

## Factcheck of City's Fact Sheet regarding Flamingo Ditch - March 2025

### History of Flamingo Ditch

The Fact sheet fails to state that the City and formerly the County chose and have utilized the FD as part of the public stormwater infrastructure for this area, since the sub division in the 1970's was built. Flamingo Ditch is part of the City's public stormwater drainage infrastructure for this particular area of Golden Beach. The beach outfall # 5 serves by far the largest density of residential homes and public streets on the island, including the Flamingo Ditch Lagoon.

### Past Improvements

A resident of Flamingo Drive ( not city staff ) successfully secured a \$ 2.2 M grant in 2013 from Tallahassee for the City to de-muck a large part of the ditch, also pruning and removing overgrown plants. The project was not entirely finished as they ran out of money. **The City could have used stormwater utility funds to complete the project.**

In 2018 the City of Venice Stormwater Maintenance crew eliminated the old wooden structure from the mid 1990's, which created a "flow bottleneck" during heavy rain events, such as in August 2017 when several homes got flooded. It was replaced with a natural outfall channel with the intent to maximize storm water drainage towards the Gulf. The removal required periodic shoveling out of sand to clear the outflow.

### Failed Improvements

December 2011 Flamingo Ditch and Deer Town Gully Outfall Improvement Project prepared by Erickson Consulting Engineers was rejected for cost reasons. ECE was engaged to evaluate both beach stormwater outfalls to improve water quality, capacity, and functionality. During typical high frequency summer storms, stormwater conveys to Flamingo Ditch and backs up within the upstream channels resulting in conditions that are conducive to bacterial growth. **The part of the project to reduce flooding occurrences on public roads was abandoned because Council/Staff determined that improvements were cost prohibitive.** The proposed improvements for the pipe option totaled \$ 3,649,574.

### Ownership of Flamingo Ditch

**It is irrelevant who owns the land known as Flamingo Ditch.** The County and City chose to use this wetland waterway to offload stormwater from numerous **public** streets on the island. They chose this no doubt, because it was cheaper than running pipe the way the rest of the island is set up. **The City is not required to continue to use the Ditch for public stormwater drainage, but they are obligated to provide safe, adequate stormwater drainage for all public streets!**

ECE Project Overview City of Venice Outfall Improvement December 2011: page 6: **"Flamingo Ditch Outfall Maintenance Easement is held by Sarasota County."** **"The City is responsible for maintenance of the outfall within the boundaries of the Federal Shore Protection Project"** (statement by Kathleen Weeden to Ericson)

## Why Does The Flamingo Ditch Flood

The City often failed to keep the Outflow open. Residents often had to do the job, when City workers did not shovel it out especially when rain events occurred at night, during week-ends or Holidays.

Needless to say the City failed to keep its promise to shovel out the berm at least weekly or more often if necessary.

It is also unclear when the FD West of Gardenia was last cleaned-out of mud, overgrown bushes, debris, standing bacteria infected water etc. by either the City or the County.

## What Caused Flooding During Hurricanes Helene and Milton

The City was at least partially responsible for the flooding event of Helene, since they failed to dig out the Outfall on September 26<sup>th</sup> 2024 when water was backing up onto the public roads early that morning. The ditch was already higher than normal for a few weeks. Pictures and videos were taken at 8:32 AM with one foot of flood water on Flamingo Dr. The corner of GB Blvd and Villas systems were already backed up. Street ditches have been carrying contaminated water for weeks before Helene, and City staff were fully aware of this. Per City records, the last dig out occurred on September 18<sup>th</sup>. City records show that staff "checked on the outfall" between 10 AM and 12 PM on September 26<sup>th</sup> and did nothing.

**The City's Fact Sheet also fails to state that homes and streets flooded in the years before the hurricanes of 2024 because the mouth of the Ditch was not kept open by the City.**

The Fact sheet also states that there was little rain fall during the events. Per the Climate Center at FSU, Venice received 4.13" of rain during Milton.

## Feasibility Study

Telling homeowners to rely on insurance is ridiculous when **the City is to blame for not updating and providing safe, adequate stormwater drainage of its public streets. Homes don't flood from stormwater when the streets don't flood...** (This is a separate matter from flooding caused by storm/sea surge).

Regarding storm/sea surge, residents have made suggestions for years to the City about implementing best practices used elsewhere such as working with owners of beach front property to excavate out dry detention ponds between the dunes and the buildings. **The City has been spending millions to dredge sand from out in the Gulf to nourish our beaches and build up the dune area when they could have used sand excavated from the upland area of the beach creating dry detention ponds which would have created a double barrier to storm surge: the dune and the dry detention ponds!**

Elevating homes is not an option for many reasons: No. 1 is cost. No. 2, most residents and buyers in this area are seniors who need a one level home. Installing an elevator is costly and **is not a solution because mechanics, parts, etc. of the elevator start at the ground level where there is flooding when the public roads flood!**

**The City of Venice needs to stop blaming the victims and accept responsibility to provide safe, adequate stormwater drainage and mitigation of storm/sea surge. Its Engineering Department urgently needs to update its old standard operating procedures observed by consultant CPE, hire an outside contractor for night, week-ends, and Holiday back-up, and modernize its outdated public stormwater infrastructure.**

**Because of the City's failure to act has cost residents Millions of Dollars of property damages. Flood losses are not limited to direct damages, but also include indirect effects such as decreases in property values, which can be substantial, though are rarely well quantified; pain and suffering from expenses to find another place to live until one's home can be repaired or rebuild. Selling any property on Venice Island at this point is practically impossible even at steep discounts, according to local realtors.**

**You can't stop nature from doing what nature is going to do. For our neighborhood to think it's never going to be this bad again would be a dangerous assumption. We urge the City to be more proactive and decisive, and moving forward to address these issues facing hundreds of affected residents.**

**Because of the inaccurate and misleading statements in the Fact Sheet, the Flamingo Ditch Steering Committee requests the City to remove it from their website.**

Venice March 18, 2025/BL

**FLAMINGO DITCH STEERING COMMITTEE**