

# Spring Lake BREEZE

*Florida... the way it should be!*



## Revised Charter Does Not Authorize Any New Taxes Or Assessments *By Terry Lewis*

Note: The firm of Lewis, Longman & Walker were retained by the Board of Supervisors to manage the Charter process with the State Legislature. Mr. Lewis spoke at a Public Information meeting on Wednesday, October 20th, 7:00 p.m. at the Spring Lake Community Center.

"The 2010 Florida Legislature approved a new and modernized legislative charter for the Spring Lake Improvement District during the 2010 regular legislative session. The new district charter is subject to referendum approval by the qualified electors of Spring Lake before taking effect. Each citizen and resident of the district that is a registered voter will have the opportunity to vote in the general election, November 2, 2010 on whether the new charter will take effect. I would like to provide you with a brief summary of the significant changes in the charter before the election."

"First, I want to emphasize that THE NEW CHARTER DOES NOT AUTHORIZE ANY NEW TAXES OR ASSESSMENTS FOR THE DISTRICT BOARD TO LEVY. FURTHER, THE DISTRICT'S BUDGET HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR FISCAL YEAR 2011 AND THE GENERAL FUND WILL NOT BE CHANGED BY THE NEW CHARTER. So, citizens that may have heard otherwise or have concerns regarding new or increased taxes or assessments have no cause for such concern."

"Second, the new charter is primarily a reorganization and update of the original 84 page charter, most of which was at least 40 years old and incorporated laws that dated back to the beginning of the 20th century; actually, 1914. Many of these provisions were in conflict with current law and unworkable or confusing at best. The new and much shorter charter (23 pages) incorporates current Chapter 298 and 189 of the Florida Statutes governing the elections, operations, and administration of independent special districts and deletes much of the antiquated law in the old charter. Anyone that wishes to download the new charter may do so at the District web site, [www.springlakefl.com](http://www.springlakefl.com) or [www.myflorida.com](http://www.myflorida.com). You should be able to understand with ease how your district is supposed to operate."

"Third, there are some substantive changes in the new law that citizens should be aware of. Additional powers have been granted to the District Board that are fully described in other articles included in this newsletter and our based on community input and discussion that goes back as far as 2004 and a more recent community questionnaire in 2008."

"To conclude, the new charter is essentially a reorganization and modernization of the old district charter with the addition of powers that will allow the District Board to provide services both now and in the future. Finally, to reiterate, THIS CHARTER DOES NOT AUTHORIZE ANY NEW TAXES OR ASSESSMENTS."

## Airport Announces... Major Funding For Spring Lake Projects

Airport Executive Director Mike Willingham (left) is thanked by District Board Chairman Leon Van on the Airport's announcement to install Control structures and upgrade the pump station to benefit the Districts Water Control Plan; a \$750,000 project.



The Board of Supervisors welcomed the announcement made at its October 13th meeting by Sebring Airport Executive Director Mike Willingham. The Airport Catalyst Project, a major initiative to expand service and attract businesses to the Airport, will be providing improvements to the Spring Lake Drainage system as their contribution towards our future water control plan. This will have a huge financial impact on Spring Lake.

On October 12, 2006 Executive Director Willingham wrote the District informing them on plans for future development of the Airport facilities and surrounding acres. It was emphasized in his letter that he wanted to ensure that mutual growth and development moves in an orderly fashion and to involve Spring Lake each step of the way. The Airport has consistently involved District staff and the District Engineer, and on several occasions Mr. Willingham attended Board meetings to update the Supervisors. Their willingness to work with Spring Lake has been appreciated and this announcement was welcomed.

The Districts updated water control plan includes two projects that greatly affect future drainage issues; new control structures and pump station upgrades and renovations. Both of these projects have an impact on the Airport's future plans; thus the willingness to joint venture with the District. A current projected cost for both of these projects is \$750,000, an amount that would have been the Districts sole responsibility prior to this announcement. Over the next several years the Airport will work with our District Engineer and phase in these improvements to our infrastructure.

