



POA eBulletin



POA4US.org

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Updating Our Communications FOR YOU!

The POA is excited to announce that beginning this month we will publish a mid-month electronic Bulletin!

News happens quickly and we want to be sure our members are getting up to date and ACCURATE information. Other print media can be misleading...be assured, our news will be accurate and objective!

We will publish our eBulletin on the 15th of each month, and will also post to our website. We are here to serve you!

Upcoming POA General Membership Meetings

September 15, 2023 • 7 pm

Everglades Recreation Center

Speaker: Joe Rojas, Union President
Coleman Federal Prison

September 19, 2023 • 7 pm

Laurel Manor Recreation Center

Speaker: Joey Hooten
Sumter County Property Tax Assessor

Donuts & Coffee will be available at the POA General Membership Meetings

VHA, Villages Daily Sun and District Manager Dispute the POA's Reporting on Fire Department Funding

In what can only be described as an effort to confuse the public and begin the political season a year early, the Villages "most trusted news source", a.k.a. *The Daily Sun* has attacked the POA's reporting of the Sumter County Commission's vote not to raise the Fire Assessment Fee. The POA fully expects these attacks against the POA and Sumter County Commissioners Craig Estep and Jeffry Bogue, the two Commissioners the Developer does not control, to continue. Three County Commissioner seats are up for election in 2024, including Mr. Estep's.

In a series of articles recently published in *The Sun* after the vote last month, the VHA's past president Fred Briggs took aim at the position the POA took regarding establishing an Independent Fire District last year. In addition, District Manager Kenny Blocker more subtly made remarks and was prominently featured with Mr. Briggs and VPSD Fire Chief Brian Twiss as they "work rapidly" to solve the funding problem.

This article will set the record straight and remind residents of why the POA is the ONLY independent advocate for property owners in The Villages. The POA's goals are to provide 1) a forum for discussion of issues; 2) research and analysis; 3) programs of interest; and 4) a conduit for objective and accurate information.

The items that follow in quotation marks are taken from the Daily Sun articles with the POA response.

"Some groups are fixated on fearmongering and sowing division,"...

We can only assume Mr. Briggs is referring to the POA. However, while the VHA describes itself as bringing solutions, the POA continues to ask, "What is the FAIR solution?" where residents and businesses each pay their FAIR share. Mr. Briggs and the VHA appear to be more interested in "not damaging the businesses upon which we rely" than the Homeowners for whom it professes to advocate.

Where was the VHA at the County's budget workshop when the report on the Municipal Services Benefit Unit (MSBU) was received and **every commissioner** agreed it was the best solution, scheduling the public hearing for August 22? The POA was at the budget hearings, studied the report, provided a link for readers to study it themselves, and reported on it in the August

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Mission Statement

The Property Owners’ Association, Inc. (POA) is the original property owners’ group in The Villages. Established in 1975, the POA operates with complete independence from the Developer of The Villages. Membership is open to all property owners and residents of The Villages. The POA is committed to acting as a watchdog to ensure that the Developer and local government are responsive to the needs, interests, and rights of residents.

Vision The Property Owners’ Association, Inc. (POA) is a champion for the rights of residents of The Villages. Guided by member input, investigation and determination, the POA brings attention to and acts on issues that may impact property values and quality of life.

Goals The POA provides 1) a forum for discussion of issues; 2) research and analysis; 3) programs of interest; and, 4) is a conduit for objective and accurate information. Specific attention is given to resolving housing, community and local government issues.

Values

Independence	Honesty	Fairness
Objectivity	Respect	

The POA Declaration of Independence

The POA is free of any outside influence. This is the only way we can assure our members of absolute autonomy to act on their behalf. From the very beginning in 1975, we recognized this need for independence, and we’ve cherished and nurtured it ever since.

The *POA Bulletin* is published monthly by the Property Owners’ Association of The Villages, Inc. Articles represent the opinion of the POA or the writer, and Letters to the POA postings represent the opinions of the writers. Care is taken to ensure that facts reported herein are true and accurate to the best knowledge of the POA and are taken from reliable sources. The POA assumes no liability for any information published, opinions expressed, or delivery to any person or location. The POA does not endorse or recommend the products or services of any advertiser or discount partner. All publication rights are reserved. Publication or reprinting of any material contained herein is by written permission only. The POA reserves the right to remove and/or discontinue any advertisement or advertiser from its *POA Bulletin* at any time at its sole discretion.

