

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 12, 2009
TO: Board of County Commissioners
THRU: Parwez Alam, County Administrator
FROM: Tony Park, P.E., Director of Public Works
SUBJECT: Team Rowing at Williams Landing

On Monday, March 9, several e-mails were received from citizens expressing concerns regarding the rowing activities that took place at Williams Landing on Saturday, March 7. Public Works staff have investigated the concerns and met with leaders of the rowing event on March 10 to discuss the issues and make adjustments to how future races should be handled. The following report is hereby provided to communicate staff's understanding of the situation and the actions taken to resolve the concerns of residents.

On February 4, 2009, Capital City Rowing applied for, and was granted, a "Special Events Reservation" through the Division of Parks & Recreation for March 7, March 14, and March 21 at Williams Landing Park. As part of that permit, the organization was required, and agreed to provide the following: additional restroom facilities, off-site parking, insurance for the event naming the County as co-insurer, to clean up after the races, to keep the public boat ramp open for public use, and to provide 2 Fish and Wildlife Officers. In addition the application reflected that the group anticipated 200-250 people in attendance.

According to reports from residents and accounts from the rowing representatives, there were about 350 people in attendance over the course of the day. Since the racing involved three separate teams competing only two at a time, the number of rowers and spectators averaged about 250 for most of the day. This number corresponds with that reflected on the event application.

There was a period of time, however, from about 11:00 am - 1:00 pm, when the teams were transitioning, that the full 350 were in the area. That, too, was the time in which the 4 large buses were in the area picking up and dropping off rowers. Race leaders indicated that there had been an incident whereby one bus driver ignored directions not to proceed further down Williams Landing Road because of the inability to turn around. As witnessed and communicated by a resident, this bus did have to use private property and a private driveway to turn around. After that incident, race leaders indicated that other bus drivers followed the directions provided for loading and unloading rowers. Once the buses unloaded, they did not remain parked anywhere along Williams Landing Road. Public Works staff have also verified that these buses do not exceed the load limit for County roads.

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Parking for the spectators and for the shell (rowing boats) trailers was accommodated on private property adjacent to the park and catty-corner from the park, not at the County's facility. This action, too, met the requirement of the event application to provide off-site parking. Staff has determined that additional congestion and parking along the road was not the result of the race spectators, but rather a private party that was being held by a neighbor. Furthermore, the camp ground was also at capacity due to Spring Break adding to the number of people and cars in the vicinity.

Race organizers, as well as a resident, have indicated that signs were posted indicating that a regatta was in process. More specifically, race organizers indicated they had posted signs in the right-of-way that said "No Parking." These signs were later removed at the request of the neighbor hosting the private party so that guests could park in front of their home.

Residents have questioned why a permit wasn't posted. Public Works staff conferred with Growth and Environmental Management staff to determine whether there was a code violation. According to GEM staff, there was no violation. Events in the rural unincorporated area need a temporary use permit only when the crowd exceeds 500; events within the urban service area have a 250 person threshold. As previously stated, by all accounts, this event did not exceed the 500 person threshold.

Regarding the use of the boat ramp itself, regatta participants did not launch from the public boat ramp. Instead, shells were launched from private property and a private dock. While the area in general was crowded, the boat landing was never closed nor was it being utilized by the rowers.

Rowing spectators were utilizing the pavilion and main fishing dock. No fee was charged for the use of the pavilion because a fee has never been charged to other users for the use of shelters at this site. The picnic facilities and pavilion are strictly a first come/first serve basis. Should the Board choose to start charging fees at this site, this would obviously apply to all events and picnic usage, including the bass tournaments held at this site. Such a policy would also require more staff time and monitoring to insure "reserved" times were honored by arriving park users.

Other concerns that were raised by residents include: use of tax dollars for the event, use of tax dollars for the ambulance, out-of-state residents using the facilities, trash left on-site, dogs not on leashes, speeding cars, and people walking in the road.

Regarding tax payer dollars, there were none expended for this event. Because of the venue (the lake), there was no need for additional preparation prior to the event. Furthermore, there was no need for additional staffing from the Parks and Recreation Division since parking was handled on private property and additional port-a-lets were provided and paid for by the event organizers. The use of the ambulance also did not utilize tax payer dollars. Event organizers paid to have a dedicated unit available and on-site.

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To limit out-of-state usage at this facility, as suggested by one resident, would be difficult. Currently users at this site are not all Leon County residents. In fact, the nature of the facility encourages out-of-county usage because of the campground facility and the boat ramp. Furthermore, no other County park facility or community centers require proof of residency for reservations. Such a policy would likely discourage use of the amenities as well as impact revenues generated at the campgrounds and community centers.

The park host that resides at the campground indicated that all trash was cleaned up by event volunteers prior to their departure. However, there was a miscommunication on where it should be placed. Trash bags were placed on the ground near receptacles, not in the dumpster. The bags were not removed until Monday morning by event volunteers. At the meeting held on March 10, Public Works staff clearly communicated that the bags needed to be placed in the dumpster prior to leaving. Event organizers assured staff that would be corrected.

Staff was unable to determine whether the speeding cars and the dogs not on leashes were from the rowing spectators or from others in the vicinity. However, event organizers have agreed to send an e-mail to participating teams and parents of Capital City Rowing reminding them that dogs must be on leashes in the park in accordance with County ordinance. As for the speeders, hopefully, that will be discouraged by the deputies that will be present at the next events.

In summary, event organizers have agreed to take the following actions for the next events:

- hire two deputies to provide assistance and authority in the area
- reiterate to the bus drivers that they should not proceed past a certain point on Williams Landing Road
- trash will be placed in dumpsters instead of alongside receptacles
- relocating one of the port-a-lets is being considered to alleviate lines at the park restroom
- send e-mail reminding spectators of the leash laws for Leon County

After investigating the situation, staff believes the event organizers did their due diligence to ensure the event went smooth and met all the parameters of the Special Events request. The added steps should help curtail the issues experienced by residents.

LR/lr

cc: Pat Plocek, Director of Parks and Recreation