

# City sitting down with Key RV once more Court-ordered mediation hopes to succeed where settlement offers have failed

BY MARC PHELPS  
Free Press Staff

As the City of Marathon gets closer to a trial date later this month with a trailer park over central sewer system assessments, only a scrap of hope is left that the two sides can find common ground.

"The original settlement offer was rejected," said Marathon City Manager Roger Hernstadt. He declined to discuss if talks were ongoing, as the matter with Key RV is currently in litigation.

Hernstadt and city staff are tight-lipped because the contentious case has seen many settlement offers fall apart at various stages, leading to the imminent trial date this month. Before that trial, however, the judge has ordered both sides to again sit down for discussions.

"I'll be asking them to designate a council member to be a representative for the media-

# New spin on wastewater



MARC PHELPS/Free Press

Marathon City staff and officials watch as a centrifuge takes more than 75 percent of the weight out of waste processed during a demonstration of the equipment Thursday morning at the area four service plant. The process will save the city money on trucking waste out of town, according to staff, and the city is deciding whether to buy a similar piece of equipment or contract with a private company for the service.

# Marathon gets demonstration of traveling centrifuge

BY MARC PHELPS  
Free Press Staff

Marathon took a piece of proposed wastewater equipment for a spin Thursday, but this isn't the type of ride you want to be on.

The city set up a demonstration of a wastewater centrifuge, at the service area 4 plant to show off a machine capable of removing excess water from the waste stream in order to reduce the weight — and therefore the cost — of material that must be removed from Marathon's sewage plants.

"It works just like the spin cycle on a [clothes] dryer," said Marathon Community Services Director Susie Thomas.

After spinning as much of the liquid material as possible out, what's left is a cake that costs only 20 percent as much to haul away as liquid sludge, according to Thomas.

"We're hoping the public and others will get educated on how it works and how it will keep our [operations and maintenance costs] as low as possible," said City Manager Roger Hernstadt of Thursday's demonstration.

According to staff, a city purchase of such a centrifuge would be eligible for about \$404,000 in grant funding, leaving the city to pay just over \$200,000 for the equipment. Staff was instructed by the Marathon City Council to look into private contractors that may be able to provide the same service.

Hernstadt said at council's Aug. 24 meeting that he would send out for letters of interest from private contractors.

Council will likely have to make a quick decision at

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In the interim, Herin and council will be seeking an opinion from the Florida Commission on Ethics pertaining to Councilman Dick Ramsay's role as a possible mediator — or to any potential vote on a settlement offer, should one arise.

Ramsay said he and the city are being proactive in seeking

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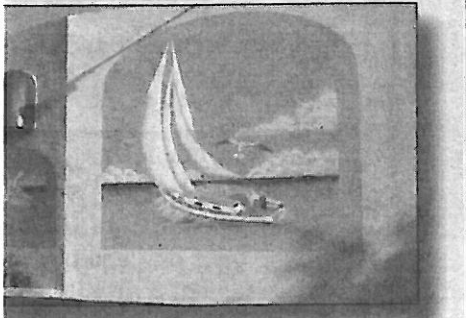

  
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# Mystery

PHOTO



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an issue. Ramsay's son-in-law, Chris Gratton, owns Keys Contracting Services, a Marathon-based contractor that is one of three companies bidding on installing the central sewer system at Key RV.

"We're just getting in touch with the ethics committee to make sure there is no conflict," Ramsay said. Ramsay could be a likely representative for the council because of his involvement in negotiations with Key RV from early on in the process.

"I would entertain a new proposal with open arms," Ramsay said. "I don't like lawsuits."

2006 over a combined assessment of nearly \$1 million to connect park residents to the city's sewer system.

Key RV's lawsuit stems from an increase in its assessment as its designation was switched from mobile home park to condominium association.

When that happened, the city formula for sewer assessments deemed each trailer as a separate equivalent dwelling unit.

The city argues it must treat all dwellings under a given designation the same. Key RV argues its water usage did not change with the redesignation, so its assessment should

The city's last round of talks with park representatives ended in a stalemate in April 2010.

"I thought the city sent a final offer to them," said Vice Mayor Mike Cinque. "If there's negotiations going on, it's to my surprise."

"I guess they could send an offer back and the council could look at it. We haven't been asked to make any changes," Cinque said.

Key RV representatives did not return phone calls seeking comment on the upcoming mediation or new settlement offer.

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## Centrifuge

Continued from page 1

Tuesday's general meeting, since the grant funding for the equipment will expire soon.

Plans call for the centrifuge to be mobile, traveling to each wastewater plant location.

"We'll find out" if the demonstration answers council's questions, said Councilman Dick Ramsay. "The city has reached out to at least four companies to see what we could get done on an outside contract. Wherever we can outsource to keep city staff to a minimum and costs low, that is the way to go."

Ramsay acknowledged it was possible for a contractor to bid low and raise the price later.

"There's two sides to every coin. It becomes a business

*"I think it's a good idea. But we had a lot of problems placing these sewer plants around town. I want the people to understand that this is going to be at the plant for a day or two a month."*

**Mike Cinque**  
Marathon vice mayor

decision," he said.

Vice Mayor Mike Cinque also seemed to favor finding a private contractor, and felt competition would keep the price low and prevent mark up when the grant funding for the centrifuge was gone.

"If we had only one company, then we would have to look at the grant and say that it has more value," Cinque said. "But if there are a couple of bidders, [there is competition]."

Cinque said the important thing at the demonstration Thursday was for people

to decide for themselves if the sounds and smells of the equipment would be something they could live with in their neighborhoods — at least for a day or two a month.

"I want people to know what it is," Cinque said. "I think it's a good idea. But we had a lot of problems placing these sewer plants around town. I want the people to understand that this is going to be at the plant for a day or two a month. It's not something that's going to create a problem at the plant."

The alternative, Cinque said, is the less palatable option of trucking sewer sludge through town to a centrally-located centrifuge, or out of the Keys altogether.

"I'm not in favor of turning Marathon into a place with [wastewater] trucks coming in and out," Cinque said.

Thomas agreed, saying the demonstration may not solve council's questions about how to provide a centrifuge, but should prove its worth.

"We're going to recommend a centrifuge," Thomas said.

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