



Spring Lake BREEZE

Florida... the way it should be!



FY '21 Budget Update

The Board of Supervisors reviewed the third draft of the budget at a Public Hearing held at the District Office on August 12th. The Board discussed the annual assessment; water and sewer rates; utility connection fees; lot mowing, mosquito, parks, and streetlight costs. There were only three residents who attended and shared their comments, as well as two members of The Signature Group developers.

To summarize the FY '21 budget that will be formally adopted at the September 9 Board meeting, the General Assessment will be \$291.36, down from \$293.76. This decrease is a result of fiscal responsibility and a very effective and efficient operation. As more homes and multi-family units are built the General Assessment is projected to continually decrease. Monthly mosquito control fees have increased by 4 cents to \$1.33, and monthly streetlight costs have risen by 47 cents to \$4.24 due to the new LED lights being installed.

The water budget was facing a \$74,401 deficit. The Board decided that the base rate should be increased by \$5 to \$27 per month, but the water usage costs per gallon would remain the same. Data shows that the Average water bill using 5,000 gallons of water will be under \$40.

The General Fund and Water Fund has been underwriting the wastewater expenses for the past five years (see insert). The base rate for sewer is being increased from \$74.60 to \$90, which will still include up to 2500 gallons.

Connection fees to our utilities for new construction include single family homes, \$3,180 for water, and \$2,150 for sewer. Apartments, small home villages, and cabins are \$1,000 for both, and \$500 for RV pads. Commercial fees are still being analyzed but will be based on meter sizes.

Copies of the budget can be viewed on our web site at www.SpringLakeFL.com or you may secure a copy at the District Office. After the Board approves the budget at its September 9th meeting, the tax rolls will be sent to the Highlands County Tax Collector for implementation.

A QUOTE FROM HISTORY: "The budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of politicians should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest we become bankrupt. People must again learn to work, instead of living on public assistance." Cicero, 55 BC!!



Bits and Pieces

- Seat #3 on the District Board of Supervisors is up for election at the November Landowners Meeting on November 11. The three-year seat is currently held by Melony Culpepper. Interested candidates may pick up their proxies at the District office.
- At the August Public Hearing and Board Meeting the Supervisors voted to keep the Community Center closed for resident use until January 15, 2021. Also, along this note, the Annual Festival of Lights program held at the Community Center has also been cancelled.
- The District has contracted with DUKE Energy for the replacement of all streetlights to LED. This is a process that will take place over a period of time.
- The Sebring International Golf Course received unanimous approval from the County Planning and Zoning Commission to move forward with their cabin project along Clubhouse Lane and adjacent to the parking lot, as well as at the former Bobcat Course; upwards of 40 units were approved.
- The County's revised recycling program has begun and if you are having any problems you can call 863-655-0005 or 863-402-6505.
- Hurricane Season is upon us and numerous articles are being written and shared with all County residents. A Hurricane Preparation packet is available at the drive thru window at the District Office. In the event of a major hurricane we have made arrangements for Spring Lake to have its own POD that will contain water, food packets, tarps, sand, and all of the supplies our residents had to travel to the Agri Center to secure during IRMA. The POD will be in front of the tennis courts and staffed by District personnel. We are hopeful the POD is not needed!!!
- This is a reminder that the District has a Resolution that establishes a trespass policy relevant to fishing and boating in any District waters. There are select areas that residents may fish, but they are not allowed to be on private property such as the golf course or behind private homes. While we have had minimal problems, please know Resolution 2016-04 is in force and you can secure a copy at the District Office or on our web site.
- The Little Free Libraries are still closed until further notice. Resident extraordinaire Sam Heede is anxious to resume her wonderful program, but she must ensure safety first. Have patience!
- To maintain the highest levels of competence, two of our personnel have received their Water Distribution Certificates after several years of on-site experience and classroom training. Congratulations to Matt Thompson and Kyle Murray
- Irwin Raskin was one of the earliest land investors in Spring Lake, including all of Village IX and numerous other parcels. He passed away on April 21, 2020 at the age of 91. His estate still held 7 acres of land directly to the west of our new wastewater treatment plant, and the District was able to purchase it for the future expansion of sewer services.
- Keep your eyes upon the renovated billboard going west on Rt. 98, just by Thunder Road. While you cannot see it from 98, what is being called an ECO VILLAGE is being built on 20 acres of land. The owners, Richard and Colleen Paul-Hus and their four children are from South Florida and want to build 35 ECO friendly cabins and give guests a real feel for what Old Florida was like. They will announce their opening and post their website and phone number on the billboard soon. They plan classes, tours, field trips and environmental practices.
- The District Lot Mowing program has 1,320 individual lots to mow, and an additional 133 acres of multiple parcels. Not all landowners are required to register for the District program and pay an assessment. Often residents see a lot that is not being mowed and will contact the District, only to be told the owner of the lot has chosen not to participate in the program and will handle it on their own.
- Kathy Rapp is the new County Commissioner for District 2, which includes Spring Lake; she will be replacing Don Elwell in November. Kathy is a long-time friend of Spring Lake and spent a lot of time during her campaign meeting with District Manager Joe DeCerbo to familiarize herself with the plans and needs of our community. She will be a good advocate for Spring Lake.



