

Brevard County Board of County Commissioners

*Commission Chambers, Building C
2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way
Viera, FL 32940*



Minutes

Monday, January 5, 2026

5:00 PM

Save Our Indian River Lagoon Workshop #1

City of Titusville Council Chamber

A. CALL TO ORDER 5:08 PM

Present: Commissioner District 1 Katie Delaney , Commissioner District 3 Kim Adkinson, Commissioner District 4 Rob Feltner, and Commissioner District 5 Thad Altman
Absent: Commissioner District 2 Tom Goodson

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Commissioner Thad Altman, Chair, District 5

Commissioner Feltner led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Delaney welcomed everyone to District 1, and expressed her appreciation for everyone coming out; she thanked the Titusville City Council, City Manager, and City staff for opening up their home to the Board tonight; there are some are some Titusville City Council, the Mayor, and some of the City staff in the audience this evening; and she thanked Commissioner Feltner for suggesting multiple meetings and having one in the north and one in the south.

C.1. Presentation - Natural Resources Management Department - Virginia Barker

Vice-Chair Adkinson stated she is going to get straight into it and she introduced Virginia Barker, Natural Resources Management Director.

Virginia Barker, Natural Resources Management Director, stated for all those who are not regulars in this room, she is going to do a Power Point and it will be on these two screens and also on the slightly larger screen behind the audience, so if someone cannot make things out, he or she might want to turn around and look back there. She stated she has been tasked this evening with a presentation on what the Save Our Indian River Lagoon (SOIRL) program has been doing, the progress that they have made with projects so far, and the Lagoon's response; she will start with the 2016 ballot language which provided staff with their marching orders, "To restore the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) through projects and programs designed to improve water quality, fish, wildlife, and marine habitat, remove muck, and reduce pollution, requiring deposit of all revenue to a Save Our Lagoon trust fund solely for such projects with citizen committee oversight and annual independent audits."; as she said, she is going to talk about the projects and programs and then Vinnie Taranto, past Chair of the Citizen Oversight Committee (COC), is going to talk about the role of that oversight committee and the annual audits that they have had; and then there are a number of other speakers that will represent the broader community interest and perspective in this program. She went on to say the project plan, program, they are built around what is staff calls the four R's, reducing the amount of pollution that comes into the Lagoon, removing excess pollution that has built up in the Lagoon over decades of putting too much in there, restoring the natural filtration systems, and responding to new information and new opportunities, and revising the plan update accordingly; in 2016, they were tasked with winning a race to save the Lagoon, but the lifeboat, much like this cardboard boat here, was sinking; and when one's boat is sinking, one has to reduce the water that is swamping the boat, i.e. reduce the amount of pollution that is going into the Lagoon, one also has to bail water as fast as one can out of the boat to keep it from sinking, so removing the decades of pollution that has accumulated there. She continued by saying they would really like to restore the bilge pump, the natural filtration system, the filter feeders that help provide balance when there are shocks, storms, and extreme rainfall events, and then respond with inspections, checking out how they are doing, if they have popped a new leak that needs to be addressed, or if they need to adjust the duct tape on the vessel. She stated the dollars are rough for the four Rs, there are portions in the pie chart on the left; over half of the money is

going to reducing the pollution that is coming into the Lagoon, a little over a third is going to removing the excess pollution that is already in the Lagoon, and then there is a two percent sliver for restoring the bilge pump, and a two percent sliver for responding to new opportunities and adjusting the plan with annual updates; the bar charts on the right show that they have spent about \$100 million of the funds so far; they have acquired \$111 million in grants, and spent about \$64 million of the grant money; right now, they are managing over \$330 million worth of projects that are either in design, engineering, permitting, or construction; when adding up the spent SOIRL funds with the dollars for the projects that are in progress, that equals the bar that says \$430 million; and they have currently collected just shy of \$500 million and the projections by the end of the current tax in December is \$586 million. She mentioned the difference between the \$431 million that is spent and in progress and the \$586 million that is expected in total collections, those dollars are allocated to projects in the plan, they just have not started yet; the chart on the left shows the green area, that is what has been collected, about 85 percent of the dollars that are anticipated in the 10-year tax; the pie chart on the right sort of shows the adage that it takes money to make money; and because this is a sales tax, when money is collected at the checkout counter, for every dollar that the residents are putting in, tourists who are visiting here and spending money here, are chipping in another \$0.26. She stated the grants that have been acquired so far, that provides another \$0.24 and then they are partnering with the municipalities, with other entities, with NGOs, with all sorts of people in the community that are providing additional dollars to help get these projects done; the utilities in particular, both stormwater and wastewater, they have funding to maintain and operate current facilities, but the SOIRL dollars provide the extra needed to actually upgrade those facilities to make them better instead of just continuing to operate the same old infrastructure; on the next slide she pointed out on the left is a map and all the tiny dots are the locations where completed projects are; one can see they are from the north end of the County all the way to the south end of the county, they are on the mainland, Merritt Island, and the barrier island; the list on the right side of the map are all the partners who have helped complete these 119 projects, thus far; one can see it really takes a village; in addition to all of these projects that are sort of neighborhood or community scale projects, they have also partnered with over 2,000 homeowners on septic and sewer projects; a lot of people say they do not see the projects, but that is because most of them are underground or underwater; and if it is a stormwater baffle box or a septic to sewer project or a septic upgrade, or removing muck, it is all underwater or underground, so the projects are not highly visible. She continued by saying how do they decide what projects should receive funding, the first challenge is to know what the sources of pollution are; on this slide these bar charts represent the scale of pollution coming from each of the known major sources; the biggest bar there, the black one, is muck flux, which is the pollution that is already in the Lagoon that has accumulated in the low spots as muck; and as the muck breaks down, it is releasing pollution into the water column above, and it is the single biggest source into the water column; if it is not cleaned up, it will be there and continue to pollute the Lagoon, and they will not succeed; however, they cannot just focus on that because if all they did was clean up yesterday's pollution, and not stop putting too much in, they would also not succeed; they also have to look at the at these other sources, the smaller bars, and figure out which of those to do; the funds are allocated sort of roughly proportional to the scale of the load, with the exception of that orange bar which is septic systems; they are allocating more funding proportionally to addressing those septic systems which are now actually the subject of new State rules; and she brought a copy of the plan, it is 350 pages, not many people have time to read a 350-page plan but there is this document that is a little annual report, and there are copies of it available in the hallway. She noted what this little annual report shows is the 14 types of projects that are funded in the plan and it goes through each of those types and talks about how many projects there are of that type, how much money is allocated to those projects, how much load reduction benefit is expected from those projects, how many are completed, how many are underway, and how many are remaining; and it is a nice little summary document that can be picked up on the way out. She went on to say she is

not going to talk about the 400 projects that are in the plan; she is not going to talk about the 14 different project types that are in the plan, she is going to talk about five that get the most interest and the most questions about; she will start with preventing sewage overflows, on the slide the graphs show the runtime of lift station pumps during different size rain events; the further to the right on each graph is a bigger and bigger rain event and one can see when it rains, the pumps have to run longer; there is rain leaking into the systems that the pumps at the lift stations are having to pump and when it exceeds the capacity of the lift stations, or the conveyance pipes to keep up, that is when overflows happen; Hurricane Irma hit Brevard County in 2017, less than a year after the voters started this program; they were barraged by people saying how could anyone let this happen; they turned to utilities and said the County just allocated \$140 million for the last three years and frantically lining pipes, improving infrastructure to prevent overflows, and how did this happen; they said yes, they have lined the public infrastructure, hardened the public infrastructure, but everybody's individual home and/or business, they own the pipe from their structure out to the road right-of-way; a lot of that has been in the ground since the 50s, 60s, and 70s during the space race, and it leaks; they really need to address that and how do they do that; the answer smoke testing, so they hired smoke testing contractors and smoke tested over 50,000 homes in the County; when looking at the run times, after that smoke testing, one can see that they are basically flat no matter how much it rains, the pumps are running the same amount of time; and they are very proud of how that program has worked. She explained on the bottom right graph, one can see it does not have the red line yet, and that is because it is special; that line is higher because during the time that they were conducting all the smoke testing and making over 1,200 repairs, new development happened, including things like this large senior living facility, so the run time went up because there is more sewage in the system being addressed by the lift station; next she will talk about septic systems; what they hear and read in the headlines is the focus on failing septic systems, but it is not just failing septic systems that are the problem, even a well-maintained septic system can pollute; when one flushes the toilet that sewage goes into the tank, the solids settle at the bottom of the tank, the liquid goes out to the drain field, and the drain field is nothing much more than pipes with a bunch of holes in them and sand; that sewage trickles down out of the pipes, through the holes, through the sand till it reaches the groundwater, which is constantly moving to the Lagoon; whatever one flushes or washes down their sink is entering that ground water; and whether it is nutrients, chemicals, or pharmaceuticals, it is polluting the Lagoon. She added that is why septic systems are particularly important; the County has 62,000 of them and it would cost billions of dollars to connect them all to sewer, so they set about calculating the load of each individual septic tank in the County and then highlighted them based on how much load was coming from each one; they gave hot colors to the ones that were polluting the most; and they looked at the map for clusters of these hot colors. She continued by saying if one sees that big yellow patch with some red in it, that was a cluster; they have identified over 100 clusters; they have calculated what it would cost to bring sewer to that neighborhood, what the load reduction would benefit if they did that, and then they could calculate the cost per pound; then they had 100 projects with the cost per pound, the cost effectiveness, and they have prioritized and funded the ones that give the best bang for the buck; they have also installed groundwater wells because they wanted to make sure the models used to determine which locations were the worst, and it was giving good information; they have placed a few wells in natural communities and that is represented by the green bar on the slide; they have put over a dozen wells in the backyards that are on septic; septic definitely pollutes the ground water, and then place another dozen or so in the back yards of those people that have sewer; people can see those houses that are on sewer have much cleaner groundwater; it is still more polluted than the green background condition and that is because people are fertilizing their yards using all sorts of lawn chemicals, pet waste, and car wash water, but it is much cleaner than the septic situation; for every four homes that gets converted from septic to sewer, they produce enough treated water to provide irrigation water to one home; and when they put wells at the homes that are receiving that irrigation water, one

sees that that one home is just as polluted, if not more polluted, than the four septic homes that were just addressed with septic to sewer. She stated the initial plan, they thought this might be a problem and had allocated funding to upgrade these two facilities, including the Osprey system here in Titusville, and after that was implemented one can see that the groundwater within months cleaned up to the same level as a sewer community without reclaimed water; based on those results, through annual plan updates, there are now 10 sewer plants being upgraded with similar technology; based on the difference between the red bar for septic and the blue bar for sewer, dozens of additional septic to sewer priorities were added to the list; they have already been identified and prioritized, they just worked their way down the list in adding new projects; and stormwater followed a similar scenario. She explained they are looking for the biggest bang for the buck; there are over 1,700 outfalls that drain flood water to the IRL; each of those outfalls drains to a specific land area; they calculated the pollution for each of those land areas, asking questions like is it developed or undeveloped, is it on septic or on sewer, is there a stormwater treatment already there because there it is a new development that had to put in a stormwater treatment, and based on all that information, they have identified the land areas with the greatest pollution and those are the ones that are allocated funding for stormwater treatment projects; moving on to much removal, after decades of putting too much pollution into the Lagoon, pollution now fills the low spots of the deep areas with this organic muck; it smothers the bottom and as it decays it uses up oxygen that the fish need to breathe, feeds algae blooms that cloud the water above, and when it gets stirred up by winds or waves, it creates dirty water; it can be vacuumed up, which is what dredging is, and when that is done one can see cleaner water and less harmful algae blooms; and not just at the site or adjacent to the site, they have seen water quality improvement at water quality monitoring stations up to four miles away, and three to five years after completion of the project, there it has longevity. She mentioned that is what this graph is, it is showing the brown as the severity of the blooms before dredging and the blue bar is the severity of blooms after dredging for the Eau Gallie River Muck Dredging project; the last project type to address is oyster restoration; in addition to contracting with Brevard Zoo to construct these sites, they have then contracted with the University of Central Florida researchers to provide an independent assessment of whether these projects work; the first few projects were done following the State's criteria for living shoreline permits; and those really struggled, the oysters did not do well following the State criteria. She noted they had reached out to old-timers, multi-generational families that have been working the waters in the Lagoon, and talked to them about what the designs needed to be, and they got individual permits to do what they had hoped would work better; over the years, they have gone from 80 percent success to last year being 100 percent success of these oyster projects; and when adding up all the completed projects, the 14 different types, one can see the crescendo of nitrogen load reduction, each year more and more reduction. She added this past year they went beyond a million pounds of nitrogen reduction. She went on to say one can see in those first four or five years, they were really busy with design, engineering, permitting, bidding, construction, and it was not until the project was finished that one can actually see the nitrogen load reduction; not until 2021 and beyond that one really started to see the load reductions adding up; and that is a bunch of project delivery but she asked if it is working. She stated the map on the left is from Satellite imagery, with multiple satellites going overhead multiple times per day, week, or whatever, and this particular image is from last week; one can see the orange area which is a bloom that cropped up right there in the southern part of the Banana River in Newfound Harbor; hopefully, it will go away in this week's bloom mapping; this technology is used to go back in time and analyze imagery all the way back to 2016; one can see in this graph from 2016 when that horrible fish kill happened, 2018 brown tide went for nearly a year, and then that peak in the middle of the graph is the 2020 blooms and fish kills that happened at Thanksgiving to Christmas time frame; conditions in the Lagoon continued to get worse, blooms continued to get worse because there was not much delivery in the way of load reductions yet, as they were just trying to get projects built; and after that 2020 bloom, things really started to settle down. She continued by saying if there are less

