

CDD NEWSLETTER



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CDD Update

By: Beth Bond, Contracts Chair for Tara CDD

In October of 2013, the Tara CDD Board of Supervisors initiated a review of its longstanding business practices with a goal of finding better ways of doing business on behalf of our community. This review focused on contracts with our major service providers (landscape maintenance of common property, maintenance of lakes and ponds regulated by the State, and management of our CDD). The Board’s tasks were to articulate precisely what vendor services we believed were most important to our community and to develop a comprehensive bid process to identify vendors who would provide the highest quality service at the best price.

Landscaping:

After a six-month comprehensive review and competitive bid process, Tara CDD selected West Bay Landscape, Inc. of Bradenton from a pool of nine professional companies invited to submit a response to the Preserve’s Request for Proposal (RFP) for landscape services. The RFP was developed by our CDD Board with technical assistance from its management company. The RFP included an enhanced scope of work that incorporated an environmentally friendly fertilization program, specifics of tree and shrub trimming, additional mowing of common property each year, and the freedom for the CDD to bid and award ancillary landscape projects to other vendors if such benefitted the CDD. West Bay agreed to perform all these services at a contract price of \$140,000. The previous contract with Florida Lawnpros, Inc. provided fewer services at a contract price of \$172,000.

Representatives of West Bay have conducted their assessment of the property and met with the Board to discuss priorities. Supervisors noted that the turf along Tara Boulevard south of Tara Preserve Lane is not pristine and expressed their desire for improvement in that area in the coming year.

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CDD Chairman John Schmidt stated in his interview with the East County Observer, “The Board believed we were paying too much for landscaping. Our finances are in fine shape, but if you can cut costs by \$30,000, you do it.”

Preserve Lakes and Ponds: Under Florida Statutes, Tara CDD is responsible for the water quality of the Surface Water Management System, designed and built by the developer prior to the construction of our homes. These ponds are connected to one another underground and eventually empty into the reservoir near Jiggs Landing. Since the construction of the new Walmart, our water management system has had to accommodate run-off from the store’s tarmacked areas through two large water pipes that run under I-75 as well.

The CDD's former contract with Aquagenix, Inc. had been drafted by the developer in 2001, amended to add four more lakes in 2003 (addressing only 43 of our 53 ponds), and had never been competitively bid. The CDD Board believed we needed a competitively bid contract that addressed ALL parts of our system and included a water quality testing program that would build a scientific data base to guide future business decisions. Our premise is that our entire community needs to be viewed as a watershed and both land and water chemicals need to be monitored carefully.

The Tara CDD awarded a one-year renewable water management contract to Aquatic Systems, Inc. at a cost of \$24,900.

The contract includes treatment of all 53 ponds, detailed monthly reports on water quality and native or invasive plant species, a chemical testing program, as well as guaranteed weekly on-site meetings with the Tara CDD's field manager. Aquatic Systems, Inc. has its own water-testing lab and employs several highly trained scientists and technicians, a key factor in the Supervisors' decision to select this company. The contract with the former vendor, Aquagenix, was less expensive (\$21,800), but serviced only 43 ponds, performed no chemical testing and was not required to provide technical reports. Supervisors concluded that the additional expense is warranted given the value our water and preserve areas add to the Tara Preserve community. However, they are also planning discussions with the new vendor to explore the feasibility of offsetting the additional costs by creating an on-site nursery to propagate desirable native species for our own pond replenishments.

Management:

The CDD Board fully reviewed and renegotiated the 2005 contract the developer had set up with the management company, Rizzetta & Company, Inc. The new contract was negotiated with no increase in the \$48,000 annual fee, but with far clearer expectations and incorporation of newer technology in CDD management practices. For example, Rizzetta drafted RFPs for the Tara CDD Board's consideration at no additional charge. These RFPs clearly reflected knowledge of the landscape and water management industries that were welcomed by our lay board members and made their decision-making process better. Rizzetta also incorporated a system for vendor accountability in all new contracts that will help supervisors meet their fiduciary responsibilities and maintain positive vendor relationships.

Summary:

The contract review process this year has been intensive and time consuming, but it has resulted in guaranteed high quality work at the best available prices. CDD Supervisors are confident this outcome will have both immediate and long term positive effects for the Tara Preserve community.

