



A boat tour was conducted to give city officials and others a look at Winter Park lakes, canals and boathouse construction. (Tony Fernandez photo)

Lakes tour eyes water problems

By **TONY FERNANDEZ**
Staff Writer

WINTER PARK—It was a picture-perfect Thursday morning as Mayor Hope Strong Jr. along with members of the city commission and the special advisory committee on area lakes took a tour of Lakes Maitland and Oceola to witness firsthand some of the problems discussed in previous commission meetings regarding pollution and growth on the lakes.

Following through on a suggestion made at the last city commission meeting, the group loaded onto one of the Scenic Boats at the Morse Blvd. tour dock and embarked on a cruise designed to give the members of the city commission and the lakes committee a view of the shoreline vegetation and the boathouses along the canals. These are two of the main areas of interest the city has been working on to maintain the lakes' quality.

The group was taken past some of the areas where aquatic vegetation had been removed and the city's Chief of Lakes, Pierre Deschenes, pointed out which of the many variety of plants needed to be revegetated along the shoreline. The city is planning a program that will re-introduce native plants such as nitella and picker weed because those plants assist in purification and filtering. Deschenes stated that nitella is a preferred plant because

it has natural enemies which keep its growth checked.

"Hydrilla, which is not a native plant, is being replaced by the nitella which provides a cover for the fish but does not grow up as high as hydrilla. The hydrilla also has less tendency to come back in the presence of nitella," said Deschenes.

The group was then taken to the canal between the two lakes. This area is of particular concern because the city considers the zoning and the construction of boathouses along the canal critical in determining the future of that area. It has been city policy in recent years to attempt to acquire as

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many vacant lots as possible along the canal in order to preserve the natural beauty of the waterway as well as to curb pollution, which is said to be caused in part by heavy urbanization of shorelines.

The canal is already becoming inundated by the boathouses and there are at least four more construction permits pending. At the city commission meeting on Tuesday several homeowners with lots on the canal addressed the commission with complaints they had regarding their construction permits. The residents of Kronenbourg, the neighborhood which contains the lots on the canal, stated that they had already received permits to build on the lots when the city imposed a moratorium restricting construction. The lot owners, some of whom were represented by their attorneys, expressed their concerns over not being allowed to build on their land. The mayor said that even though he sympathized with their concerns he also had to think about the other residents of the city who might not want to see the natural beauty of the canal destroyed by the boathouses.

The city imposed the moratorium to give it time to either come up with the money to purchase the remaining lots or to decide what to do if it could not come up with the funding. The city had offered \$25,000 to purchase the lot of one of the owners present at the meeting, but he stated that the lot was worth over \$45,000. Most of the lots on the canal measure only 50 feet long along the shoreline and 40 feet deep.

Commissioner Gary Brewer agreed with the mayor that the lots were an asset to the city but also added, "We need to put up or shut up. If the city wants to buy the lots we need to come up with the money soon." He stated that the moratorium would not prevent anything and it was not fair to hold up the people who had already been given permits to build. The commission then took a vote and decided to allow the four residents with permits to go ahead with construction. However, the future of the canal and the remaining lots still hangs in the air as the city struggles with a solution to the problem.