

# BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

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To the Residents of Lake Charlene,

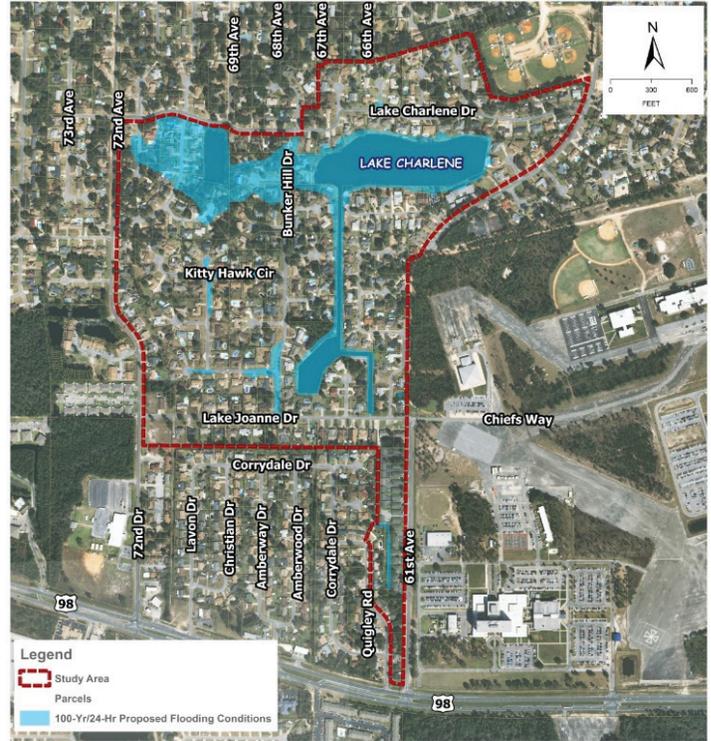
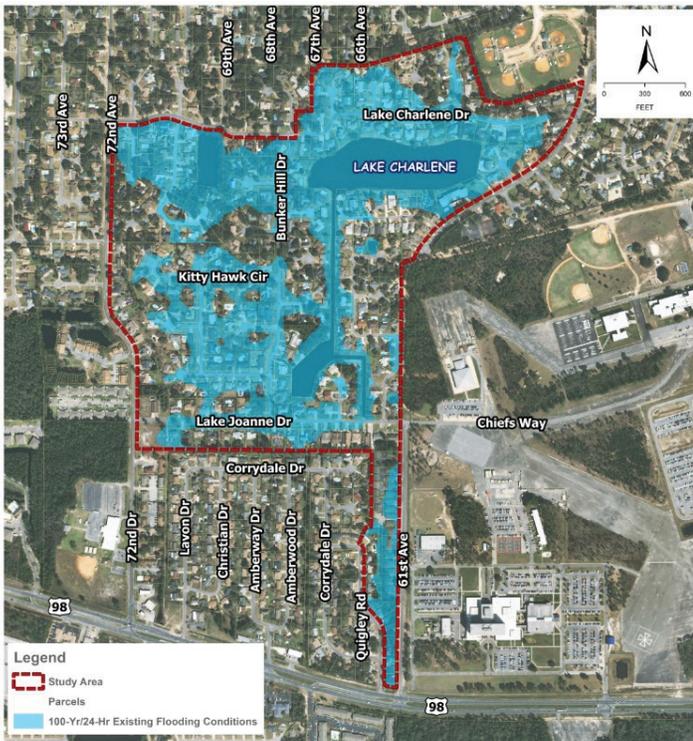
Since my election in 2014, I have been working hard to fix the flooding problems of Lake Charlene. Wendy and I met many of you for the first time while knocking on your doors that summer, and we shared our mutual experiences. Like many of you during that time, we too had the drywall in our home torn out to waist height and bare floors. We know what it is like to smell that damp air and to want to cry every time you look at your own home. We too were living with the pain and frustration of FEMA, insurance adjusters and broken promises. I promised you and myself that I would fix the flooding issue in Lake Charlene. **I am writing you this letter to tell you - I have failed.**

While it won't make your homes safer, it is important to know the truth of why I have failed. **I have not failed for lack of funds.** I have secured 100 percent of FEMA funding to increase the outfall from Lake Charlene. **I have not failed for lack of effort.** The project has been designed and redesigned twice and is 100 percent ready for release for contractor bidding. **I have not failed for lack of communication.** We have held numerous town halls, sent mailers, received press coverage and even did a door to door survey. In fact, the survey showed that you wanted this project at a ratio of more than 4:1 in favor. **I have failed for one reason only** - your HOA has taken the extreme and unprecedented position of hiring a lawyer to prevent the project from happening. Yes, your HOA is spending your money to prevent the county from protecting your homes. In my five years in office, I have never heard of an HOA taking such a measure to stop something that will protect its members from the kind of pain you went through in 2014. And 2012. And 2005. And 1979.

