

**Official Minutes of
MARION COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

December 2, 2025

CALL TO ORDER:

The Marion County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) met in a workshop session in Commission Chambers at 2:01 p.m. on Tuesday, December 2, 2025 at the Marion County Governmental Complex located in Ocala, Florida.

INTRODUCTION OF WORKSHOP BY CHAIRMAN CARL ZALAK III

Chairman Zalak advised that the workshop was scheduled this afternoon to discuss the Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of our Country.

ROLL CALL

Upon roll call the following members were present: Chairman Carl Zalak, III, District 4; Vice-Chairman Matthew McClain, District 3; Commissioner Craig Curry, District 1; Commissioner Kathy Bryant, District 2; and Commissioner Michelle Stone, District 5. Also present were County Attorney Matthew G. Minter, County Administrator Mounir Bouyounes and Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Angel Roussel.

It was noted for the record that the Deputy Clerk was in receipt of a 10 page Agenda packet to follow along with the PowerPoint presentation.

WORKSHOP PRESENTATION

1. Present Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility Update

Utilities Director Tony Cunningham presented the following recommendation:

Description/Background: On March 21, 2023, the Board approved a contract with Ardurra Group, Inc., to provide engineering services for the Southwest Service Area Wastewater Treatment Facility Project Design for the Marion County Utilities Department. The first phase of this project was to address the preliminary study to determine the long and short-term solutions and to support future development and design tasks.

The second phase of this project, which was approved on August 20, 2024, includes design, permitting and bidding assistance for the Oak Run Wastewater Treatment Plant expansion from 1.6 million gallons per day (MGD) to 3.5 MGD treatment capacity as well as designing and bidding of an early work operating and maintenance component to improve existing operations, prior to the expansion construction. Odor Management is considered and included in the scope of the project.

This workshop is an update regarding the second phase of the Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility project, formerly known as Oak Run Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Budget/Impact: None.

Recommended Action: Update for discussion and direction from the Board.

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Utilities Director Tony Cunningham advised that today's workshop will provide an update relating to the Southwest Regional Water Reclamation Facility. He stated the County's partner in this project is Ardurra Group, Inc, noting their representatives are present today are Mitchell Chauncey, Kathryn Stevens, Dave Rasmussen and Chuck Pigeon.

Mr. Cunningham referred to the map shown on the overhead screen outlining the southwest service area.

Principle Engineer Chuck Pigeon, Ardurra Group, Inc., SE 17th Street, provided a brief history of his involvement with the facility.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Pigeon advised that the County purchased the facility sometime between 2002 and 2004, the design and construction of the expansion took place in 2009 and it was online in 2010. He stated the biggest upgrade to the facility was the odor control, which was done in 2016. Mr. Pigeon advised that as the plant increases and the flow increases it becomes harder and harder to build and maintain the facility.

Mr. Pigeon stated the first really big review of the region was the Marion Oaks Wastewater study that was done in 2016. In 2022 the Oak Run Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) capacity study was performed. This was followed by a more massive serious study of the all the alternatives for the southwest District in January of 2024. He stated a supplemental engineering conceptual design study was performed early in 2024, and three technical memos were done this year addressing odor control, bio solids, and future build out capacity.

Mr. Pigeon referred to the chart on the overhead screens showing the flow projections. He stated the permitted capacity is 1,600,000 gallons per day (gpd), noting the current flows are approximately 1,100,000 gpd. Mr. Pigeon advised that the green line is based on the Land Development Code (LDC) and Comprehensive Plan of 200 gallons a day per unit. Realistically, because of the population demographics, size of the house and number of houses it is closer to 100 gpd. He stated designs for subdivisions, facilities, lift stations, etc., are done with the Code in mind, noting if designing for today's Code the County would be out of capacity. Mr. Pigeon advised that there is approximately 3 years of capacity left in the treatment plant; however, there may be some things that can be done to squeeze an additional year or two out of the facility.

Mr. Pigeon stated Ardurra prepared a preliminary engineering report (PER), which evaluated the expansion of the facility to 3,500,000 gpd; provided capacity for approximately 30 years; and evaluated various biological treatment alternatives to ensure the most cost-effective option.

Commissioner Curry questioned what will happen when capacity runs out. Mr. Pigeon advised that the County would still be responsible for meeting the obligations of Developer's Agreements. He stated steps could be taken to address immediate needs such as bringing in additional tanks, but to fix the issue would take time.

