lugar donde crecen grandes cosas. ■

Florida's scrub jays draw birding tourists to area



Maya Ellenson
Art Kaleidoscope

Editor's Note:

A common thread among three economic studies conducted for Indiantown has been the recognition that the Village already possesses many attributes that could draw tourists to its outdoors without requiring large investments. Birders, recognized as highly desirable tourists (those who spend lots of money locally with little negative impact), are high on Palm Beach County's list of marketing targets. Perhaps Indiantown should consider attracting birders, as well. The following column shows the impact of one birding walk on one person, who has joined the ranks of official birders.

Living in Martin County is totally delightful with so many wildlife and nature trails to explore on foot or on a bike. Yet when you join a group of enthusiasts who share their passion for nature, your connectedness with Mother Earth becomes even more eye-opening and fulfilling.



Maya Ellenson

My first snapshot of a Florida scrub jay perched in live oak tree surveying his surroundings at Jonathan Dickinson State Park.

Fortunately, the Martin County Chapter of the Florida Audubon Society, founded in 1955 with a main purpose of "The Conservation and wise use of America's natural resources," provides various interesting events, helping us to understand the fundamentals of nature conservation.

Audubon's field trips to explore wildlife, its volunteering opportunities, youth programs, and educational resources are just the few basic tools for cultivating an eco-conscious mindset.

Having said that, checking the Audubon calendar of events can be truly gratifying in itself. My first field trip happened to be a Scrub-Jay Walk in



Maya Ellenson

Jim Howe, an Audubon guide, points out a Florida scrub jay at Jonathan Dickinson State Park. The walks are free with paid admission to the park.

Jonathan Dickinson State Park, which takes place every first and third Wednesday of the month.

That breezy morning nearly a year ago in the park looked truly serene, soaked in soft sunlight. A group of around 10 people gathered at our startup place. Ahead of us laid a paved road to give us an easy one-third mile walk toward the haven where scrub-jays congregate.

We walked slowly, scanning the environment and listening to our Audubon guide, Jim Howe, who is both erudite and a passionate citizen scientist. Like a magnet, he pulls everyone into nature's mesmerizing spectacle in which we all will participate.

Everyone carries a set of binoculars and cameras, ready to hit the trail. As Jim steered us onward, he shared essential facts about the scrub-jays. For one, these beautiful birds are Florida natives and need the scrub to survive.

In 1987, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service placed them on the federal list of threatened species. As studies show, by 1993 their population had dwindled by 90 percent, leaving approximately 4,000 breeding pairs.

Today their number has shrunk even more due to development that strips scrub-jays of their natural habitat. Jim termed this sprawling attack on their dwelling "suburbia."

"Scrub-jays are not blue-jays," Jim explained. "They live in oak scrub. It's their only home."

Prescribed burns nourish the scrub oak habitat, essential for the birds' survival. "When the vegetation becomes overgrown," he said, "it starts posing a threat to the flock, giving too much cover to predators. On the other hand, when the ground cover comes to be low, it signals less food to (predators)."

Scrub-Jays forage on acorn, lizards and various insects. "Unfortunately, these birds are totally extinct in Palm Beach County in general...Thankfully, in Martin County they're still around," he said with a tinge of pride in his voice.

Jim seems to be connected with the scrub-jay universe with all his five and beyond senses, intuiting the flock's presence long before it becomes visible to everyone else. When the first scrub-jay with its rich blue bib and wings perched

on a live oak, we all rejoiced. Cameras—some of them of a truly enviable size—instantly flared in the air.

Taking my first scrub-jay picture felt really amazing. The birds started showing up in solo and in pairs, skimming from one shrub to another and sweeping up their spangled wings. Eventually, they became more emboldened, landing on the ground and staying still for a while. One particular bird looked simply dazzling. Settled on a

totally nude tree, it glimmered in the sun with its rich sapphire plumage, fully coupled with the element of air.

In between the bird photo shots, Jim educated the team on a parasite plant we kept seeing all along, known as a love vine, or witches hair. This fleecy, yellowish parasitic herb entangles itself with a host plant, sucking, like a vampire, all life out of it.

Suddenly, a silver shimmering ribbon rose up into the sky, swooping up and down in fluid motions.

"It's tree swallows, or *Tachycineta bicolor*," Jim pointed out. Observing this soaring congregation, swirling happily in the high made our walk even more panoramic. As the trail ended, everything appeared profoundly interlaced: the scrub-jays and swallows, our friendly crew, and the scrub itself – this vital terrain that sustains so many life-forms daily, including a vampire plant.

