

This week's conservation newsletter shares the words of IXIA member and Amelia Island resident Betsy Harris and concerns, perhaps, the greatest threat the Island has ever faced.

Driving north across the George Crady Bridge, the view of southeastern Amelia Island, swaths of green maritime forest nestled against white sand beaches lapped by the Atlantic Ocean, is one of the most iconic and beautiful scenes in all of Northeast Florida. It is one of the very few places in the state that offers both magnificent sunrise and sunset views and for the people lucky enough to call Amelia home, whether coming from work or play in Jacksonville or points further south, it is the beacon that signals that they can exhale, they are back to their small island home.

Having driven this (once quiet) stretch of road hundreds and hundreds of times over the years, I have had the fortune of witnessing this scene in all of her splendor and all of her rage. I've seen bright buttery sunrises on brilliant blue skies with nary a cloud in sight. I've seen those stunning sunrises, when the morning light mingles with Saharan dust on the horizon and the sky is every shade red, from coral to hot pink to crimson. I love the ones where the sun is nearly hidden by the clouds, but her rays are jutting out in every possible direction (for those unaware, in the south we call these particular sun rays "Jesus rays"), I've seen the ones where the sun peeks in and out, gone one minute, nearly blinding you the next and of course, I've seen the sunrises that weren't, the grayest of stormy days when she's hidden by a thick blanket of clouds and sheets of rain, her only proof of existence that is day and not night.

And, that's just. the. sunrises.

I've watched bald eagles fly across the open skies of south Amelia, hunting breakfast to take back to their young on the banks of Simpson's Creek. I've been witness to rainbows worthy of Oscars arc over the ocean following summer thunderstorms and swallowtail kites, here to breed from South America, gracefully cruise above the tree canopy. I've been silenced by the display of purples and pinks on the eastern horizon in winter reflected off the setting sun on Nassau Sound. I've walked the beach from Southend Beach Access to Amelia State Park and circled back on the Amelia Island Bike trail, admiring the flora, fauna and natural history of this ancient and majestic spit of sand that broke off from the mainland thousands and thousands of years ago.

So many images, each one defining who and what Amelia Island is and also... what she is not.

On June 14th, 2021, with tremendous support from the citizens who live, work and play on Amelia Island, the Nassau County Board of County Commissions approved building height restrictions that would bring the county in line with the City of Fernandina Beach and permanently restrict height limits to 35 ft. on oceanfront buildings and 45 ft. elsewhere.

And now, not even a full year later, the BOCC wants to give a variance to Riverstone Properties to not only exceed the 35 ft. limit on oceanfront properties, but allow them to more than DOUBLE it to 85 ft. Eighty. Five. Feet. That's basically double the height of the natural tree canopy in place on the property in question. It's more than double the height of any existing structure from Amelia State Park to the Omni Resort. And, if you are trying to imagine what one 85 ft. tall structure might look like, you're going to need a bigger imagination because Riverstone has explicitly stated that they intend to build not one, not two, not even three, but ELEVEN of these 85 ft. tall monstrous eyesores.

I know, the residents of Amelia Island are tired of constantly being called to arms to fend off greedy scumbags and beg their representatives to actually act in the best interest of their constituents, but this

one is important. To say that this proposal is not in line with the character of Amelia Island is just a scratch on the surface of everything that is wrong with this deal. If approved, this proposal will permanently and irrevocably alter not only the skyline and beachfront of Amelia Island, ruining all future sunrises and welcome home vistas, it will undoubtedly open the door for further developments of this kind and the Amelia that we know and love will be a memory recited to our kids and grandkids instead of shared with them.

What can citizens do?

Contact the BOCC and tell them to VOTE NO on May 23rd. Attend the BOCC meeting in person and make them look us in the eye if they sell out to the highest bidder.

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