The relationship the District has with the Airport remains positive as both entities look to the future and work cooperatively on projects and activities that affect all of us.

# Public Information Meeting Provides Answers To Residents

The Board of Supervisors hosted a public information meeting on the upcoming Referendum. The meeting was held at the Spring Lake Community Center on Wednesday, October 20, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. and over 100 residents attended the presentation as well as the question and answer period that followed.

Mr. Terry Lewis, General Counsel to the Florida Association of Special Districts and the Attorney retained by Spring Lake for the Charter revisions, conducted the meeting. Mr. Lewis detailed the purpose of the Charter revision; the process used, and clarified the various sections of the Charter. The Spring Lake Referendum is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, November 2, 2010 and all registered voters who reside within the boundary of Spring Lake are allowed to vote.

**A number of pertinent questions were once again addressed:**

## **Why can't Village One vote on the referendum?**

The Florida Constitution stipulates who may vote in this referendum, and it has been determined that landowners who are not registered voters within the boundary cannot vote on the referendum. Village I, an area that is not in the legal boundary of the District, is excluded from voting. It is important to note that this decision was NOT made by the Board of Supervisors of Spring Lake, but came about as a result of existing Florida State Statutes. The Highlands County Board of Elections Supervisor, Mr. Joe Campbell, communicated with a number of State officials and affirmed this process.

## **What happens if the Referendum does not pass?**

The District would have to continue using the current Charter which does not include mosquito spraying

## **Will the District have its own police department?**

No. The District will continue to work with the Highlands County Sheriff in an effort to bring public safety closer to our District. This was a major request from our residents when the community questionnaires were distributed in 2008.

## **Will the District build and operate its own school?**

NO. By Florida Statute only the School Board can authorize a school and levy a County tax to support schools

## **Why will Supervisors get paid more money?**

Members of the Board of Supervisors have received \$100 per month since Spring Lake became a District in 1972. Other than one Supervisor attending a State Special Districts Conference each June, no Supervisor has received reimbursements for travel, food, auto expenses, or supplies used for District purposes. Any increase in the \$100 per month would have to be a supermajority vote.

## **Who will control the District if this Referendum passes?**

Landowners elect three of the five Board positions; one vote for each parcel or acre that a person owns. The District is currently at less than 30% density and only until the District is over 50% density will the Board majority swing to popular elected positions. This means that there would be NO changes on who controls the District; it is the landowners.

## **Why do we need Board Committees?**

Not everyone has the time to be a Supervisor. Board committees enable the District to take advantage of people in our community who have expertise and talents in various areas and can help the District outside of required monthly Board meetings. All committees of the Board have to publish legal notices of when they are meeting, why, and who will be involved. It is a system that provides more involvement and input from residents and landowners.

## **Why are there powers that don't seem pertinent for us today?**

There is going to be much more development and expansion in Spring Lake in the years ahead; maybe not in the next 10 years, but certainly beyond. The Central Florida Planning Council, who has been working with Highlands County on the future Comprehensive Plan, has identified the Spring Lake/Airport corridor as one of two future sustainable communities. Why not have documents that will meet the needs of our future Board leaders? Why not give landowners the opportunity to grow and expand the District if that is their desire? Again, Landowners control the majority seats on the Board and control the decision making process.

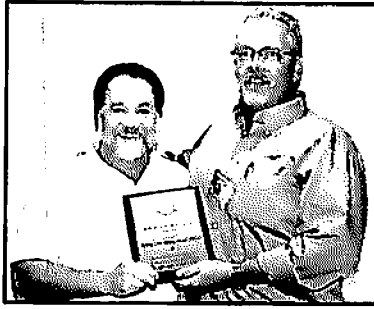




# SLID recipient of Water System of the Year Award

The Spring Lake Improvement District (SLID) has been a member of Florida Rural Water Association (FRWA) for over twenty years. The FRWA has over 1300 utility members in Florida.