Why Does the District Own a Sewer Plant?

In 2014 Wauchula State Bank became the owner of the golf resort and inherited a very old package plant sewer system. The plant was installed when the Clubhouse and Country Club Villas were first built, and Oak Leafe and the two Waterway Patio developments were added to the system. The plant came into severe disrepair and was put under Administrative Order by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). If certain corrections were not made, the plant ran the risk of being shut down. The District Board of Supervisors began to discuss this situation to avoid over 600 people being negatively affected by a shutdown.

The Board entered negotiations with the bank to sell the plant to the District, and after several public hearings the Board unanimously agreed to buy the plant. The Board agreed to this purchase despite no funds being available in the sewer reserves....it was broke!!

For the next six months the District provided in-kind services valued at over \$60,000 to make the necessary repairs and upgrades to the plant: personnel; equipment; fuel; supplies; and management. Additionally, the Water Fund provided a loan to the wastewater project in the amount of \$100,000. This cash infusion enabled the District to meet the immediate costs and keep rates and fees stable. The Administrative Order was removed in September 2015, but the District had to agree to construct a new and more modern facility that had to be operational by June of 2020. The District secured a \$3.2 million 20 year no interest construction loan from FDEP and purchased 7 acres of land on Rt. 98. Again, the General Fund and the Water Fund had to provide the funding, or the financial burden on so few customers would have been too much for them to handle. To this point, over \$300,000 has been provided for the users of the wastewater system

It is very important to understand that if users of the sewer system had to pay for everything themselves their bills would come to several hundred dollars a month. The District Board realized assistance was necessary and in the long run it would be a good investment for the District to own both a water and sewer system. It was a way to keep expenses as low as possible for the users, the money could be borrowed from other funds and repaid at a later date when more users were on the system, and it allowed the District to control costs instead of an outside company operating the sewer system.

Prior to the District taking over the system, each Association had to maintain their own septic tank and pump (STEP System). When the District assumed responsibility, thousands of dollars were saved by each Association; in the case of Country Club Villas alone it came to \$35,000. The STEP systems in each area have gone thru extensive renovation and repairs, at no cost to the users other than what is part of their monthly bill. There have been very few issues with sewer backups and other problems since the District took over, and users have a much better system in place with the new plant than ever before.

With the projected growth taking place in Spring Lake over the next few years there will be close to double the sewer accounts, and that means lower monthly bills. Until that time, increases are needed to pay for the new plant loan, operating expenses, and paying back the loans from the General and Water Funds. The District Board has discussed rates and fees all during the budget process, and a public hearing was held at the August meeting. Patio Homes One met with the District Manager to offer comments; Patio Homes Two attended the public hearing and offered comments; and Country Club Villas did not share any comments or attend the hearing.