VHA *continued from page 1*

POA Bulletin. Additionally, every July the POA hosts the Sumter County Administrator and Commission Chairman to present the upcoming budget and answer questions from residents. The Fire Assessment Fee was discussed this past July at that meeting.

What does the VHA do to educate its members?

A quick check of the archives of the VHA’s “Voice” (printed and distributed by the Developer’s Daily Sun) didn’t find any education or meetings that addressed the Fire Assessment Fee issue.

While the VHA promotes itself as a “Villages Homeowners” advocacy group, perhaps its real function is as the Developers advocate and it should therefore change its name to the DHA. It was only after the business community organized itself in protest and the Commission voted down the funding that the VHA has come forward with its commitment to “help.”

“The POA has published materials telling residents the failed tax hike will result in the county laying off 30 firefighters, closing four fire stations and eliminating its hazardous materials team.”

The minutes of the Sumter County Commission’s August 22 public hearing on the Fire Assessment Fee increase will reflect that Sumter County Fire Chief Rob Hanson stated that these would be the cuts if the increase did not pass. Sumter County Administrator Bradley Arnold stated that he had signed off on the plan. The minutes will also reflect that a similar plan presented by VPSD Fire Chief Brian Twiss stated that programs and staffing would be cut. Mr. Arnold stated that his counterpart, Mr. Blocker, had signed off on the VPSD plan.

“Who voted to support that tax hike?”

Chairman Craig Estep and Commissioner Jeff Bogue, both of whom accepted the endorsement of the Property Owners Association of The Villages, the group that spearheaded opposition against VPSD’s prior request for independence.”

Mr. Estep and Mr. Bogue were the only commissioners with the courage to vote for a plan that all five had agreed to in the budget workshops. The other three lamented and wrung their hands while conceding to the pressure in the room.

Every year when there is an election the POA hosts a candidates’ forum to give voters the opportunity to hear directly from the candidates at the same time on issues. The POA asks questions it believes voters are interested in knowing more about. Sometimes the POA endorses candidates it believes will represent the interest of the residential property owners. Regardless of who the POA might endorse, every candidate is invited to submit a biography for publication in our Bulletin and to participate in the candidate forum. And residents are always encouraged to do their own due diligence and make up their own minds.

“This is why we wanted to have our own independent fire district,” Blocker said. “We wanted to be in control of our own destiny instead of allowing our destiny to be directed by the county commission.”

In every step of the process the POA reported about and fulfilled its goals to provide research and analysis and forums to discuss the formation of the Independent Fire District. The POA attended every meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee that was formed to address the ambulance response time issue and reported after every meeting. We note that the VHA did host an informational meeting about the Fire District that reportedly went so badly that a second scheduled meeting was cancelled. Its “Voice” also included a column from District Manager Kenny Blocker urging residents to support the initiative.

Mr. Blocker’s comment about controlling their own destiny, absent the approval of the county commission, puts the blame in the wrong place. Shame on the District for not coming forward to adequately educate people about the financial need. Education. Education. Education. People need to understand what such a jump in the budget is for and the best/most fair way to pay for it. The POA hopes that when/if a dependent fire district is established there will be more transparency.

“What about reviving the idea of an independent special fire district that failed at the 2022 ballot by 49-51 margin?”

The District has not indicated that it wants to endure another attempt. Its 2022 proposal earned unanimous approval from the state legislature,

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a greenlight from Gov. Ron DeSantis and the support of the VHA.

But opponents, including the POA and a political action committee that backed commissioners Bogue, Estep, and Andy Bilardello, **lobbied heavily against it...**

In a **campaign blitz** that countered District information sessions and VPSD open houses, the POA wrote that, "Funding for The Villages Public Safety has been provided as a part of the Sumter County budget for years without issue. The POA does not believe the Special District is needed at this time.

It claimed that VPSD's numbers shouldn't be trusted, even though for all but the owners of the most expensive homes, the annual cost of an independent district would have been more affordable than the current POA-backed tax increase."

It is categorically false that the POA lobbied heavily against the Independent Fire District. The "campaign blitz" to which the article refers was our own POA Bulletin which has a circulation of 60,000 plus households.

