



Beach Ordinance 04-05 Beginnings

– by Public Works Director Danielle Slaterpryce

Our beautiful beaches attract tourists and citizens alike who have fallen in love with this area. The beaches have a reputation for being laid back and user-friendly. However, in recent years the number of visitors has increased. The opportunity for providing services to these visitors and residents, along with competition for use of the beaches has also increased. During the last two years Okaloosa County Public Works began getting calls from condo owners, property owners, beach visitors (residents and tourists alike) and vendors who were in conflict with each other. They were unhappy with some situations on the beach. For example, property owners wanted a voice in which vendors were allowed on the public beach in front of their property. The vendors wanted access to the public beach but brides, wedding parties and visitors wanted to be left alone. There were no clear guidelines or regulations for any of these activities. These problems didn't exist when the demand for beach space wasn't as great. The problem became bigger with the increasing demand. Public Works felt the public needed some protection and the vendors and property owners needed some guidelines.

Last summer it became evident that it was time to review the existing Okaloosa County Parks Ordinance No. 04-05 and provide updates in order to better serve the public and create some balance between all the interested/impacted groups. Public Works approached the Board of County Commissioners with a request to hold several workshops involving the public, vendors, commercial property and homeowners, Okaloosa County Public Safety, the Tourist Development Council and Public Works. The four workshops were advertised and the public was encouraged to attend. We had a great turn out and very solid input from everyone.

Okaloosa County's primary concern was for safety on the beach and in the water. The goal was to balance beach activities such as volleyball, fishing, sunbathing and maximize family fun under the sun while providing for prompt response to emergencies and maintaining overall beach safety. Approximately 40 people attended the four workshops that lasted around four hours each. Attendees consisted of a cross section of the community and included all of the groups previously mentioned.

The current Parks Ordinance, No. 04-05, was reviewed and suggestions for revisions were made by the workshop attendees. Everyone worked hard to balance their wants and needs and to come up with a solution that benefited all interests. The entire group is to be complimented for their courtesy, time, energy and resolve. The Ordinance is now a dynamic document that can be modified and improved as the need arises. Public Works will be monitoring beach activities this summer to see how the changes are working and what might need improvement. We welcome public input at anytime. The input is what makes the process work well!

When proposed changes were presented to the Okaloosa County Board of Commissioners at the March 18, 2008 public hearing, additional changes were made based on public input during the meeting. The changes included removal of the proposed north to south beach safety corridors as well as language about an annual fee for permits needed for beach property owners. Overall, the revised ordinance reflects all of the hard work put into it by the general public and interested groups. We are truly grateful for our concerned citizens and the wisdom they brought to this issue.