For those of you who have lived in Spring Lake since 2014 you should be aware of everything that has been shared in this briefing and should be grateful for what the Board has done to keep you in your residence. If you moved here after the District purchased the plant, you should have been given this information from your Association during your due diligence prior to purchasing your unit. Additionally, there are dozens of articles that have been written in *The Breeze*, our District publication, that thoroughly and completely described the process of “getting into the sewer business!”

Residents who want additional information on current and future rates, fees, and revenue projections can view the two major studies that were conducted on behalf of the District by the Florida Rural Water Association on our website at www.SpringLakeFL.com



Spring Lake Wastewater Plant Officially Dedicated

FDEP South District Director Jon Inglehart (pictured with shirt and tie), attended the dedication of the newly constructed \$3.2 million wastewater treatment plant. He was joined by members of the District Board of Supervisors and staff, as well as Assistant County Administrator Laurie Hurner (pictured with mask). The cost of the plant was financed by FDEP’s State Revolving Fund and enabled Spring Lake to expand their service base. As a result of this new plant, and a Legislative Appropriation to run sewer lines down Rt. 98, developers have already reached out to the District for utility services.



The Signature Group is planning to build upward of 900 homes and multi-family units within the next seven years, as well as build an assisted living facility. JGS Developers are building a 350 upscale pad RV Park just east of Arbuckle Creek and sewer lines are now installed to their entrance, along with water. Several other groups have discussed a shopping plaza, gas station, medical center, and grocery.

This development is only occurring due to the construction of this new plant. Without the partnership that has existed between Spring Lake and FDEP this project would not have been possible, and expansion of the District would have been delayed for decades. Over the last 8 years FDEP has been involved in over \$13 million worth of stormwater, water, and sewer projects that impacted Spring Lake. A \$5.2 million water infrastructure project is currently being reviewed by FDEP for funding in 2021.

50th Anniversary Plans Begin

The Spring Lake Improvement District (SLID) was created by a Special Act of the Florida Legislature and a Plan of Reclamation was prepared and adopted by Resolution of the Improvement District Board on **November 11, 1971**, our official creation date.

A group of volunteers will be asked to put together a year long schedule of events to honor and observe this event. The District will publish a special edition of The Breeze that will contain dozens of articles and pictures dating back to our creation. The Spring Lake Property Association has delayed their annual telephone directory until the new year to denote this event, and the Sebring International Golf Resort will play a major role in hosting numerous events. This is the first of several notices asking for volunteers to work on the project. A planning meeting will be held later in the year to outline all facets of the project. If you are interested in serving on this task force, please send an e-mail to jdecerbo@springlakefl.com or mail a note to the District Office at 115 Spring Lake Blvd. State your name, address, contact numbers, and e-mail address if applicable. These Anniversaries happen only once in a lifetime for a community; join us!

