

## COUNCIL UPDATE NOVEMBER 2015

...from Jeff Hmara's Point of View

### EDUCATION IN ROYAL PALM BEACH

On October 27<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Lynn Balch, EAB Chair, and I met with representatives for PBC School District: Dr. Frank Rodriguez, Area 5 Superintendent, Ms. Kris Garrison, Planning and Intergovernmental Relations Director and Jason Link, School Enrollment and Demographer official...one year ago, we started this series of meetings to address RPB schools' issues, including RPBHS needing: sprucing-up, a new marquee, IB Program, JROTC Program, School Boundaries, etc.

At this meeting, we discussed Student Enrollment for this school year: PBC school enrollment increased by about 1.6% over last year (187,475 students)...at RPBHS, the student population increased by about 1% to about 2250 students, which is 103% of the school's official capacity...remember that school boundary changes are not considered until 110% or more of capacity...

We also talked about upcoming growth here in RPB and the Western Communities and the plan for accommodating the additional students expected... all school district planning is done on a 5 year, rolling timeline, to prepare for student population changes and other needs...the DS work with individual developers to keep abreast of latest plan for building and selling of houses...for example: currently, based on Lennar's development plan and schedule, as the DS Staff understands it, the Crestwood development is expected to add about 31-47 new HS students within the RPBHS boundary... we asked about the possibility that with those additional students and all the other western community development planned and proposed (Minto & GLHomes, etc.) might be reason to move the eastern boundary of RPBHS westward, closer to our Village boundary...their response was, not as far as they can see, based on what they know...

Also, they said that all new HS Students, from Minto (Westlake) and GLHomes developments will go to Seminole Ridge HS, until it hits 110% capacity and then alternatives will be considered, like "portable/re-locatable classrooms"... and when that's not enough, the SD will probably propose building a new HS at the western edge of GL Homes property (10 acres land available, but price tag is about \$100M to build the school)...they pointed out that it will take decades to complete all of these developments, so there is time to prepare for the increase, but RPBHS boundary does not appear to be a likely change...still worthwhile to stay involved through these SD Staff Meetings and the Boundary Committee Meetings...meanwhile, RPBHS has been painted and there is an initiative within the school to purchase an electronic message board as a new marquee for the school.

## **REPURPOSING SCHOOLS**

Another topic at the DS Meeting was something called: Repurposing Schools...Western Communities student population changes aren't just due to new development...some due to parent/student choices (Choice Academies/Charters) and, as a result, some local schools are declining in enrollment...so, SD Staff is looking at underutilized schools and considering changes including boundary adjustments (those at or below 60% capacity)...some innovative ideas are also being considered, such as creating K-8 grade schools where we now have K-5 and 6-8 grade schools...changing the model from separate traditional Elementary and Middle Schools to K-8...there are some schools that have already been converted (Elementary to K-8) and they are being watched closely to see how well that works for students.

## **ANOTHER POSSIBLE NEED FOR A COUNTY SALES TAX INCREASE**

As the County Staff and, eventually, County Commissioners continue to consider putting a proposed Sales Tax Increase on next November's Ballot, new needs/uses are raised... at the last PBC League of Cities Meeting, PBC Fire Fighters and Paramedics Union presented an alternative funding approach to paying for Fire & Rescue Services...this new funding approach would depend on a 1% sales tax increase that would be dedicated to F&R, combined with a lowered Property Tax % (Municipal Special Taxing Unit millage rate) being applied to county property taxes...one direct benefit of this approach that was cited was that tourists would then pay a portion of the cost of these services rather than the cost being borne totally by fulltime PBC residents, as it is now...another benefit is that what the taxpayer pays for F&R Service will not be based on our property values, but something closer to actual cost of service...our MSTU millage rate would drop from 3.5% to 1.75% with a 1% sales tax increase (no sunset clause)...since, only 2 propositions for increased sales tax in the County can be put on the Referendum...Board of County Commissioners will have to decide in January, which one or two proposed increases will be on the November ballot, if any....

## **ROYAL PALM BEACH DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS**

With our local economy recovering, the growing attractiveness of Palm Beach County and the increasing number of business opportunities, we are seeing a major increase in development applications, here in RPB...this presents opportunity and challenges...one major challenge is to maintain a healthy balance as we grow...as you probably know, one application that has drawn a lot of attention is a development request to build and operate a Race Trac gas station and convenience store at the corner of RPB Blvd. and Southern Blvd...about 300 people attended the last Council Meeting, with about 160 comment cards submitted and many public speakers heard by the Council...since, development, in general, has such a major impact on our village, it is something that is highly regulated by our Ordinances (local laws)...these Ordinances describe a process, known as: Quasi-

**Judicial...this process requires the Council to act like a “court of law”...what this means is that the Council must rely on hard evidence as presented during the Council Meeting to make a decision...in this case, the Council must consider 10 specific categories of possible impacts on the village...impacts such as: adverse impacts on traffic, adverse impacts on property values, adverse impacts on police and fire protection or drainage, and it must be compatible with the character and living conditions of the existing neighborhood in which it is be located...the Council is expected to follow the law(s) and decide based on the facts presented in each of these categories.**

**With that said, Council will be continuing its consideration of the project on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, at the Cultural Center, beginning at 7PM.**