

City holds first mooring field meeting

By Lisa Neff
Islander Reporter

Sailors, Bradenton Beach officials and planning consultants began a journey Oct. 27 — an 18-month course to creating a city mooring field.

The city, with a grant from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, hired Scheda Ecological Associates Inc. of Sarasota as the consultant on developing a recreational boating master plan. The foundation of the plan will be establishing a mooring field in Sarasota Bay near the Historic Bridge Street Pier.

The city already has cleared some hurdles in the process.

In 2006, state lawmakers approved a request from the city to expand its municipal boundaries to include 500 feet from the shore.

Last fall, the city completed a multi-million renovation of the Bridge Street pier, which included showers and rest rooms and a floating dock — amenities for boaters and others.

Then, over the summer, the city hired Scheda to take a lead role in developing the master plan that, in



*Boater Wes Wal-drope talks about his interest in a mooring field during a meeting Oct. 27 at Bradenton Beach City Hall. Senior scientist Dianne Rosensweig of Scheda Ecological Associates Inc. listens. *Islander* Photo: Lisa Neff*

addition to establishing a mooring field, will identify a public location or locations for a kayak launch and set the criteria for hiring a harbor master.

Specifically, Scheda will help:

- Organize the creation of a master plan with

a series of public meetings and focus group interviews.

• Analyze existing city data and research, such as mapping, depths and bathymetry studies and conduct

PLEASE SEE MOORING FIELD, NEXT PAGE

Mooring field moves forward

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

any new engineering research to create a base map for a managed anchorage and mooring field.

- Prepare plans and permits for markers and buoys.
- Design signage for the mooring area.
- Prepare an overall, final master boating plan for the city to adopt and the state to review.

Last week's meeting at city hall involved Sceda representatives Dianne Rosensweig, Wendy Hersfeld and Kathy Noullet, city project/program manager Lisa Marie Phillips, Commissioner Janie Robertson, Mayor Michael Pierce and about two dozen members of the boating community.

Rosensweig welcomed the group to city hall and outlined the task — to balance recreational needs and interests of boaters with environmental concerns.

"We don't want boats mooring in the seagrasses," she said.

Rosensweig then outlined the benefits of developing a master plan: enhanced security with the presence of a harbor master and convenient amenities and regulations that will help promote safety in the water.

Commenting on the city's current offerings, several boaters said there are not enough showers on the pier, that their access to the floating day-dock on the pier has been restricted and that overnight vehicle parking locations are needed for boaters.

Phillips said the city was trying to balance concerns about vandalism in the showers with public access to them. "When we have a harbor master, there will be a keypad," she said.

She added that the Bradenton Beach Police Department is working one-on-one with boaters to help provide overnight parking.

In regards to the floating dock, Phillips said she would consult with Police Chief Sam Speciale, but she thought that the dock was available to anyone for day use, and that boaters, whether liveaboards or day visitors, should have access.

Some boaters seemed wary of the city effort to create a master plan and others endorsed the idea.

Phillips emphasized that the city's goal is not to drive away liveaboards.

"That's never been the idea," Phillips said.

Boater Wes Waldrope said, "I appreciate your comment that the purpose is not to push out the liveaboards. Many places have decided they'd like the quote-unquote riff-raff to go somewhere else.

"In the boating community at large, there is a rising concern that more and more cities are developing these plans to restrict peoples' access to the waterways."

Waldrope said he understood the environmental reasons for mooring management and that he supported the city's effort.

Phillips said the city will not make a profit on the mooring field, but the city expects a positive economic impact for local business.

"This is as much an economic-impact project as a public-access project," she said. "But this is not in any way a revenue generator for Bradenton Beach.... No profit, but self-sustaining is the goal."

With the discussion of money, boaters raised the question of cost — how much would the city charge per boat per month?

Phillips said she couldn't answer that question because a cost-balance assessment has yet to be completed.

"I know what the going rates are. And I think Sarasota is a bit high," she said, referring to a \$400-a-month charge for mooring there.

Several boaters cautioned against being too optimistic about occupancy rates in setting the cost.

The next meeting on the master plan has not been scheduled.