

Briefing #15

Lobbyists for Legislative Appropriation

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On my trip this week to Tallahassee I met with our lobbyist, David Ramba, and the ECO Water lobbyist, Greg Black. David and Greg know one another and have worked together in the past. Both men will be working with us as we go thru the Legislative process. There is no cost to the District for Greg.

I have been thru four Appropriation requests and understand the system very well. My meetings with Dave and Greg were to let them understand that Israel is the point person on this appropriation request, as he needs to learn the ropes for future requests. They know that I am staying involved and will be part of the process, but Israel will be their main contact. Israel will be at the FASD quarterly meeting next week and will meet with David, and he has already met Greg once. Greg will also be visiting the ECO unit later this year and we will try to introduce him to all of you at that time. To ensure coordination between David and Greg, we will copy Greg on all pertinent developments.

Representative Kaylee Tuck will be the sponsor of our Bill, and Dave and Greg know her well. In fact, Greg called Kaylee to let her know he was meeting with me, and she gave him a very positive comment about Spring Lake and the ECO project. I am sure that Senator Grall will be the sponsor on the Senate side, and they both know her quite well also. The Legislative Delegation hearing is tentatively set for December 9th, 9:00 a.m. This is the same day as our Board meeting, so we will decide who goes where. These dates change a lot, so there is no point in changing our December meeting date.

Israel and Joey have already begun to complete the applications that are required for both the House and the Senate. The official applications have not been sent out yet, but they rarely change from year to year. We are simply getting a head start on collecting the data and information needed. Packets have to be prepared for the Delegation and presented at the hearing. We usually send an advance copy to them beforehand, so the packets need to be completed by the week before Thanksgiving.

I went into detail with David and Greg about the project that we were seeking funds for. There is a complexity involved when you are looking at the actual unit that we need for wastewater, the facility that is being built to house the unit and the ECO offices, and the septage facility. Both are going to think about the best way to approach this, but the feeling is that an appropriation for the actual unit, probably around a \$2 million ask, is the approach. The fact that we have a population of under 5,000 and less than 400 people on the current system is a disadvantage in seeking a higher amount. The thinking might change once Dave and Greg get a better feel from the legislators who will be heading up the committees our Bill has to go thru.

Greg has a concern that ECO Water has not been able to give him a solid cost for the units, as well as defining characteristics that can ensure that when an RFP is issued, ECO Water is the vendor. These items are critical in putting the appropriation request together, and Greg said he has been asking for the information since April. Israel has a similar concern and is also waiting for answers to questions he has presented and will be needed for the request. Regarding the RFP, I agree with Greg when he says that the District will be open to scrutiny and possible legal action unless the RFP is so specific that other companies cannot meet the requirements. We have been trying to develop this RFP with ECO since March.

Both David and Greg discussed the septage option with me, and it really isn't clear how an income producing project will impact either the appropriation or an SRF loan. I was hoping to meet with Mahnaz, our main SRF contact at FDEP, but she was not at work this week. Once Israel and Joey put together a pro forma and we have good projections on net income, we may want to look at private investment to cover the costs of that part of the project.

To summarize, we are at the beginning stages of the process and are ahead of schedule. Session starts in January, but our lobbyists will be going to a lot of committee meetings and individual meetings with Legislators well before the budget process begins. Israel will be at the FASD Legislative week and visit key people David and Greg identify. The biggest question remaining is how much we feel the Legislators will feel comfortable funding.