Mr. Cunningham advised that regulatory triggers would be launched; therefore, the County would be working with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). He stated the facility would most likely be able to handle flow higher than 1,600,000 gpd, but it would exceed the regulatory limits. Mr. Cunningham advised that if the County is not planning and designing to address the issue, DEP could put them in violation of the permit.

Dave Rasmussen, Ardurra Group, Inc., SE 17th Street, provided a brief overview of the existing facility and the proposed expansion. He stated the County can efficiently and effectively expand this plant from 1,600,000 gpd to 3,500,000 gpd. Mr. Rasmussen advised that it is critical to get the new tanks online and working to treat the wastewater

biologically, noting once the new tanks are working the old ones can be taken offline for rehabilitation.

Mr. Cunningham addressed the proposed modifications to the facility based on community feedback and preparing it for the future. He stated a rapid assessment was performed, which uses an acoustic methodology to go through all the gravity sewer pipes and determines if there are cracks, failures, blockages, or crushed pipes. Staff found that 96 percent (%) of the pipes were in good shape and operating properly. There was approximately 4% that needed to be cleaned. Mr. Cunningham advised that staff reviewed the lift station Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) to determine if things are operating properly, noting based on that information some modifications were made. He stated the Department measured odor in the collection system by using an OdaLog, which measures the hydrogen sulfide levels. There are no strict criteria for hydrogen sulfide. Mr. Cunningham advised that several lift stations were identified as having higher levels, noting neighbors assisted by keeping logs of when they noticed odors. He stated in response to those findings, staff installed carbon cannisters at the air release valves, which essentially scrubs the odor or hydrogen sulfide out of that gas before it is released into the atmosphere. Mr. Cunningham advised that each lift station has a vent that allows gases to come out of that confined space, noting some lift stations have odor control systems at the plant. The odor control systems were evaluated to ensure the levels of media in them and that they were operating properly. He stated the Department is working with a new vendor, Premier Magnesia, to review the system. Mr. Cunningham advised that a chemical is being added to the upstream lift station to bind the hydrogen sulfide and keep it from being released as it flows through the system. He stated staff measured the odor before and after the chemical was used and there was a 90% reduction in those areas.

Mr. Cunningham advised that initially there were concerns relating to odor and noise at the facility. One of the things contributing to the noise is attributed to the Centrisys system, which spins and dewateres the biosolids. The Ardurra Group has assisted with the design of a curtain around the biosolid building to mitigate the sound and odor. He stated the project has gone out to bid and once a vendor has been selected the curtain will be installed. Mr. Cunningham commented on the steps taken in an attempt to mitigate sound from the blowers onsite.

Mr. Cunningham advised that in 2019 the Department installed the odor control system and upgraded the head works. He stated the Department plans to cover the entire basin, noting the odor control system has the ability to draw off of the new basin without upgrading the system.

Mr. Cunningham addressed the proposed screening plan, which will create a clear boundary between the site and the neighbors.

Mr. Cunningham stated staff is recommending decommissioning the existing digester and biosolids building at the bottom right of the property and will construct a building on a different portion of the property (shown on slide 12 of the PowerPoint). He commented on the need for more capacity in the digester and to move it away from the neighbors. Mr. Cunningham stated moving the biosolid building will reduce the noise for the neighbors. Chairman Zalak advised that only one recommendation has been presented to the Board and the associated costs are not provided. He questioned if there are other options available. Mr. Pigeon advised that another option would be to determine what could be done to expend the least amount of capital and prolong the existing facility, but with that there is the risk of when the failure occurs. He stated technical memo one addresses odor

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control and technical memo two addresses the biosolids evaluation. Mr. Pigeon advised that the Ardurra Group considered options to thicken the sludge faster, to expand and extend the life of the facility. He stated expending funds for expensive equipment to thicken the sludge did not make sense because it would not help the expansion in the future.

Chairman Zalak questioned if process unit tank 3 gets the capacity to 3,500,000 gpd. Mr. Pigeon stated the third tank adds volume and allows staff to re-rate the other two tanks. Chairman Zalak stated the third tank has the line basin, additional power and site improvements to perform the required task.

