

Contract for islands undergoes fine tuning

Lawyers for Vero Beach and Indian River Shores said they do not foresee problems in the \$15 million conservation land purchase, but a name change and final numbers need to be added to the agreement.

By James Kirley
staff writer

While Vero Beach and Indian River Shores leaders are on-board for a deal to buy Lost Tree Village's Indian River islands, they have yet to see a dotted line on which they will sign.

An interlocal agreement

between city, town and Indian River County that has been making the rounds has gone back to county officials for some fine tuning.

Lawyers for the city and town said they do not foresee problems in the \$15 million conservation land purchase, but a name change and final numbers need to be added to the agreement.

The Indian River Shores Town Council tabled the interlocal agreement at its Oct. 24 meeting and Town Attorney Chester Clem has island maintenance costs and additional contributions on today's Town Council agenda.

"My opinion — nobody else's — is that's not going to be a stumbling block," Clem said Tuesday.

Former County Commission

Chairwoman Ruth Stanbridge signed the interlocal agreement for the county Sept. 3, one week before losing her re-election bid to Art Neuberger.

The agreement anticipates a \$125,000 shortfall between state and local money raised and the actual cost of buying the islands. It proposes the shortfall be split evenly between city, county and town.

It also asks a similar three-way split for the cost of restoring and maintaining the islands — a promise required by the Florida Communities Trust before it will deliver almost \$4.9 million in grant money. But nowhere in the agreement is the amount of those costs stated.

Stanbridge has said it

could be upward of \$1 million over 20 years.

Indian River County Environmental Planner Roland DeBlois said much of the cost probably would involve replacing exotic plants currently on the six islands and nearby McCuller's Point with native vegetation. State grants could be available to pay for this work.

Vero Beach City Attorney Charles Vitunac said the interlocal agreement, drawn up by county officials, is not signable in its present form.

"The (chairman's name) is not right and the figure's wrong," Vitunac said Tuesday. "It was signed by Ruth Stanbridge. I gave it back to the county (Monday) and asked it be signed by the new chairman."

That would be Ken Macht, at least until January's regular vote among board members to pick a new chairman.

Vitunac also noted the proposed cost of buying the islands is not exactly \$15 million.

"There will be another plus or minus \$100,000 in closing costs and taxes for documentary stamps," he said.

Vitunac said City Council should wait until county negotiators at The Conservation Fund and Lost Tree Village Corp. officials reach a final purchase contract.

"We don't have a problem with (the agreement)," Vitunac said. "But to sign that without the contract attached would be premature."

Clem said he will talk about the agreement at today's Town Council meeting, at least in terms of cost proportions.

"I'd like to get the concept of it approved, as far as the percentages," Clem said. "The town very much wants to get this done."

The city and Indian River Shores have agreed to each pay \$1 million toward buying the islands. Both are currently defendants in multi-million dollar lawsuits that claim land use laws are illegally preventing Lost Tree from developing home sites on its property.

Indian River County will contribute \$8 million from an environmental lands bond issue.

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