blooms does that mean the Lagoon is healthier, and for that question they look to seagrass; the next slide, she explained is data from the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and the green bars are the area of seagrass; one can see the area sort of peaks in 2007 and 2009, as shown in the middle of the graph, and then tapers off with the 2011 super bloom and more blooms after that; that aerial photography is only flown every other year; the black dots and black line sort of follow the same pattern; these are transect and they swim the same transect every year at about 100 different sites and log how far they go, how far the seagrass goes before running out of seagrass in deeper water; the longer the line is with seagrass, the more area of seagrass there is; now, she has zoomed in to the peak in 2007-2009 to present and one can see the loss of seagrass with the 2011 super bloom, the 2016 bloom and fish kill, and the 2018 brown tide, the 2020 bloom, and since their projects have actually been getting completed, the load reductions have been occurring, the blooms have settled down, the seagrass transect lengths are getting longer; she hopes when the 2025 green bar appears it will be much higher than the 2023 green bar; one can see, the black dots for 2024 and 2025, the last two black dots are actually higher than the black dot for 2016, so they have already recovered the seagrass that was lost between 2016 and 2021; and they hope this upward trajectory continues. She added she was supposed to show this overlay of seagrass continued to decline while the blooms were getting worse, and then the seagrass started getting better when the blooms subsided; and one can see that trajectory down and then back up. She went on to say why seagrass is important, they can either have a Lagoon that is covered with an underwater rainforest of seagrass or underwater desert; seagrass supports up to 40,000 fish per acre and that seagrass provides food, habitat, and oxygen; the IRL is an ideal place for seagrass because it is huge, shallow, and protected; it is that combination of huge expansive sea grass right at the ecotone boundary between temperate America and the subtropics that provides and made the IRL a sport fishing capital of the world and makes it worthy of national estuarine program status; and in summary, the SOIRL program is working. She noted after decades of pollution, one can see progress, but restoration takes time, and hope is on the horizon.

C.2. Presentation - Save Our Indian River Lagoon (SOIRL) Citizen Oversight Committee - Vinnie Taranto

Vinnie Taranto stated if anyone has a printout please do not look at the first slide, it has the punchline printed on it; it would be like going to SNL and having the a printout of all the skits, but that is cool, everyone will have a good time; the people from Titusville have amazing eyesight, he cannot see the screen so he has a printout of his slides in front of him; and he asked if the text is not there.

Commissioner Adkinson stated she can read the text, it says, "Failed portrait model."

Mr. Taranto replied, yeah. He went on to say, Ms. Barker talked about back on August 23, 2016, the Board of County Commissioners at that time created an Ordinance; he wanted everyone to think where he was in 2016; this slide shows where he was, he had way more hair on his head, actually that was 1993, he dated himself a little bit longer, but still had more hair on his head; he is the immediate past chair of the Citizens Oversight Committee (COC), what an honor that was; he served on the COC for eight years and was one of the original members; and what he would like to talk about is the COC and to explain what it has done and how it has done it. He went on to say, this slide shows the ballot language that was in the Ordinance; in there it says, citizen committee oversight; therefore, the residents of Brevard County who voted for this saw that in there; also in the Ordinance, it stated that the COC was to recommend updates of the Save Our Lagoon project plan to the Board of County Commissioners annually and also to provide public oversight and a transparent process that allows and fosters development and implementation of better tools; those are the two things that the COC was

designed for and charged to do, annual updates and look at the efficiency through tools and processes; the County Attorney, Morris Richardson, and other attorneys may get upset with him, but ordinances are made up of words or letters, letters make words, words make sentences and paragraphs, and so on, but they end up with an intent; there is an intent of the Ordinance; and what he wants to talk about is the brilliance of the implementation. He continued on by saying he once heard the COC is the best thing since sliced bread; this is science so to dive in and look at that, what is the structure of the COC, and he explained there are seven areas of expertise with one voting member and one alternate representing those, which makes 14 members in total; as someone who has had the honor of being a chair, it was very important for him to make sure everybody had their voice and their opinions heard; half are appointed by the Space Coast League of Cities, those are the municipalities; the other half are appointed by the Board of County Commissioners; there is a two-year term with possible reappointment, with an eight-year limit; this was new and created after the Ordinance; it is an example of how the process changes; and there are also now two *ameritus* non-voting members, which is another change in the process to improve it and make it more efficient and to add tools. He stated when does the COC meet, and answered that they meet monthly on the third Friday at 8:30 a.m. in Viera; it is also broadcast live on Space Coast Government Television (SCGTV), on Brevard County's website and Facebook, and the SOIRL Youtube page; if one adds up all the minutes over the past nine years from the SOIRL Youtube page, it is now 14,445 minutes, with 84 meetings; those are just public meetings; members, such as himself, would reach out and do research in between the meetings or meet with citizens; this is a process that over the past nine years has gone over nearly 15,000 minutes of meetings; what the COC does, he explained while providing another slide, the COC is in orange, and there is blue, what is done every month is to take the latest science with expert presentations; here is an example of the list of presentations through the first four years; Dr. Windsor put that list together to him; at every meeting they receive expert presentations with up-to-date science; then they take a look at new technology, again written in the Ordinance; this next slide is an example of what Ms. Barker showed of satellite imagery that is used to get a look at where the muck deposits are and this one also shows the algae blooms, so they can look historically if it was just a wet summer or a dry winter, or if it was compared with another one; this is one of those tools that the COC has been able to utilize to make better decisions; and this slide was another and really cool, it is a model of the Lagoon, and if one thinks about other bodies of water that have been repaired like Chesapeake Bay or Tampa Bay, but Brevard County's Lagoon, especially the County being 72 miles long, does not have a tidal flow, it has a wind flow, and this is a super cool model where it showed little probes in the water and where they went at different times of the year. He stated one can see the Mosquito Lagoon in the photo on the left and how it had more of the water in it and then on the right one can see all the water that has come out into the body; again, they were able to take tools and new technology to be more efficient with the process; then the COC had advisors from Natural Resources Management Department and also the COC staff and what they did was they would give updates and project progress so the COC could see and he displayed a slide stating this is an example of that; these are the monthly revenues; they would chart the monthly revenues, and Ms. Barker did not say anything but she has a crystal ball at home that tells her finances because at the beginning of every year she would chart where they are in the State charts and where they think they would be, and she nailed it every year off by a million; and if anyone needs financial advice, talk to Ms. Barker. He went on to say every month they look at the monthly revenues; they have quarterly project reimbursements and this slide shows the update on the quarter of the projects and where they are; they also have quarterly grant acquisitions where they have been able to utilize this money to go after other grant dollars; they receive those on the quarter and also receive quarterly project progress; lastly they receive the yearly audit; this slide takes a look at the entire process from the Request for Proposals (RFPs) that are submitted through the reimbursements and monitoring on a yearly basis; he noted they have the presentations, the advisory, and the last thing is the citizen input which is done

through public comment and also citizens; the bylaws state that they take comment on a proposition before the COC; each chair has looked at that differently; he looked for public comment when he was the chair, on the Agenda approval and meeting minutes; he wants to hear from the community that the COC is representing; it is an honor, so he always asked for public comment on those items; and then there is general public comment on all the meetings, if someone looks at some of these meetings, public comment can run long and that is okay because they need to be heard. He stated finally, citizens talking to citizens; this is one of the best parts for him; he has personally spent hundreds of hours talking to citizens about the project; his information was on the website where people could call or email him at any time; this slide is of a patch that a gentleman gave to him who was so passionate about the Lagoon and he had an idea to meet and talk with this gentleman; they met multiple times and spent so many hours together talking about his project; and with 14 citizens on this COC being out in the community, that makes the community more accessible to the process. He stated this slide is the yearly project update, the thing from the Ordinance that the COC presents; they take RFPs and open it up every year to look at new projects and new project types, look at which ones are more efficient, and go ahead and put that project plan together; the final stage is then presenting it to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) to decide because the COC is an advisory board, an oversight board; they spend the year learning the best they can, talking to the community, and then present an update to the Board; one can see that arrow on the slide goes two ways, from the update BoCC and from the BoCC to the update; back in 2019, through public comment and science, the allocation changed, and that was already three years into the plan; the COC presented it to the BoCC and through the public comment they said they were not happy and asked the COC to take it back; the COC then took it back, talked about it, looked at some different project types, and that was the result; one can see the gray which was muck, the lighter gray is interstitial which was combined in the first one, and was 63 percent; in the new pie it is like 43 percent; the other thing is new project examples and Ms. Barker just talked about laterals and smoke testing; that was not in the original project; they have been able to come up with new ideas to be more efficient and to take care of more; the brilliant part is the project plan does change because as Ms. Barker said, in those first five years they were working on permitting and planning, but they have the money so just like in other people's expenses, when one is saving for something it can take time; one wants to be able to move and bob or say maybe that item he or she wanted to buy may not be the best so change it, and the project plan does change; he is very proud of his service and those other 26 members that he was able to serve with, citizens who turned passion into progress, the current BoCC members, and Natural Resources Management Department staff; and it really has been an honor to work with the people and driving up here seeing the Lagoon.

