Ocean Breeze Park cooperative strikes debt reduction deal with town, Hoke family

By Jim Mayfield

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OCEAN BREEZE PARK — Four years ago, the future for Ocean Breeze Park, anchored by its 55-and-over mobile home park, was uncertain, but with a restructured loan, professional marketing assistance and fresh business plan, residents and town leaders say it's a new day — even in a hard economy.

Residents of the small, waterfront enclave just south of Jensen Beach Boulevard along Indian River Drive, founded by Harry Hoke in 1938 and incorporated in 1960, faced the ever-present prospect of being developed off the land and out of their homes.

The community reached a safe harbor, of sorts, in March 2008 when park residents formed a cooperative and paid the Hoke family $26 million for the 45-acre mobile home park land east of the Florida East Coast Railroad tracks.

As the new co-op labored to put down roots and grow the community, however, it also struggled to meet its loan obligations. Earlier this year, its board provided a financial and operations audit in support of a third request for further modifications to its debt terms.

Relaxed and smiling Wednesday, principals and representatives from the cooperative, town and Hoke family announced that a debt restructuring deal had been struck based upon "respect, trust and confidence between the town, the cooperative and the note holders," said Stuart attorney Bob Kilbride, who represented the cooperative in the negotiations.

Though the specific terms of the restructuring are confidential, the cooperative's monthly payments have been reduced and the term of the note extended, Kilbride said.

"We are extremely happy with the terms," said Gail Myers, Ocean Breeze Park manager.

The new loan terms will allow working capital for "a major overhaul" at the mobile home park, removing timeworn homes, landscaping along Indian River Drive, retaining an accounting firm to monitor the co-op's finances and enlisting real estate professionals to improve sales, rentals and marketing, Myers said.
"The first year, people are going to see a drastic change," Myers said. "In five years — can I say this? — people will see one hell of a change."

Board members say the park will remain one of the most affordable waterfront communities in the county — with a median monthly payment of $500 — and additional professional teams and limited restructuring within the park will not affect the fabric braided by the community over its nearly 75-year history.

"There are homes in here that have been here for generations," said board treasurer John Slates. "We are vested here."

The accord also calls for the park to close retention ponds tied to the town's package wastewater treatment plants and located on the 45-acre parcel west of the railroad tracks now known as Ocean Breeze Park West.

Martin County commissioners Tuesday approved agreements that will allow the town to close one of its two package treatment plants, connect to the county's regional wastewater system, and sell the county a utility easement that will allow future expansion of the county system at a $465,000 savings, said John Polley, county environmental services director.

Last year, the town council amended the town's land development code to allow a planned unit development zoning district on the western frontier, and future development there would only add to the town's population and tax base, officials say.

"We wanted these negotiations not to be for a short-term Band-Aid," said Jim Morgan, broker-owner of Treasure Coast Commercial Real Estate Inc., who represented the Hoke family. "We wanted something that represents a bright, bright future for the park here."

Town Mayor David Myers said the latest chapter in the town's history is nothing short of inspiring.

"When I see everything that's happening now I start to remember my original vision for this place and why I want to be here," Myers said. "It's all good."