

## CAPTIVA COMMUNITY PANEL

### *Why the Panel is conducting a Septic-to-Sewer straw poll*

MARCH 2020

The Captiva Community Panel is asking for feedback and your opinion. This is a straw poll about converting from septic systems to sewers. It is not a final vote and it is certainly non-binding. But the Panel needs to know if you support its continued investigation into a central sewer option for Captiva before we can ask Lee County, the City of Sanibel and our state representatives to finance the feasibility and engineering work necessary to keep moving forward.

**Please remember that before any central sewer plan can be implemented, a majority of all property owners on Captiva who would be serviced by central sewer would have to formally vote for it. *We are not at that stage now.***

The Panel has been investigating this issue for more than **two years** because Captiva relies mostly on septic systems for wastewater processing outside South Seas Island Resort. Because Captiva is a low-elevation barrier island with porous soils in an environmentally sensitive area, many concerns have been raised about Captiva's reliance on septic systems designed principally for more rural areas. The Panel has supported research by TKW Consulting Engineers and David Tomasko, Ph.D., of Environmental Science Associates.

TKW evaluated different **wastewater alternatives** for Captiva and provided cost estimates for central sewer processing. Dr. Tomasko evaluated current and future **health and environmental risks** of Captiva's septic systems. In addition, SCCF scientists modeled the **"nutrient" impacts** to coastal waters attributable to Captiva's septic systems.

All the research found **no immediate** environmental or health imperatives to replace Captiva's septic systems with central sewer, although SCCF scientists raised concerns about actual **nutrient loading** from septic systems being understated in certain models. However, both Dr. Tomasko and SCCF believe Captiva's reliance on septic systems is **not sustainable long-term** – particularly in light of the impacts on groundwater levels expected from sea level rise. Most current Captiva septic systems do **not** conform to state guidelines, including many having **inadequate separation** of drain fields from the underlying groundwater table. As sea level rises (and with it groundwater levels), the lack of adequate separation will become increasingly problematic – impairing the functioning of septic systems and increasing pollution of coastal waters.

Given the long lead times needed to establish central sewer service, both SCCF and Dr. Tomasko believe Captiva should begin efforts to develop central sewer service. **We need to know what you think.**

The most feasible plan is to extend Sanibel's central sewer service to all areas of Captiva **outside South Seas**. (South Seas already has central sewer service provided by FGUA throughout the resort area.) Sanibel will have enough capacity to serve all Captiva with Advanced Wastewater Treatment (the highest standard available) after completing the planned expansion and improvement of its Donax wastewater treatment facility. For Captiva to tie into the Sanibel system requires an estimated **\$16 million** to construct a new main sewer line with lift stations necessary to transport wastewater to Sanibel. In addition, there would be costs to individual property owners to **access** the Sanibel system, to **connect** homes to the new system and to **shut down** existing septic systems. Sanibel, operating under an interlocal agreement with Lee County, would be responsible for creating and maintaining the new Captiva system.

All one-time costs – including the new sewer line, access fees, individual property hookups and septic system removals – could be funded by a **municipal taxing authority** approved by a **majority** of property owners in the new Captiva service area. Captiva residential property owners in the service area would be assessed an **estimated**

average of \$2,000 per year over 30 years to retire the financing (this would be done in conjunction with collecting your property taxes). Commercial property owners would be assessed on the basis of their share of total wastewater processed.

In addition, property owners would pay about **\$800 annually** for ongoing waste processing (average cost for a medium-size residence). (Estimated per-property costs assume **equal cost sharing** by all residential property owners.) Other means of cost sharing such as taxable property values would be evaluated prior to creating a specific municipal tax authority proposal for property owners to approve.

Besides the **questionable reliance** on septic systems in the face of sea level rise and the **cost** to create central sewer processing, Captiva property owners should consider the **maintenance** costs associated with operating septic systems, the **alternative uses** of property now required for septic drain fields, and the **possible increase** of property values associated with a reliable central sewer system.

On the other hand, there could be significant **community disruption** during main sewer line construction. And although Captiva has **strict zoning regulations** and the island is virtually “built out,” a central sewer system could **tempt developers** to seek variances or zoning changes for higher-density development.

The engineering design completed thus far for any potential central sewer system serving Captiva has **not** established specific system elements such as the location of lift stations. Residents should assume that the new system will **not** negatively impact the appearance or ambience of Captiva or any individual property. If the community opts to move forward to the next phase in this process, work would be done to both create more accurate cost estimates for such a system and to identify and explain any potential negative impacts to the community based on the expected design **prior** to creating any municipal taxing authority proposal for approval by property owners.

If plans for a central sewer system are to be further developed (including a full feasibility and engineering study), a **strong expression** of community support will be needed. To that end, the Panel is conducting this non-binding straw poll of property owners in the areas of Captiva that might benefit from a septic-to-sewer conversion. **All property owners are encouraged to participate.**

The Panel will evaluate the poll results and hold a **public meeting** in April to hear community comments before making a decision on whether or not to recommend further development of a central sewer program. The straw poll form is included and can be accessed online through the link below. An expanded discussion of the Panel’s central sewer research can be accessed on the Panel website, [captivacommunitypanel.com](http://captivacommunitypanel.com); the TKW and Tomasko reports and the updated SCCF modeling of septic nutrient impacts also are posted there.

## CAPTIVA COMMUNITY PANEL

*Members: Antje Baumgarten • Mike Boris • Ann Brady • Jay Brown • John Jensen  
Mike Kelly • Mike Lanigan • Tony Lapi • David Mintz • Rene Miville • Mike Mullins*

REMEMBER:

### Respond to this straw poll by April 7:

- Online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TVYK2LD>
- Send emails to [captivacommunitypanel@gmail.com](mailto:captivacommunitypanel@gmail.com) or send faxes to (239) 362-9771.
  - Send mail to Captiva Community Panel, P.O. Box 72, Captiva, FL 33924
- Email Wastewater Committee chair Jay Brown with questions at [jaybrown1.icloud.com](mailto:jaybrown1.icloud.com)

If you’re not receiving emails from the Captiva Community Panel already and want to get on the list, email your address to [captivacommunitypanel@gmail.com](mailto:captivacommunitypanel@gmail.com) to join!