

The Martin County Board of County Commissioners will be asked at its next meeting to approve major changes in development regulations to allow property owners to obtain approval of plats for new development projects without public notice or hearings.

And the BOCC is being asked to approve the change without public notice or hearing.

The meeting is scheduled for Monday, July 21, rather than Tuesday, which is the usual meeting day.

The primary focus of Monday's meeting will be the Fiscal Year 2026 budget workshop which is Agenda Item WORK-1 at the end of the agenda. If the workshop does not conclude with an adopted tentative millage rate for 2026 property taxes on Monday, July 21, the workshop will be continued to Tuesday, July 22.

But hidden on the Consent Agenda to be approved without public discussion or hearing before the budget workshop is Agenda Item CNST-2, which assigns authority to approve plats submitted for development projects to the County Administrator, without public participation or approval by Commissioners.

Current regulations require County Commissioners to approve proposed plats, with public hearings and an opportunity for residents to make comments during the process. But the Florida Legislature amended the statute governing approval of plats by local governments to require that plats be approved administratively, effective July 1. In other words, plats must be approved (or denied) by a non-elected administrative officer – such as the county administrator.

It is clear that Martin County staff and the County Attorney are making no effort to provide for public participation in the process.

Amended Section 177.071, Florida Statutes, requires plats to be approved by an administrative authority within a county or municipality. But it does not prohibit a local government from incorporating notice and public participation requirements into the process.

The law requires the county administrator or other designated authority to provide notice to a plat applicant within seven days of receipt of an application and an explanation of the review and approval process. The county could – and should – establish a process which requires notice to nearby residents and members of the public that a plat application has been submitted and is under consideration for approval. Residents should be given an opportunity to submit comments on a proposed platted development near their homes or businesses.

Local governments retain the ability to establish “textual components” for plats, that is, the language required to be included on a plat. The last time textual components for Martin County plats were adopted was 2002. Staff has submitted proposed new textual components as an attachment to the resolution assigning authority to approve plats to the county administrator – all to be approved by the commission on the Consent Agenda with no public explanation, no public comment, and no public participation. The new textual components are lengthy and complex, with no explanation or indication of the changes which are proposed.

Agenda Item CNST-2 is an extremely serious and complex change to the process for approval of major developments in Martin County.

It is ironic that a resolution which will eliminate public participation in the process may be approved by County Commissioners on the Consent Agenda without public participation.

Also on Monday's agenda is an item for a public vote by the Commission to waive a conflict of interest to re-appoint a member of the Rio Neighborhood Advisory Committee. Committee member Travis Waddell has contractual relationships with Martin County through his businesses, Bremar Construction and Freedom Waste Services. He is seeking re-appointment to the Rio NAC, and a two-thirds vote of the County Commission is required to waive the conflict of interest. Agenda Item B&C-1.

A public discussion will be held as Agenda Item DEPT-1 to provide guidance for the process to fill the County Attorney vacancy following the retirement of Sarah Woods. Applications have been solicited and received, and staff seeks direction from the Commission for moving the process forward.

NOTE TO COMMISSIONERS: Please, please, please consider hiring a County Attorney who recognizes and commits himself or herself to protecting the interests of residents and citizens of Martin County rather than serving as an advocate for developers. You should disqualify any applicant who says development proposals should be approved – regardless of whether County regulations are met – because the developer might sue the County if the project is denied. One of the functions of the County Attorney is to defend the County's ordinances and regulations and to ensure they are properly implemented and complied with. A County Attorney who refuses to enforce codes and ordinances in order to avoid doing what he or she has been hired to do, that is, to defend the County's legal and proper actions, is not worth the salary that taxpayers pay for his or her services.

The meeting begins at 9:00 a.m. Monday in Commission Chambers at the Martin County Administration Center. Attend in person, watch on MCTV or livestream the meeting from the County website at http://martin.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=24.

Agenda items may be viewed and downloaded at <https://martin.legistar.com/DepartmentDetail.aspx?ID=35023&GUID=98D7CC54-EF7D-4C4C-8084-1AF34C623D6E>

E-mail commissioners about matters that interest you at sheard@martin.fl.us, eciampi@martin.fl.us, bcapps@martin.fl.us, evargas@martin.fl.us, shetherington@martin.fl.us with copies to the County Administrator and County Attorney at ddonalds@martin.fl.us and swoods@martin.fl.us.

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