C.3. Presentation - National Estuary Program, Dr. Duane De Freese

Dr. Duane DeFreese stated he is going to take two perspectives tonight and a little liberty; he has been a resident of Brevard County for 47 years; he has had the amazing good fortune of having his career parallel to what he calls the best examples of local government leadership investment, citizenry support, and vision for conservation; he was the County's first Director of the Environmentally Endangered Lands (EELs) Program and he is now over 10 years the Director of a new body that was formed in response to much of what people have seen already; he can say without reservation, both as a citizen, as a scientist, and somebody who has been in the County for almost 50 years, he brags everywhere he goes about the SOIRL Program; it was well thought out, science-based, and people saw the data that is being used to generate, and it not only answers the questions, but adapt to changing conditions; and both Ms. Barker and Mr. Taranto have given him a really easy task and that is just to provide some highlights about what makes what the IRL Council does, thanks to the public support, of national significance. He explained on the left of the slide the IRL is one of 28 estuaries in the nation that were identified by the US Congress, as estuaries of national significance, brought into a

network of estuaries that includes one estuary in Puerto Rico, the IRL is administered within the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), but what is remarkable about the congressional authorization, which is now over 30 years old, is that national estuary programs are non-regulatory, science-based, and Congress envisioned that this work would not happen from the top down that it would happen from the bottom up; it is place-based, community-oriented, and are closely aligned with all the activities at every level, from City, County, nonprofit, and even the industry sector; to look to the right, one of the things people did not hear is why it is so vulnerable, but of such national significance, and it is not just the environmental assets, the high biological diversity, it is the unique location in Central Florida on the Atlantic coast, bounded by water; looking west is the St. Johns River, the IRL and three different lagoon systems, all three represented in Brevard County, but people often forget the human aspect of this; just in Brevard County there are two national wildlife refuges, a national seashore, the busiest cruise port in the world, Kennedy Space Center the nation's gateway to space, and new decade of growth, and all this growth, people are attracted to live here because it is exceptionally unique in the nation because of those human, economic, quality of life, and environmental assets; but it is also really vulnerable, it is narrow, it is shallow, there is a very different watershed, and the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program has authoritative oversight even though it does not do regulation, from Ponce Inlet, as the north end of Palm Beach County, all the way to the northern end of Volusia County; but he is going to focus just on Brevard County. He continued by saying in 2015, after 25 years of having the national estuary program administered within the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), changing an organizational structure priorities and a system that hit a tipping point that not only caused catastrophic harmful algae blooms, loss of seagrass, manatee mortality events, and six of the County's along the Lagoon, therefore, not just the five Counties adjacent, but Palm Beach County also came together and said to think about this in a holistic system, and Brevard as a leader of one of those commissions that move that coalition forward that ultimately resulted in a reorganization of a 25-year program, under a brand new independent district of the State of Florida, called the IRL Council; that Council is represented by a board of five County Commissioner council men and women with an equal vote, two water management district with a governing board member from each, a Florida DEP and that is a the voting policy board for the IRL National Estuary Program and the US EPA unlike many other places, is an ex-officio member; at the time they felt that they knew best about how to move this forward and that the EPA, while they are a funding entity and authorized by Congress, they are also the grant agency so they are very active with them at both region four and headquarters, but the leadership is local and State; they have moved that; and in that interlocal agreement, which gets renewed and revisited every five years, each of those policy board organizations brought money to the table and have been doing so each year for the last 10 years. He stated point one, he cannot understate and it is the national perspective that he has about how important the SOIRL program is because there is the right amount of revenue and there is recurring revenues for tough projects; many, including their programs with NEP, rely on annual appropriations, congress, and the State of Florida; that is a tough way to do the business that Ms. Barker just showed that it is doing right now; people should be really pleased; that 10 years sets up a whole different model for doing really hard infrastructure improvements and projects that sometimes take years to go from concept to completion; there is also an authorization by Congress, which is remarkable when thinking about Washington D.C., thinking locally; they said one of those authorized mandates is going to create a management conference of stakeholders; and that is very much happening in each of the 28 NEPs around the nation, but somewhat differently, this one is unique, it currently is over 100 volunteers, scientists, citizens, leaders from the community, and representatives from industry coming together on a quarterly basis in multiple committees, who advise the council as a policy board on all business that moves forward through this program. He noted he would say, and he has no data to prove it, but he would argue with anybody to find a coalition of scientists, citizens, industry leaders, and community leaders that are as robust as this who have met regularly over 10 years with a lot of

commitment to do the right thing; they dovetail closely with the SOIRL program, in fact, there are days he feels that he is one of the staff members for Ms. Barker, that is how closely; they make sure that what they are doing on the higher end aligns with support and also helps move the agenda forward at State and federal levels; they also recognize that having great scientists in the region was not enough, they had to work together because no one could do this alone, no single organization, no single city, no single municipality; this is a very complicated, very large system; people saw the complexity of just addressing the infrastructure issues of nutrient reduction here in Brevard; and so the mission statement was changed which caught a lot of eyes among the NEPs, they are all scientific, it is one Lagoon, one community, and one voice. He advised there are participants in Martin County who are just as vested in Brevard County's success and Volusia County and it makes this County strong, not only at a Statewide level but also at a national level; Brevard County has a lot of plans; there is a 10-year Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan that was developed by the management conference, vetted through that conference and EPA; the SOIRL Program and Brevard County's priorities align very closely; the other two plans that are a little different than this County's is that when looking at Brevard's plan it is project driven; there is a list of projects, they are prioritized every year, there is an oversight committee, the County can adapt, and on the lower corner, in 2017 and also as recent as 2024, Chris Peterson might talk to this, the Water Management District has been looking at stormwater feasibility and treatment projects ranking those projects, prioritizing; his second message, besides this partnership, is that having a project list matters; the only way to move this agenda forward is having enough money; and the only way to understand what that is going to cost is build and prioritize a project list and then deliver that project list because the time value of money is something that has been seen over and over in the State of Florida, and the longer they wait to do the work the more it costs. He stated he throws this slide in only to show what they do in the National Estuary Program in a context of what others are doing; the 10-year cumulative investment with NEP and IRL council money is about half of what the County has to do the hard work; where the IRL Council focuses its efforts is in the projects that do not meet SOIRL's mission and criteria; he just wants to name a couple of projects that would have never happened without having a NEP; they received \$9.4 million to do multiple projects with multiple partners from the Noah's Fishery group; part of the delivery of that is an update of the economic value of the IRL; what is remarkable is how much work it takes to understand seven counties, 38 cities, and a watershed that is complicated; when one looks at the plan, he or she will be as shocked as he is of how big the contributed economic value of this system is; they have also created a network of seagrass nurseries, hard infrastructure in five different locations that are supporting the seagrass work; in the lower right, one can see that they also invest in innovation and high-risk projects that may or may not deliver what they want, but deserve at least a pilot study to see where they go; and it is all done in a competitive grants program. He went on to say they are evaluating Fiscal Year 2027 grant proposals as he speaks; this slides shows how it breaks down over a 10-year period, county-by-county; often the County Commissioners and City Council people ask how well their own county or city has done; not a single decision that they have made in 10 years has anything to do with the location of those projects; the balance among that distribution is the really good work that County staff does writing proposals, securing additional dollars, and as Ms. Barker mentioned, how much they are leveraging the half-cent sales tax to other revenue sources, that does not happen; going to Tallahassee or Washington D.C. with an empty hand, looking for legislative budget requests or earmarks is not a powerful place; but going and saying as a community it has invested for 10 years this amount of money and this science-based plan, that catches attention, and also delivers matching funds. He continued by saying there have been historic levels both at the Federal and State level of funding over the last years and he gives credit where credit is due; a lot of this is due to the current Governor, Ron DeSantis, who made water one of the pillars of his two terms; people have seen the IRL now recognized in statute with the IRL Protection Program; the Governor's budget just recently released it is requesting \$100 million for IRL and also for Biscayne Bay; those dollars are one-time dollars; when one has recurring

funds like Brevard County does, it can leverage position and make a case that those State and Federal dollars should flow here; lastly, just to throw the numbers out, because they are shocking even to him, he made a phone call to the contractor and this is a year's worth of economic data analysis by the Balmoral Group in Winter park; when they showed him the draft he called and asked if he took them to court on their analysis because he does not believe the number what would their response be, and their response was they were really conservative in the estimates; they did not look at a lot of non-marketplace issues, but compared to 2016, what they did look at is real estate value, they looked at this emerging marketplace of industries that are either directly or indirectly connected to the IRL; they are looking at a system that delivers economic output of over \$28 billion annually; the one number they wanted for a long time, the data was not there, it was difficult to get, they used the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) proposal, which had hard costs clam restoration, seagrass restoration, wetland restoration, and built that cost base into an analysis for ecosystem services; and he knows the City is plagued many times with flooding, but when one builds good infrastructure, it not only protects the Lagoon, but it protects the citizens from those dramatic events of 10 inches in 10 hours. He added people have seen bomb rainfall events enough now in the last five years; he does not call it an anomaly, it is not about if, it is about when; the infrastructure is not ready for that; what both Ms. Barker and Mr. Taranto have shown is that the County, because of citizen support, are fixing the infrastructure; and when the plumbing is fixed, it fixes the Lagoon. He stated he will leave with this, recurring funds is essential, the job is not done, and when the full revenue package is complete in this first 10-year Half-cent sales tax, there will still be a lot of work to do; the IRLNEP will continue to work with Congress and the Florida Legislature, and work with County staff, but he has never been more proud, as a scientist or a citizen, than when he can go to Mobile, Alabama, which he did just a month ago, and brag about what is happening here thanks to the citizens vision and this political leadership to move this agenda forward.

*The Board recessed at 6:05 p.m. and reconvened at 6:23 p.m.

Commissioner Altman is in attendance.

C.4. Presentation - Business Community - Laurilee Thompson

Laurilee Thompson stated she will give a break from all the tiny numbers and show a lot of pretty pictures; this picture looks really different than the first time National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) revealed a view of Florida's nighttime sky from space; there are a lot more lights in the landscape now; that little, tiny, black gap along the coastline with the yellow arrow, is a very special area, the Northern Indian River Lagoon; except for the extreme northeast corner of the State, this is the only place where one can stand on the west shore of an eastern Florida estuary, look towards a barrier island, and not see the lights from houses, hotels, and condos; before spaceships and cruise ships made their way to the community, citrus and fishing were Brevard County's biggest industries; net fishing was a profitable enterprise; and in 1922, the Indian River fishing industry was bigger than the world famous Indian River citrus industry. She added the region thrived on commercial and sport fishing; numerous fish houses and tackle shops operated along the river; and by the 1950s, pier fishing had become a major activity for tourists, as well as locals; and every coastal town had a fishing pier. She went on to say her Thompson grandparents operated the Titusville fishing pier and her family had the great fortune to live right next to it; a pioneer in the fiberglass boat building business, her dad built his first 16-foot teacraft runabouts under the apartment where she lived; there was a small basin by their house and when the wind blew out of the east, large mats of seagrass drifted in and then the manatees would come; they could sit on the dock and touch the backs of grazing manatees with their bare feet; they welcomed a summer when clouds of moon jellies floated into the basin; sometimes there were so many moon jellies that it seemed

as though one could walk on them, and they filled the water column from the bottom to the surface; and bottle-nosed dolphins fed outside the entrance of the basin every evening and they could see them tossing the fish in the air and leaping after them. She continued by saying watching the dolphins from the pier was better than being at Marine Land because the dolphins were in the wild, in their home, in the river; on summer nights the bioluminescence was spectacular; staring into dark waters was like peering into a fairy land as tiny luminous creatures scattered through shimmering seagrass like flickering stars; when she was 11, her grandfather told her something that was so profound she has never forgotten it; they were standing on his fishing pier looking down the river at the cranes, barges, and dredges used for building the NASA bridge and causeway and he told her that all the new development was going to kill the river; her grandfather only had a 7th grade education, but he knew that the causeways and the development were going to be very bad for the Lagoon; that was about the same time her dad built a fishnet and started dropping her, the net, and a rowboat off at Haulover Canal on summer days so she could catch shrimp for her grandfather to sell at his pier; and like many kids from families who made their living from the river, she was expected to work and that suited her just fine because all she ever wanted to do was hang out on the river and fish. She stated later she built 150 crab traps and started running them every afternoon after school; when she was 17 her grandfather co-signed for her first bank loan and she bought 500 yards of Gillnet, and a bowrunner boat so that she could fish for mullet, there were massive schools of mullet back then; the same school of mullet could pass under her grandfather's pier for more than 20 minutes; she made a lot of money as a teenager fishing for mullet; being on the river was a magical time for her, the water was crystal clear and close to shore the bottom was carpeted with rippling and waving seagrass; a walk along any shoreline revealed fiddler crabs as far as she could see; when she approached they raced toward their holes, and the motion of hundreds of fiddler crabs running for cover looked like water parting as she moved along the shore; and with the coming of spring, hordes of bigger crabs made their presence known, as any sandy beach with a hard onshore wind was covered with spawning horseshoe crabs. She went on to say flocks of hungry shorebirds feasted on their eggs, gaining weight for their long-distance flights to the arctic tundra to nest; she did not know it then, but she was experiencing the end of the grandeur of the IRL before her grandfather's prophecy came true; the 2000's were a period of intense focus on the Indian River as a world class fishery, particularly for its abundant prized red fish; anglers came seeking the high quality of the fishery, particularly for sight fishing opportunities in clear shallow waters; the area became a premier destination for competitive angling; it was a regular stop for the professional fishing league worldwide red fish tour and prestigious local events such as the red bone large celebrity tournaments; guides who consistently performed well in these tournaments gained recognition and some ended up with their own television shows and a large platform for conservation messaging and promoting the Lagoon; and regardless of whether a fishing tournament is a local event or a major professional tour, fishing tournaments are a big business for the hospitality industry, as hotels and restaurants fill to capacity for days as anglers scour for the best fishing spots. She noted the economic worth of unpolluted water through the creation of jobs and fishing, tourism, recreation, and other industries is well documented; these assets make it easy to attract a good workforce for the economy; people come here to enjoy the same magical experiences she had while she was growing up; bioluminescent kayak tour operators put hundreds of people out on the water every summer night relying on schools of mullet for their quests' experience; Manatees often swim right up to the kayaks and fishing is a widespread activity; popular past times for visitors and residents include birding and wildlife photography; without a healthy Lagoon, the unique nature would not exist; it has been shown time and again, property values increase in direct proportion to their proximity to clean water; and a huge portion of ocean seafood relies on estuaries, and their salt marshes, with estimates that over 70 percent of the U.S. commercial catch and 80 percent of recreational catch depend on these vital nurseries of the sea for critical life stations. She mentioned generations of her family and many others have depended on a healthy Indian River to make a living; this map of

