

## FPUA: Fort Pierce developer improperly tapped residents' drinking water

By Alexi Howk

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**HUTCHINSON ISLAND — HUTCHINSON ISLAND** — Several residents in the Harbour Isle condominium complex have been paying a lot more for water in the past two years than they should have.

Fort Pierce Utilities Authority officials discovered the developer of the 912-unit community improperly tapped into the water supply intended for domestic use for each building and has been using that water for irrigation. By doing so, the developer avoided paying a \$478,000 impact fee, FPUA Director Bill Thiess said.

"It's a shortcut to avoid the impact fees, and it was not the right thing to do," Thiess said. "Residents got a raw deal out of it because they are the ones paying for it. The finger goes back to the developer for doing what he's not supposed to do and for the city signing off on the landscape structure."

FPUA and city officials are trying to determine how Harbour Isle Development LLC was able to pass inspection and obtain certificates of occupancy for the units with an unauthorized irrigation system. Officials plan to meet Wednesday to discuss the issue.

"I don't know anything about it," City Manager Dennis Beach said. "There appears to be several different players in this, and the plan is to get them in the same room and figure all of this out."

Meanwhile, because of the improper configuration, the development is paying about \$54,000 more per year in sewer fees on water used for irrigation, FPUA officials estimated. There are 38 buildings in Harbour Isle.

"Please note this configuration is not an approved irrigation alternative for this development," wrote FPUA senior engineer David Mellert in a letter to Harbour Isle representatives.

Mason Simpson, developer of Harbour Isle, did not return calls seeking comment.

There are two homeowners associations at Harbour Isle — one for the west side and one for the east side.

The homeowners association for the east side has already taken action to remedy the problem by paying \$30,700 to have irrigation meters installed, Thiess said. However, he said the association wants the developer to reimburse it for fixing the problem.

East Association President Karl Tutt could not be reached for comment Thursday.

At most, Thiess said the association for the west would likely have to pay \$519,000 to get its system into compliance.

At Wednesday's meeting officials will try to determine who is responsible for paying the charge to bring the system into compliance — the developer or residents, Thiess said.

In a March 4 letter to Mellert, Kevin Burbon, association president for the west side, said the responsibility of fixing the system should rest with the developer.

"We at the HIW are deeply concerned with your prediction of the low pressure system on the upper floors and our buildings resulting from the unauthorized irrigation system and are dismayed at the (\$519,000) proposed fee to bring this situation into compliance that is clearly the responsibility of the developer," Burbon wrote. •



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