Audubon's guided field trips do raise our awareness for becoming responsible guardians of the environment we share collectively with all kind of species around.

As the American poet and environmentalist, Henry David Thoreau, proclaimed in his *Walden*. "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?"

After this enlightening walk with our intelligent guide, Jim Howe, it did feel we all became partly a mould of a scrub-jay in our own, present-day way.

Check the Audubon of Martin County website for a listing of the chapter's upcoming events at: www.audubonofmartincounty.org/happenings, but you also can always count on Howe's walks through scrub-jay territory at Jonathan Dickinson every first and third Wednesday mornings from October through May. The parks website is at: www.floridastateparks.org/events, call the parks Kimbell Education Center at 772-745-5551, or go directly to Howe's Facebook page: Jonathan Dickinson Scrub Jay Walk with Jim Howe. ■

Russian-American Maya Ellenson, who holds M.A. and PhD degrees in Russian language and literature from Moscow State University, has lived in Martin County for eight years. A free-lance writer, she has a particular interest in world culture and art.

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Sharing news about family, friends, neighbors



Julie Gaskins Roberts
Village Life

Hello! I am so excited to be writing a social column for our wonderful new Indiantown newspaper, *Indiantown Currents*. I will also be helping to compile a calendar of upcoming events in our area. What a great endeavor it is to have a newspaper back in Indiantown! Thank you, Barbara Clowdus, for all of the time, resources, and attention you have put into starting this.

Each month, I will be focusing on the events going on in Indiantown at schools, sports events, churches, clubs, and other organizations. I would also love to write about events that families have going on, such as anniversaries, weddings, quincineras, and so forth. If you would like to share news about any events, or if

you have anything to add to our calendar of events, please email me at Itown-currents.social@gmail.com. Let's get started!

Perkins Head Start was able to have the **Hobe Sound Nature Center** go to their school Nov. 19. The students learned about all types of wildlife. They showed the children a hawk, barred owl, red rat snake, and a two-month-old alligator. The children were allowed to touch the snake and alligator! I'm told they learned a lot and had so much fun!

Through the generosity of many kind people, **Elev8Hope** donated turkeys and Thanksgiving baskets to our **Head Start** families. Many thanks go out to all those who donated and supported this generous gift.

Warfield Elementary teachers, students and staff are very proud to be the home of the Martin County School District's "Assistant Principal of the Year." During a training with teachers and students, our assistant principal, **Mrs. Angie Gilbride**, was surprised by a visit from District Superintendent **Laurie Gaylord**, Deputy Superintend-

ent **Dr. Ginger Featherstone** and Chief Human Resources Officer **Dr. Carlos Perez**, who came to the school to announce this honor. Congratulations, **Mrs. Gilbride!** We are so proud of you. You deserve it!

We have been collecting for our annual **Food for Families** food drive during this month that celebrates our blessings. Thank you to all who donated.

We also have been collecting supplies for **Aftermath Ranch Rescue**, right here in Indiantown. This is a no-kill shelter for all types of animals who would otherwise be homeless. Under the direction of **Ms. Kim Love**, we were able to collect numerous supplies for these special animals.

We are trying to help a very worthy organization in the Bahamas, which was severely devastated by Hurricane Dorian, by collecting coins for the **Ranfurly Homes for Children**. This is a shelter for children who have been left homeless due to death, separation, abuse, abandonment, illness, or other unfortunate circumstances. If you would like to give, please contact **Warfield Elementary** at 772-597-2551.

The **Indiantown Middle School** family is looking forward to its upcoming **Career Day** on Dec. 10. Local business representatives will come to the school to talk to students about their jobs and encourage the students as they begin to think about what they want to do when they graduate.

House of Hope hosted an event called, "**On the Table**" for residents of Indiantown Nov. 12. Residents were encouraged to gather for this free meal and discuss ideas to improve our neighborhoods and community.

The Future Farmers of America (FFA) Alumni Chapter of Martin County elected officers for the next year in their November meeting. Our very own **David Hafner**, of Indiantown, was elected president. **Dawn Hicks Nelson** was elected vice president, and **Brittany Beardin** was elected secretary/treasurer. Congratulations to all of you!