Mr. Pigeon concurred, noting additional filters are needed and the chlorine contact chambers need to be expanded.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Pigeon advised that the cost to add the tank and bring the capacity to 3,500,000 gpd is approximately \$19,000,000.00, noting the estimate was obtained in 2024. He stated the additional tank will increase the biosolids capacity. Mr. Pigeon advised that the relocation cost would be between \$8,000,000.00 to \$10,000,000.00.

Mr. Pigeon advised that the County is currently at 1,100,000 gpd, noting the plant is permitted at 1,600,000 gpd. He stated industry standards recommend 15 days of storage for sludge. The permitted capacity allows for 12 days of storage.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Pigeon stated based on the current usage the County is a little over the recommended 15 days of storage. He advised that if the permitted use increases to 3,500,000 gpd there would only be 5 days of storage.

Commissioner Bryant questioned when the plant was originally constructed. Mr. Pigeon advised that the original plant was built in the early 1980's, but the current bioreactors were constructed in 2010.

Commissioner Bryant commented on the possibility of newer technology that is available today that was not available 20 years ago, which could do the job more effectively and more efficiently.

Mr. Pigeon stated the County is using a 4 stage process, which is the standard.

Commissioner Bryant expressed concern relating to expanding the existing facility instead of relocating to a different site further away from residential areas.

Mr. Cunningham advised that what is being proposed today will take the facility from 1,600,000 gpd to 3,500,000 gpd, which is 30 plus years of capacity.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Cunningham stated the 20,000,000 gpd is a potential need roughly 100 years from now. He advised that the current focus is on the next 30 years, noting a strategy is being used to ensure the Department is not blocking future growth. Mr. Cunningham stated staff are working to pursue additional property outside of the existing site. He commented on the current recommendation and proposed changes.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Cunningham advised that based on neighbor feedback the odor is coming from the collection system in the neighborhood, noting there is not a distinct area where the odor is occurring. If a digester is properly operating, it will not have a major odor.

Commissioner Bryant questioned what creates the odor in the collection system in the neighborhood. Mr. Cunningham advised that wastewater has odor associated with it; therefore, if the area being serviced has a small flow and longer travel time there may be an odor coming from that area. If the wastewater is being repumped several times it will

cause odors. He stated staff are working on different ways to sequester the hydrogen sulfides from being released.

Mr. Cunningham noted it would be extremely costly to move the facility to a new site, noting everything is designed to be hydraulically connected. He stated staff is recommending things that can be moved to get the most value out of existing site while expanding to the 3,500,000 gpd.

Mr. Cunningham advised that the project is funded through capital charges.

Commissioner Zalak questioned the cost of rebuilding the northwest system. ACA Angel Roussel advised that it costs approximately \$18,000,000.00.

Mr. Pigeon stated that facility was built in 2021 and has a capacity of 800,000 gpd. He advised that some funding for the northwest project did come from the State; therefore, the overall cost was approximately \$20,000,000.00

General discussion ensued relating to cost comparisons between the two facilities.

In response to Commissioner Bryant, Mr. Cunningham advised that there are 6 main areas that the complaints are coming from and the plant is one of them.

Commissioner Curry questioned if 3 years is enough time to accomplish the recommended changes. Mr. Cunningham advised that it is a tight timeframe, noting it will take roughly one year to design and 2 years to construct.

Mr. Rasmussen stated the old facilities will still be in operation while the new ones are being built.

Mr. Cunningham commented on the potential additional land acquisition, which would allow the facility to have more of a buffer from neighbors and provide another way to access the site. This would also allow for future wet weather storage, a potential recharge area and a customer service location.

Mr. Pigeon advised that effluent disposal is equally as important as the treatment plant, noting the current capacity is 3,200,000 gpd. Part of that capacity includes Royal Oaks and Spruce Creek. He stated there is roughly 1,600,000 to 2,000,000 gallons of safe water available all the time. Mr. Pigeon advised that approximately 10 to 12 sites have been reviewed and what capacity those sites could generate.

Mr. Pigeon stated wetland recharge was considered as an option, which could ideally be placed in the Greenway or in the Marion Oaks area. He advised that there are 2 defunct golf courses in those areas that could possibly be good candidate sites for either irrigation or wetland recharge parks.

Mr. Pigeon advised that the next steps would be to get serious about identifying an appropriate location for the County's future effluent disposal. There is potential to build this into future developer agreements, sell reclaimed water or give it away. He stated the County also wants to show that it is consistent with the water use permit for taking water out of the aquifer for drinking water.