The POA at no time said the VPSD's numbers should not be trusted. What the POA said was that based on the question on the referendum, the formula that was being proposed and estimates of what homeowners would pay could not be trusted. The numbers the District gave were based on the minimum of the .1 mil rate while the referendum would have given an unnamed board to be appointed by the Governor up to 1 full mil rate. Homeowners, when voting on a new tax, should be given the maximum they would pay, not just the minimum.

The Independent Fire District proposal came as a surprise to the Ad Hoc Committee when then-Chief Edmund Cain presented the idea, as it had nothing to do with ambulance service. Nonetheless the POA listened, asked questions, and explored the referendum question from every angle. Early in the dialogue the POA even published a special Fire District section of the POA Bulletin. In the end, the POA said "Not yet." The POA did believe, especially after a study was commissioned and came out of the

Sumter County budget hearings with a favorable recommendation by every Commissioner, that Sumter County would support the Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) proposed budgets.

In the September printed issue of the POA Bulletin, the lead article about the public hearing was just going to press. A portion of the article stated, **"Clearly, the Commissioners backing down on the increase came as a surprise to the public safety officials. No doubt they will be working non-stop to see what they can do to minimize the negative impacts this will have on citizens. The information in this article is as up to date as can be within our print deadline. It is also likely that the topic of a Special Fire District may come up again."**

As reported, VPSD, the District and Sumter County have been working non-stop to minimize the impact and have assured residents that services such as the fire alarm battery replacement and AED programs will not be cut. Nor will any current positions be cut. Only the 57 future hires that were presented in the budget will be put on hold, as will the construction of new fire stations.

Mr. Blocker has said recently that he will be looking at increasing the amount of funding for the Fire Department that comes from Amenity Fees. There would be no increase in Amenity Fees paid by residents. Currently \$4.08 per rooftop's Amenity Fee is allocated to the Fire Fund. Mr. Blocker stated that has not changed since 2007. An increase in that allocation would reduce Amenity Fees available for other areas and would have to gain approval/recommendation from the Amenity Authority Committee (AAC) and the Project Wide Advisory Committee (PWAC).

The District has also asked Sumter County to begin the process to establish a "Dependent" Fire District that is similar to the North Sumter County Community Utility Dependent District (NSCUDD). At its September 12 budget public hearing the Sumter County Commissioners directed the county administrator to begin the process. Another article in this special issue is included on how a Dependent District can be created and funded.

It is difficult to respond to comments from an organization (VHA) that the POA has tried to

work with on numerous occasions over the years. As recently as last month a meeting was held between the two organizations' presidents (requested by the POA) in an effort to put aside differences and find common ground. The funding for fire and safety could have been one of those issues. **But neither the VHA nor the District Manager reached out to the POA. They didn't ask the POA to be part of the solution.**

The POA has repeatedly expressed its full support of The Villages Public Safety Department and Fire Department and recognized there would be a significant cost associated with turning over emergency response and transport to them. The POA was the ONLY organization that not only provided education on the issue, but also SUPPORTED the funding.

You can be assured that the POA will always give you the full story and both sides of the story. It may not always be what people want to hear and that's okay. We will not tell you half-truths. We will not try to paint an inaccurate picture. Occasionally we may offer an opinion. We trust you to read the facts and make up your own mind.

We are all in this together to support and maintain the best retirement community in the world. ●



**JOIN THE
POA TODAY!**

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Residents' Rights
Since 1975**

In Case You Missed It... Highlights from Early September Meetings

CDD 1 Holds Town Hall Meeting on Morse Blvd. Safety Improvements

Most residents who attended the Community Development District (CDD) 1 Town Hall meeting on September 7 were not impressed with the Kimley-Horn Study of Alternatives for Morse Boulevard. Many expressed they thought the alternatives were too costly and were unrealistic.

Residents seemed to be more interested in solutions that would slow people down by putting up stop signs or lights. They also criticized the Sumter County Sheriff's office for not having enough patrols and not writing enough tickets.

However, CDD 1 Supervisor Ellen Cora urged them to think outside of the box and go for the best solutions, no matter the cost. She said that there is no way to make the roadway safer for golf carts unless they are separated from the road.

CDD 1 Chair Rocky Hyder said that while he has been critical of the Sumter County Commissioners for not being engaged in finding solutions, he was pleased to receive a phone call from Commissioner Craig Estep asking him to meet to have discussions. The meeting is to take place later in September.

