

LEARNING FROM OUR PAST

By Shauna Torian

FROM THE SCOOP ARCHIVES | 2007

Nearly twenty years ago, North River Shores faced another controversy involving a major project proposed for neighborhood park property. This official March/April 2007 SCOOP confirms that the Board had already granted two easements to Martin County for pump stations before substantial community opposition arose.

THE BACKSTORY

At Nosaw Park, nearby homeowners learned of plans for a proposed 6,600-square-foot wastewater facility at a waterfront neighborhood park—directly affecting nearby homes, views and enjoyment of the park—without first receiving meaningful notice, input or a vote. What followed was not quick, easy or painless.

Those homeowners had to organize, hire attorneys and file a lawsuit to protect the park and their property rights. The fight continued for more than a year. They did not simply voice an objection and watch the problem disappear. They carried the emotional and financial burden of a prolonged legal battle against their own property owners' association.

Ultimately, Martin County repealed its acceptance of the easements, the Association rescinded them, and the proposed facility was not built at Nosaw Park. The March/April SCOOP then announced that Martin County would present the sewer-project options to the community and that residents would have options “to vote upon” before the final decision was made.

That did not happen because the homeowners were meaningfully included from the beginning. It happened only after they discovered what was underway, objected and endured a lengthy legal fight.

Their effort deserves to be remembered accurately. Those neighbors stood up when doing so was difficult, expensive and deeply personal. Nosaw Park was protected because they refused to give up.

THE CONTRAST

In the January/February 2007 SCOOP, the Association devoted an entire section to a proposal for one directional light at the boat ramp. It explained the purpose,

acknowledged that residents might have both positive and negative reactions, invited their support and concerns, and promised: “I will not proceed with any new light until at least April so everyone has a chance to speak his or her mind.” Full transparency and months of public input—for one light.

Yet a proposed 6,600-square-foot wastewater facility at a waterfront park had advanced to the point of easements being granted before the affected homeowners received that same opportunity to be heard.

It honestly blows my mind that a handful of Board members—temporarily elected to serve the Association and its membership—could believe they should make permanent, neighborhood-changing decisions for everyone without first asking the people they were elected to serve. Board members do not rule this neighborhood. They serve the Association and its members. Even assuming, purely for argument’s sake, that they have the “ultimate authority” to act without a membership vote—why would they want to?

These parks existed long before any current Board, and they will remain long after its members’ terms have ended. Major, lasting changes should not reflect the preferences of whichever few people happen to occupy Board seats at that moment.

Update by Janet Edwards

It has been discovered that lights have been installed on the dock twice in the past year or two, with none of the considerations shown in 2007. Once by a concerned neighbor that just wanted to help keep people safe while using the dock, but he said his lights were quickly destroyed. Another group of lights has appeared, which has received complaints from neighbors. If we could all learn from our past.