

LAKELAND CITY COMMISSION**Special Called Meeting
Lake Bonny Area Flooding
November 6, 2024**

The City Commission met for a special called meeting on the Lake Bonny Area Flooding in the City Commission Chambers. Mayor Bill Mutz and Commissioners Bill Read, Stephanie Madden, Sara Roberts McCarley, Mike Musick, and Guy LaLonde were present. Commissioner Chad McLeod was absent. City Manager Shawn Sherrouse, City Attorney Palmer Davis, and City Clerk Kelly Koos were present along with staff.

CALL TO ORDER - 6:30 P.M.

City Manager Shawn Sherrouse gave a presentation, a copy of which is on file in the Agenda Packet. The presentation recapped what happened and what the City has done.

Mr. Sherrouse recognized Cindy Rodriguez of SWFWMD and Mr. Womble, Polk County Emergency Manager.

Mayor Bill Mutz framed the evening's public comments. The Commission wanted to hear from the citizens. He hoped for good decorum. In the longer term, what do we do to keep this from reoccurring?

Nicole Ramirez purchased her home in 2020. She had paperwork showing the house was not in a flood zone. Her home was underwater for 3 weeks. She showed photos of flooding in April and after Hurricanes Debby, Helene, and Milton. They lost everything. Her husband lost his scooter and oxygen machine. She showed paperwork that she was in Zone X, not a flood zone. A random boat hit their house. Their dog died from the stress. In less than an hour everything was gone. Her home was declared unlivable by FEMA. There needs to be a fund created for them.

Janis Morsey was a lifelong resident of Lakeland. They lost memories and keepsakes that insurance or assistance cannot replace. Omissions were made. Their inspections were delayed because their homes were surrounded by water. The City and County need to ensure that FEMA completes inspections for those who are still waiting. She asked for funds for residents facing serious financial hardships. That support could be life changing. Our community has shown resilience. Put processes in place to ensure that our community does not experience this again. They also need transparency.

Brittney Dickey: These were the hardest days of her life. Her front yard is full of all the things they could not salvage. Before they can move back, they will need the City's help. Many areas of Lake Bonny were flooded before Milton. One of the issues is that they are 1/2 County and 1/2 City. They are not getting the same response from County Commissioners. She suggests making the entire area in the City so it can be properly cared for.

Kevin Kayden lived in unincorporated Polk County and spoke against the Commission.

Misty Wells thanked the Commission for staying for the meeting tonight. She thanked the Commission for bringing in The Army Corps of Engineers and the pumps in to get their homes out of the water. Now we need to figure out why this happened. Why did the water stand in their homes for 21 days? Flood insurance is not going to pick up any of it. No one was checking the pump. Draining Lake Mirror should have waited. She invited the Commission to come and walk through her house. The mold is the least of their problems. This summer showed that the Commission is not prepared to handle another big storm. Have you thought of ways to rebuild? How about putting some dumpsters out there for the community?

Michael Coker lived on Longfellow Blvd. He did not believe that the electric bill showed the pump was running at full capacity for a month. The canal they live next to appears to be clogged. His buildings have been underwater since August 5th. The losses they have incurred cannot be replaced.

Sue Kriegel of Little Lake Bonny requested a contact number. There needs to be markers so they can call for help when the water is rising. Is there grant money available to put up a seawall? She has lived there since December 2020. She has lost more than 4 feet of her property because of the water. Residents can be the eyes and ears of the lake.

Emily Brunett said the water surrounded their home, flooded their crawl space but did not get inside their home. They started to see some ground last week. The septic company still cannot pump their septic tank. They may have damage to the tank and the drain field. They may also have damage to their airducts. She was looking for a plan going forward for the next time.

Trisha Molitor was here on behalf of her mother-in-law Beverly Molitor. It is devastating. We checked out the home after the hurricane and they were in waist deep water. Her mother-in-law is currently living with her. She is completely displaced. FEMA cannot go into her house right now.

Frank Myer lived on the canal that went from Lake Parker to Saddle Creek. He also had flooding. The pump from Lake Parker to Saddle Creek was working. Things that can be done:

- Clear the ditches so more water can go through.
- Connect ditches to move more water.

Water needs to flow and ditches need to be cleared for that to happen. He lost things from 30 years ago. That cannot be replaced. His dog died October 24th from the stress of living in a hotel.

Pamela Smith of 539 Lake Bonny Drive East came forward. She lived with her husband and daughter prior to July. In July the lake started taking over their property. On October

9 her house was flooded. How did my home go from AE to Zone X? How were they reclassified from AE (the middle of Lake Bonny) to X? We are in Zone X. Where is the documentation to back up that change? When can she get answers to how they got in Zone X? The change happened 6 months before she bought the house. Her house has flooded 3 times since 1960 and FEMA knew it.

David Beck of 41 Bonny Shores Drive spoke. You have heard the stories from these people. There are all kinds of people in this situation. We need action. We need to know what we can do. Talk is cheap, we need action.

