

Ad Number:

GCI0500752-01

Advertiser:

Martin County - Growth Management

Insertion Number:

N/A

Agency:

N/A

Size:

2 Col x 20 in

Section-Page-Zone(s):

A-16-All

Color Type:

N/A

Description:

BCC Transmittal ad

Roundtable

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mask-wearing, citing schools in Sweden that remained open during the pandemic without masks in a recently published editorial in the Wall Street Journal, co-authored by Bhattacharya.

Bhattacharya has also been vocal about lockdowns and mandates being ineffective in combating the virus' spread and recently came under fire for his participation in an antibody study that estimated the number of COVID-19 infections is significantly higher than numbers show, Buzzfeed News reported.

Levitt, who received the 2013 Nobel Prize in chemistry, has been quoted in news outlets across the country for predicting back in March that the pandemic would not result in millions of deaths and months of shutdowns, the L.A. Times reported.

A central question DeSantis posed to each was whether another statewide lockdown should no longer be an option. The three experts agreed that another lockdown would cause more damage than good.

Bhattacharya answered DeSantis by saying another lockdown in Florida "would be disastrous."

"At this point, we know that the benefits of a lockdown are small. ... All they do is push cases off into the future; it doesn't actually prevent the disease from happening. And the costs are absolutely catastrophic, enormous," Bhattacharya said.

Kulldorff said elected officials should be doing as much as possible to protect the elderly while still allowing children and young adults to go about life normally, albeit with more frequent hand-washing.

"These sort of general lockdowns for closing schools, for closing restaurants, for closing beaches or whatever, that actually has a detrimental effect on public health ..." he said. "We are protecting very low-risk college students and professionals who can work from home while we are putting all the working-class people at risk because they have to work."

The assessments drew criticism from Democrats and other public health experts.

Senate Democratic Leader Audrey Gibson and Democratic state Sen. Lori Berman responded to DeSantis' roundtable discussion with strongly-worded statements, calling it a public relations roundtable rather than a public health discussion.

"No one is advocating for a full-scale lockdown in Florida. But we have been and continue to ask for common sense prevention measures such as face masks which are essential to preventing further spread. Without that, the virus remains a threat, the elderly will remain in isolation, and those who do contract the disease will live with the ongoing uncertainty of possible long-term health damages scientists are only now beginning to document," Gibson said in a prepared statement.

Berman, mentioning recent virus outbreaks on college campuses and in schools across the state, said these hotspots are results of DeSantis pushing to quickly reopen these facilities.

"The governor's roundtable today was little more

than a collection of like-minded individuals echoing the governor's push for herd immunity policies. There would be no need for lockdowns had he enforced mandatory masks and widespread, more consistent testing," Berman said.

Jay Wolfson, a professor of public health, medicine and pharmacy at the University of South Florida, said experts who advocate against mandates and closures and for the reopening of the state are not presenting public health arguments but rather "pragmatic, economic and political statements."

Wolfson said "we have every reason to believe that deaths will stabilize as we have learned to manage the disease itself much better," but that it is crucial to remember 40% of all COVID-19 cases are asymptomatic and may not know they are shedding the virus.

DeSantis said during the discussion that there have been "significant interventions" with college students on campuses that have enforced "mandatory testing, aggressive quarantining" and have sent students home who test positive for the virus.

Kulldorff said universities should operate "almost normally" and that students should be on campus attending in-person classes and that there does not need to be testing at colleges and universities.

DeSantis later said during the discussion that despite allowing local government officials to enforce more stringent rules than the state if they saw fit, businesses that have been green-lighted to reopen from the state should not remain closed.

"We've worked great with locals. We understand different problems. We've given them a lot of latitude. At the same time, I think everyone in Florida has a right to work. But to say no at this point from a local perspective, I don't think that that is viable," DeSantis said.

Bhattacharya said that the coronavirus, in terms of mortality rate, is less serious than the flu for younger people in the population and emphasized that recognizing the "sharp age gradient" where older populations are more at risk is important.

The discussion comes at a time when Florida's statewide positivity rate for new cases is at 4.45%, according to data from the state Department of Health. The number of COVID-19 patients who are hospitalized has decreased over 70% since July, according to data reported to the Agency for Health Care Administration.

Florida reported 2,541 new COVID-19 cases Thursday, bringing the state's confirmed total to 693,040.

DeSantis highlighted the decline in COVID-19 hospitalizations, noting that 24% of hospital beds are empty while 23% of intensive care unit beds are empty statewide.

"I mention that because the initial rationale, as we discussed, was to prevent this hospital overrun," DeSantis said.

He then asked the three professors whether they think "COVID-19 represents a significant threat in terms of overwhelming hospitals in the United States." All answered with an emphatic no.

"We're in the minority worldwide. People are still locking down and engaging in behavior which is likely to be detrimental in the long run," Levitt said.

Discharges

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urity of the Herbert Hoover Dike surrounding the lake, Kelly said.

Preventing a dike breach that could cause massive flooding around the lake is the Corps' priority, he added.

Kelly noted the causes for discharges remain: Lake O rising quickly and the threat of storms through the remainder of the hurricane season.

Lake O's elevation was 15 feet, 3 inches Thursday morning. The lake has risen almost 3 inches in the last week and slightly over a foot in the last 30 days.

The lake is 1½ feet higher than it was a year ago.

King tide flooding

The Corps also factored in this week's flooding of low-lying areas of Martin County, particularly along the South Fork of the St. Lucie River, just downstream of the St. Lucie Lock and Dam where Lake O discharges would enter the river.

"We absolutely are watching all that," Kelly said. "We work very hard to not cause harm to anyone at anytime."

