

BSI Canal Committee

10/5/21

Today's article has been one of the hardest for me to write and I have struggled mightily with the contents for several weeks, but I feel it is my job to keep you informed by knowing the probable future for us in BSI.

Wanda and I moved here, because of a city-maintained canal system, allowing us to enjoy a lifestyle we both wanted. So, my request to you is to not only read but to think about all aspects of why you move to BSI, in large part and for us, living on a well-maintained canal system that is unique to other communities in Florida.

According to city records, there is 95,037 feet of seawall in BSI. Of which 17,249 feet (approximately 18%) has been replaced since initial installation (circa, 1980). As a point of reference, there is 480,252 feet (or approximately 5 times more) of seawall in PGI, of which 206,950 feet (approximately 43%) has been replaced since initial installation (circa, 1965).

As of 2020, The city's cost for replacing seawall is a little over \$350/lineal foot (spread out over the total cost of seawall replacement for both BSI and PGI). There are extras such as dead men anchors, drain lines, riprap, all of which are inspected and replaced on an as needed basis. Additionally, the city is responsible for annual mangrove trimming, lock maintenance, channel markers/piling maintenance and maintenance dredging, all which add to the total canal costs above and beyond any seawall repair/replacement.

Although not specific, most of the seawalls in PGI are 12 to 15 years older than BSI. On the surface, that would indicate a failure rate in BSI of 23,759 feet (or approximately 25%) in the next (let's say) 15 years. So, from a strictly empirical perspective (and based on PGI replacement rate) seawall replacement in BSI will cost approximately an additional \$8.3 million in the next 15 years.

There are 750 canal lots in BSI, so spreading that cost over the lots, would suggest an additional assessment of \$11,066 /lot. Spreading this cost over 15 years, gives us an additional assessment of \$737/year/lot—this is assuming assessment increases start next year.

Ok—so this puts a “stake in the ground” pointing to a high probable outcome, if we accept that what has happened in PGI will happen in BSI. I can tell you I am not happy with this outcome, and to be honest, the city and its canal maintenance department is not happy with this either. So how do we (as a community) work to change or reduce the potential assessment increases.

Over the years, our canal maintenance department has realized that a good portion of their job is to become more proactive in maintaining our seawalls. Within the last 10 years, there has been an ongoing focus on wall specifications including rebar, concrete mix, and installation practices. There have been secondary studies looking at alternative wall constructions techniques such as steel sheet piling, fiberglass and even plastic walls.

All of this effort has resulted in modifications to seawall materials and practices—all focused on extending the life expectancy of our seawalls, with some success. Associated with this effort, the city recently contracted an outside engineering firm, to review wall construction techniques, practices, and specifications. Many recommendations were made and after a fairly thorough review, a number of changes have been adapted—again, all focused on extending the life of our seawalls and reducing the annualized cost of our assessments.

Make no mistake, we in BSI have it better than they do in PGI from a reliability and cost perspective, --- and the ongoing learning has paid off. Additionally, we are more protected storm-wise, which suggest we would expect less damage from hurricanes, etc.—and all indications hold this to be true. Reality is, we still experience storm damage, but so far, not to the extent as has been seen in PGI.

So—the question on the tip of our tongues, where does this put us--assessment wise? All of this effort has had the desired effect in reducing our anticipated assessment increases from the previously mentioned \$737/lot/year to what appears to be now something closer to \$150/lot/year. Even then, based on our current failure rate, we expect to be able to step into this additional assessment over the next few years, hopefully allowing individual homeowners to better adjust and absorb these increases.

Although prices differ widely depending upon a long list of specifics, a “best guess” is a seawall replacement in kind would cost individual homeowners between \$35,000 and \$75,000. ---So, now you can be the judge as to the value an additional \$150/year assessment.

Several individuals have asked me if the BSI community has ever taken a vote on whether to increase or not increase the annual assessment. The fact of the matter is your move to BSI included a clause in your purchase documents agreeing to reimbursement the city for all costs associated with maintaining the sea walls. So there you have it—about the only point of possible consideration is either agreeing to annual reviews and assessment adjustments (up or down) versus lump sum reimbursements by you, and from my paragraph above, you can see potential costs if it was ever decided to pursue a lump sum reimbursement path forward.

As I said in one of my earlier articles, we are one of the few communities in the entire country where the local authority maintains the seawalls. I believe this is a tremendous advantage and is one of the primary reasons we moved to BSI.

I know I am going to get a lot of mail complaining and telling me “What needs to be done”, etc. and I encourage all input, but at the end of the day, you have already agreed with the city to reimburse them for the cost to maintain the canals. Personally, I derive a lot of enjoyment from being able to keep my boat on my lift in my backyard, I think for the value, it is the bargain of a lifetime.

Until next time---

Rick Daugherty, Chairman, BSI Canal Committee