The Ponds:

By John Schmidt

The Ponds in the Preserve at Tara represent a major concern and expense to the CDD. Their purpose is misunderstood by many, their upkeep is expensive, and their ownership (until recently) was not fully comprehended by the CDD or the Preserve Golf Club.

Purpose: The ponds are manmade and are designed as retention ponds for runoff of rains. All ponds in the Preserve take runoff from the streets and grassy areas and hold the water and either evaporate or slowly drain to other ponds or streams, and eventually drain into the Evers Reservoir by Jiggs Landing. The ponds also act as a chemical factory that through the plants in the ponds take nutrients from the runoff of lawns (fertilizers) and change their chemical structures making the water safer.

Upkeep: All the ponds in the Preserve are either wholly owned by the Community Development District or the Preserve Golf Club. No resident has any property rights to any pond. As reported by Supervisor Bond, the CDD has the responsibility of maintaining the water quality of all the ponds in the Preserve. The CDD also has responsibility for the weirs and other concrete structures, as well as pond banks for the ponds owned by the CDD. So the storm sewers on the streets are the responsibility of the CDD.

Ownership: As I reported in the previous paragraph, no home owner in the Preserve has direct access to any pond in the Preserve. This means that no lots have direct access to ponds. A map of all ponds and ownership is located in the CDD Field Manager's Office and is available for viewing.

Fishing in the Preserve:

Fishing is legal in all ponds in the Preserve. One must have appropriate licensing. That said, a person wishing to fish, must obtain permission to gain access to the ponds from owners living around the pond.

As an example, certain Condo organizations may restrict fishing in ponds surrounded by their property. Ponds that are surrounded by or owned by the Preserve Golf Course, are private property and one must obtain permission from the Management of the Golf Course to fish in their ponds. In cases where the only access to a pond is by walking over a homeowner's property, one must obtain permission to cross their property. And lastly, while the land surrounding CDD owned ponds is owned by the CDD or the CDD has easement rights, one must be aware that residents might take offense to people walking behind their homes. Especially when fishing during early hours. Oh, one might consider the ramifications of eating fish from the ponds. It is advisable to use the catch and release suggestion.

Alligators:

When it comes to alligators, people have a lot of mixed feelings. People new to Florida are excited in seeing them. Some people are horrified by them, and some want to leave them alone. Whatever your feelings alligators are with us here in the Preserve...a lot of alligators.

State Statute requires that no one feed alligators. Some people do, and besides being illegal, they reduce the animal's fear of humans and this can be very dangerous.

If you wish an alligator to be removed from a pond, (keep in mind, they do not give the animals a new home, they are destroyed) you must call the CDD Field Manager. Here is why:

"Complainants must be able to grant legal access to the property on which the alligator is located. Statewide Nuisance Alligator Program (SNAP) does not permit the removal of nuisance alligators from private or publicly managed property without first obtaining permission from the property owner or management authority."

Only the Field Manager, representing the CDD, having the ability to provide legal access to all the ponds in the Preserve, can give permission to the game warden.

IMPROVEMENTS AROUND THE PRESERVE

You might have noticed that Manatee County placed white lines on Tara Blvd from Tara Preserve Lane Linger Lodge Road. The request to have the lines painted came from your CDD. The County also repainted the yellow lines too. We have had a number of accidents on Tara Blvd. where it appeared drivers just didn't see where the road ended. It is believed that the white lines will help.

In May and June, a number of things will be happening around the Preserve that you may observe and question what's going on.

There will be a lot of pond maintenance occurring over the next two months in our ponds. You may see blue water, don't be alarmed. This dye is used in determining algae levels. You may see boats and what you might think are people fishing. They are not fishing, and in fact are there testing water quality and pond temperature in the deeper portions of the ponds. If you should have any questions, please call the Field Manager.

In June, the interior of the Community Center will be painted, and the center will be closed for a week to accommodate this painting.

Landscaping: The issue of the Preserve and its proximity to Residents home will continue to be an issue. For those of us who have Preserve areas directly behind our homes, frustrating as it may be, if the property directly behind your home is owned by the Preserve Golf Course, Manatee County or the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) the CDD has no authority to work in these areas. Residents must work with the Management of the Golf Club, Manatee County or SWFWMD. The Field Manager can assist in determining who owns these properties.

A Reminder: The golf paths in the Preserve Golf Course are not walking, jogging or bicycle paths. They are private property and without permission, you are trespassing.



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