



September 20, 2022

Jim Hill, Mayor, City of Sebastian
1225 Main Street
Sebastian, FL 32958-4165

Dear Mayor Hill:

In our previous letter, we encouraged the City to hire a professional consultant to assist with the development of a conceptual masterplan for the future development of the Graves Brothers property which is under consideration for annexation by the City. Such an annexation will permanently and irrevocably change the character of Sebastian, and it is therefore the responsibility of the City and the Council to do its utmost to provide for, and obtain the most beneficial outcome for ALL the citizens of Sebastian and surrounding communities, which will be impacted by this annexation. Once again, we cannot reiterate strongly enough that this action needs to be taken prior to granting development entitlements!

Attending last week's Sebastian Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, we saw no discussion of the possibilities or options in making a recommendation to the Council, which reinforces our concern for the need to engage the services of an experienced consultant. Such a large-scale development and annexations happen infrequently. No one should expect the Council and Committee members, even staff, to be experts in coordinating such agreements. This is not a criticism but rather a realistic observation of the nature of such infrequent major issues. As stated in our press release earlier this month... "it is common for large development projects with the capability of changing the character of a community to utilize professional consultants to develop a collaborative process by collecting input from citizens, advocacy groups and other governmental entities. Such process is happening in Alachua County where a 4,000-acre tract of land is being master planned to include significant open space, central water and sewer systems, a new University of Florida Golf Course, and a possible solar project. That landowner has engaged with CHW Consultants to guide the process for developing the masterplan *before it seeks its development entitlements.*"

This and similar actions in our state demonstrate how annexation and land use changes should work. So our concern remains unabated, and in fact, reinforced by actions regarding the Graves Bros., so far. There should be a plan - a great plan. A plan based upon community input and collaboration with local and state agencies, one that protects the headwaters of the St. Sebastian River, provides for known residential capacities, development patterns, open-space locations, and community amenities.

The property proposed for annexation currently allows 1 residential unit for every 5 acres. Whether the development is approved at 2 or 3 units an acre, the increase in value for the landowner is astronomical. What needs to be understood is that you don't give away development entitlements without knowing what you're getting in return. There's nothing wrong with a landowner making money, but there is something wrong with a jurisdiction that heaps huge financial windfalls without securing the necessary exactions to protect its current residents.

There are other steps the city council can take to underline the open space conservation we all want for both the annexed property and the current city land uses – that is, a revision of the city's landscape and tree ordinances to help us restore the ecological processes that are basic to a sustainable "smart growth" city.

Thank you once again for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Tim Glover, President, Friends of St. Sebastian River
Richard Baker, President, Pelican Island Audubon Society
Mike Johannsen, Chairman, Indian River Neighborhood Association
Paul Fafeita, President, Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County

Ccs: City Council Members and City Manager
Jason Brown, Manager, Indian River County
Dylan Reingold, Attorney, Indian River County
Commissioners, Indian River County