Florida salt marshes shows the critical importance of the Mosquito Lagoon and Space Center salt marshes as recharge areas for fisheries; very little salt marsh acreage exists along Florida's southeastern coast below Kennedy Space Center; she knows that the Lagoon is getting better, the water is clearer and algae blooms are generally spotty, smaller, and do not linger as long as earlier blooms; there is a lot more bait now and fishing continued to improve; seagrass has started coming back strong in the southern Mosquito Lagoon in 2022 and in the northern Indian River in 2024; in 2025, this year, it has expanded south into the basins between the Titusville railroad bridge and NASA Causeway; and with better water quality it should continue its southern movement. She commented one way to measure the character of a community is to look at what one protects, one protects what it values; the IRL is more than a beautiful body of water nestled inside coastal barrier islands, it is one of the greatest estuaries in North America; its diversity of life is unmatched and its total annual economic value is more than \$28.3 billion, a staggering economic impact that affects communities and economies throughout its entire length; everything about the way of life here in Brevard County is enhanced and given greater value due to the influence of the Lagoon; she still likes to fish, but she does not keep them to sell any longer, she throws them back so others can catch them too; and due to development and a growing population, the Indian River will never again be wild and free like it was when she was a kid; but it can be brought back to a condition where people's children and grandchildren can enjoy it as much as she did; it needs to be treated like it is a giant aquarium that is always going to have to be managed; and there is still a long way to go, but it is the responsibility of the people to leave a restored IRL and a funding source to keep it healthy as a legacy for future generations to enjoy.

C.5. Presentation - Municipal Perspective - Frank Catino

Frank Catino stated he has had the opportunity to work in the municipal end for many years, realizing in doing so that votes are never 5:0, people do not always agree on everything, but they always seem to try to make sure they are working together for a better community and better environment; the other end of it he will show a few slides like Ms. Thompson just did; he has had a great honor, his real job is a fishing guide and this is his 50th year; he started fishing many years ago and this is year number 50, and it is an amazing place; it has given him a perspective of the area that it is of tremendous importance that the people work together; he expressed his appreciation to the County Commissioners for the hard work on this, and Ms. Barker and her staff for working with the municipalities on these projects; and he noted it is a thankless job and in a lot of cases, people have a different opinion on what works better, but again, working together. He continued by saying working together and the half-cent sales tax brings in more reoccurring dollars where grant dollars are available to municipalities to do and complete more projects; again, the half-cent is so vital and it is not just all paid for by the people who live in this community and this area; it spread out that people will come use the environment; in the mid-50s, approximately 25,000 people lived in Brevard County, today, plus 650,000; the municipalities and County infrastructure is aging and as a society, people cannot go back to living the way it did in the past and expect the environment to change, everyone must work together; the cities have worked closely with counties to complete important projects funded by the Lagoon tax, such as septic to sewer conversion and funding that also helps offset trunk line replacement projects, muck removal, and stormwater ponds; many of the cities were built in the 1950s, to go back and retrofit these is very costly; and most of the cities would never be built the way they are today, if they were to start from ground zero, and unfortunately, it is not practical to go back and knock things totally down and try that. He went on to say everyone has to work together; he thinks this bloom and the half-cent sales tax have done some good things; it has brought together County, municipalities, along with community organizations that are helping educate and ever-growing population for a better environment; a lot of the cities have created sustainability boards and are putting out information to the citizens on better ways to live, how to manage one's yard, landscape, and so forth to help lessen

pollutants in the Lagoon; it is not over and he does not believe it ever will be over; municipalities, the County, and the general public must always work towards a cleaner environment; and everyone needs to use the best available technology, have funds available for this, and remember that this technology has a lifespan and will need to be upgraded someday when better technology comes along. He added for instance, in the city years ago a gentleman came to Satellite Beach and asked if anyone was interested in doing baffle boxes and they were one of the first cities, in the mid 90s, to put them in. He stated they are not in there today because they were outdated; with the SOIRL project they have been upgraded because the baffle boxes are much better today; just because something is done today does not mean it is done and over; the best science and technology must be used. He noted the river system has been dying for a long time, and he is not being sarcastic when he says this, but the bloom in the long run might have been Mother Nature's wakeup call; until the fish washed up on people's backyards and floated in the river, most people did not know or care, out of sight out of mind, that this system was in dire need; these funds are being used for meaningful projects that directly benefits the IRL; none of this would have been possible without the tax; a strong collaboration among the County and participating cities, everyone must remain committed to working together to continue advancing these critical projects while there is still much work to be done; and funding is often the key factor that determines how quickly progress moves forward. He commented he does not know if a lot of people knew this but the sawfish used to be very prevalent in the river and he had a pretty cool picture of one; the reason he wants to show this picture is for people to keep it in mind while he goes through the few pictures that he has; the bottom used to be spectacularly clean; the seagrass and amount of life was amazing; this one is the algae bloom and is at that spot in the previous picture; this slide is the same area within 10 to 15 feet after the algae bloom; this slide is that same area a year ago; and this last slide is today. He stated the sales tax and the hard work with the County and the cities is starting to show; it is not over and is never going to be over, but to him it is more than worthwhile for the funds that are being spent to better the environment; and it is definitely working.

C.6. Presentation - Economic Impact of the Indian River Lagoon - Chris Peterson, St. Johns River Water Management District Member

Chris Peterson stated although he is the secretary of the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) he is in attendance as a private citizen and a Brevard County business owner; he would thank the Board the allowing him to speak about one of the most important issues facing Florida, the health of the waters; from the Everglades to the IRL, from the springs to the St. Johns River basin, the story of Florida is the story of water; today he would like to share with everyone what is being done by the legislature, the Governor, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), the Water Management District, and importantly Brevard County, to restore and protect these vital resources; first he would like to take a moment to explain why these issues matter so much to him; he loves natural Florida; he spends time boating, fishing, and it is more than a pastime, it is a way of life; he has been so passionate about it that he built his career around it; and today he has the privilege of serving as the president of Hell's Bay Boat Works where they build the finest shallow fishing skiffs in the world, right here in Titusville. He went on to say the economic impact of just recreational fishing, according to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, saltwater recreational fishing alone generates about \$9.2 billion of economic impact and supports 88,500 jobs, and when combined with freshwater fishing the total estimated is over \$13.8 billion and about 120,000 jobs across Florida; that is why he feels it is important to spend valuable resources on fixing the water and saving the Lagoon; the truth, without clean water there are no clean estuaries, without clean estuaries there is not good fishing, and without good fishing no one needs him to build the world's finest Skiff, which means all the families that depend on Hell's Bay Boat Works would be impacted; and clean water is not just about the environment, it is

about people's livelihood, heritage, and their future. He continued by saying this current year's State budget, 2025-2026, includes \$1.4 billion dedicated to Everglades restoration and other projects in water quality; the same budget declared since 2019, Florida has invested nearly \$9 billion in restoring and protecting the State's waterways; in the 25 proposals, the Governor's budget includes \$600 million for targeted water quality improvement and spring protection efforts; also in that budget, \$25 million was allocated for the Indian River Lagoon Protection program for priority water quality projects; and that same budget, \$382 million, a part of a larger chunk is set aside for expanded water quality projects, including wastewater, stormwater, and septic conversions. He mentioned closer to home, the State has also recognized the crisis in the IRL; since 2019 nearly \$390 million has been invested in Lagoon restoration; in a most recent budget, over \$100 million has been set aside for water quality projects in the IRL basin from septic to sewer conversions, wastewater treatment upgrades, and stormwater retrofits; people know the Lagoon cannot be saved by one project or one year of funding, it takes consistent long-term commitment; that is exactly what is being seen; long before the State level commitment, Brevard County voters took a bold step in 2016 approving a half-cent infrastructure sales tax specifically dedicated to restoring and improving the IRL; this half-cent sales tax referendum, often called the SOIRL program, was designated to raise up to approximately \$586 million over 10 years to fund local restoration efforts; through that tax Brevard County has already planned and implemented hundreds of projects or put them into process, all designed to reduce and remove excessive nutrients, pollution that undermines the health of the Lagoon, reduced and prevented nitrogen phosphorus from entering the Lagoon which the projected annual pollutant reductions are measured in hundreds of thousands of pounds once these projects are completed; and they also support upgrades to the septic systems, stormwater improvements, sewer expansions, and innovative approaches to reduce pollutant inputs. He mentioned some of the standout local projects funded through this tax include the Crane Creek M1 canal restoration right here in Brevard County, that project is now complete; for decades the M1 canal sent polluted water east into the IRL and today with a new operable weir, pump stations and treatment wetlands west of I-95, the flow has been redirected and the project will prevent 24,000 pounds of nitrogen and 3,100 pounds of phosphorus from entering the Lagoon each year and restore up to seven million gallons each day of flow back into the St. Johns River where that fresh water is badly needed; another one right here in Titusville is Titusville Causeway multi-tropic restoration and living shoreline; it is another project set making the difference of a living shoreline, instead of hardened seawalls, they are building oyster reefs, planting mangroves, and marsh grasses, and using nature to restabilize the coast; Brevard County alone has helped fund reef and living shoreline projects that stretch more than 2,300 feet filtering water, reducing erosion, and providing habitat; the Titusville Causeway project is a standout, 650 wave attenuation devices, four acres of seagrass restoration, and millions of clams have been deployed to help clean the Lagoon; but none of these projects are possible without partnerships. He stated through the State's cost share programs, local governments and utilities, bring forward and the State helps fund them; it is a model that stretched taxpayer dollars, rewards innovation, and ensures both State and local priorities are met; these projects not only improve the water quality, they support the economic and recreational value of the Lagoon, strengthen property values, and protect the livelihoods of residents who depend on clean water, like himself, for tourism, fishing, and quality of life; the synergy between the State funding and local investment represents a powerful model for environmental stewardship; the State's historic water budget brings broad and strategic support to communities Statewide; and local investments like Brevard's half-cent sales tax provides targeted, community-driven action where water issues hit home. He added the combination of State leadership and local incentives is what makes Florida uniquely positioned to tackle the complex water challenges from nutrient pollution to water supply sustainability and ecosystem restoration. He noted as the SOIRL sales tax approaches its sunset this year, the community faces important decisions about extending and refining this successful effort; public engagement and support will be crucial as they continue confronting legacy pollution and build

on the progress that has already been made; together, with this partnership between the State and County, scientific experts and engaged residents are setting new standards for water stewardship in Florida, one that protects the waterways today and preserves them for generations to come; one point that is especially important to understand, and cannot be understated, local investment is not separate from the State funding, it is the key that unlocks it; across Florida, a vast majority of water quality grants, restoration funds, and infrastructure programs operate on a cost-share model which means that the State dollars are awarded competitively and require local governments to bring real funding to the table; and in Brevard County the half-cent sales tax is not only a local commitment, it is a financial foundation that allows it to compete and secure State funding. He stated Brevard County has been able to meet the required local match threshold often by 50 percent or more for State water quality grants; projects funded through SOIRL program are structured to align with State priorities making them eligible for funding from the FDEP and the water management districts; every local dollar invested through the half-cent sales tax has been leveraged to attract additional State dollars, multiplying the impact well beyond what local funding could achieve; and without this dedicated funding source, many of these projects simply would not qualify for State assistance, regardless of how urgent the need may be; in practical terms, this means that the half-cent sales tax turns local taxpayer dollars into matched State funds and allows Brevard County to move forward projects years sooner than waiting for State funding alone; and it ensures that State funds are spent on shovel ready, engineered, and accountable projects, rather than sitting idle. He noted this partnership model is intentional; the State has made it clear that communities that invest in themselves rise to the top of the funding list; by approving the half-cent sales tax, voters sent a strong signal that this community is serious about restoring the IRL and the State responded by becoming an effective partner; the success that is being seen today, cleaner water, reduced nutrient loads, major funding infrastructure upgrades, is not a result of one funding source alone, it is a result of an alignment of State dollars, local investing, scientific planning, and public accountability, that is why they are maintaining a strong local funding commitment remains essential; it is not just to continue the work that is already underway, but to ensure Brevard County remains competitive for future State grants and cost share opportunities; when one steps back and looks at the big picture, the message is clear, Florida is investing in water like never before; and the Legislature, the Governor, the water management district, and local governments like Brevard County are backing that up with billions of dollars of innovative science and real results on the ground. He mentioned the money and projects alone are not enough because whether it is the Everglades, the springs, St. Johns River, or the Indian River Lagoon, these waters do not belong to any one person, they belong to everyone; the Indian River is the lifeblood of Brevard County and fuels the economy, supports people's way of life, it defines identities as Floridians; and thousands of pounds of harmful nutrients have already been removed, thousands of septic tanks have been converted, oyster reefs have been restored, living shorelines have been installed, and decades of decline have been reversed thanks to the half-cent sales tax; if people want clean water, strong property values, and a healthy future for Brevard County, then everyone must keep that sales tax going; he commented to keep pushing forward together to ensure that Florida's waters are clean, abundant, and alive for generations to come; in Florida the water is the golden goose that drives economies; and Florida water is Florida's soul.