I know there are so many great things happening in Indiantown. Remember to reach out using the above email to share your happenings in our column, **Village Life**. ■



Thursday, Dec. 12 Village Council Meeting

The bi-monthly Village Council Meeting will be held at the Civic Center at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 12. It will be the only meeting in December. The Village Council anticipates approving the first-ever Indiantown Comprehensive Growth Management Plan that will guide the Village's growth.

Friday and Saturday, Dec. 13-14 Grand Miracle

A collaborative effort between New Hope Fellowship Church and New Beginnings Community Church to present "Grand Miracle," will be at New Hope Fellowship Church at 3900 SW Citrus Boulevard on Friday, Dec. 13, and on Saturday, Dec. 14, at 6 – 8:30 p.m. both nights. There is no charge for admission. For more information, call 772-283-8343.

Friday, Dec. 13 IVA Potluck

The monthly Indiantown Veterans Association Potluck will take place at the IVA building at 6 p.m. Friday, Dec. 13, located on Morgan Street. Bring a covered

dish to share. The main dish will be announced on the Indiantown Veterans' Association Facebook page the week of December 8.

Friday, Dec. 13 & Sunday, Dec. 15 Bethlehem Morning

Indiantown Baptist Church Choir will present the cantata, "Bethlehem Morning" on Friday, Dec. 13, at 7 p.m. and on Sunday, Dec. 15, at 11 a.m. Refreshments will be served afterwards. The church is located at 15451 SW 150th Street, Indiantown. Pastor: Patrick Dennis

Sunday, Dec. 15 Stuart Community Concert Band

"Homemade" music and "homemade" cookies make up the theme of "Homemade for the Holidays," planned by the Stuart Community Concert Band, set for Sunday, Dec. 15 at 2 p.m., at the Kane Center, 900 S.E. Salerno Road, Stuart. Palm City Cookie Ladies will provide the edible treats, while band director James LeBon and musicians will perform holiday tunes. Tickets: \$10 per person. Walk-ins are also welcome based on seating availability. Call 772-223-7800.

Monday, Dec. 16 FFA Alumni Meeting and Fair Association Meeting

The FFA Alumni Chapter of Martin County meeting will be at the Martin County Fairgrounds in Building A on Monday, Dec. 16, at 6:30 p.m. Martin County Fair Association meets at the Martin County Fairgrounds in Building A at 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec. 17 Citizenship Class

The final citizenship class for the calendar year will be Tuesday, Dec. 17, at 6:30 p.m. at the Blake Library on Monterey Road in Stuart. No pre-registration required.

Wednesday, Dec. 18 Christmas Caroling and Hayride

The Family Worship Center will have an old-fashioned hayride and Christmas caroling Wednesday, Dec. 18, at 6 p.m. The hayride will begin in the Church parking lot. No pre-registration required. Pastor: Bruce Butler

Tuesday, Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Service

The Family Worship Center will hold its annual Christmas Eve Service on Tuesday, Dec. 24, at 6 p.m. Everyone is welcomed. Pastor: Bruce Butler.

Sunday, Dec. 29 Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Got a new pair of binoculars as a holiday gift? Or want a reason to break out the set languishing in a drawer? Then, sign up now as a volunteer bird counter with the Hobe Sound Nature Center in the annual Jonathan Dickinson State Park Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, Dec. 29. Experienced and amateur birders are all welcomed, with assignments available from Juno Beach to Hobe Sound. Any commitment of time is appreciated. This count is a part of the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count, which began over a century ago and is held throughout the western hemisphere. Contact HSNV to volunteer (772)546-2067 or email Hobesound-naturecenter@gmail.com.

Your event was not listed? Be sure to add it to the Indiantown Currents calendar, by sending a press release in the body of an email or attached as a Word document to itowncurrents.social@gmail.com.

Sheriff asks parents to talk to their kids

A student at Indiantown Middle School sought the help of a school counselor to deal with social media messages that were making him uncomfortable.

The counselor reported the incident to a school resource officer from the Martin County Sheriff's Office, which resulted in the arrest and incarceration of Jose Antonio Valenti, 26, of 174th Avenue in Indiantown for allegedly soliciting a child for sexual conduct.

Working as a youth counselor for Americorps and the Boys & Girls Club of Martin County gave Valentin access to hundreds of children. He had passed the Level II background screening check required for all those who work directly with children.

Although the initial complaint came from just one child, Valentin told investigators the first names of four others. Subsequently, two additional victims came forward after Valentin identified the first four, according to investigators.

Those children also are from Indiantown Middle School and the Indiantown Boys & Girls Club.

