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## Alligator Creek cut treading water in PGI

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**PUNTA GORDA** — Some Punta Gorda Isles boaters haven't given up on the idea of a new inlet from their canal system into Alligator Creek.

The idea of the cut first surfaced several years ago and was incorporated into Team Punta Gorda's 2005 Master Plan. In April, Team Punta Gorda members brought the idea before the City Council and were told to investigate the state permitting possibilities — and potential costs — further.

Last month, supporters floated the idea again at a City Council town hall meeting

in PGI.

The PGI canal system already has four existing inlets allowing access to Charlotte Harbor. However, the boaters on the southern end of PGI — including the "bird section," where streets bear the names of various birds — would benefit most from a new inlet on Alligator Creek.

Besides a significant reduction in the time it takes them to reach the existing inlets and open water, supporters say the new cut would allow them to return to sheltered water in case of storms or other emergencies.

Council members were

somewhat prepared for the discussion at the town hall since the PGI Civic Association already weighed in, suggesting the city use \$100,000 in sales taxes for the initial studies to determine if the idea is environmentally feasible and permissible. The city receives an estimated \$2 million annual share of the Charlotte County 1 cent infrastructure sales tax.

"With the passing of the sales tax extension, we, the Punta Gorda Isles Civic Association's board of directors would respectfully request that this plan be addressed as strategic and funds for these initial studies be included in the city's

upcoming budget." PGI President Don McCormick wrote in a letter to Mayor Larry Friedman dated Oct. 27. The idea, McCormick said, is the two initial studies would prove "educational" and help the association board to decide whether it would support further investment in the idea.

McCormick has since been seated on the council as its District 2 representative, replacing Councilwoman Marilyn Smith-Mooney.

In response to McCormick's letter, Friedman wrote, "On a myriad of occasions, the City

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Council, both collectively and individually, has told the (supporters) that they would expect a complete proposal, including proposed costs and chronology, as well as source of funding and mechanisms to demonstrate that the majority of affected citizens agree with the proposal."

Friedman reiterated his position at the town hall meeting.

Ultimately, if the city can garner state and other permitting for a new canal inlet, the cost to dredge a new inlet is expected to be

\$2 million or more. And while its PGI supporters suggest the city's sales tax be a funding source, property owners in the PGI Canal District could fund the project with a special assessment.

At the town hall meeting, Smith-Mooney, finishing out her term, told the supporters she's heard from a significant number of PGI and other residents who oppose a new cut on Alligator Creek.

"Did you ever think about going out and getting a petition going in your own (PGI) section and see how many will

take on the (fiscal) burden?" Smith-Mooney asked, suggesting a partial special assessment in the PGI canal district could be a funding alternative.

"I don't think you will ever see enough people who vote in this city and pay for it out of (general) taxpayer money," she said.

Now, that he's a council member, McCormick said the cut is viewed by many in PGI as a benefit, especially since PGI is a community orientated for water activities, but some property owners are adamantly against having to pay for an inlet from

which they wouldn't see a benefit. McCormick described himself as "prudent" and would expect those who would benefit from the new cut to pay for it.

Jay Buckley, who has been spearheading the issue, said the message from council was heard — the users should pay for the project. The Team Punta Gorda committee, he said, is now in the process of doing additional research, revising and refining their presentation, which they will be making to PGI groups and city officials.

City officials.

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