The flooding was caused by a combination of high seasonal tides, called "king tides," and a heavy swell along Florida's East Coast caused by Hurricane Teddy far out in the Atlantic Ocean.

Adding Lake O water to the South Fork could have made the flooding worse in areas such as Old Palm City and the St. Lucie Settlement.

"We know there is the potential to exacerbate what was going on there," Kelly said.

'D' grade

Even without Lake O discharges, millions of gallons of water a day has been pouring through the St. Lucie Lock and Dam, all from the C-44 Canal watershed in western Martin County, dominated by agriculture.

The water has dropped the saltiness of the estuary to a point that threatens oysters and seagrass, both of which are key to the estuarine ecosystem.

Water quality in the estuary was graded C-plus Thursday by the Florida Oceanographic Society in Stuart. Water in the South Fork was graded D, mostly because salinity was at 3 parts per thousand when it should range from 15 to 25 parts per thousand.

Tyler Treadway is an environment reporter who specializes in issues facing the Indian River Lagoon. Support his work on TCPalm.com. Contact him at 772-221-4219 and tyler.treadway@tcpalm.com.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

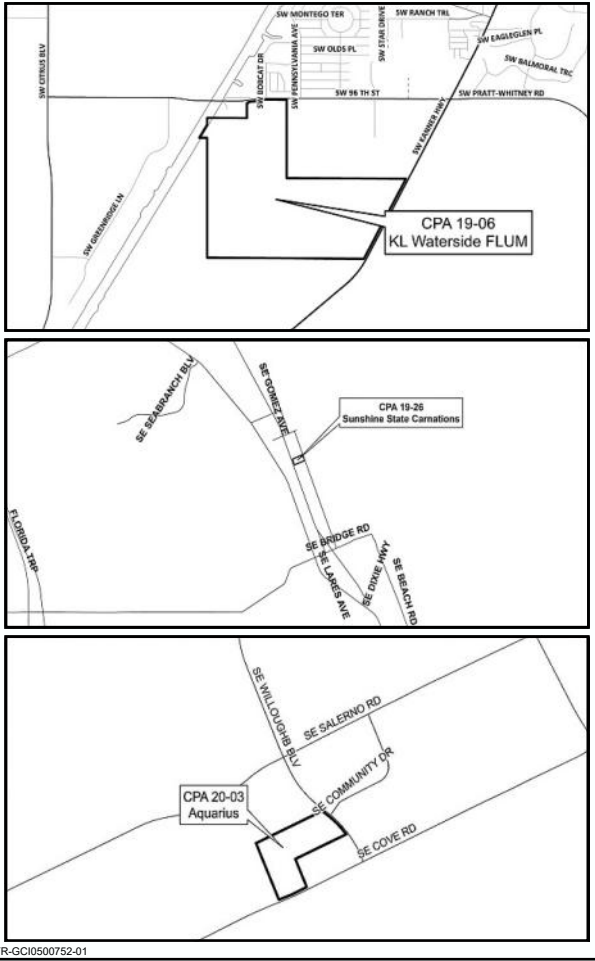
Notice is hereby given that the Board of County Commissioners of Martin County will conduct public hearings on October 13, 2020 beginning at 9:00 A.M., or as soon thereafter as the items may be heard, to review the following items:

1. Comprehensive Plan Amendment 19-5, KL Waterside, LLC (fka Neill Parcels), a text amendment to Chapter 4, Future Land Use Element and Figure 4-2, Urban Service Districts. Also proposed are amendments to Chapter 11, Potable Water Services Element/10 Year Water Supply Facilities Work Plan, specifically, Figure 11-1, Areas Currently Served by Regional Utilities and Figure 11-2, Potential Service Areas, of the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan. The text amendments would also create a 250-acre Freestanding Urban Service District within a 499.4-acre property located south of SW 96th Street, between SW Kanner Highway (SR76) and the St. Lucie Canal.
2. Comprehensive Plan Amendment 19-6, KL Waterside, LLC (fka Neill Parcels): A Future Land Use Map change from Industrial and Marine Waterfront Commercial to Agricultural on the western portion of the property. Also proposed is a Future Land Use Map change from Agricultural to Industrial on the eastern portion of the property. All of the changes are occurring within a 499.4-acre property located south of SW 96th Street, between SW Kanner Highway (SR76) and the St. Lucie Canal.
3. Comprehensive Plan Amendment 19-26, Sunshine State Carnations: A Future Land Use Map change from Residential Estate Density (allowing 2 units per acre) to Low Density Residential (allowing 5 units per acre) on 2 parcels totaling 19.44 acres, located at 9450 SE Gomez Avenue in Hobe Sound.
4. Comprehensive Plan Amendment 20-03, Aquarius Land Holdings: A request for a site-specific text amendment to the Comprehensive Growth Management Plan regarding the uses permitted on the property.

All interested persons are invited to attend and be heard. The meeting will be held in the John F. and Rita M. Armstrong Wing of the Blake Library, 2351 SE Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida 34996. Written comments may be mailed to: Paul Schilling, Director, Martin County Growth Management Department, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida 34996. Copies of the items will be available from the Growth Management Department. For more information, contact the Growth Management Department at (772) 288-5495.

Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding are entitled, at no cost, to the provision of certain assistance. This does not include transportation to and from the meeting. Please contact the Office of the ADA Coordinator at (772) 320-3131, or the Office of the County Administrator at (772) 288-5400, or in writing to 2401 SE Monterey Road, Stuart, FL, 34996, no later than three days before the hearing date. Persons using a TTY device, please call 711 Florida Relay Services.

If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at the meetings or hearings of any board, committee, agency, council, or advisory group, that person will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to insure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record should include the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.



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