Joy Jones of 141 Bonny Shores Drive read last year that there was money dedicated to the restoration of Lake Bonny having to do with water quality. She saw culvert pipes being installed around Lake Bonny. Were those pipes to drain more water into Lake Bonny? She wanted to know what those pipes were about. The water was already too high before Hurricane Debby. Before the storm the water was up to her house. The Bonny Shores Mobile Home Park is zoned outside the flood zone except for 7 homes. She is one of those 7. FEMA will not help her. You cannot get insurance on older mobile homes.

Shawn Sherrouse thought she was referring to the water quality grants the City has been talking about.

Teri Rodriguez of Bonny Shores Mobile Home Park understood she is in the County. She is a resident of a 55+ community. Before now, no flooding had happened. We have endured destruction and loss because of poor or no management. Even before the storms they had flooding. She reported it to management, and they said the City and County have been contacted with no response. People are experiencing anxiety. She does not live on the lake and she had flooding. Her neighbors lived with her for 3 weeks. They need assistance for cleanup and restoration of their community. They need grants to get their lives back in order. FEMA is not doing them any good. She wanted an investigation as to why this happened in the first place. Why did we have to wait for such an extreme event before we scramble to fix it?

Diana Hoagland: Tonight, her neighbors have been brave and vulnerable. The fundamental question is how did we get here and how can we move forward? Has the outfall been well maintained? When was the last time the complete system was inspected? Were the right decisions made in releasing so much water from Lake Gibson? What short-term measures could be implemented now? Infrastructure is not sexy. We have outgrown our infrastructure. As you approve of new development, think of us. Where will the water go?

Terry Mullis of 564 Lake Bonny Drive East: They are still not able to live in their homes because of mold and the septic system is not working. He sympathized with all these residents. His situation is not as dire as some. He knows what it is like to be out of his home and wade through sewage. We would like to know how they can be annexed into the city limits so they can have city sewage.

Gina Tullio asked who put on the presentation? She was going to point fingers tonight. We were supposed to get answers tonight. The presentation had no new information. We are back 3 weeks later and we do not have answers. She expected answers. She sees the Commissioners taking notes. Mr. Sherrouse is not taking notes. He is not giving the Commission any answers.

Mayor Bill Mutz acknowledged how Shawn Sherrouse has been working diligently on this project. He was less interested in trying to point fingers and more interested in solving problems. This meeting was to provide an overview and listen to the residents.

Gina Tullio said they gave a list of questions 3 weeks ago and there were no answers. Is it true the City will not start a fund because they would admit liability? She asked the Commission to consider forming a 501(c)(3) to allow corporations to make donations.

Chad Smith spoke. They were here for the Commission to do the right thing. All these little things are taxing. We appreciate what you all do. Show us what you can do!

Collen Betzer of Bonny Shores Drive had to wear wader boots to get to her car after Hurricane Debby. She was surprised that the Lake Mirror car show was able to go on. Where did all the flood water from Lake Mirror go? It got cleaned up in seven days and Lake Bonny has not been cleaned up in 3 weeks.

Mayor Bill Mutz: Lake Bonny is a multijurisdictional lake.

Jessica Christian stated that in the middle of the storm she got a phone call from her mother at 12:30 a.m. because water was flooding into her home. She had to drive in the storm to get her mother. The Commission should prioritize the residents on Lake Bonny over the water flooding in Lake Mirror. The pump is not enough. Moving forward they should add another pump permanently. Ms. Christian cautioned the Mayor to watch his tongue and how he talks to people.

Jennifer Atkins spoke on behalf of her mom who lives on Honeytree West. The retention pond behind her flooded her home. She is homeless. She is a 32-year retiree from the State. She has no home now. Her mother is deteriorating now because she does not have her home. She is 78 and was still mowing her own lawn. She lost antiques from four generations. Where do we go from here? What are you going to do? How are you going to help the retirees and young families? You go home every night to your bed. My mom is sleeping on a donated bed.

David Dickey of 561 Lake Bonny Drive East asked about the 30% jump in energy consumption between September and October. What caused that?

Shawn Sherrouse cannot answer that at this time. He went to staff and asked how we can demonstrate that the pump was operating. They pulled the information that was

provided here tonight. He will take any detailed questions like this one and get those answers and provide those back to the group.

David Dickey stated a lot of folks in the neighborhood have reached out to find an attorney to take this case. Attorneys have declined. Is there away way to activate an insurance policy to provide recourse?

Palmer Davis explained that the City is self-insured. They do not have a third-party insurance fund to cover these types of things.

Mayor Bill Mutz explained that the City wanted to see what funding opportunities they could find to assist residents.

Pamela Smith asked about a relief fund. When do you think the Commission can get the ball rolling? When are we going to see something?

Mayor Bill Mutz: We should have an answer in a couple of weeks in terms of direction.

David Beck: Is there anything we can get like a brochure as to what we can expect? Something we can hold to know what to expect?

Mayor Bill Mutz: Let us work on a solution and help direct the residents to resources.

