**Palm Beach County Commissioners Selling Out the County’s Ag Reserve to GL Homes?**

As the Palm Beach County Commission plans to vote on whether to give away the Ag Reserves to wealthy developers (GL Homes), it is imperative that the Commissioners ask themselves **“What are the most important priorities for the good of Palm Beach County residents?” Is it to give away undeveloped land next door to the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Preserve?**

A review of articles in media over the past few months proves **that priorities should be preservation of quality of life and conservation, not handouts to wealthy developers to take away one of few undeveloped areas near the Preserve.**

Here are examples:

**1.**      There has been lots of development in Palm Beach County but it has been devoted mostly to homes for the wealthy. A recent article stated that “billionaires are pushing out the millionaires” in Southern Palm Beach County (Sentinel, April 9, 2022). This shows how **skewed the “economic development” policy of this County has been to pander to the wealthy and developers like GL Homes who build their mansions.**

2.      Another recent headline states that “**Rents show no signs of slowing down & many buyers get priced out of the market**, some are turning to the rental market, putting added pressure and causing prices to rise (  (Sentinel, April 5, 2022). Rents in West Palm Beach shot up to $2,265 for a two-bedroom apartment, a 42% increase from the year before.” Developments such as the one proposed by GL Homes will result in far higher home and rental prices as “comparables” used by real estate escalate rents far beyond what middle class people can afford.

3.      **The State of Florida has done little to nothing to help**—Florida lawmakers raided $100 Million from the affordable housing program to give to be transferred to a “program that does not exist.”  This means  that it is incumbent on local governments such as Palm Beach County to prioritize controlling these out of control price increases due to pandering to wealthy developers and developments. “The Florida Association-Realtors said EMTs and paramedics would need to earn an extra $25,000 a year than currently to afford a median-priced home in Florida, about $348,000 in 2021. Nurses would need to make an additional $15,000 a year and firefighters would need to earn an extra $10,000 more a year…” “This crisis is not going to be solved by single-family homes…” (Sentinel, April 3, 2022).

4.      **Developers and their real estate industry pals are making tons of money while their actions are  pricing middle and working class people out of the market**. Here is another headline: “How hot is the housing market? (Sentinel, April  3, 2022).  It goes on to say that “These West Boca homes could reel in billions in sales… prices will likely continue to soar for the new West Boca properties. GL Homes announced on its website that prices for its new Lotus Palm Beach property, which will be located on the old golf course, will range from $1.3 million to $2.5 million.” In short, The County is helping to provide billions for wealthy developers—but nothing for middle and income people. You can be sure that developers like GL Homes can use their vast profits to make those politicians who go along with their proposals happy.

Why is GL Homes pushing Commissioners to hand over the Ag Reserves which were established in 1999 by courageous Commissioners who saw undeveloped land disappearing along with quality of life—so much so that they brought a bond issue which passed overwhelmingly by the public?  Because undeveloped land is almost non-existent—so much so that developers have been “gobbled  them up over the past 5 years” ( Sentinel, April 2, 2022).  This powerful developer, GL Homes, thought they could convince CURRENT commissioners to hand over the Ag Reserves despite the fact that the conditions that led 1999’s Board have been p**roven to be true & all the more important now**! The Sentinel  on  March  22nd stated that “a shortage of available land on which to build has been one of the driving forces behind today’s hot real estate market, making competition for current homes fierce and pushing developers find creative solutions.” GL Homes found their creative solution—develop the Ag Reserves which were supposed to be reserved for posterity.

5.      **Surveys show that Florida residents are fed up with Florida politicos prioritizing expensive homes for Northerners**. The Sentinel (March 24, 2022) stated that “many Floridians have scoffed in disbelief at all the homebuying competition posed by out-of-state newcomers, and a new study shows just how eager they are to remove the welcome mat. **Over 73% of Floridians polled believe that too many people have moved in from out of state, according to a survey from Mphasis Digital Risk, a tech company for residential real estate lending. “You are starting to see people getting really priced out of the market, or migration happening within the state itself to more affordable areas**,” said Kim Lanham, senior vice president of Florida based Digital Risk. The Sentinel (March 22, 2022) stated “Investors are gobbling up homes in South Florida like never before. What does that mean for average home buyers?... **Buyers who’ve spent years trying to cobble together enough money for a purchase often aren’t able to get the home they’ve been hoping for…**“**They are now forced to live as renters…”** Yet nothing seems to stop some Palm Beach Commissioners from continuing to put these wealthy outsiders’ interests ahead of middle income Floridians.

6.      Each new development brings more traffic to already-jammed roads. One description of traffic in Boca Raton described it as ““**Traffic is so backed up now,” she said. “One lane will be going east, one will be going west, and an emergency lane in the middle (Sentinel, March 26, 2022).** The Sentinel (March 24, 2022) described the outrage: “ Developments such as the one proposed by GL Homes will add to traffic in the western section of the County that is already jammed. The Sentinel (March 28, 2022) stated that **“**But as[**more and more people move to the area**](https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/palm-beach/fl-ne-golf-course-homes-20220123-ggd4iwo5jneq5nss53qjxkj3g4-story.html), some West Boca residents feel that (added traffic lanes) won’t produce significant traffic relief.

