



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 24-01080

Agenda Date: [Publish Date]

Agenda Item Name:

City of Alachua Mill Creek Update

Presenter:

Stephen Hofstetter, Environmental Protection Department Director, 352-264-6811

Description:

Update on current activities in and around Mill Creek Sink in the City of Alachua

Recommended Action:

Hear staff update

Prior Board Motions:

November 12, 2024, Regular Meeting - The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) made a motion to move money from reserves to cover associated costs related to contractual services and documentation collection and filing fees and potential legal fees for the Mill Creek Watershed.

Oct 1, 2024, Special Meeting, the BOCC made a 14-point motion addressing concerns presented at the meeting:

1. Direct staff to follow “next steps” slide as presented, which states the following:
 - Attend future City of Alachua public meetings and hearings related to any of the mentioned development projects to retain affected party status
 - Meet with City staff to discuss concerns and propose strategies to address these concerns with existing applications
 - Meet with development representatives when appropriate
 - Provide updates to the BOCC on status of projects moving forward
2. Bring back recommendations to strengthen our stormwater quality code regulations and procedures immediately.
3. Bring back recommendations to eliminate the current self-certification process for the county’s stormwater regulations and look at improving these regulations prior to preliminary approval.
4. Bring back whatever recommendation that staff has to avoid this current situation from happening again, which might include, but not be limited to, formal interlocal agreements that improve collaboration with both our state and municipalities.
5. Authorize a chair letter to City of Alachua to discuss holding off on any approvals of Tara April and Tara Phoenicia or anything that relates to the Mill Creek Watershed.
6. Ask staff to inquire with developer to see if they are willing to sell Tara Phoenicia to the county.
7. For the sensitive areas within the county during the Evaluation & Appraisal Report (EAR) process, review potential requirements for Comprehensive (comp) plan and code which would require

prevention and avoidance.

8. Allow staff to obtain any consultant support or any other documentation or information with regards to the stormwater plan for Tara West to ensure it will function as claimed.
9. Ask to consider the Community Commercial zone in the Mill Creek Sink watershed.
10. Direct staff to obtain the necessary experts to determine if the stormwater plan will work.
11. Ask staff to review the community Commercial Comp plan amendment and Tomoka Hills comp plan amendment. Also ask staff to engage about excluding sensitive karst areas and specifically the Mill Creek for that Comp Plan Amendment.
12. Send a chair letter to the water management district to express the county concerns for the record.
13. Review the comp plans for the municipalities around the county and identify where there might be some conflict with sensitive environmental areas and try to be proactive in a discussion with those cities about those areas.
14. Ask staff to look into having funds from the County Reserves moved into legal reserves so that they are available should they be needed.

August 13, 2024, Regular Meeting – the BOCC directed staff to draft a Chair letter and provide data and reports to the City of Alachua related to Mill Creek Sink and its sensitive connection to our springs and Floridan Aquifer.

August 15, 2024, Special Meeting – the BOCC directed that the Chair letter include a request for affected party status, requesting that County staff have the opportunity to present testimony and evidence at the City of Alachua’s August 26, 2024 meeting regarding the Tara Forest West final plat agenda item and additionally directed staff and the County Attorney to brief the Board at their August 22, 2024 Special Meeting on what concerns would be presented at the City’s upcoming meeting and what party status rights would be available to the County.

Fiscal Note:

N/A

Strategic Guide:

Environment

Background:

Staff will give an update on the progress made on the October 1, 2024 BOCC Motion related to activities in and around the Mill Creek Sink and Watershed. The motion is above.

The BOCC has recognized the sensitivity of the Mill Creek Sink and Watershed since a large box commercial business was proposed over the Mill Creek Cave system in 2005. There is strong evidence that the Mill Creek Sink and Swallet is connected to the Floridan aquifer and that water entering this system moves quickly in a general northwest direction. A 2005 Dye Trace Study conducted for Alachua County by Karst Environmental Services documented the direct Alachua County, FL connection between Mill Creek Sink and Hornsby Spring and the Santa Fe Hills drinking water system.

Based on recent proposed development activities in the watershed, including Tara Forest West, Tara April, Tara Phoenicia, and Tomoka Hills, the Board has directed staff to intervene as an affected party and work with the City of Alachua and the developers/property owners to address concerns with these proposed developments and the potential impacts they could have on sensitive water resources, drinking water, county-owned resources, rare and imperiled species, and the Mill Creek cave system and other karst resources.