Oris Hill of 1501 Lake Bonny said he was not aware of the first meeting. He was sent a text from a friend. That is how he found out about it. He asked for a line of communication with all the neighbors in the community.

Courtney Craft of Honeytree Lane declared the Commission breached their duty. These people did not have flood insurance because the City and the County decided they were not in a flood zone anymore. We did everything we were supposed to do. We spent 10 hours looking for sandbags. People were calling the City and County for months before Milton hit. The Commission had a duty and it was not done. If you lived in the area, you would do more than say this is so sad. When are you going to start doing something? Everything is gone. Our houses are gone.

Diane Hoagland: There was a stormwater study approved prior to the hurricane. I think we can accelerate this study now. We need to pull some action forward a little sooner. She raised the lift station on Lake Bonny Drive East. It was inoperable for 48 hours. It completely failed when we lost power in the middle of the night. We had always had a backup generator dropped offer every other hurricane. For the first time one was not provided, and we lost power. Waste was bubbling up in the street. They did not bring a generator out until Saturday morning. How can we get backup generators assigned before every storm?

Commissioner Stephanie Madden: On her way tonight, she spoke to the Red Cross. She thought we were going to have some resources available for residents. She now

understands we are here to listen to you. We have never had a flood of this proportion. We finally got that big grant to help with Lake Bonnett to help with flooding in May Manor. Nothing is fast in government. That is something that was on our radar. Lake Bonny was not on our radar. We did not know what resources were available to you because we have never had floods like this before. We have never raised a relief fund so we do not know how to do that. It was her thought to bring in FEMA, the Red Cross, and United Way. She has heard a lot about the change in the flood zone. We can ask about those changes. We wanted to be sure we heard from you. We will take this information and try to see what is possible. She does not know how long FEMA applications take. We did not know you had to wait for the water to go away before FEMA could inspect. She needed tonight to be able to gather more information from residents. She called the Red Cross representative forward.

Tena Sweeten, Executive Director of the Red Cross, came forward. Nothing I can say right now will make you feel better. We are trying to provide services. At some point you are going to get a text message. It is going to say you may be eligible for funding from the Red Cross. It is going to say call this phone number. It is not a scam. Call the phone number. The people here in Central Florida brought in over \$1 Million in one day for you. Call the number. It is not a scam. We got your number because you have called Red Cross or had a damage assessment done by FEMA. If you get a text message and it has a link, do not click the link. If you get a text with a phone number, call the number. If your neighbor gets the text and you do not, call 1800RedCross.

Nicole Ramirez: Right now, in Lakeland it is \$6,000 to \$10,000 to secure a rental. We do not have that money.

Mayor Bill Mutz: We must find sourcing for those needs. Cities do not provide those types of funds. If we did it would not be limited to Lake Bonny residents.

Commissioner Sara Roberts McCarley Googled how flood zone maps get changed and that is from FEMA and insurance companies. GiveWell is supporting entities that are working in the area to assist hurricane victims. She has been writing down residents' ideas tonight like waiving fees and getting them dumpsters. She has not heard of a specific fund yet for Lake Bonny residents. When we leave here, there will be conversations trying to find support for you. Tethering them all together is complicated and not as fast as you would like.

Commissioner Mike Musick understood their loss because he lost his home to fire years ago. He became a Commissioner to help people. He has reached out to try and find assistance. He planned to write a check tomorrow for \$50,000 and put it in an account. I hear your anger towards people sitting up here. I can promise you that I hear them working. The employees of the City are working. He requested a night meeting because some of you could not attend a day meeting. We are so proud of our City and so are our employees. I do not know why things happened but stick with us and let us get this fixed. He was committing to stay with them and commit his own resources. Thank you

for coming tonight. He is going to try and raise money. The City is pumping as fast as they can.

Commissioner Guy LaLonde thanked everyone for coming out. It is late and you are trying to have a normal life. Thank you for sharing your stories, expectations, and ideas.

Michael Coker was reasonable. He appreciated Shawn Sherrouse. He did not expect to get all the answers tonight. He has seen Commissioners in the area. It means a lot.

Joy Jones thought she heard that Lake Bonny is City and County. She understands that makes a difference. She thinks the City needs to investigate that. Who does she call when she sees the lake getting too high? How could they become part of the City?

Mayor Bill Mutz: It would be an annexation. The City can work with the water.

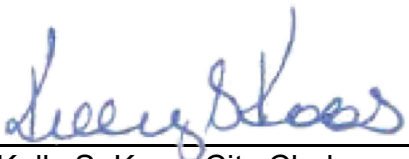
Palmer Davis explained there is voluntary annexation and property owners can request to become part of the City.

Shawn Sherrouse: There are requirements they would have to meet such as being contiguous. It would be easier if everyone was on the same page.

Mayor Bill Mutz: The lake is inside and the City can develop a plan. We need to talk about what we are going to do moving forward.

Commissioner Bill Read: This has been a tough night to sit here. I feel bad for you but I do not know how we can help you.

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 p.m.



Kelly S. Koos, City Clerk