*The Board recessed at 6:55 p.m. and reconvened at 7:00 p.m.

D. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Robert Pickert stated he is a lover of the Indian River Lagoon; he supported the initial SOIRL tax and offer conditional support for a continued tax; he offers a general observation for improvement of the SOIRL Program and a specific proposal that would be good for the Lagoon, good for the watershed, and good for Brevard County, providing long term

supplemental or other funding to reduce the need for the SOIRL tax; a muck fact sheet on the SOIRL project plan website states in part that dewatered muck can be used for beneficial purposes if deemed to be safe and cost effective or disposed of in a landfill if contaminated; the County 'muckeneers' did step up and arrange for four samples of the Grand Canal muck from the Pineda dewatering site and the results indicate that the muck is likely to serve as a good base for a pelletized biochar-based fertilizer soil amendment; the utility of a biochar amended muck comes from the incredible properties of biochar to absorb water, absorb nutrients, and make them bio available to plants while dramatically reducing the leeching to surface and ground water and improving drought resilience; and adding 60 to 70 percent biochar and other ingredients to the muck would transform the muck into a slow-release fertilizer and soil amendment, distribute the high quality and permanent source of carbon to landscape soils that would reduce the flux of nutrients and other contaminants to the Lagoon and provide a way for Brevard County residents and businesses to learn about soil health that would contribute directly to the restoration of the Lagoon and replace or supplement the SOIRL tax with a non-tax revenue from the sales within and beyond the watershed; and thinking of it as adding the activated carbon in the water pitcher in ones refrigerator to the soil. He mentioned the sale of two million bags of slow release fertilizer and soil amendment at \$45 per bag, the typical rate for biochar, could generate \$100 million in sales and provide the County with the \$20 to \$40 million in net proceeds to pay for SOIRL programs; this could be implemented as a pilot project to demonstrate the commercial viability and scale up through greater investment; it would require a focused marketing campaign that would likely build quickly and the result would be a Brevard industry creating jobs and reducing taxes; on people do not have to take his word for it, Sally Scalera of Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) County Extension called the idea fantastic; fertilizer companies are adding biochar to their products; and biochar also makes an effective stormwater treatment media. He continued by saying this would require a lot of biochar, fortunately, the Solid Waste Department is in the process of developing a plan for the reuse of the County's woody waste and could eventually produce all of the biochar needed for this effort; he would support a renewed tax if it was supplemented with a parallel effort to create a commercial soil health initiative featuring IRL muck biochar and other local ingredients; and with regard to the programs, he would suggest the program drop its exclusive focus on funding efforts of only municipalities and non-profit organizations and engage the private sector. He added in addition, he would recommend reviewing the directives in the original ordinance that says not only allowed, but to foster tools and techniques for restoration of the Lagoon and to identify and develop long-term funding sources to preserve, protect, restore, and enhance the Lagoon.

Vincent McDermott stated he is from Indialantic and his background he is a retired 50 years in city planning and retiring in Florida; he would like to commend the Board, the oversight committee, and staff for setting clear objectives, transparent process through the COC, and establishing metrics for identifying what is successful; changing plans for the better when better techniques are found; he has one major concern going forward, it took 75 years to screw up the Lagoon, it cannot be fixed in 10 years; people need to look at processes to prevent the causes going forward; his pet peeve is something he learned 50 years ago in college, it is called Low Impact Development (LID); and he learned about it but it was not called that, that is just smart growth management planning. He mentioned urban runoff has been shown to cause about 12 percent of the pollution that is in the Lagoon; looking at smart growth management plan, recognizing both and balancing development with measures to reduce the impacts on environmentally sensitive land is important in going forward; the County needs to adopt strong LID practices during the planning process as required by the 2028 stormwater management plan that comes into effect on that date; the County should be requiring green infrastructure for the implementation of the development plans, both for new development and redevelopment projects as they come aboard; and this is not new it is just going to be smart. He noted he would encourage the Board and staff to place great emphasis on growth management going

forward.

Laura Wilson stated she is the Executive Director of Marine Resources Council, an environmental non-profit, to protect and restore the IRL; she thanked the Board for the opportunity for the public to learn, engage, and share their voices about the SOIRL program; the IRL is essential to the economy, the environment, and people's quality of life; she is there to support a ballot measure to renew the SOIRL half-cent sales tax; it took 35 years for Chesapeake Bay to show signs of recovery after significant efforts to address pollution where initiated; she echoes Ms. Barker and Ms. Thompson's assessments that the improvements that the improvements being seen recently in seagrass are related to the years of effort through SOIRL; however, with only nine years under the belt, there is still a long way to go; one of the greatest strengths of the current program is the Citizens Oversight Committee (COC); they provide a vital mechanism for listening to residents, reviewing projects, and ensuring accountability in how public dollars are spent; and this level of public engagement and oversight should remain a cornerstone of the program moving forward and could actually be expanded to help with public communication and education on projects and fiscal decisions. She went on to say they need to make sure that they are sharing the process and not just the results; at the same time, any long term restoration effort must evolve; there are opportunities to strengthen the program by leading more intentionally with science and using the best data available to prioritize projects that deliver the greatest results; this means to incorporate long-term monitoring to gauge project effectiveness and ensuring the use of the most up-to-date baseline metrics on primary nutrient sources and how that might vary from region to region; Brevard will continue to grow and there needs to be surety that today's investments anticipate future development pressures; skills have been honed to be reactive and now is the time to be more proactive; incorporating low impact development priorities is a key part of this; preserving natural resources, utilizing existing wetlands, creating engineered wetlands, opening up impoundments, and using green infrastructure can reduce pollution at the source while saving money over time; these approaches that work with nature instead of against it should be the foundation of the program going forward; and finally, flexibility remains essential, a successful lagoon restoration program must be able to adapt to new information and emerging solutions, while staying focused on the restoration goals. She went on to say collaborating with aerospace companies that are actively bringing scientists and engineers into the region is just one way to accomplish this; she appreciates the Board's leadership to date; and she would encourage the Board to approve a referendum that continues this important work and strengthens what has made this program successful thus far being science-driven, forward-looking, and responsive to the community.

Kay St. Onge stated she is speaking on behalf of the Titusville Tree Team which is a citizen's environmental advocacy group; like many, she has a personal commitment to the Lagoon; beginning in 1998 she lived on her sailboat anchored in the Lagoon and sailed the Caribbean; that is when the water was clean and safe to swim in; seagrass was widespread and dolphins and manatees were abundant; that is no longer the case; septic tanks, sewer leaks, and clear-cut development have sent excess nutrients into the Lagoon fueling algae blooms, degrading water quality, and resulting in hundreds of manatee deaths; and swimming in the Lagoon now jeopardizes tourists' health. She went on to say stormwater runoff is a major source of pollution to the Lagoon; when trees are cleared and land is paved for development, rain no longer soaks into the ground sending polluted runoff into the Lagoon; in 2019 a group of retired scientists, engineers, and educators formed the Titusville Tree Team to advocate for stronger tree protection in the land development regulations; their efforts led to Titusville City Council's 2021 adoption of a tree protection ordinance prohibiting clear cutting by requiring 25 percent of the area of subdivisions in tree canopy; they also advocated for Low Impact Development ordinance which was adopted, and an urban forest management plan that is now in progress; the Tree Team has planted 220 native trees in City Parks, reducing runoff,

providing wildlife, and cooling and beautifying the community; in 2022 the Marine Resource Council awarded the team its achievement of the year for outstanding service to the Lagoon; the Titusville Tree Team supports extending the half-cent sales tax to fund SOIRL's many projects restoring the Lagoon with an independent science-based oversight committee; and she thanked the Board for its commitment in protecting the Lagoon.

Michael Myjack stated he is the Chair of the Environmental Commission, the Vice Chair of the Friends of the Enchanted Forest, and a founding member of the IRL Roundtable; he is going to talk about the stormwater in the Indian River Lagoon; there is a program that his co-partner, Dr. Jeff Greenberg and he started, working with Astronaut High School and the local Eastern Florida State college to try to get some of the students to come out and start looking at the pollution in the stormwater; they have high goals because he wants to be able to measure the volume of stormwater that has been put in, so they can know exactly how much they are reducing salinity in the Lagoon, which is a major factor in the seagrass not coming back; there are projects taking place in and above the community that are also in addition to what is being done with SOIRL; and there are many things the Board can do in addition to approving SOIRL, demanding for LID everywhere in the County, stopping the runoff that is going into the Lagoon and redirecting the fresh water back to the St. John River away from the IRL. He noted he knows salinity is the major problem that they are having in recovery right now; the only way to fix that is to fix where the stormwater is going; everywhere that one can put in rain guards, slow down the water, redirect the water, or where it can get into the ground, or as Ms. St. Onge stated, put it in trees, above ground because every oak tree can put out 10,000 gallons of water; and there are so many things that can be done to protect the Lagoon besides SOIRL; but SOIRL is critical, vital, and absolutely necessary. He added the Lagoon would not be where it is today without the SOIRL program going. He noted when he first came to Brevard, like Laurilee, there were fish in the Lagoon; he remembers the sawfish when he was eight years old and went to Marineland and he wanted to become a marine biologist because he did not know what a sawfish was and he was face-to-face with one; and these are the kind of things that bring people to this County. He went on to say can one imagine what the space industry would be like trying to get people to work here if the Lagoon is crap; if there is a dead environment who is going to want to come here to work; the space industry is going to be the future here, but how the County manages it is going to be critical to how people survive.

Vince Lamb stated he is the past chair of the IRL Coalition and he currently serves on the board as Treasurer of that coalition; in 2016, he served as the chair of political action committee supporting the passage of the SOIRL Program referendum; the referendum strongly passed in every precinct in Brevard County and provided a majority of votes in favor of the SOIRL Program; he has been deeply involved with the Lagoon protection and restoration for more than 15 years; he is a Lagoon waterfront property owner for 50 years and he has watched the Lagoon water quality degrade for many years; and in the last few years, it is clearly getting better. He mentioned the IRL Coalition held an event in Titusville in October with an emphasis on fishing and Lagoon restoration; speakers included members of the fishing world, boating community, a boat builder, a research scientist, and a commercial fisherman; their stories are quite different but they all reported some improvements in the IRL that were influenced by the SOIRL Program; all expressed similar views that the program should be renewed; the original SOIRL Program featured multiple approaches to restoring the Lagoon, including muck removal, stormwater improvements, living shorelines, and much more; he is hopeful that the 2026 renewal will continue much of the current plan with some differences in emphasis; perhaps the stormwater improvement projects should be chosen to reduce flooding as well as reducing nutrient pollutants; the Florida Legislature passed a mandate to remove basic septic systems from the Lagoon watershed; and the renewed SOIRL Program should include funding to assist homeowners with that effort. He went on to say the Bowen Aquarium and Dr. Duane De Freese Coastal Conservation hub should be completed and opened in 2029; he inquired how this

renewed SOIRL Program can utilize this facility for the maximum benefit to the Lagoon; he mentioned he looks forward to hearing the public comments tonight and the Commission discussion following these workshops; and he thanked the Board for providing the opportunity to speak.

