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Islandia

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Community Background Report

Islandia

County

Miami-Dade

Boundaries

North: Biscayne Bay

South: Atlantic Ocean

West: Biscayne Bay

East: Atlantic Ocean

Community Type

Neighborhood

History

Islandia, up until February 2012, was a municipality. However, the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) has abolished the island as a city, making it a neighborhood within the unincorporated area of Miami-Dade County.

Islandia has a short, yet controversial history. Islandia, the twenty-seventh municipality incorporated in Miami-Dade County, is the smallest village in Florida. The village is located on Elliot Key in Biscayne Bay, eight miles across the water from Homestead. During the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, the island served as haven for refugees of wrecked ships and as a fishing area for the Tequesta Indians. Elliot Key became popular in the 1860s as settlers from the Bahamas came bringing their agricultural skills; however, they soon found that the ground was comprised of coral rock that was not compatible with farming.

In 1906, Islandia had its own school district and was home for nearly 100 permanent residents. On June 22, 1961, thirteen of Islandia's eighteen-registered voters voted to incorporate the village. U.S representative Dante Fascell introduced a bill to congress in 1966 that would make parts of Islandia a national park. In October of 1968, President Lyndon B Johnson authorized \$25 million to convert portions of Islandia into the Biscayne National monument. The federal government purchased all but five of the thirty-three islands.

In 1990, an investigation by the State Attorney's office found that the village had been operating under an illegal government. The voters who participated in the elections did not reside on the island and voted in other Miami-Dade County precincts although they held property in Islandia. The nine residents who resided on the island were ineligible to vote because they did not own Islandia property. No legal action has been taken against the municipality or its council members. The village may face dissolution its residents vote against remaining incorporated. Since 1966, Islandia has lost most of its real estate to Biscayne National Park. Of the 180,000 acres existing at the time of Islandia's incorporation, only 667 acres remain and only 16.69 of those acres are above water. The population did not grow above twelve or thirteen residents and has continued to decrease through the years.

Community Dynamics

The Village's intended use as a bustling real estate spot and a tourist attraction never quite materialized. In the proposed comprehensive plan, the landowners called for limited commercial development, such as convenient stores and gas stations, no road construction, no schools, no sewers or landfills on the island, and no cars allowed on the island. The village never got past the initial planning stages of development. Three plans to build causeways failed since the 1940s, as have several resort schemes.

Real estate battles between property owners, the state government and the National Parks Service have come to define the controversy of Islandia. In 1989, Islandia property owners attempted to gain state approval for a comprehensive development plan of a residential development containing about 300 houses; the state rejected it. As of 1990, the village's only legal residents were a caretaker, an angler, and seven Park Service employees along with their family members. Since half of the members are park rangers, most are unsympathetic towards the village and its development. In fact, many of them would like to de-incorporate Islandia.

Islandia has no infrastructure. The town clerk operates out of an office in Hollywood, Florida since there has not been a town meeting in years and an election in over 15 years. Legally Islandia is still a village, but not a functioning village. Although Islandia started out with large aspirations and possibilities to become the next Miami Beach, the village has been unable to capitalize on its potential.

Sources

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