



# THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



Published by the Department of Public Affairs, City of St. Augustine, Florida

October 23 2009

## Historic Echo House 'Unsafe Structure'



Echo House - victim of time and weather

Echo House, the venerable historic Lincolnville structure established as a nursing home for blacks by Buckingham Smith and a vision of the late Rosalie Gordon Mills to be a community library and learning center, has been red-tagged by our city as an unsafe structure.

Planning and Building Director Mark Knight explained the action at a meeting this week of the Lincolnville Crime Watch. "We found at least two roof areas collapsed, and evidence it's being used for drugs and prostitution," Knight said.

The property is owned by our city, but legally held by a non-profit corporation. Rosalie's heirs, Carlotta and Tony Miles, have made efforts over the years find funding for restoration, succeeding at one point in getting a state grant to stabilize the building and



Fern overtakes roof

develop a restoration plan.

Knight said that, because it is a public safety concern, action will be fast-tracked to abate or demolish the structure. "We'll get it on the November 10 agenda of our Code Enforcement Board," he said. Because of its age, our Historic Architectural Review Board would have to approve a demolition.

Echo House is part of a contiguous triad of historic properties, including the former Excelsior School, renovated by our county and used today as a cultural center and county offices, and St. Benedict School, a restoration work in progress through a civic non-profit committee.

## Commission to consider bids for skateboard wall



## ***Paper/plastic/neither?***

Florida's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) wants to make our state the first in the nation to prohibit throwaway plastic and paper bags, the Orlando [Sentinel](#) reports.

DEP is proposing a five-year phase-out with escalating fees for continued use. The bags litter landscapes, kill marine animals and birds, and clog storm drains and landfill machinery, DEP officials say.

Consumers have seen a rise in reusable shopping bags at groceries and retail stores. DEP wants to speed the process.

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Our City Commission Monday will consider authorizing contract negotiations for a sound attenuation wall at the skateboard area of Hamilton Upchurch Park.

It's part of a light commission agenda that includes public hearings and final action on stiffer sign regulations and a lease program for city utilities, and an interlocal agreement with our county to sweep county-owned streets in the Vilano Town Center area. The meeting begins at 5 p.m. in the Alcazar Room at City Hall.

## ***Skateboard wall bids***

Core Construction of Jacksonville and local contractor John Valdes were highest-rated bidders for a 10-16 foot sound attenuation wall along the Flamingo Drive area in bids from five contractors ranging from \$67,900 to \$463,000. Bidders were rated on criteria developed by a city team.

Core's bid ranged from \$67,900 for a 10-foot wall to \$92,500 for a 16-foot wall. Valdes' bids were \$90,035.70 and \$105,875.70.

Commissioners authorized \$75,000 to correct noise problems at the area, including a wall to decrease the skateboard noise level reaching the Flamingo Drive neighborhood.

City staff will also update commissioners on current activity at the Upchurch Park skateboard area since reducing hours of operation and removing metal rails targeted as noisemakers.

## ***Hearings on signs, utilities***

Public hearings will be held on a sign code change, aimed in part at prohibiting changeable message boards, and an innovative program to spread up-front costs of utility connections over time.

Chief Operations Officer John Regan said the utility plan would apply to new businesses creating more than 100 jobs, and "fits well into our strategic plan for West Augustine, where one plank is to find alternate funding for development."

## ***Sweep north, city***

Commissioners will consider an interlocal agreement with the county to send our street sweeper to Vilano Town Center every two weeks at a fee of \$140.85 a cycle.

## **City Heritage program, 450 plan in workshop**

City commissioners will retire a relatively light meeting agenda Monday night to move onto a heavier workshop agenda Tuesday morning - a Heritage Tourism Business Model and 450th Strategic Planning.

Dana Ste. Claire, director of the city's Heritage Department and of the 450th Commemoration, will outline plans for both to commissioners in a 9 a.m. workshop session in the Alcazar Room at City Hall.

Wednesday the strategic plan for the 450th will go to the 450th Steering Committee for review and adoption in a session at 2:30 at Flagler College's Ringhaver Center. The community will get its introduction to the strategic plan November 2 at 5:30 p.m. during a general assembly in Flagler College's Auditorium.

## **Temporary VIC restrooms upgraded**



Visitor tries out new facility, right, men's room detail

Extra comfort has been added in temporary restrooms at our Visitor Center (VIC) while work proceeds to correct ventilation design flaws in its facilities.

Situated north of the center are three double-unit facilities, climate controlled with both air conditioners and heaters, and hooked up to our city's water, electricity and sewer. Some units even have electric hand dryers, VIC Manager Sharon Langford says.

"All are being maintained by city staff so we know they are in tip top shape," Sharon said. "When we are busy on weekends from Nights of Lights through the New Year, we

will supplement the trailers with individual porta potties on the south side of the building."

## ***H.O.G.s parade flags Saturday***

The roar of motorcycles and waving of flags will ring our area tomorrow as the 2009 Florida State H.O.G. Rally's Parade of Flags courses through St. Augustine Beach and our city.

The parade of several hundred motorcycles will depart Bozard Ford on SR 16 at 9 a.m. and travel east on SR 16, south on Ponce de Leon Blvd., east on SR 312, and south on A1A, then north on Beach Boulevard through St. Augustine Beach. The procession will continue north onto Anastasia Boulevard, over the Bridge of Lions, north on Avenida Menendez, west on West Castillo Drive, then north on Ponce de Leon Boulevard and west on SR-16 back to Bozard Ford.

Activities of the 2009 rally of H.O.G. (Harley Owners Group) have been ongoing at the Holiday Inn on St. Augustine Beach and the Bozard dealership, near the Harley Davidson store on SR 16.

**The St. Augustine Report** is published by the Department of Public Affairs of the City of St. Augustine each Tuesday and on Fridays previewing City Commission meetings. The Report is written and distributed by George Gardner, former St. Augustine Mayor (2002-2006) and Commissioner (2006-2008) and a longtime newspaper reporter and editor. Contact The Report at [gardner@aug.com](mailto:gardner@aug.com)

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