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Survey: Captivans disapprove of underground utilities

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The Captiva Civic Association received the results of the survey they had sent out to Captiva property owners on whether they would approve the undergrounding of Captiva's utilities.

A total of 569 surveys were returned to the CCA, out of a total of 1,133 surveys that were mailed out. Well over 75 percent of the 50.2 percent of property owners who responded to the survey disapproved of the new taxing plan.

The underground utilities project's construction costs, given to the CCA by Lee County, were estimated to be \$16,498,724 with a 10 year financing cost estimated at \$7,812,373.

"Only about 12 percent of the 1,133 property owners indicated that they would approve such a plan," said a press release from the CCA. "Lee County Staff has indicated that 67 percent of all property owners would have to approve the plan in a petition process in order to propose official Lee County approval of the taxing plan, significantly above the 12 percent indicating approval in this survey."

The press release also indicated that responders to the surveys had concerns about the cost and whether the installment of the utilities underground would benefit and help improve protection from storms and hurricanes.

"Also, several respondents from South Seas expressed concern that they would be required to pay part of the cost, even though existing overhead lines at South Seas would remain above ground," the press release from the CCA stated.

The CCA President, Bill Fenniman, claims that his organization is not surprised by the results of the survey.

"The CCA is not really surprised at the results, but more than pleased that we were able to provide factual information to Captivans about this project, information that should have been made public a long time ago," said Fenniman. "While our Board is neutral as to the final outcome, we remain steadfast in our efforts to be certain that all Captivans are made aware of all of the information available that may affect them."

Lee County will not do any type of action until Captiva shows interest in performing the project and asking for a petition. "The community panel and the Captiva Civic Association could do whatever survey they want," said Libby Walker, of the Lee County Public Resources Department. "We're not going to do anything at this point until we have a request from the community to perform a formal petition."

The CCA has expressed that aside from informing the public, including Lee County and the Lee County Electric Cooperative, of the outcome of the survey, there is no other action planned for the time being. "No further steps are necessary at this time, for just as the CPOA (Captiva Property Owners Association) Community Panel stated that its 'safety shoulder survey' speaks for itself, so, too does the underground power survey speak for itself," said Fenniman.

The Captiva Community Panel has expressed the need to form a committee for this project. Rene Miville, the temporary chair of the project committee for the underground utilities, claims that the survey conducted by the CCA holds no weight to Lee County and is misleading to Captivans because of the incorrect estimates.

“So now they should send out another survey and ask: if it costs \$5 million, like in Marco Island (million per mile), and the additional \$20 million over the construction cost of the LCEC binding estimate of \$5 million was not going to happen, they would get reverse results,” said Miville. “This is why this particular survey is flawed. It is not by the panel, it is not based on official numbers, and most important of all, the only survey that will be recognized by Lee County will be that by the panel. Would you pay \$10 for a cup of coffee at Starbucks? This survey pretty much asked the same question. They got the answer they wanted. It is really too bad they refuse to work with us instead of always being busy trying to undermine the island working together.”