The Sheriff believes there may be

more and is encouraging parents to talk to their children enrolled at IMS or who attend the Indiantown Boys & Girls Club to see if they received any disturbing messages on Instagram or SnapChat from Valentin, or if they'd had any disturbing personal conversations with him.

Valentin, who asked for photos of students' genitals and asked if the children pleased themselves, also attempted to "meet up" with them. According to the arrest affidavit, he told deputies he had a fantasy about watching the children perform a sex act.

Parents who believe their children may have had any form of contact with Valentin, should call Sgt. James Maltese at 772-260-3945.

Authorities also are asking people to save and not delete any potential digital evidence that can be used in the investigation. Valentin admitted to investigators that he had deleted all of his social media messages.

According to the sheriff's office, Valentin apologized in writing to the children.



Jose A. Valentin, 26

The school district released this statement on Valentin's arrest:

"The individual arrested was a contracted employee through the Martin County Boys & Girls Clubs. Contracted employees and vendors are required to undergo level 2 background screenings, which was the case for this individual."

Also releasing a statement on Wednesday, Dec. 11, was the Boys & Girls Club of Martin County representing all six clubs in the county.

"The safety and protection of the children we serve is always our number-one priority, and we take any situation that impacts the well-being of the young people entrusted to our care very seriously. Boys & Girls Clubs of Martin County is aware of the arrest of a staff member, who was stationed at Indiantown Middle School, for alleged inappropriate communications with youth. In conjunction with the Martin County School District, the Club took immediate action upon learning of these alle-

gations, and the individual is no longer associated with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Martin County. We are both shocked and saddened by this very serious matter as no child should ever be put in this situation, and there is no place in our Clubs for this type of behavior or action.

"Our organization is committed to the highest level of ethical behavior and integrity and does not tolerate inappropriate or illegal activity on the part of any Club staff, volunteer or youth member. All safety and supervisory policies are designed for the maximum safety and protection of Club members and staff, and all Club staff and volunteers must undergo thorough criminal background checks prior to hire and annually, as well as ongoing training. As always, we remain dedicated to keeping kids physically and emotionally safe.

"We will continue our full cooperation with the authorities throughout their investigation. However, to protect the privacy of the youth involved, we will withhold further comment until the investigation and legal process are complete. ■"

Land For Sale in Okeechobee, Florida



1,090± ACRES

DINNER HAMMOCK RANCH located in Northern Okeechobee County. County-paved road frontage on the North, west and southern boundaries. Electricity to site. Well and septic required. Palmetto flat woods, large oak canopies and cabbage palm heads provide excellent cover for quail, deer and turkey. No conservation easements and all oil, gas and mineral rights are conveyed at closing. Very hard to find topography, a must see property for the discriminating quail/turkey and deer hunter. Property has 197 +/- acres of native water features with the balance in excellent farming soils that are well drained. Zoning is Agriculture, one housing unit per 10 acres or 109 total housing units allowed if subdivided. Clustering is allowed with lots as small as 1/2 acre in size with well and septic. World famous Pine Creek Sporting Club 5 miles to the east and Quail Creek Plantation 8 miles to the east.
Asking \$5,495 Per Gross Acre. Contact: Brandon D. Tucker (772) 201-8722

850± ACRES

LUSH CATTLE PASTURE with very fertile soils. Grass types are Star and florita divided into five pastures. Property has current Consumptive Water Use Permits with the SPWMD. Two solar wells located on-site with cattle ponds providing additional watering for your herd. Property also features beautiful oak and sable palm hammocks with abundant deer and turkey. Great trophy ranch for an active recreational lifestyle and excellent cow/calf production. Property holds approximately 350 head of cattle, on an annual basis, and currently is holding nearly 500 head. **Asking \$5,495 Per Gross Acre.**

Contact: Brandon D. Tucker (772) 201-8722

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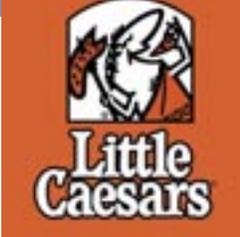
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Indiantown Chamber parade delights kids of all ages!

The advantage of a parade route through a residential area is that few need to stake a claim on their viewing spots in advance. With the helicopter fly-over, however, the sidewalks suddenly teemed with families. Children had no issues with the ditches, the length seemed just about right, and the lights at night added a touch of magic. A chance to sit on Santa's lap in the Civic Center was an added bonus, although some youngsters found that Mrs. Claus was far less scary than Santa! Merry Christmas to all!