Craig Wallace stated he is the current chair of the IRL Coalition; he retired here 10 years ago on the shores of the Lagoon to enjoy his favorite hobbies, sailing, wind surfing, and recreational boating; he was shocked in 2016 when his backyard was filled with dead fish; he had to find out some answers; fortunately, he was not the only one in search of a solution; he quickly learned about the SOIRL Program and attended Lagoon science seminars at Florida Tech Harbor Branch Institute, which helped him understand that there are many different causes and solutions to the problems with the Lagoon; and he also found other resident volunteers that were seeking the solution, so he joined the IRL Coalition. He commented people must use science to guide them; the Space Coast is attracting the world's smartest space scientists and engineers and the SOIRL Program has attracted some of the best environmental scientists; let the people challenge this talent to find better ways to dispose of biosolid waste, identify more cost effective methods for muck removal, and improve stormwater retention as has been heard tonight; also the aquarium and the conservation hub would be a great place for scientific collaboration, so get it built; public engagement is critical to support the continued funding as has been heard tonight; and this meeting is a good first step. He mentioned the Citizen's Oversight Committee (COC) provides a continuing forum for public input; people need to attend those meetings; volunteer programs, like the Zoo's Restore the Shores Program and shoreline cleanups create opportunities for public engagement and learning, this is critical to this program should it continue going forward; and Lagoon Loyal is an excellent platform for public education and engagement, but it could use some additional funding investment. He continued by saying this community is fortunate to have many known nonprofit volunteer programs that help with community engagement; the County should use them to expand the reach of the SOIRL Program; educated citizens are the best way to assure a long-term preservation of the Lagoon; they have proven their support over the years, so entrust them with the future; the Coalition encourages continuing the SOIRL Program and investment in scientifically proven solutions while encouraging sustainable public support; and working together they can restore the Lagoon.

James Nelson stated he is a very concerned, grateful, humble, and hopeful citizen; all the speakers that have talked tonight are a lot more experienced and knowledgeable than he; he wants to discuss some general things, speak a little about the past, present, and what happens tomorrow; he was in Brevard County in 2016 when the Ordinance came out; he was very happy; he was thinking someone has an idea and wants to help so he voted for this tax increase; he read the articles in the paper later about people on that committee having issues with contracts; he thought they would learn they are smart; he remembers them getting their first contract lit and saw the first articles about cleaning the Lagoon out and he thought they are making progress; and here it is a few years later and they come up here and spoken about what has been done, but what he sees is they have just gotten started. He noted there are some dams that have been taken down in the western United States, the Elwha dams were taken down a little over 10 years ago and they are still learning and the salmon are still increasing in the river compared to Brevard County, where the people here are still learning what will happen with that Lagoon; that is a look at the past; the present, he thinks the people who spoke tonight are telling what is going on right now, but what happens tomorrow; tomorrow he would like for the tax to remain, for the people to keep working because the way he sees it is when people touch on it, the Doctor spoke about a rain event that was had in Titusville a few weeks ago, and that is going to happen again; there is water in the Lagoon, stormwater issues, development, all these suburban yards, he calls it fake Downton Abby front yard, need to go to away; he needs to support that sales tax; and he thanked the Board for coming to Titusville and

listening.

Sandra Sullivan stated she runs a group called Wavesaction; as an environmental advocate, she is not for renewing the sales tax; the County has a huge infrastructure crisis and the last meeting when the Board was giving \$12.1 million for a developer's garage, essentially, it talked about raising people's taxes and talked about the cost of infrastructure; there is a \$168.5 million yet unallocated according to the graph on the County's website; she would suggest the Board put that to critical sewage infrastructure and stormwater; Brevard County has the largest number of Manatee and Dolphin deaths in the entire State; and looking at what has happened, according to Marine Resources Council (MRC), there were 1,600 workers laid off in 2010, with the passing of House Bill (HB) 981 in November 2010; looking at the seagrass maps that are publicly available, including on Wavesaction going through the timeline, all the seagrass had disappeared in 2011, corresponding with that change; the muck did not change, the sewage systems did not change at that time, what changed killed all the seagrass in one year; almost all of it died since; in 2024 that sea grass had not recovered, as of last year; and she has posted Brevard stops spraying in 2024 where it drains to the Lagoon because she saw that at State Road 513, where she lives in South Patrick Shores on South Patrick Drive, and in other areas in Brevard. She noted they can say the Lagoon tax is working when the seagrass improves in 2025; that is her allegation; "Repetition does not transform a lie into truth," by Benjamin Franklin, so when one follows the science, and she has read all of the Florida Institute of Technology (FIT) studies that the County has been paid them over \$5 million for, it says most of the muck flux sites are the causeways, fix the cause; the other one, Turkey Creek, it says the muck is coming from the sewage treatment plant; she calls it the tax; and there are over \$1 billion worth of muck projects. She added there is a \$250 million muck project coming up on there for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Banana River. She inquired why the muck tax, and answered one can go back to when the Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) report came out from Patrick and put this burden on the people; she continued saying Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) is fining Brevard County for dumping a lot of sewage they have not reported; in 2022-2023 Brevard dumped 21 million gallons of sewage, most people do not know that because they do not tell people that, they talked about the seven million gallons before; and in conclusion, she wants to say the County is not matching the SOIRL tax to the State grants like was promised and what she would suggest is that the County rethink this tax, look at the critical needs in Brevard County, and find a way. She noted it is called the infrastructure surtax, State Statute 212.055, and that means it should be going to infrastructure; and a lot of that tax, like grass clipping marketing is not infrastructure, and it does not fulfill the State Statute.

Matthew Nylon stated he is a Rockledge resident and lives in precinct 37 right on the IRL; he has been a resident since the 1980s; he is also an avid fisherman and has watched with great dismay as the Lagoon has deteriorated through time; he retired in 2019 from Lockheed Martin and bought himself a nice flats boat and then watched the IRL turn into a green slimy mess right after that; he is so very saddened by that because he was looking forward to that; he thinks the greatest jeopardy to this renewal getting passed is people being skeptical about the projects and the decisions being made on how the money is being spent; and there have people who have claimed that this money has been used to subsidize further development or people have claimed that the money has been put to projects for political reasons rather than scientific reasons. He mentioned he does not know if those things are true but he thinks a robust COC process that is very transparent in a very transparent process at the County Commission level is essential in maintaining people's trust to want to keep funding this program; the greatest jeopardy is people losing trust in that decision-making; and he thinks if the Board keeps it open and keeps it transparent, then it can pass the tax again and continue to clean up of the Lagoon.

Toni Shifalo stated she moved to Titusville and bought the historic Norwood House which was built in 1895; indoor plumbing arrived there about 1925, therefore, the pipes in the ground were very old; she was lucky enough to benefit from the lateral line grants that SOIRL made available; not everybody is lucky enough to have a project that impacts the IRL impact themselves as well; she has a special interest and is very interested in Sandra Sullivan saying to not continue the tax, whereas she thinks it is probably a good idea; however, she does agree that there needs to be a lot more education so the citizens of Brevard County, instead of complaining about that half cent sales tax and that the river still stinks, that they understand the types of things that are going on like the lateral sewage line grants. She continued to say muck farming is a strange thing to her, spending so much money on it, and then what happens with all the muck, they are taking it over to the St. Johns basin waterway and distributing all of the toxins and all of the built-up phosphorus, PFAS, and all the bad things and just distributing them over there; there has got to be a different kind of solution; Mr. Myjack stated people have got to start thinking outside of the box; one of the places that the Board should really start thinking about is with that space industry over at the Space Center; they are wanting to ship their sewage across the IRL to a sewage plant that the taxpayers put up the money for to pay, on the mainland; she thinks they know how to deal with recycling and reusing water in space, why can they not figure out how to do it down here as well; and she knows that is outside of SOIRL, but she thinks the collaboration between Brevard County and the space industry would go a long way and help people paying that half cent sales tax seeing something really is being done. She noted the other thing that Ms. Sullivan mentioned was that in 2010 the State changed from requiring mechanical harvesting of water weeds and things to allow spraying of herbicides, if the Board could stop that it would help a lot, and make the landscapers and the maintenance people pull those weeds like she did when she was growing up on Lake Susanna.

Jason Miller stated he is not a native Floridian but he moved to Titusville and bought a house in 2017 when he got stationed in Port Canaveral with the Coast Guard; despite only being here for a couple of years, he got transferred away, and then retired in 2022; there was no question that his family was coming back here; he considers himself lucky because he came in when the Lagoon was at its worst and now he has been able to see a lot of the recovery efforts; he is on the Titusville Environmental Commission as well as the County Environmentally Endangered Lands (EELs) Selection Management Committee; a lot of the information presented he has already seen through those organizations but he really wants to stress how amazing and unique SOIRL is; being in the Coast Guard for 22 years he lived his life on the water, not only professionally, but recreationally as well, and he got to see a lot of very diverse and very cool bodies of water throughout this Country and Puerto Rico, including a few of those national estuary programs that were talked about earlier; none of the water ways that he was ever stationed on or boated on had the kind of organization or commitment that Brevard County has here for the Lagoon; he still keeps in touch with people and some of those estuaries are still actively being destroyed while Brevard County is actively making very positive efforts in recovering this one; and he just wanted to give his advocacy for this sales tax and for SOIRL. He added he thinks Brevard County is moving in the right direction on this thing.

Warren Edwards stated he would like to acknowledge the Board and those sitting up there, this is really public service to take the commitment to listen to the people and really get what the citizens see or are doing; listening to those presentations that were provided this evening, it is impressive what has been going on; how proud the people of this County should be as to what has been done thus far; and he is totally in support of continuing this half-cent sales tax. He went on to say he is a resident of Viera and he has been here over 20 years; he is a sailor, a kayaker, and a biker; one example of improvement that he has seen as a biker is going up Rockledge Drive, there was one place every time he went by where he wanted to hold his nose, it was funky, and he would say he is glad he does not live there, but eventually it cleared and low and behold he found out it was one of the septic to sewer conversions; they had taken a

whole block that they knew was an area with a problem, and they went ahead and put sewers in, and now it does not stink; that is just one small example of what SOIRL has done for the community; he thinks the elephant in the room is development, ultimately the amount of development that people are seeing in the County is just a stress on not only the Lagoon but the whole society, and he would encourage the Board to really think about how to tie infrastructure into development, in other words, not stopping development but how can there be a way where development is tied to having the proper infrastructure; and he thinks SOIRL, as well as all the other programs that are involved, are what is important; he also has concerns with learning about Blue Origin and the 490 million gallons of water a day of fresh water being put into a retention pond, where the retention pond eventually gets into the Lagoon, where people have heard salinity is a problem; this is a private business and these people are making money, this is not NASA; he does not think the County has planned for as much development that is being seen out there; the County has to take a look at that; and he asked how about the aquifer, they are sucking the water out of the aquifer. He continued by saying if they are doing it, what about the other companies; and he thanked the Board.

