

County officials pursue permit for Oslo Road boat ramp despite commission vote for delay

See documents between Corps and county below

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Indian River County officials are continuing to pursue permits for the controversial Oslo Road boat ramp project ([franchise/indian-river-lagoon/the-lowdown-on-the-oslo-road-boat-ramp-project_77849973](#)), even though the County Commission voted to delay the project three to five years.

In a letter dated Nov. 21 — exactly a month after the commission tabled the project — Michael D. Nixon, the county’s roadway production manager, told the Army Corps of Engineers the county “does not plan to withdraw from the project” and asked that a corps permit “be issued at this time.”

Irene F. Sadowski, the corps permit chief in Cocoa, had written to Nixon on Nov. 7 that she had been told about the commission’s vote to delay the project “by the public” and asked if the county planned to withdraw its permit application.

Deputy County Attorney William DeBaal said the county is pursuing the still-pending corps permit because it would last five years.

“So if the decision is made sometime, let’s say in three to four years, to proceed with the project, we’ll have the permit in our pocket,” DeBaal said.

DOESN'T JIBE

That doesn’t jibe with his vote for the delay, said Commissioner Tim Zorc.

“My understanding was that we were suspending all activity related to the project,” said Zorc, adding he plans to bring the matter up at the commission’s meeting Tuesday. Commissioners Bob Solari, who made the motion for the delay, and Joe Flescher also voted for the delay. Commissioners Wesley Davis and Peter O’Byran voted to continue the project.

“If we need to clarify what we want, we’ll have to clarify,” Zorc said.

Richard Baker, president of the Pelican Island Audubon Society, said seeking permits “just in case” isn’t what he and the hundreds of vocal opponents to the project expected, either.

“This isn’t at all what we, the community, thought the commission voted to do,” Baker said. “It’s sneaking around, trying to get the project done when the people said they didn’t want it and three out of five county commissioners agreed with them.”

A one-year St. Johns River Water Management District permit for the project was approved before the commission voted.

THE PROJECT

The nearly \$1 million project at the boat ramp where Oslo Road meets the Indian River Lagoon would have dredged muck from a channel leading to the ramp, extended the dock on the north side of the ramp and paved the parking lot and the section of Oslo Road between the lagoon and U.S. 1.

Opponents said the project would destroy one of the county’s last healthy sea grass meadows and threaten crucial nurseries for snook, tarpon, redfish and spotted sea trout. They also claimed the project would invite overuse of the boat ramp and too many powerboats speeding across the fragile sea grass beds because an interchange on Interstate 95 at Oslo Road is in the works, making it easier for more people to access the area.

Proponents say removing muck and stopping runoff from the dirt road and parking lot would actually enhance sea grass in the area. They said the ramp would remain strictly for small power boats, canoes and kayaks; and designating parking places on the paved lot would limit overuse.

Sadowski wrote to Nixon that she had received more than 300 letters and emails and a petition signed by 3,026 people objecting to the project.

“(I)t appears that the project will have impacts on submerged aquatic vegetation,” Sadowski wrote, adding that information supplied by the county didn’t mention any possible environmental damage.

In his reply, Nixon wrote that statements by opponents to the project “are patently false. ... but no matter how many times an incorrect statement is made, i.e. the project will dredge up valuable sea grass in the channel, the statement does not become correct due to the number of times it is stated.”

Baker told Sadowski that state Administrative Law Judge D.R. Alexander ruled in favor of the project in August; he didn’t mention that the County Commission had delayed the project in October.

READ OUR INDIAN RIVER LAGOON REPORTER TYLER TREADWAY'S STORY ABOUT THIS ISSUE. (http://www.tcpalm.com/franchise/indian-river-lagoon/oslo-boat-ramp-project-will-it-harm-indian-river-lagoon_99406115)

HOVER CURSOR BELOW OR CLICK HERE TO SEE AN INTERACTIVE AERIAL OF THE SITE. (<http://www.thinglink.com/scene/574287670390292481>)

DOCUMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Page 2-3, Army Corps of Engineers' Nov. 7 letter to Nixon;

Page 81, Nixon's Nov. 21 response to the Army Corps.