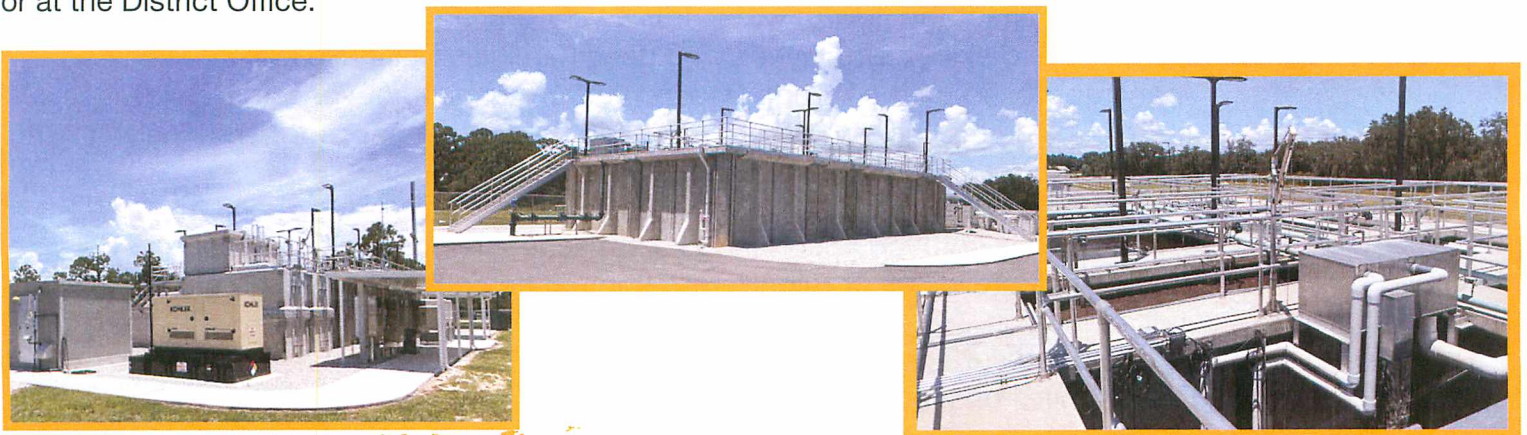
Utility Rate Studies Completed

As part of this year's budget process the District partnered with Florida Rural Water Association (FRWA) to perform a water and wastewater rates and systems development charge study. The study included a review of water and wastewater expenses, revenues, and asset values. It also considered future expenditures and provided recommendations regarding connection fees.

FRWA has been assisting the District for close to 10 years in developing our rates and fees and has provided superb consultation and training to our staff and Board. The District has provided FRWA with much data over the past several months to help them understand where we are with the current system that is in place. Being a recipient of millions of dollars from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the State Legislature, the District was required to have these studies conducted and shared with the State.

Our needs for the future must be adequately funded by our rates and fees, and FRWA are experts in helping communities establish those costs. With the prospect of commercial and multi-family development expanding along Rt. 98, and areas outside the boundaries of our District wanting to be served (Pinedale Estates), it is imperative that adequate and fair rates and fees are reviewed and approved by the Board. The study was available to the Board and residents at a public hearing on held on August 12 at the District Office.

After review and discussion, the Board used the FRWA studies as their guide and developed revised rates and fees (see accompanying article). Copies of the study are available on our web site at www.SpringLakeFL.com or at the District Office.



SPRING LAKE

IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

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Important District Services

The Spring Lake Improvement District maintains and operates a **Mosquito Control** Program within areas of the District, and fees are collected on the water bills. Village One pays \$1.71 per month, and all other Villages \$1.33 per month. We provide the following services:

- Larvicide control of all storm drains within the District by using special chemical pellets.
- Grassy swales and ditches are chemically sprayed for Mosquito larvae.
- A truck specially equipped with "Micro Gen" equipment generates a fog of spray that drifts across the roads and properties that the truck travels through. The fog kills adult mosquito's on contact, or within a short period of time. The spray that is emitted is not harmful to humans or animals; only mosquitoes. There are four District personnel qualified to do spraying.
- The District sprays for Mosquitoes up to 30 minutes prior to dusk, when they are most active.
- Pursuant to state law there can be no set schedule for mosquito spraying due to the chemicals used; it is a complaint driven service. Call the District office at 655-1715 to request mosquito spraying for your area, or complete a work order on our [Request Services Page](#) on our web site, www.SpringLakeFL.com



Aquatic Spraying is an extremely important service of the District. Keeping our canals flowing properly ensures flood protection by eliminating vegetation that can affect the flow of water. It is a very demanding service that requires trained and skilled employees who use chemicals that have been designated and approved by the Florida Department of Agriculture. Very strict guidelines are in place that govern this service, and the District has four personnel who are qualified to conduct the spraying.

Every canal bank, lake, and pond is sprayed according to a set schedule but can be affected by delays because we cannot spray if there are winds or rain. Here is some data on how large a program this is:

- 200 acres of canal surface
- 160 acres of lake and pond surface
- 17 miles of canals; 34 miles of shoreline to be sprayed