Elizabeth Neville stated she represents Save the Manatee Club as Director of Environmental Law and Policy; she is in support of renewing the half-cent sales tax to support the SOIRL Program; in deciding the future of SOIRL, it is essential to recall why the program was created in the first place; in 2016, Brevard County voted to implement the half-cent sales tax to generate money for IRL restoration; she expressed her appreciation to the Board for its leadership in establishing this important program; she noted since the program began, the funds from the sales tax have supported the implementation of more than 400 projects Countywide, working to remove and prevent millions of pounds of excess nutrients from entering the Lagoon; and these nutrients, mainly nitrogen and phosphorus, feed harmful algal blooms, which create toxins and block light that seagrasses need to grow. She mentioned seagrass loss in the IRL, driven by such algae blooms, contributed largely to the 2020-2022 unusual mortality event for manatees; during this tragic event, over 1,200 manatees died, many due to starvation from the seagrass loss; this was also a concern for tourism, as well as quality of life; in recent years people have seen seagrass recovery in much of the IRL thanks in large part to restoration programs such as those funded by SOIRL; however, now is not the time to back away from this important work; and industrial and population growth are increasing the pressures on the precarious health of the Lagoon. She continued by saying the SOIRL Program focuses on implementing projects like septic to sewer conversions, muck removal, and stormwater and wastewater treatment upgrades; these projects actively reduce and remove pollution in the Lagoon, supporting seagrass recovery and overall ecosystem health; these projects must get done to protect the health of the IRL, wildlife like the Manatees that call it home, and the many people who live in its watershed; and without SOIRL providing guaranteed financial support to these projects, IRL restoration will be slower if it is able to happen at all. She noted to save the Lagoon, people must support the program that makes these amazing projects possible; and she asked that people continue this program for the sake of the IRL and its residents.

Stan Johnson stated he is a registered professional engineer, registered land surveyor, and this is his area of discipline; but he does not go too much; he was going to be an ocean engineer, but he changed it to civil engineering; he is happy to be here and is going to say something different than what he had planned to speak; it just so happens that he went to a meeting before this and he was wearing this shirt and decided to just keep it on because what is happening right now in the City of Titusville is a horror story of politics; on October 26, 2023, he had a phone call from a friend saying, "Hey listen, the Titusville Police Department, they got a scanner saying that you are to be arrested" he said, "Oh really?"; he called the Police the next morning and said he was ready for them to arrest him up, but they said they had no idea of anything to arrest him; another phone call later he talked to a police officer and he said they would arrest him unless he bothers the contractor over on a site; he said that sounds good and

that he would be there at 4:30 if they need to arrest him they can; he went there at about 4:30, got his samples of what appeared to be a sewage spill and on his way a police car pulled up and the officer said he got him; he asked got him for what, he does not know; he took him to the Police Station, interrogated him, and took him to jail, but never told him what he was arrested for; and anyhow, the story gets more worse. He mentioned according to his pastor, he said the City Manager and the Chief of Police have gone to his church and talked all kinds of stories about him going back to 1985; anyhow, going back a little bit further, 1952, he came to Florida and visited his family numerous times with his family on the west coast; he came here in 70 or 71; this is called an estuary but it is not an estuary, an estuary is where things are born and then nursery; Brevard County does not have that here, it is way far behind that; he is hoping that the politics will be better; and he is wearing this shirt that says to fire the City Mayor and also get rid of the Chief of Police for what is going on. He noted Politics is a problem, same with Flint, Michigan, there are big, big problems and they have had them for years.

Lew Kontnik stated he lives in Melbourne; he wanted to start by thanking the Board for holding this meeting; this is the kind of meeting the County has to have to get the knowledge out; he and his wife retired to Brevard County, excited about the amenities and the beauty of this place, in 2016; they bought a house two weeks before the big March 2016 fish kill, and moved in two weeks later; he has had a keen interest in the Lagoon ever since; he spent eight years on the board of the Indian River Lagoon Coalition and help to found the IRL roundtable; and here are his thoughts. He went on to say the Lagoon has improved; there is more work to do; water visibility improved, seagrass returning, and no major fish kills; SOIRL has been a game changer providing focus, funding, and understanding; SOIRL gives the community a focal point for understanding and seeing the action on the Lagoon; the COC meetings are excellent; the Commission Meetings for the annual review and approvals are perfect; and project completed documents as provided now. He mentioned that gives a method for the media and other groups to follow along; funding, the plan is for 412 projects that were reduced by more than a million pounds, maybe more than that, of pollution; so far 212 complete or in process; that is based on the \$417 million of SOIRL funding; but that is leverage, as has been heard, by \$110 million in additional outside grants and then even more matching of local projects; and understand, careful planning and professional execution has led to better understanding of the problems and solutions. He went on to say trailer park package plants were not it initially; excess fresh water, salinity and seagrass problems, smoke testing repairs, and of course the 53,000 septic in the watershed; he wants to continue living in here, so do the increasing numbers of space employees and tourists that join them; the County needs to keep up the work to keep people here and keep them happy; and people need to pass this SOIRL tax. He added he wants to make one comment about an example that is worth looking at from his point of view, and it was mentioned earlier, and that is Chesapeake Bay; 35 years and really highly improved, but it takes commitment; and he expressed his appreciation to the Board for what it is doing.

Tracy Phillips stated she is representing Florida Wildlife Hospital's Board of Directors; she supports the efforts to improve the overall health of the IRL and the extension of the SOIRL program; please accept the Florida Wildlife Hospital's 2024 annual report, the 2025 stats are still being compiled; the annual report illustrates how the Hospital's mission, what they do every day, rescue, rehabilitate, and release, is connected to the overall health of the Lagoon; and going forward, as the Board has discussed authorized work, remember that Florida Wildlife Hospital can provide a supportive messaging in their outreach and education programs.

Kimberly Newton stated she serves on the COC in the voting seat for education outreach and advocacy; it is a position that she takes very seriously and she is very privileged to serve on after years of being an advocate in the community; she was asked to apply and after some time she was offered the position to fill in for Mel who left once upon a time; she was not sure if it was the right use of her time; she definitely lives wise and wanted to make sure that she was

using her time wisely; after being on the committee for five years, she can tell people it has been the most beneficial opportunity that she has ever done in public service; and she learns constantly from the FIT community, the County, Brandon's videos, and the entire team with the County is spectacular with getting back to them COC with information. She noted she definitely submits questions pretty regularly and they always get back quickly and extensively; it has been a great opportunity and she really cannot imagine not giving the community an opportunity to vote if they want to tax themselves again; she knows the Board is in a position to decide whether or not that is offered to them; she hopes the Board acts wisely, as it always does, to give the community an opportunity to vote and get this tax approved again; and for the record she is not pro-tax, but she is pro-Lagoon and if the community chooses to put this money towards the conservation, it should have that. She continued by saying with that, some people call it addressing the elephant in the room, she thinks the County needs to increase its accountability and transparency with the projects; specifically for her, that comes with herbicide sprays; she proposed at the last meeting in November in accountability, if one is an entity, County, City, homeowner, golf course, that is requesting funds through SOIRL to remove pollutants, specifically nitrogen and phosphorus, that he or she is not permitted to intentionally put those nutrients back into the Lagoon; she became involved in advocacy in general 20 plus years ago; her son did a 4H project on Monsanto and herbicide and it is old science; it is not an anomaly to think that people are poisoning themselves; it is proven, its banned worldwide outside of this country; billions of dollars in lawsuits have already been paid out in California, as one specific local example; and she would encourage that conversations continue to hold everyone accountable. She mentioned the LID aspect, as well, goes hand in hand with that green space; a lot of accomplishments in Titusville have occurred; and she thanked the Board for being there and allowing the community to talk as SOIRL and the County listen to what people are saying and leaving it up to the voters to choose whether or not they want to tax themselves again, which is obviously the right choice.

William Klein stated he is from Titusville and is very pleased to hear all the work that the County has done with SOIRL, funding it and keeping it going; one thing he has not seen happen yet is to let the people and the public know if the water is safe to swim in and recreate in; several counties in Florida have a program where they test the water, sometimes it is on a weekly basis and sometimes more frequently, and publish what the readings are so people know when and where it is safe to swim; this is what was done in Palm Beach County where he used to live and where he used to swim; if there was a problem it would be posted; they use the federal EPA standards for recreational water safety; and this is on the internet, in the papers, and it is posted at the beaches where people swim. He noted the one thing he would like to request since he lives in Titusville and the only place that he can swim in the IRL in Titusville is over at Parrish Park, there was a big public beach over there at one time, and they had lifeguards there back in the 1950s, there is still a small beach there with a parking area, but no one knows where it is safe; some people have gotten infections there from the water; one boy in 2020 or 2021 became paralyzed from swimming in the area; and he has checked to see what the cost is to test for EPA standards and it is like \$50 a test. He mentioned that does not sound like much but it begins to add up when it is maybe a full year; it is still small amounts of money compared to all of the other projects; and he would like to see the Board sponsor somebody or ask some group to come test the water where people swim, kayak, sail boat, and fish as it would be very beneficial to the public. He noted he hopes the Board keeps SOIRL going; and he would like to see it funded for many more years because they are doing a great job.

Keith Winsten stated a lot of the people know the zoo has been involved with SOIRL from inception; they were there initially when it was going on the ballot and they have been deeply involved in terms of boots on the ground and ecosystem restoration work; they have a really big megaphone in Brevard County because the Zoo will see just under 600,000 this year; he came

tonight to listen and hear what everyone had to say about SOIRL and what the citizens of Brevard County think of it after all of these years; and he is really heartened by what he has heard. He noted he is going to repeat back a few obvious things; first of all, it is vastly overwhelming support with only one person tonight who thought this was not worth reinvesting in; that is an amazing thing to hear; he thinks the people understand what makes SOIRL a great program; the latest science, it is being able to be reactive, it uses science to base its decisions, and then a great two-part COC; for all of the people who are worried about fraud on their computers, that double check is so critical, and this program has it with the COC and then the Board of County Commissioners; and he thinks the people really understand what makes SOIRL effective and they also understand the opportunities for the future which is continued flexibility, the ability to react to the latest science. He continued by saying he thinks it was heard from quite a few speakers that more investment in communication and getting the word out with people and engaging them so they understand where their dollars are going; he learned tonight that people understand the program and they see the incredible thing it has done, and the potential for the future; he salutes the Board for giving folks the opportunity to be there and to sit here and listen, like it is going to do again in a week, to make sure people's voices are heard; he reiterated he is heartened and needs to look at all of the Board, all of the people who work at SOIRL, and all the members of the COC, people get their work, not just the impact, but the incredible rigor everybody shows in having it done; and he takes this opportunity to hear what the people here are saying and what the people in Palm Bay have to say because he feels like everyone has a responsibility to react to that and to make sure those who are working in this field are listening to folks and doing the best work they can.

E. BOARD DISCUSSION

Chair Altman thanked the speakers and the audience members for taking the time to come and be heard; the final item on the Agenda is Board discussion; and he will open it up to any discussion.

Commissioner Delaney stated she will start with thanking everybody who showed up tonight, all the presentations, all the citizens who showed up to let the Board know what their thoughts were, and the Board for traveling to District 1, she appreciates that also; she has a lot of thoughts about SOIRL and what she thinks people are calling it SOIRL 2.0, and what it could look like; some things she has heard from across her District is people would like to see more emphasis on infrastructure and stormwater; she thinks the Board heard some of that tonight; that is where her thoughts are with that; there is definitely a lot of great work that has happened thus far; but she thinks things have changed a little bit where before a lot of the septic tanks were causing a lot of the nutrient flows out to the Lagoon, and now that is has finally gotten through a good chunk of those conversions to the sewer plants, she thinks that there is a new problem and the sewage plants need attention. She continued by saying not that the County should stop the septic to sewer conversions, but in her mind she feels as though the plan needs to be shifted a bit as far as the sewage plants, the stormwater, stormwater retention, stopping some of that freshwater from getting to the Lagoon, which helps in two ways, not just with the Lagoon, but with flooding; and those are just her initial thoughts for now.

Commissioner Adkinson stated at the moment, she has always believed that the voters should decide; with that said, she has some questions and this will be the first time that the Board has gone through this kind of process; her understanding is that the Board is going to have this discussion, it is going to do this again in Palm Bay, and staff will put together the wording, should the Board decide that it is going on the ballot; and that for her will be interesting on how the wording is decided based on the public's comments, because that is what the Board is doing it is gathering the public's thoughts; and she reiterated she is interested in hearing how the Board puts all of the comments together that are being heard from this workshop and the

next, together in the wording, should the Board decide to place it on the ballot.

