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Walton County buying properties to provide more public beach accesses

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A North Dakota woman has visited every single town on the state's map. (KFYR, PEGGY PERSON, CNN)

By Leticia Vaselli

"We set out on a campaign to identify and acquire beach access property. So, identify means finding locations where we don't have it now or didn't have it then. Large tracks are obviously better where we can build a regional beach access, that's a beach access that has parking, restrooms, sometimes picnic tables or picnic pavilions, so we did that," said Walton County Administrator Brian Kellenberger.

We are told Walton County has spent roughly $70 million on beach property through Tourist Development Tax dollars. County officials said most of that money is generated by the roughly 20,000 rental units in South Walton that raised $55-60 million in revenue over the last three years.

These properties can include unoccupied land or beachfront houses.

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"A lot of times, the land we buy, particularly beachfront, it will be what I call a 70s or 80s era cottage, you know, it's what would be determined as a teardown. The land value is worth more than the house," said Kellenberger.

Kellenberger told NewsChannel 7 that it is the county's goal to keep supplying the demand for more public beach access and enhance the visitor experience.

"The people are coming here, they come for the beautiful white sands and the emerald green waters. Like I said, as the community has developed where people don't have direct beach access, we need to provide them with beach access and the facilities necessary for going to the beach," said Kellenberger.

Kellenberger also said he believes the secret is to learn to share again.

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"I truly understand the people that have built a nice rental property and want to maximize their rental value, the people who come here and want to enjoy what they paid for in a somewhat exclusive manner. The people that have decided to live here. I truly get it. I think there needs to be an understanding that you have moved into a vacation destination. What attracted you here will continue to attract people here, and to come to understand that when I am doing it to accommodate people that are already coming here, it's the truth," said Kellenberger.

New public beach regional accesses are under construction, and you can find all of them here.

County officials told us they are planning on acquiring land for parking facilities adjacent to large public beach accesses like Grayton Beach. Kellenberger said the next parking facility is likely to open in Miramar Beach. The county is also looking to make changes to the public transportation system to hopefully decrease traffic on 30A.

"We're looking at doing sub-hubs, and eventually we will have what we call long-range shuttles that bounce out onto 98 and just go

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County leaders said if you are interested in selling your property to the county, reach out to the county administrator's office.

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