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A Marathon resident filed an administrative challenge Monday to the City of Marathon Comprehensive Plan amendments that add 300 new development units in excess of the current growth limitation caps. The Marathon growth increases are the first of a total of as many as 1300 additional development units which the state has offered to the County and to the Cities throughout the Keys.

Cecelia Mattino is the Petitioner, represented by attorney Robert Hartsell. She alleges that the additional development units will make hurricane evacuation dangerous for everyone, ignore the legal development caps which protect the Keys, and will not promote the development of needed workforce housing.

She has requested a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge from the Department of Administrative Hearings. According to Richard Grosso, long-time land-use attorney who is consulting to Mattino's legal team, "Key West and Islamorada have also begun the process to amend their comp plans to increase development by another 300 new development units each, so the impacts of this action extend well beyond just Marathon."

"During hurricane evacuations, traffic congestion has been dangerous for the entire County, even once we got to the mainland," Mattino stated. "Why would anyone want to make hurricane evacuation even more dangerous and ruin all the long-term growth planning that has kept the Keys the Keys?"

Mattino's Petition reflects the concern of many experts. Scientific studies show – and state law requires - that hurricane evacuation of the Keys must be completed within 24-hours in order to protect human lives. The plans to increase development rely on agreement by residents of the new units that they will "early evacuate" 48 hours before landfall. But opponents say there's no way to enforce that, and that it won't work anyway.

"Tropical Storms can and have intensified into Category 3-5 hurricanes within 24 hours. This has happened 6 times since 2005, most tragically Hurricane Maria that devastated Puerto Rico. We applaud Ms. Mattino's courage and willingness to confront this very bad plan," stated Charles Causey, President, Florida Keys Environmental Fund, Inc., one of 14 civic, environmental, and neighborhood groups, representing many thousands of residents Keys-wide, which are opposing the 1300 additional development units.

"What's needed to solve our workforce housing problem is not more development units, but a real will by our local governments to dedicate more of the ones we already have to workforce housing," stated Ann Olsen, from Friends of the Lower Keys (FOLKs). "We still have

plenty of affordable housing development units and we can also allocate market rate development units if that's not enough."

"Residents of the new housing to be developed under Marathon's ordinance don't even have to be members of the workforce," Martino added. "It's another one of those boondoggles where developers can build all of the units at the highest end of affordable housing --the most profitable for them - but the real working people of Marathon STILL won't have affordable housing."

Land-use experts are also concerned that the plans will undermine the Keys' growth limitation caps and open the Keys up to unlimited development.

Martino's Petition alleges that Marathon's shallow sewage disposal wells are polluting the nearshore waters in violation of state law and can't handle existing levels of use, much less even more development. Previous legal challenges to shallow sewage wells resulted in the deep well now in operation at Cudjoe Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant.

"Marathon's nearshore waters are in terrible condition," adds DeMaria, a commercial fisherman and marine researcher who was one of two commercial fishermen who successfully filed the legal challenge to the Cudjoe shallow wells. "They shouldn't be increasing development when they can't even properly dispose of the sewage from the development they already have."

For more information and a copy of the Petition go to info@friendsofthelowerkeys.org