

FRANKLIN COUNTY'S FORGOTTEN CITIZENS:

A Tale of Broken Promises & Abandonment by Government



In 2005, when Hurricane Dennis brought widespread devastation to Alligator Point and Bald Point, its storm surge and winds destroyed homes, roads and lives. Since that time, our community continues to suffer negative impacts that have only grown worse. Hurricanes Hermine, Irma and Michael dealt a triple punch to our community, leaving us with broken homes and even more broken promises from state, federal and county officials.

Citizens feel abandoned. We have seen promises broken -- and hope for reasonable solutions evaporate.

IMPACTS TO OUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND LIVES

- Road access has been spotty at best for more than two years, with more than 100 homes past the break at the old KOA Campground cut off on a periodic basis, when even minor storms make access impossible for protracted periods of time.
- More than 35 homes have been destroyed and more are threatened due to steadily eroding shorelines.
- The County has lost millions of dollars of revenue due to diminished assessed values of those houses remaining at Alligator Point and Bald Point, lost tourism and lost business.
- The residents and owners, who pay some of the highest per capita taxes in Florida, have seen the value of their homes plunge since Hurricane Dennis.
- Our water supply is threatened as storm-after-storm increases the possibility that our storage tanks will be contaminated or destroyed.
- Critical habitat for nesting sea turtles and shorebirds continues to be destroyed.
- Life Safety has been materially reduced. Fire trucks are periodically unable to reach all homes and ambulances are prevented from timely reaching the sick and injured.

WHO WILL STAND UP AND BRING THE NEEDED SOLUTIONS?

Will Governor Rick Scott or the new Governor-elect mandate that the Florida Department of Transportation re-acquire CR 370 as a state road?

Who's to blame? Do we blame our political leaders at the State level? Our elected officials in Washington? How about FEMA, which eventually shows up but is constrained by a federal bureaucracy that has left a pile of rubble where our community once had a road?

Here's the unavoidable reality. The blame rests squarely on an inept County Commission that thinks and acts politically – but not strategically. County Commissioners wring their hands and blame everyone but themselves for the conditions at Alligator Point. They ignore our community but continue to collect taxes from us to the tune of roughly \$19 million since Hurricane Dennis.

When presented with these problems and being urged to help, County Commissioners essentially shrug their shoulders with an attitude that boils down to this: "We don't live at Alligator Point so we don't know your issues." This from commissioners that have lived their entire lives in a county of little more than 10,500 people. Citizens that **each commissioner should represent.**

Beach renourishment (road protection) could protect Alligator Point's infrastructure, enhance the County's tax base, provide nesting areas for sea turtles and shorebirds, and restore beach access for residents and visitors.

Renourishment projects in other communities throughout Florida have worked. However, Franklin County's leaders simply don't care. A past referendum concocted by the County Commission placed the entire cost to rebuild the public beach and the only road serving a large section of Alligator Point on the backs of a few families living closest to the coast. The choice given to us was clear: pay over \$3,000 each year in additional property tax or continue to live with the rubble, destruction and lack of basic services.

Alligator Point pays millions of dollars in taxes to fund our County Commissioners' pet projects without seeing any benefit for our own community. We have reached out to anyone who will listen: from County Commissioners to both Federal and State Legislators, and even the Governor. We see four options:

FOUR OPTIONS

- Return Alligator Point Drive to the State (they once owned it and gave it back at some point) and hope the Florida Legislature will take responsibility for protecting the people of Alligator Point.
- Waive Federal Rules that will not pay for mitigation so that the road can be fixed in its entirety. This is a long-term savings to the Federal Government and will allow for a permanent solution.
- As suggested by U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, try to convince the Department of Agriculture to do the remediation that FEMA will not through a grant -- as has been done elsewhere.
- As part of any permanent solution, the use of sacrificial sand to be used as road protection is a must. Franklin County has discussed the idea of using Restore Funds to match available State Funds to accomplish this goal. The stumbling block is the required local match of \$250,000 a year that the County wants a small sub-segment of AP residents to pay for with a guaranteed revenue stream; i.e. higher special taxes.

The undersigned individuals make a plea to all County, State and Federal officials to do what is required so that we can have quiet enjoyment of our properties as all citizens have a right to expect. We no longer wish to live in fear or to be berated when we ask our elected leaders for a drivable road and the respect that taxpaying citizens should always be accorded. Recently, County leaders have created a written policy to no longer speak to its citizens at County Commission meetings by refusing to respond to public comments at the beginning of a county meeting and not allowing any comments before voting on agenda items.

A "government of the people, by the people and for the people" is a cherished principle of our American political system. But Franklin County's commissioners – by their words and actions – have made it clear that this is NOT the people's government. We remain the Forgotten Citizens of the Forgotten Coast.

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Rachel Goff Albritton
Casey Albritton
Larry Allen
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Patrick Mifsud
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Joe And Darlene Morton
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Lewis & Lisa Oliver
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Ronnie & Joyce Raum
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