

PROGRESS MADE ON LAND ZONING CHANGES

March 29, 2016



Merrillee Malwitz-Jipson Did Her Homework and Came Prepared

The Columbia County commissioners' attitude has changed from: "If you don't like the Chicken Farm, just move away." to "What could we have done differently to have prevented this? "



Aquatic Botanist Dr. Colette Jacono Speaks to the Board

The latter sentence was by Chairman Bucky Nash today at the workshop devoted to consideration of changing the zoning laws and land use practices, at the instigation of Our Santa Fe River.

As everyone in the area knows, the JTC Chicken Farm materialized out of nowhere, built upon a 77-acre tract of land that was fallow, with no history of intensive animal husbandry, and sneaked through, basically legally, following the loopholes of no permits needed since there was to be no wet storage of animal wastes nor wastewater application to the land surfaces.

This in spite of being built in a high recharge area of our aquifer and in a land use area of no industry and no confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs)



County
Attorney Joel
Foreman Gives
Presentation

Amid many protests and complaints, the county lawyers, the water management authorities and the Florida DEP scrutinized the proceedings only to come up with nothing substantial enough to halt construction.

During this time, the attitude of those in authority basically went from defensive hostility and denial, to tacit agreement that they were remiss, are now somewhat contrite and want to work to prevent a recurrence on an aquifer high recharge area. Most of them, perhaps not all.

Accepting this fiasco as history, OSFR immediately took the leadership action to determine that a similar situation would not be repeated. After several requests, Columbia County agreed to examine the LDRs in order to effect a change. At the meeting today, March 29, 2016, Chairman Nash first entertained County Attorney Joel Foreman to give synopsis and rundown of the current regulations and their failures, and then the citizen input, written by Policy Director Merrillee Malwitz-Jipson.

After the attorney's presentation, Merrillee went over in great detail the current book, the loopholes, weak language and regulations. After her lengthy, thorough and careful presentation, Chairman Nash allowed any comments from those present. Helpful suggestions were made by Steve Gladin, Colette Jacono, Charlie Trowbridge, Stew Lilker and several others, including OSFR members Karen Mullins and Norman Beigner.

The consensus of the board was that indeed the language of the regulations should be changed, but only for the area of aquifer high recharge, as often pointed out by Commissioner Williams,

very protective of the agriculture producer. His statement that the food produced by the farmer is the most important thing in life, was corrected by an audience member to "water is the most important thing."

The board agreed that Joel Foreman, County Attorney and Brandon Stubbs, County Planner, should meet to work on regulatory language, principally to redefine "intensive agriculture," and to address CAFOs, their definitions and thresholds, with the goal of not permitting either on areas of high recharge of the aquifer. When sufficient progress is made on this task, Commissioner Nash will reconvene the board to address the issue.

Under the wise direction of Chairman Nash, OSFR is hopeful that the board is now committed to protecting our valuable resources, and that, by working together, we can have both a reasonable type of agriculture and at the same time preserve our springs, rivers and aquifer.