

# HARBOR BRANCH OCEANOGRAPHIC INSTITUTE

## FOUNDATION

### DECISION MEMO

TO: Finance Committee  
FROM: Katha Kissman, President & CEO  
DATE: March 11, 2019  
RE: Montessori School Site/Lakela's Mint

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Foundation-owned parcel on Old Dixie Highway near the FAU Harbor Branch campus which we refer to as the "former Montessori School site" or "Lakela's Mint site," property tax code: 1408-311-0003-000-1 has been sitting empty since 2014.

This parcel and building had been leased by the Learning Garden Montessori School for a number of years. The School vacated the site in January 2014 and Bill Stewart's office and I successfully worked to resolve outstanding issues with the School's owner with regard to the payment of back rent and her abandonment of four portable units on the site when she left.

Because Learning Garden stripped the portables of several bathroom fixtures and after being vacant for so long, they were not in the best of shape and would need substantial code improvements to be usable, we determined to try to get rid of them. We approached Patrick Boles first and he confirmed with FAU that they did not want the portables nor the school building and/or land.

The Foundation was not prepared to pay for any removal or transport of the portables unless absolutely necessary to sell the property. We found an entity willing to relocate the four portables at their cost if we would transfer title to them. They agreed to prepare for and then remove and transport the units to their site. All costs were borne by them.

In August 2015, after multiple conversations with St. Lucie County, we submitted a no-obligation "Willing Seller Letter" to St. Lucie County to purchase the land and building for its use in conjunction with the future "Harbor Branch Preserve" project. That project would eventually include nature trails on the County-controlled parcel surrounding our property as well as the trails planned on their two additional parcels adjacent to FAU Harbor Branch, across US Highway 1, and around our Old Citrus Grove property. At that time, the County officials saw the possibility of having this parcel and building as a potential Nature Center with public restrooms and additional parking for the Harbor Branch Preserve project.

Unfortunately, just as we thought officials at St. Lucie County and the Land Acquisition Selection Committee process would support this acquisition to be funded either through Environmentally Sensitive Lands Program or Greenways & Trails program, there were personnel changes at the County. When last discussed, we were told that acquisition funds in both programs had dried up.

In addition, when the property was no longer being used by the Montessori school, we lost our property tax exemption.

#### **PROPOSAL**

The Finance Committee may wish to consider recommending to the Board of Directors listing this land for sale. This would relieve the ongoing carrying costs or prompt a renewed interest from St. Lucie County. Currently the carrying costs on this property are:

Property Taxes: 2018 Tax \$4,017.95 (Paid \$3,857.23 – Discounted for Early Payment)  
Insurance: Total HBOIF Property Premium \$1,926.28  
(Coverage of former school site is only a portion of the premium. Premium also includes business/personal property and valuable papers coverage.)  
Maintenance: \$650.00 per occurrence for mowing and trimming (2-3 times per year)  
Electric Service: \$24.10 per month

The last appraisal on October 9, 2017 noted a market value of \$80,500.