**7.**      Rentals are becoming too pricy for middle income Floridians as demand for rentals is pushed up by the developers building expensive homes they can’t afford. The Sentinel (March 23, 2022) stated: “**Rents as a whole have risen about 32% in South Florida in February when compared to the year prior. In a normal year, rents will usually rise about 5%, Johnson pointed out.** Such a huge fluctuation usually indicates that “something systematic is going on that we don’t have a handle on,” Johnson said. **The South Florida rental market took off in the past years, as many potential home buyers, priced out of the housing market, turned to renting. Out of state buyers have also added pressure to a market where there is already limited inventory of homes available.**

I have shown that the majority of Floridians are not anxious for more multi-million dollar homes to be built—they need affordable homes and they certainly do not want to sacrifice the remaining undeveloped areas near the Loxahatchee National Park to make a wealthy developer millions of dollars.

There seemed to be some indication that a new direction toward affordable housing was to happen when Mayor Robert Weinroth presented a speech on the “State of the County” on March 13, 2022. **He spoke approvingly of a bond issue for workforce housing that was being prepared by Commissioner Bernard**. Here is a verbatim part of his speech concerning this issue—you can listen to his speech at [Palm Beach County Perspective: Special Episode - Palm Beach County State of the County 2022 on Apple Podcasts](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/special-episode-palm-beach-county-state-of-the-county-2022/id1578125913?i=1000553882507)  (listen to 19 mins 10 secs on):

“Housing and homelessness is our second strategic priority. This the place where we are working very hard—**Commissioner Barnard has been working on an initiative to try to help us see if we can put a bond  issue on the November ballot so that we can put more affordable workforce housing out there.** We certainly understand and the nice thing is that everyone wants to live here. The bad thing is everyone wants to live here. Prices have gone crazy and we need to make sure we have a place for people who work here to live here. So your County Commissioners is very focused on that (**Applause!)** over 8000 out-of-state people have exchanged their license for a Florida license living right here in Palm Beach County…in the past decade, the County has helped provide 6500 workforce homes. **Clearly more needs to be done. We are going to talk about a potential bond issue**…. Workforce housing, what is that? People hear that and they think Section 8 Housing. This is not just for the homeless. This  is for working people. **This is for people who have good jobs making 60,000—that is the kind of people we are trying to attract and we have to find a suitable home for. That is what your Board of County Commissioners is working on** (**APPLAUSE AGAIN!) (21M:17S)**

Weinroth’s statements concerning forthcoming County action on workforce housing and the bond issue **drew the only major enthusiastic applause during his address** showing that his audience was strongly in favor of these actions. But exactly one month later when Commissioner Bernard introduced this bond proposal referred to in his speech, Weinroth reacted as follows:

**“I’m still not moved,” Weinroth said regarding the discussion.** “We have people who are barely hanging on, and we’re going to look to tax them even more to try and address a problem, which I think is there but I don’t see that we’re going to make a real dent in this.” By way of contrast, Weinroth was “moved” by GL Homes to sell the Ag Reserves. **Wealthy developers have influence—not people who need workforce housing.**

One of the arguments made by supporters of the GL Homes project was that it would bring in **hundreds of millions of dollars of additional tax revenue** but he does not want to increase the real estate taxes on his wealthy pals to help middle & working income people.

We need Palm Beach County Commissioners who are dedicated to prioritizing the quality of life of average middle and working income people, not wealthy millionaires. We need commissioners who want to conserve our undeveloped property, especially that across from the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Preserve—not hand it to wealthy developers.

In an interview, Weinroth admitted that he thought that if the Ag Reserves swap to GL Homes were put up for a public vote, that it would fail. Some of the current Commissioners seem uninterested in conservation.

Indeed, since the County’s taxpayers voted overwhelmingly to establish the Ag Reserves, **why not have a Referendum to ask voters if they want to hand it over to GL Homes**? The answer is that supporters of this swap know they would lose big time.

**We need to make sure that any commissioners who vote for this swap will be called to account for selling out the public’s property which gutsy commissioners established in 1999.** It’s time to put quality of life and conservation ahead of wealthy political influencers. We need new candidates to run against any commissioners who vote for this swap. These commissioners think they can get away with it—that the public will not be aware of their sell-out. They are wrong. **New candidates who choose to run against commissioners voting for this swap can use the above information and be confident that the majority of the public opposes this swap and would have excellent chances of defeating those who vote for it**.

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1. “Billionaires are pushing out the millionaires.” Florida Sentinel. April 9, 2022.
2. April state of the market. Florida Sentinel. April 5, 2022.
3. “Florida lawmakers raid $100M from affordable housing for program that doesn’t exist.” Sentinel, April 3, 2022.
4. How hot is the housing market? These West Boca homes could reel in billions in sales. Sentinel, April 4, 2022.
5. Debate rages over downtown Boca traffic. Sentinel, March 26, 2022.
6. Fed up with so many northerners moving to Florida? All that frustration is shown in a new study. Sentinel, March 24, 2022.
7. Rents overpaying by 18%. Sentinel, March 23, 2022.
8. Investors are gobbling up homes in South Florida like never before. What does that mean for average home buyers. Sentinel, March 21, 2022.
9. A vacant golf course will be redeveloped into single-family homes in Delray Beach, Sentinel, March 22.
10. More lanes are coming to Florida’s Turnpike near West Boca. Some residents feel that’s not enough to help traffic at Glades Road. Feb. 28, 2022.
11. Weinroth’s podcast: (Support of Bond for work-force housing at 19mins 10secs) [Palm Beach County Perspective: Special Episode - Palm Beach County State of the County 2022 on Apple Podcasts](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/special-episode-palm-beach-county-state-of-the-county-2022/id1578125913?i=1000553882507)
12. 200 million. 20,000 affordable homes. A new plan emerges for housing in Palm Beach County. Sentinel. April 13, 2022.