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December 15, 2020

Mayor Ed Dodd
City of Sebastian
1235 Main Street
Sebastian, FL 32958-4165

Dear Mr. Dodd:

Several of our members have been attending the City's Integrated Pest Management Plan Committee meetings. This past week we were very disappointed to learn that the City has contracted with a new company to provide services of spraying herbicides in the City's canals.

We were pleased with the time and effort the City put into developing a similar IPM Plan for its parks and terrestrial properties, a process that seemed to work well with a reasonable outcome. But frankly we are confused with the resumption of canal treatment with herbicides, since the IPM Committee is in the beginning stages of its development of a plan specifically addressing management of the stormwater assets of the City. And comments from this week's IMP Committee meeting as to the conduct of this new treatment are especially concerning.

Providing for this new contract and resumption of the herbicide spraying work would seem premature, at best. At its worst, it makes a mockery of the IPM Committee's work.

Recent comments by City Council members perhaps provide understanding as to why now. There has been an obvious change to the makeup of the Council and attitude toward this issue, with comments such as "disaster" as to the condition of the City's canals. The current hurricane season has recently ended and we are now in the driest season of the year. Since the moratorium of spraying of herbicide in the canal system, many have observed seeing more wildlife and clearer water. A declaration of disaster would seem bewildering. With no apparent disaster looming, from the standpoint of stormwater management, and none to be forecast in the foreseeable future, it would seem such a declaration gives rise to an excuse to do something, anything, exactly the opposite of the majority of the previous Council member's wishes – a level of arrogance that benefits no one in the City, and especially not wildlife, water quality and the habitat of the St. Sebastian River and the Indian River Lagoon!

We were also under the impression that the City has taken great effort to seek out and acquire an "alternative," more natural herbicide (EcoMIGHT), with comments to the effect that it has worked quite well, and the intention to try this alternative herbicide on vegetation in the canals while developing a comprehensive IPM plan. While treatment of vegetation within the canals only contributes more to the muck and nutrients in the system, use of this "natural" herbicide would presumably be better for wildlife.

The City needs to look beyond the canals within the City as simply a drainage project. The St. Sebastian River is one of the largest tributaries to the Indian River Lagoon. Coincidentally, the same

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day as last week's IPM Committee meeting, the Marine Resources Council issued its third annual "report card" on the health of the Lagoon. While based upon the parameters they measure, their efforts show the water quality in our area of the Lagoon has slightly improved, whereas the overall health of the Lagoon, based upon seagrass surveys, is declining. Seagrasses are considered an important indicator of habitat quality. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission states the "*... statewide reporting network has found that seagrass beds are stable and healthy in many areas, but they are vulnerable to water pollution and other stresses. Seagrass beds require clean water to flourish, and the health and abundance of seagrasses declined in Florida and worldwide in response to water pollution during the middle and late 20th century. These declines were especially dramatic in areas subject to rapid human population increases and urban development.... Since that time, increasing awareness of the value of seagrass beds as nurseries and food sources for fish, shellfish, manatees, and sea turtles has led to concerted efforts to clean up coastal waters to promote seagrass growth and expansion. ... recent losses of seagrass in Florida's Big Bend, Florida Bay, and the Indian River Lagoon have occurred as the result of extreme weather, heat, water pollution, and algal blooms.*"

We ask that the City reconsider the application of herbicide treatment within the City's canals and allow the IPM Committee to complete its work, thus defining the issues and recommending multiple alternatives. We also ask that the City consider the issues beyond the exercise of clearing the canals of vegetation, to get them "back in good shape," for the benefit of all residents and others visiting our area to enjoy our local natural resources.

We've said it before and we'll say it again – exposing oneself to our local waterways and the possibility of contracting a life-threatening infection is not normal and none of us should tolerate it!

Sincerely,

Tim Glover, president
Friends of St. Sebastian River

Cc: Brian Benton, Director, Leisure Service
Paul Carlisle, City Manager
Ken Griffin, Director, Public Works