Commissioner Feltner stated first he wants to thank each of the presenters; he called each one of them and asked if they would do this, and they each accepted; he then said he wanted them to do it in two places, not just Titusville but also Palm Bay, and they were all very gracious; he thinks everybody gets an A+ tonight; he expressed his appreciation again for all of them coming to Titusville; he thanked staff because they had to take the concept and actually turn it into a meeting tonight; he advised he worked in Titusville for a long time; and he used to walk by these chambers almost every week day, twice a day on his walk, so he knows this area very well. He went on to say there has been a lot of interesting things this evening; he appreciated all the comments, it has been great; the Board has talked about stormwater before and if it is really clever, in the future, and this is a big County, and if stormwater retention also means that there is flood control and keeping it out of the river, then that is doing two good things at the same time; he does not think that is an impossible task for up here; he heard some things that he will certainly take back to staff to look into further; and he appreciates all the other folks who maybe he did not talk to but came out to speak tonight, including Marine Resource Council (MRC); and there certainly will be a lot more conversations. He continued by saying many of the speakers he has met with in his office and it has always been a good discussion and obviously food for thought; there are a lot of smart people who are looking at the river and how to make it better; someone had said earlier that it has taken 75 years to get to this point; he days it similarly; and in his words, it took three generations to make the river dirty, and it is going to take this one to clean it up, it is not a five or 10-year plan it is definitely a 20-year plan.

Jim Liesenfelt, County Manager, stated that everybody will be back in Palm Bay next week at 5:00; what the Board has directed for staff is to work with municipalities to amend the sales tax use and distribution, and interlocal agreements; they will have to work with that with everybody; they will have to work with the municipalities and the community on a project plan that identifies the most cost effective pollution reduction opportunities; unfunded needs restoring the health to the IRL ecosystem, implement it with funds raised or leveraged by the extension of sales tax, if renewed by the voters, solicit public input, which the Board is doing today, and then direct staff to develop ballot language for the November 2026 general election; and about April or May to bring it back to the Board.

Chair Altman stated this is just the beginning; it is an effort that the Board wants to make sure it has the maximum amount of public input; this is not the final, there will be many meetings and lots of public discourse as this moves forward to the possibility of placing this on the ballot; and he thanked everyone for being there.

Commissioner Delaney stated she has a couple questions for Ms. Barker and one for Mr. Cantino; and one of the things in Ms. Barker's presentation, the pie chart on one of the first few slides, it had the 37.1 percent, and she asked if that was muck removal.

Ms. Barked replied yes, and interstitial treatment.

Commissioner Delaney asked on the slide that had all the projects listed, there were a bunch in the Scottsmoor and Mims area, it looked like, are those considered Titusville projects.

Ms. Barker responded by saying yes some of them are City of Titusville projects, some of them are in the unincorporated area, County projects.

Commissioner Delaney stated the chart that talked about pollution source, the one that had very little on the left side that was point source, she asked if that was considered sewage dump.

Ms. Barker explained it was wastewater discharges.

Commissioner Delaney asked when that analysis was done.

Ms. Barker answered initially it was done based on data that was available in 2016; it has been being updated over the years; and it was just updated again in the last month or so, they try to keep it current.

Commissioner Delaney stated in preparation for this meeting she was looking through the Ordinance, doing some research on that; one of the things that she has heard some gray area around is the ability to use SOIRL dollars for updating sewage plants, even expanding capacity, things like that; and when reading it, it sounds like there is a little bit more freedom to do that versus just AWT expansions.

Ms. Barker explained the Ordinance language is written broadly enough that there is quite a bit of flexibility; when the planning began, the Board direction at that time, the COC concurrence, was that these funds would be used to do what utilities could not do with the rates that were set at that time; not using this half-cent sales tax to replace what rate payers should be covering in their rates, and complying with State rules, but using the tax dollars to go above and beyond requirements; over the nine year life so far a lot of the rules have changed and the wastewater treatment plants, utilities, the stormwater, the bar has risen and the rate that people had does not count for that; one of the things that was talked to the COC about is for them to have a discussion; that will probably happen in February of how they perceive that changing environment and how the program should adjust to those rule changes; but that is certainly the Board's authority to look at how it might want to broaden the use of the tax going forward.

Commissioner Delaney stated she is wondering about the thought process or foresight of all of the septic to sewer conversions because she was not watching government meetings back in 2016; she asked if that was ever translated into, "oh wow, these sewage plants were planned and maintained to a rate before all of those requirements happen, so now there is all these new septic tanks that now go to sewers"; that is part of the reason why the capacity has risen; and she kind of feels like it is fair to assume that the sewage planning was not really expecting this type of a mandate to come down.

Ms. Barker replied she thinks there have been a lot of changes in State rules that were not anticipated; there were septic to sewer project areas where the capacity did not exist, so those projects are not funded in the plan; or some of the ones that were very important, they coordinated with the utility directors and said that such and such improvement is happening, or about to happen, and there will be that capacity, so they said they just will not put that septic to sewer project in years one to three and place it in years seven to 10, after that capacity is available; and they have looked at the timing to accommodate capacity issues.

Commissioner Delaney stated she was reading something about the wetland action plan and the objective is preserve, protect, restore, and enhance the wetland resources of the IRL region; that was really interesting to her because not only does it have this allowance in the Ordinance, also thanks to the voters, have an EELs program; between these two programs, the County might be able to do some cool stuff with stormwater parks, retention, rehabilitating wetlands, and that kind of stuff; and she asked if there is anything in the plan now that goes towards this part of the action plan for the wetlands.

Ms. Barker asked towards using wetlands to store and treat stormwater.

Commissioner Delaney clarified yes, or preserve, protect, restore, and/or enhance the wetlands

that are in the IRL region.

Ms. Barker stated they have partnered with the water management district on wetland priorities and share priorities with the EEL program as well; there are rain garden type programs and bioswale type wetlands that are funded that have stormwater projects in the Lagoon plan; and several that have been constructed so far.

Commissioner Delaney stated that is it for her for now.

Commissioner Feltner inquired in 2016, when considering the referendum, was the 2030 mandates from the State there.

Ms. Barker responded in the negative.

Commissioner Feltner stated he thinks that is a clear distinction, so the public understands; he thinks maybe a question he might have heard from Commissioner Delaney, but he will say it a little differently, he thinks the Board considered a couple of different things recently, and he does not know the answer; and he asked if SOIRL could partner with EELs on a property that could turn into or restore a wetland.

Ms. Barker responded by saying she thinks so.

Commissioner Feltner stated he does not see why those two things would be in conflict with each other; and he asked if that was a better answer to that question.

Chair Altman stated that is a good question that generates a thought; the Board will have that process once it gets through with this initial stage where it actually workshops, writes, develops, and public hearing on the Ordinance; there will be a lot of opportunity to do the very thing that Commissioner Delaney is doing, talking about the guts of the Ordinance, what the Board is going to do, what will be kept the same or what will change, or not do at all; and that is part of this process and that is why they wanted to get started very early on with this process so the public is engaged with the staff.

Commissioner Feltner stated the referendum language has to go to the Supervisor of Elections from this Board, at the beginning of August; and the Board does not want to be that late in getting the language over there and that is why it is doing these in January.

Chair Altman stated that is a great point.

Commissioner Delaney stated she knows there are no Board Reports on the Agenda but this something she would really like to bring to the Board's attention and it is kind of time sensitive; she appreciates Ms. Barker, who reached out to Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), to try to get the meeting in Viera where there is more parking, it is just a better situation for the Blue Origin conversation with the FDEP, and basically they responded with a thank you but no thank you; she asked her staff to correspond with the FDEP to see if there is any consideration because the AG extension has very limited parking; and the response was, "The DEP regulatory has conducted public meetings in open house forums for years and it has proven the most effective and efficient way to properly engage and have discussions with the public, as well as receive and log public comments." She mentioned she has a little bit of an issue with the way that they are holding their meeting because it is an open house forum and not everybody gets to hear the questions and responses in that type of a format; this is basically in her mind, she is thinking this is basically an evening of sidebars and what is needed is public solutions, not sidebars; that was the whole point of asking for this

public meeting; she is coming to the Board and the County Manager to see if there are any steps that can be taken to make this go a different way, a better way for County residents; she has been to countless of these types of meetings and they go nowhere, they write down the public comments, and nothing comes of it; and she feels like it is such a disservice to the community, especially when the Board asked for the public meeting. She continued by saying the Board is talking about SOIRL and dumping hundreds of millions of dollars into restoring the Lagoon, and here they are doing something that is going to greatly affect that and the County is supposed to clean it all up; that is just very frustrating; and she did not know if the Board could empower the County Manager to push back, if the Board wants to push back, or if there is anything that can be done.

Mr. Liesenfelt stated Commissioner Delaney saw the email that was sent out last week or the week before; that was Senator Mayfield and she called, so that was them working together with her to say they could hold the meeting here and gave the reason it was better for parking, it is set up so they could have comments like this, it is better than an evening of sidebars; with 30 plus years of experience, it comes better from elected officials to push on that than it does from staff; ultimately, they report to the Governor not him; they do not have to follow up; they all have their processes, whether it is good or not, that is what they follow; staff has been there and a couple staff members talked to Senator Debbie Mayfield to try to help with whatever she can do to get it moved and if there are other legislators who the Board members can get in the background; but honestly, it has to come from elected officials representing the people to let them know that the Board is unhappy with the set up they have proposed.

Commissioner Feltner stated the Board knows what he has suggested and he has been pretty vocal with legislators who will listen but he is going to echo what the County Manager said; Commissioner Delaney should call her members because that is who DEP answers to; that would probably be the most fruitful thing; he shares the sentiment that he cannot imagine an open house on the issue; that is why he originally suggested the Cocoa campus Simpkins Center because parking, being off a major road, close to the interstate, it is set up with cameras, mics, everything, all one has to do is show up and turn on the lights; but they opted for IFAS Center. He commented he thinks they will have tremendous public turnout and the parking is a legitimate issue that he thinks they will run into; ultimately, that is their call; and he does not think it would hurt if the Board calls members call their members and suggest an alternative to that meeting site.

Commissioner Adkinson stated she is going to echo a lot of what Commissioner Feltner just said because she has been very disappointed in the way they decided to schedule this meeting and run it; she will also say that she was heartened because FDOT did the same thing when there was an issue in her District and it went surprisingly well; she thinks it was because of the overwhelming support of the people who showed up; she thinks DEP will see the same thing; she also knows because of her relationships with the representatives, she has been reaching out to let them know, as this is her job; she was elected to make the phone calls that her residents cannot because they are at work; and her job is to relay how her residents feel, to the people who need to do something about it. She noted that is how the Board has to get this done.

Commissioner Feltner stated he will go back to what he said at the Commission meeting, he thinks that the legislators will probably hear about this during session, January 30 is session; if the public is not satisfied with that meeting they will probably for the next natural course of action would be contact members; he has suggested that too to a few who would listen on that issue; and he restated for the public to keep calling their members.

Chair Altman asked Mr. Liesenfelt to remind him of the date.

Mr. Liesenfelt advised it is January 30 at 4:00 p.m. at the UF Extension Center on Lake Drive; and it is from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Chair Altman asked if DEP has time to change, he does not know what the notice requirements are with the State.

Mr. Liesenfelt commented he would not know enough, but it is still three and one-half weeks away; and staff has pretty good relations with Eastern Florida State College.

Chair Altman stated that is good, there are a lot of seats there.

Mr. Liesenfelt noted they are very good to work with.

Commissioner Feltner asked what the County's notification requirement for a meeting.

Morris Richardson, County Attorney, advised it is reasonable under the circumstances.

Commissioner Feltner asked if the County notices like Thursday before a Tuesday meeting and that sort of thing.

Attorney Richardson advised dates are noticed well in advance, but that is when the Agenda comes out.

Chair Altman stated what he has heard with petitions is that they may need Space Coast Stadium. He thinks the Board needs to reach out to the Governor's Office; ultimately, DEP work for the Governor, he runs the executive branch; all of the Board Members should probably reach out not only to the delegation members but to the government liaison with the Governor's Office; he thinks he would want to be responsive; and he thanked Commissioner Delaney for bringing that up. He mentioned in the old days the Board used to have meetings all over the County and alternate Commission meetings from Melbourne to Titusville; they were a traveling road show; and this brings back a lot of good memories.

Upon consensus of the Board, the meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

ATTEST:

RACHEL M. SADOFF, CLERK

THAD ALTMAN, CHAIR
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
BREVARD COUNTY, FLORIDA