AAC Passes FY 2023-24 Budget

The Amenity Authority Committee approved the Recreation Amenities Division (RAD) budget of \$76.8 million at its meeting on September 6. The budget includes \$28.75 million in capital projects with the majority going to the reconstruction of the Paradise Recreation Center (\$20 million). Other improvements were allocated for La Hacienda Recreation Center (\$2.75 million) and golf facilities and maintenance (2.65 million.)

After the preliminary budget was approved in July, the Developer terminated the golf management contract and the AAC agreed that it would pick up approximately 1,000 employees that work at both the executive and championship golf courses. At the time it had been stated that the Developer charged approximately \$90,000 as a management

fee, however, Ms. Duckett clarified that they did not know what management fee was being charged. They were given a lump sum contract. The District will now manage all the employees, including those at the championship (private) courses for which the Village Center Community Development District (VCDD) has approved a contract. No amenity fees will be used to pay employees on the championship courses.

CDDs 12 & 13 Say "No Thanks" to Joining Eastport Maintenance Advisory Committee (EMAC)

Earlier this summer Project Wide Advisory Committee (PWAC) Chairman Don Brozick, CDD 11, raised the question again about whether CDDs south of CR 44, specifically CDDs 12 and 13, could consider joining the newly created Eastport Maintenance Advisory Committee (EMAC). It would require the agreement of all of the CDDs on the current PWAC – CDDs 5 – 13. The proposal was derailed two years ago when CDD 7 wanted to open up the Project Wide agreement.

PWAC members Jon Roudabush, CDD 12 and Tina Williamson, CDD 13 each went to their boards, who decided there would be no benefit for them to move from PWAC to EMAC. This essentially ends any further discussion of a change to PWAC.

PWAC Gets Lower Aquatic Weed Control Contract

When the current contractor, Solitude Lake Management, for aquatic weed control asked for a \$15 per acre increase in its contract, PWAC said "not so fast." The committee instead directed District staff to see if there were any other contractors in the business that could provide the service. District staff went out for bid and found a new contractor that came in \$25 per acre lower than the current contract, saving PWAC \$164,185. CDD 4 also turned down the requested increase, however, the AAC approved the increase.

The aquatic weed scope of services includes the chemical and herbicidal treatment of all

ponds and retention areas to keep them clear of any exotic and/or nuisance species of aquatic submersed, floating and/or emergent plant, algae, weeds, or any other type of unsightly and or nuisance vegetation based on a set application schedule as decided by District Property Management (DPM). Services also include the manual removal of plants, algae and weeds, litter control and water quality testing services based on an as needed basis, or as directed by DPM. This contract will also provide biannual maintenance services for the diffused aeration systems and quarterly maintenance services for the circulation (fountain) systems.

PWAC Approves Maintenance and Amenity Budgets

The Project Wide Advisory Committee (PWAC) recommended approval of both the maintenance and Sumter Landing Amenity Division (SLAD) budgets to the Sumter Landing Community Development Committee (SLCDD).

The maintenance budget was approved at \$20.5 million. A decrease from the proposed budget in June of \$183,405 is good news for the participating CDDs 5-13, whose allocation will also decrease 1.1%. The lion's share of the budget is spent on recurring landscape maintenance at a cost of \$12 million.

PWAC also recommended approval of the SLAD budget of nearly \$95 million, an increase of \$650,000 from the current fiscal year. Recreation centers will get more than \$7 million in capital improvements while golf maintenance will receive \$3 million. ●

What is a “Dependent” Fire District and How Does It Differ from an “Independent” District?



In the wake of the Sumter County Commissioners turning down the recommended increase in the Fire Assessment Fee the Sumter County Fire Department and The Villages Public Safety Division’s (VPSD) Fire Department have had to tighten their belts to fund operations for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24 budget year that begins October 1. Both departments have scrambled and in less than a month found ways to continue operating without layoffs or decreasing services. Sumter County’s fire union employees, fire department chiefs and the County Administrator in Sumter County, have accepted concessions to avoid layoffs in the upcoming year. The POA applauds these dedicated public servants.

Sumter County and The Villages District government are now proposing the creation of two separate Dependent Fire Districts to fund future operations. What is a “Dependent” District and how is it different than the “Independent” District that was defeated last year?

