

PBA Annual Meeting October 10, 2011

150 people attended our annual meeting on October 10th. The main topics of discussion were taxation and fee simple title. County Attorney Alison Rogers and County Commissioner Grover Robinson answered questions from the audience.

During a short business meeting, the PBA membership approved a change to the bylaws to change the membership year to follow the calendar year beginning immediately. The dues will remain at \$30 per year per leasehold. The Board of Directors was elected as follows: Jim Cox (President), Scott Holland (Vice President), Glenn Windham (Treasurer), Maria Weisnicht (Secretary), Ray Ascherfeld, Max Scroggin, and JJ Waters.

Jay Baynes gave an update on the many projects that our environmental group, BeachKeepers, is evaluating.

Lila Cox gave a short update on the various tax litigation cases. The Portofino case contesting the amount of assessment is being appealed. She indicated that the leaseholders may have to file another lawsuit on the new land taxes. She referred attendees to the Tax Lawsuit website (www.pbtaxsuit.com) for more information and reminded everyone that they needed to keep their mailing addresses current with the attorney.

Jim Cox introduced the guest speakers and gave a short overview of the work the PBA directors have been doing to engage the Escambia County Board of Commissioners to find remedies for the double taxation problems including fee simple title legislation and lease fee offsets.

Commissioner Grover Robinson gave a short presentation, reiterating many times that the BCC is not responsible for the taxation of the land – that the property appraiser and tax collector have taken this issue on independently from the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners (BCC). Alison Rogers explained that Escambia County cannot legislate offsets. However, the BCC can send tax revenues (on the land) to the SRIA who as the landlord for our leases can refund lease fees. She also mentioned [Florida Statute 196.199](#) which says that legally the state can tax leased property. This is a complex issue because of timing, residential vs commercial leases and whether the tax revenues will be escrowed and for how long. There was never any mention of using taxes collected on the improvements to offset the shortage in land tax revenues for the commercial leaseholders. The county collects

Another issue was mentioned but not discussed in detail (the creation of a waterfront authority to include all waterfront properties in Escambia County). Grover stated that he was not in favor of a plan that would take revenue generated on Santa Rosa Island to spend elsewhere. Right now all the lease fees generated from Pensacola Beach stay on the island and are spent by the SRIA.

Fee simple title concerns were discussed including need for a Senate sponsor, offset of lease fees (see related article on our website), Municipal Service Benefit Units vs Tax Units, future of SRIA (elimination of SRIA requires state legislation not a BCC resolution). Another attendee pointed out that the value of our homestead should be calculated retroactively to the date our leases were in effect, not based on the current value.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00pm.