Recently, the SLID Water Utilities Department, which serves 1520 connections, submitted a nomination application packet that demonstrated all the improvements that had been accomplished over the past year. They have taken a proactive approach to becoming a strong viable operating utility. The FRWA has provided assistance with a rate evaluation, which provided for a revenue increase, to allow for future reserves for renewal and replacement of the thirty-five year old utility infrastructure.



*(left) Robert Monroe -FRWA Board member Spring Lake Improvement District Water Treatment Facility & (right) Clay Shrum- SLID Water Superintendent/Operations Director*

Some of the major projects that have been completed are as follows: the conversion of the disinfection treatment process. The concern about the use of hazardous chlorine gas within the SLID community was eliminated when the installation of liquid bleach was installed. The water plant's 400,000 gallon tank, hydro-tank, pumps and piping have been sand blasted and painted. The water plant's electrical service has been upgraded, which included surge protection. This year SLID adopted a new cross-connection control program and resolution. The June edition of the (SLID) Breeze newsletter was dedicated to informing the customers about the importance of cross-connection control and backflow prevention.

The committee's panel of Judges for this award consisted of: Van Hoofanagle (FDEP Drinking Water); Ron McCulley (FDEP Water Distribution Operations); Tim Waddle (Talquin Electric Coop); Troy Hamberger (FRWA) and Sterling Carroll (FRWA).

When asked what the criteria is to win this award, Justin Strickland, the FRWA Training Specialist, stated "There's no set criteria for the judges to follow. However, I can say that your system just provided more significant documentation on all the improvements/goals that have been achieved over the past year, which, in the judges' determination, were quite impressive."

Clay Shrum, SLID's Water Superintendent/Operations Director, said that this achievement was due to team effort, when he was notified about winning the award.

## Public Safety

Exploring ways to improve and enhance public safety were discussed as far back as October of 2004 when the results of a Board Planning Workshop challenged the Supervisors to study this area. Past Board minutes reflect the willingness of the District to donate land to the Lorida Volunteer Fire Department for a sub station in Spring Lake and the land discussed is where the current basketball courts are located.

September 2008 results of a community questionnaire that had responses from close to 1/3 of our residents listed Public Safety, Fire, and EMS as the top priorities for Spring Lake. In the months that have followed that survey numerous meetings and discussions have taken place between the County, the Sheriff, the Airport, and Spring Lake to look at a facility closer to our District.

All taxpayers are currently assessed \$25 per year, by the County, to help support the Lorida Volunteer Fire Department. There is NO assessment for public safety levied by the Improvement District, and all our future efforts to bring protection closer to our residents will ONLY be in cooperation with existing agencies and entities that have direct responsibility for these needed services. As Spring Lake continues to grow our District Board needs to be proactive advocates to ensure our community receives the best possible public safety services as possible.

## View Charters On Web Site

[www.springlakefl.com](http://www.springlakefl.com)

If you would like to inspect either the existing Charter or the proposed revised Charter you can go to the District web site at [www.springlakefl.com](http://www.springlakefl.com) Once you are in the site go to the ABOUT section at the top of the page, go to DOCUMENTS, and then scroll to the bottom of that page. You can also view the latest issue of The Breeze that is devoted entirely to the Referendum on this site as well.

The original Charter goes back to 1972. On June 25, 2002 the District received a letter from the State Legislature sent by The Honorable Ken Sorenson, Chairman of the Local Government Committee, informing Spring Lake that section 189.429 of the Florida Statutes required the codification of Special District Charters. In accordance with this section, each Special District with more than one special act had to submit to the Legislature by no later than December 1, 2004 a draft-codified charter, which created a single act for reenactment by the Legislature. The District retained the services of legal counsel and the result produced House Bill 1487, which was almost a twin to the original charter, and was enacted by the Legislature and approved by the Governor on June 8, 2005. During this process, while the document was lengthy with confusing language, the Board of Supervisors at that time chose not to make any changes other than provisions for a community center.

