TAB 7

LETTER FROM KEVIN O'KANE, ACOE, DECEMBER 18, 2012

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
JACKSONVILLE DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS
10117 PRINCESS PALM AVENUE, SUITE 120
TAMPA, FLORIDA 33610

December 18, 2012

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

Tampa Permits Section
SAJ-2011-00551 (IP-TEH)

Ms. Michele Baker
Pasco County Board of County Commissioners
7530 Little Road, Suite 320
New Port Richey, Florida 34654

Mr. John Post, Jr.
Florida Department of Transportation
Florida's Turnpike Enterprise
Post Office Box 613069
Ocoee, Florida 34761

Dear Ms. Baker and Mr. Post:

This is in reference to your permit application requesting authorization from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to impact waters of the United States in association with a project known as "Ridge Road Extension" (SAJ-2011-00551 (IP-TEH)).

We have received your December 17, 2012 correspondence regarding the alternatives analysis. You have proposed a revision of the overall project purpose to specify the construction of a "centrally located arterial roadway". In support of this revision, you note that the proposed Ridge Road Extension is featured in the Pasco County's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). You further offer that the Institute of Traffic Engineers recommends that arterial roadways be spaced a minimum of every one mile in rural areas and note that SR-52 and SR-54 are 10 miles apart. While the Corps recognizes the role of the LRTP in the County's planning process, the mere existence of the proposed Ridge Road Extension in the plan does not eliminate the possibility of reasonable alternatives worthy of further evaluation. Nor does the recommendation of the Institute of Traffic Engineers eliminate the need to evaluate alternatives that may not be centrally located, but that may improve east-west roadway capacity, enhance overall mobility, and improve hurricane evacuation clearance times.

As noted in our July 23, 2008 correspondence, the preferred alternative provides increased roadway capacity east of the Moon Lake Road –Starkey Boulevard north-south corridor to US-41. Therefore, as noted in our November 15, 2012 meeting, the Corps has refined the overall project purpose from that featured in the public notice. The overall project purpose, as defined by the Corps for the purpose of conducting the alternatives analysis, is as follows:

To improve east-west roadway capacity and enhance overall mobility within the area bounded by SR-52 to the north, SR-54 to the south, US-41 to the east, and Moon Lake Road / DeCubellis Road / Starkey Boulevard to the west in accordance with the County's current Comprehensive Plan and the Metropolitan Planning Organization's Long Range Transportation Plan. The project will also provide additional roadway capacity and improved routing away from coastal hazard areas and improve hurricane evacuation clearance times in the event of a hurricane or other major weather-related occurrence in accordance with State of Florida requirements and the County's current Comprehensive Plan.

The Corps cannot limit the alternatives to the construction of a "centrally located arterial roadway," as you have requested. The Corps finds that such a narrow definition of the project purpose would preclude the consideration of reasonable alternatives.

In our November 16, 2012 correspondence (attached), the Corps requested that you provide an outline of alternatives, including any information you would like the Corps to consider regarding the elimination of alternatives. We also requested this information at our August 20, 2012 meeting. Your December 17, 2012 submittal fails to provide this information and instead dictates a process by which this information will be generated. We respectfully request that you provide an outline of alternatives, including any information you would like the Corps to consider regarding the elimination of alternatives no later than January 17, 2013. As an alternative to seeking further Corps input, it is also your option to provide a full response to our July 23, 2012 request for additional information, including the alternatives analysis, by January 17, 2013. If no response is received, we will assume you have no further interest in obtaining a Corps permit and the application will be withdrawn.

The contents of this letter pertain solely to alternatives analysis and do not reflect our ongoing review of other aspects of your application. This letter should not be interpreted as acceptance or approval of any aspect of the proposed application.

Should you have any questions or comments regarding this letter, please contact Tracy Hurst of my staff at the letterhead address, by phone at 813-769-7063, or by electronic mail at Tracy.E.Hurst@usace.army.mil.

Sincerely,

Kevin D. O'Kane

Kevin D. O'Kane
Chief, Tampa Permits Section

Attachment:

USACE 11/16/12 Correspondence

cc (w/att):

Mr. Ron Meidema
Wetlands and Marine Regulatory Section
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
61 Forsyth St.
Atlanta, GA 30303-8960