Special districts, both Dependent and Independent, are allowed by Florida Chapter 189, the Uniform Special District Accountability Act. Chapter 189 states, “It is the specific intent of the Legislature that dependent special districts shall be created at the prerogative of the counties and municipalities and that independent special districts shall only be created by legislative authorization as provided herein.” The primary difference is that a Dependent District is created by local government and an Independent District is created by state legislature. The statute further states that, “special districts cooperate and coordinate their activities with the units of general-purpose local government in which they are located.”

A special district, both Dependent and Independent, is created to serve a special purpose. In this instance the special purpose would be Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The primary difference between a Dependent and an Independent District begins first in its creation either by the local ordinance (Dependent) or by the State Legislature (Independent). An Independent Special District requires a referendum, as was conducted in 2022.

A Dependent District will have its governing board appointed by local elected officials, in this

case the Sumter County Commissioners. Any member of a local board, as stated below, can be removed by the governing body of the County. An Independent District board would have been appointed by the governor.

A Dependent Special District is defined in Chapter 189:

(2) “Dependent special district” means a special district that meets at least one of the following criteria:

- (a) The membership of its governing body is identical to that of the governing body of a single county or a single municipality.
- (b) All members of its governing body are appointed by the governing body of a single county or a single municipality.
- (c) During their unexpired terms, members of the special district’s governing body are subject to removal at will by the governing body of a single county or a single municipality.
- (d) The district has a budget that requires approval through an affirmative vote or can be vetoed by the governing body of a single county or a single municipality.”

Sumter County Administrator Bradley Arnold explained to the Sumter County Commissioners at the public hearing held on September 12 that a Dependent Special District would be created by ordinance passed by the Commission. Mr. Arnold said that in order for a Dependent Board to be operational by the Fiscal Year 2024-25 which would begin on October 1, 2024, and an ordinance would need to pass by the first

meeting in December 2023 at the very latest. The ordinance must contain the method of financing for the Dependent District. He also said that since a portion of the Dependent Special District territory is within the City of Wildwood, the City’s governing board would also have to sign off on the district.

The POA is interested in this solution as it provides another local government oversight. The devil is always in the details and the POA looks forward to hearing more about a proposed financing structure and how a governing board will be appointed.

Dependent special districts are nothing new to The Villages. The North Sumter County Utility Dependent District (NSCUDD) was established pursuant to Chapter 189 of Florida State Statutes and Sumter County Ordinance 2010-10 on July 15, 2010.

NSCUDD consists of a seven-member Board of Supervisors representing Districts 5-10 and one at large seat. The members are elected by registered voters residing in Districts 5-10.

NSCUDD is the water, wastewater and non-potable irrigation water service providers to properties within District’s 5 – 11 and is also the provider of the solid waste sanitation services for the Marion, Sumter, and Fruitland Park portions of The Villages. In addition, the services are provided to Sumter Landing and Brownwood.

Effective December 27, 2012 The North Sumter County Utility Dependent District (NSCUDD) became the provider of the solid waste sanitation services for the Marion and Sumter County portion of The Villages located in VCDD Nos. 1 thorough 10 when it purchased Sumter Sanitation. Sumter Sanitation also provides services to VCDD No. 11 in Lake County. The Sumter Sanitation services are contracted through CH2M HILL/Jacobs.

The POA will continue to keep residents informed as this process moves forward. ●



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Charmaine Adams
(904) 646-8206



Sunny Parsons
(352) 239-0980



Amanda Fincher
(352) 497-5673



Heather Brown
(352) 233-9294



Jenny Ferns
(352) 445-8903



Cissie Smith
(352) 391-0884



Team Lauder
Alan (352) 256-2568
Amy (321) 303-6469



Peggy Schaefer
(352) 801-0040



Gail Carter
(352) 516-9131



Steve Savage
(908) 675-0533



Bob Berube
(352) 446-9969



Jamie Rosier
(352) 247-1659



Cheryl Simmons
(404) 272-6113



Gail Damon
(352) 626-3121



Tim Davis
(352) 446-1688



Kat McNeely
(352) 250-4842



Deborah Adelman
(630) 390-9272



Kristin Wendt
(603) 509-0027



Frances Pierce
(352) 459-5601



Patti Goodson
210-882-0708



Cheri Probert
(352) 427-9501



James "Coop" Cooper
(352) 626-3151



Micki Wohl
(954) 839-5880