Mr. Pigeon referred to a map on the overhead screens, noting the light purple areas show the locations considered for candidate sites to either investigate more or to speak with the landowner about possible purchase or use. The dark purple areas are existing effluent disposal sites.

Mr. Cunningham commented on the potential cost of the expansion. He stated the Department has engaged Ardurra Group with assisting in finding funding sources.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Cunningham advised that currently \$10,000,000.00 is set aside for the project, noting \$5,000,000.00 annually is scheduled in the CIP over the next 5 years.

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Mr. Cunningham stated a change order for modifications of current scope to include additional upgrades is needed with Ardurra Group.

Chairman Zalak questioned what is being changed. Mr. Cunningham stated the moving of the digester and biosolids building, noting the original scope did not include the relocation of the digester.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Rasmussen advised that the approach was to wait until the flows actually did increase before the decision was made to move the facilities.

Mr. Pigeon stated when originally considering the project 2.5 years ago it was unclear whether the County would be purchasing a new Centrisys unit or if a new treatment plant was going to be constructed in a different location. He advised that at that time Adurra Group reviewed what could be done to re-rate the plant to get to 2,000,000 gallons, noting it was determined that it would be a waste of funds. Mr. Pigeon stated the minimum that could have been done was to build a new bioreactor and move along with the sludge disposal and sludge handling. He advised that a new Centrisys unit is roughly \$1,000,000.00 and would have to run 14 hours a day. If it were to fail the cost to haul the sludge out would not be feasible. Mr. Pigeon stated moving and rebuilding the biosolids facility will solve the odor, noise and future capacity problems.

In response to Chairman Zalak, Mr. Pigeon advised that the County has spent approximately \$400,000.00 on the Ardurra Group, noting the modified scope will add approximately \$750,000.00 to the expenditure. He clarified that the original contract was for \$900,000.00, of which \$400,000.00 has already been spent.

Mr. Rasmussen advised that the facility can be permitted for the 3,500,000 gpd without expanding the digester, but it presents more of a risk.

Chairman Zalak expressed concern with being able to measure the odor and address the complaints. He stated he is not comfortable moving forward until there is a plan in place addressing these issues.

Mr. Cunningham advised that staff have measured odor in various places in the system, but there have been complaints even after modifications were made to address the issues. Staff continue to monitor the odor and respond if an issue arises. He stated a plan can be developed to measure the pre-odors and post-odors to determine the reduction, noting there will not be zero odors. Mr. Cunningham advised that the recommended changes would provide better screening and less odor.

Chairman Zalak expressed concern with the cost associated with the project if it does not fix the majority of the problem. He stated the covers put on the facility several years ago were supposed to fix the odor issues, but it did not. Chairman Zalak requested data that can be shared with the constituents showing what has been done to address the issue.

Mr. Cunningham advised that the scope can be increased to include an in-depth odor study containing a pre and post component.

Commissioner McClain stated he toured the facility with staff last week and was there for approximately 1.5 hours, noting during that time he observed a well-run, clean facility. The noise was there when next to it, but when further away it was not that loud. He advised that he did not smell anything at the 6 lift stations they visited. Commissioner McClain opined that there are some things that can be done to buffer the sites.

Chairman Zalak stated when visiting the sites, the time of day does matter as it relates to odor.

Commissioner Bryant advised that the only way to not have complaints is to move the entire facility.

Commissioner Stone stated the only way to avoid the issues is to sell the facility and the County not be in the utilities business. She expressed support for improvements that are guaranteed.

Chairman Zalak commented on the cost associated with the project and requested data be provided to show citizens what was done.

Commissioner Curry stated a firm time line needs to be established.

Mr. Cunningham stated the feedback provided today will allow staff to focus on the project.

Chairman Zalak advised that the Board needs to modify the scope to add the biosolid component with the current consultant or another consultant to address the odor issues. He directed staff to test the facility now, again when a firm is online and periodically.

Mr. Cunningham advised that staff could bring back a revised scope along with a schedule for Board consideration by January 2026.

Chairman Zalak requested the matter be brought back no later than January 20, 2026.

(Ed. Note: It was noted for the record that the Deputy Clerk did not receive a copy of the Technical Memo)

BOARD DISCUSSION AND CLOSING COMMENTS

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting thereupon adjourned at 3:24 p.m.

Carl Zalak, III, Chairman

Attest:

Gregory C. Harrell, Clerk

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