

PACE Progress Report for the Wabasso Environmental Assessment

Submitted by Julianne Renk

During the month of July, the PACE process continued to produce life-changing results for the people of Wabasso, FL. On July 1, representatives from the Indian River County (IRC) Utilities Department and the IRC Sheriff's Department joined me in meeting Senator Mike Haridpolis at the Republican Headquarters in Vero Beach, FL. We planned to speak to him about the water project we drafted, which would supply water to Wabasso; however, everyone was so curious as to why we were there, that we ended up making a presentation to the entire group of about 30 people. This proved to be extremely beneficial because nobody there knew of the Wabasso community and the Third World living conditions that exist within its boundaries. The Senator lent his support to the project and was appreciative to have been enlightened about Wabasso. I am becoming increasingly aware that exposing the fact that this community (Wabasso) exists in a county (Indian River) that is known for its affluence is a shock to many people. Once they learn of the living conditions in Wabasso, then the concern, compassion, and offers to help are extended.

A case in point is a gentleman who essentially donated 20 mobile homes to anyone in Wabasso who could use them. A developer bought the land that the mobile homes were on and needed to get rid of them. The developer pledged \$10,000 to move them. So far, I have coordinated for three trailers to go to families who, quite frankly, had homes that were of condemnable stature. Some homes will have to be demolished and, during the month of July, through departmental collaboration, the homes have been inspected and permits to demolish have been issued. The first house came down on July 27th and was a huge event for Wabasso. Freeman Wiggs, who is 81 years old, had lived in the house for over 30 years and actually built the house with his own hands! The house was literally caving in so he moved into his inoperable car, where he has been living for almost three years now. He never had a bathroom or a well so the house came down and was removed in a time period of two hours. The demolishing services were donated and the press was there to cover the story and to promote the improvement of the housing situation that we have appropriately coined "Project Hope."



Project Hope came to fruition during the month of July through a phone call from a contractor in Brevard County who read about the living conditions in Wabasso and the plight of the people who made up the community. She is affiliated with a network of over 500 volunteers who will visit Wabasso once a month to repair and rebuild people's homes. The first thing they will do is to build Freeman Wiggs a home! Construction is anticipated to begin in September and the plans are being drafted this week. The volunteers will continue to visit Wabasso and work on homes with the intentions of continuing work as long as they can identify residents in need of help. I compiled a list of residents that will last them at least a year! Donations are coming in already for the project and I anticipate it to be a tremendous aid for the people of Wabasso that will truly give them HOPE for a better way of life.

Other significant events in July included the July 19 community meeting and the steering committee meeting on July 12. Both meetings were extremely productive and positive. Once again, the tone for the meetings has completely changed from negative, angry outcries to applause and cries of joy relating to the recent improvements taking place in the community. On July 6, I teamed with Teddy Floyd from the IRC Sheriff Department to do a radio show about Wabasso and the PACE initiative. The majority of my time this month was allocated towards distributing easements and collecting them for the Wabasso water project.



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