That's right. As most of you know, flooding in Lake Charlene is not new. Despite this history of flooding, the HOA has spent decades and a small fortune attempting to artificially elevate the lake level for aesthetic purposes. They have lobbied for and gotten more and more infall pipes over the years, increasing the rate of flow into the lake. In an illegal expenditure of public funds on private property, they lobbied the county to build a flow control device on the only outfall pipe from the lake. This control device is owned and controlled by the HOA to keep the lake level high so that it looks the way they want. In doing so, the HOA is placing the aesthetic value of the lake above the safety of the residents in the neighborhood. For four years I have been explaining that the lake level must be lowered a mere nine inches to achieve the design protections, but they have fought me every step. They have made arguments that lowering the lake nine inches will harm the wildlife, the seawalls, and property values. But the truth behind their opposition is nothing more than aesthetics.

## The Project

The proposed project consists of removing the flow control device from the existing drain pipe and adding two additional outfall pipes from Lake Charlene. The pipes start on Lake Joanne Drive about 320 feet west from the intersection of Lake Joanne Drive and 61st Avenue and continues southward along the east side on 61st Avenue approximately 2,150 feet. The new outflow pipe passes under U.S. Highway 98 at the intersection of 61st Avenue, and into Jones Swamp. The county is currently excavating the end of the old runway south of the Navy Hospital and restoring this swampland, which will enable the swamp to accept the larger outflow from Lake Charlene. Please see the two maps below. The one on the left shows the flooding that would result from a 100-year flood event today. The one on the right shows the result of the same storm, had we been able to build this project.



***To all the people whose homes lie in this area above, I am sorry I have failed you. I cannot build this project with your HOA and their lawyer fighting me.***

## The Bottom Line

The design is complete, the funding is secured, and this project is ready to execute. However, doing so will lower the lake level by nine inches. Any arguments that lowering the lake level nine inches will harm wildlife, seawalls or property values are absurd, given that natural annual fluctuations are far greater than nine inches. To complete the project, the HOA must give or sell to the county about 1,200 square feet of the ditch on Lake Joanne Drive and drop its threat of lawsuit. If the HOA were to do this, I promise to do everything in my power to complete the project before the grant deadline, which is rapidly approaching.

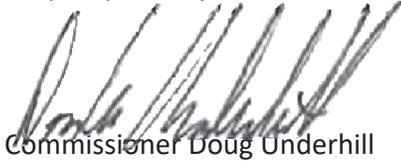
## What Can You Do?

The BOCC meets next on Thursday, April 4 at 9 a.m. for agenda review, 4:30 p.m. for public forum and 5:30 p.m. for the regular meeting. You may contact our chairman and ask that this matter be placed on our agenda. You can direct your HOA to drop their opposition and partner with me to get this project done. You can contact every

other commissioner and tell them to vote in favor of this critical project. Or you can accept failure. Failure means the grant is rescinded and the project is abandoned. Failure means 75 homes in your community remain at risk. Failure means that the next time these homes flood, we have only ourselves to blame. That is not the Escambia County I believe in which we live.

I know that many of you have been told things by your HOA leadership that are simply not true. I am happy to come to your doorstep and address anything in this letter or anything they have told you. We can do it one on one. You can call some neighbors together and do it in a small group. I will come whether you support or oppose this project or me. I will answer your questions and give you the facts. All you have to do is contact me at 850-595-4920 or district2@myescambia.com.

Very respectfully,



Commissioner Doug Underhill

## Project Timeline

2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County submitted an application for a federal grant to undertake a project to remedy the outflow deficiency in Lake Charlene</li> <li>First Town Hall held</li> </ul>
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grant funding agreement was executed, allowing nearly \$2 million for design and construction</li> </ul>
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Second Public Meeting held to discuss 60 percent design plans</li> <li>Final design was submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for approval</li> </ul>
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final permit for construction approved</li> <li>Grant funding agreement for construction executed</li> </ul>

## Contact the Commissioners

District 3/Chairman	Commissioner Lumon May	850-595-4930 District3@myescambia.com
District1	Commissioner Jeff Bergosh	850-595-4910 District1@myescambia.com
District 4	Commissioner Robert Bender	850-595-4940 District4@myescambia.com
District 5	Commissioner Steven Barry	850-595-4950 District5@myescambia.com