The proposed revised Charter that will be part of the referendum has 24 pages, down from the previous 42-page document. It is intended to be a working and planning document that can be easily understood by Board, staff, and residents.

## SPRING LAKE IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

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## Voting YES Continues Mosquito Control.

As a result of the State Legislature and Governors Office decision, the Referendum is an all or nothing vote. Regardless of some of the other changes that are contained elsewhere in the revised Charter, ALL of the suggested revisions will be null and void, including Mosquito Control. This service can only remain if the vote is YES.

During the FY '11 budget process that was conducted by the Board of Supervisors over the last several months, specific line items for both income and expenses in that category have been eliminated until the vote in November. Residents will not see a mosquito assessment on their October water bills, which is the current method of collection. If the Referendum passes, the charge will again appear on the November water bill. A failed Referendum eliminates mosquito control for Spring Lake.

Spring Lake is the only community in Highlands County that has a formalized mosquito-spraying program; the latest insecticides; vehicles; sprayers; certified personnel to mix the chemicals; and drivers who spray the entire community in the evening hours. The ability to control the spread of such diseases as West Nile virus and targeting larvae before they mature into adult mosquitoes has enabled our community to drastically reduce the problems that face other areas of the County and State. The current assessment for mosquito control ranges from 98 cents to \$1.28 PER MONTH.



*SLID Board members thank State Representative Denise Grimsley (4th from left) and Senator J.D. Alexander aide Larry Ford (3rd from right) with appreciation certificates for their work with the Spring Lake Charter revisions.*

## Board Committed To Well Being of District

*By Leon Van*

I was appointed to the Board of Supervisors in September of 2004 to fill a landowner vacancy due to a resignation. Landowners reelected me in 2006 and in 2009, and I have been Chairman of the Board for the last 4 years. During my 7 years on this Board I have witnessed and participated in a number of very positive developments in the areas of finance, personnel, water, drainage, parks, lot mowing, and administration. The Board was able to end the long and tedious litigation with a landowner, start looking at the future, and develop goals and objectives for today and tomorrow. An updated water control plan, developed by our Engineer, is currently being reviewed by South Florida Water Management District, and required improvement projects will be worked on up to and possibly beyond 2021. The District has developed solid relationships and partnerships with Highlands County, the Airport, numerous regulatory agencies and governmental departments; Spring Lake is no longer an island unto itself.

Future Boards and personnel are going to be faced with a number of questions and concerns that will need action. The infrastructure of our District is upwards of 40 years old; close to 70% of the District is still vacant and awaits future development; and it is only a matter of time before a gas station, supermarket, and other small businesses discover our community. The current economic climate is not going to last forever, and when it rebounds, so will development. The District needs to position itself for the years ahead and allow future elected members of the Board of Supervisors to make positive decisions for the community. While some of us currently on the Board and staff may not be here when the bigger changes arrive, it is our current responsibility and obligation to ensure that future leadership is positioned to make the necessary decisions by having appropriate policies and procedures in place.

This is a landowner-controlled District, with three of the five Board members elected by landowner vote; it will remain that way until the District reaches upwards of 50% density, and currently we are less than 30%. As our community continues to grow and develop, reasonable citizens may wish to take measures to provide for additional services and programs. The Florida State Legislature approved the original District Charter in 1971. Since that time a number of changes have evolved with what is known as Chapter 298 of the Florida Statutes. The current revisions to that Charter is a responsible attempt by this current Board to ensure the continued growth and development of Spring Lake in the future.

Four other very committed Supervisors join me on the Board: Marsi Benson; Bill Lawens; Brian Acker; and Jim Foote. We all share a common love and concern for our Spring Lake community, and we try our best to make the right decisions.