

**FORT MYERS BEACH  
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING  
EMERGENCY MEETING  
OCTOBER 14, 1999  
NationsBank, Council Chambers  
2523 Estero Boulevard  
FORT MYERS BEACH, FLORIDA**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Ray Murphy opened the meeting on Thursday, October 14, 1999, at 4:30 P.M. Council members present at the meeting: Mayor Ray Murphy, Vice-Mayor John Mulholland, Anita Cereceda and Garr Reynolds. Daniel Hughes arrived toward the end of the meeting.

**Town Staff present:** Town Manager Marsha Segal-George and Deputy Town Manager John Gucciardo.

Also present: Staff members and representatives from the Fort Myers Beach Fire Control District.

Mayor Murphy said that the purpose of this meeting was to talk about the impending situation with Hurricane Irene and what actions we can take.

**II. DISCUSSION OF HURRICANE IRENE UPDATES BY JOHN GUCCIARDO**

Memo's from Bill Zeiliff advised that the weather situation had changed dramatically this afternoon from early today. Between about 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. the projected path of the hurricane shifted to the east. This could mean that the storm that we thought would be spending it's time west of us as it went northward would now make a landfall further south than we originally projected and it could mean a landfall here in the Fort Myers Beach area or potentially even further south than our area. Because of that, the plans for emergency operations have changed. The understanding now is that instead of being under a tropical storm warning, as of five o'clock we could be put under a hurricane warning. A hurricane warning could necessitate certain actions by EOC involving evacuations, and we thought that we needed to be prepared.

The storm itself, according to John, is still a Category 1 storm. New information will be coming out at 5:00 p.m.; but based on the information that we have so far, it looks like it will remain a Category 1 and perhaps a 2, but not a major storm. The potential danger, though, comes more from the rain associated with this storm than with the wind. We've had a serious amount of rain the last couple of weeks, and some of the projections from the storm, depending on which angle hits us, could mean water up to 10 or 15 inches. And 15 inches of rain on top of what we have obviously puts us in a pretty desperate spot.

Deputy Town Manager John Gucciardo said that at 5:00 p.m. they'll be in contact with the Hurricane Center, get the latest information, then they'll do a multi-county conference call at 5:45 p.m. They have asked for another conference call between the cities at 6:15.

Mayor Murphy said the question now is do we want to wait until after 5:00 p.m. or do we want to take certain actions now.

John Gucciardo remarked that Ordinance 99-6 that has already been approved sets out what Council can and can't do when responding to this kind of situation. We have a copy of a draft of an emergency resolution, which again sets out some of the things that could be handled by staff, by the Town Manager or the Council if they're available. The only other decision that we'd be looking for at this point is how to respond in terms of the different options we have for an evacuation. John Wilson has indicated that in an emergency operation he has some flexibility in the way they respond. And his own sense is that unless something unexpected came from the Hurricane Center, they believe they would be under a hurricane warning, but they also believe that there are basically two options: that we'd probably be liable for going through a mandatory evacuation some time this evening and that we'd be going through a recommended or advisory evacuation for people in low-lying areas and also for people with special needs this evening. And then after looking at the situation again Thursday morning, going through the mandatory evacuation in the morning.

Town Manager Marsha Segal-George said that in talking with the manager at Sanibel and also from information given on the latest conference calls, it would seem we'd be looking at not going to mandatory evacuation until tomorrow morning. There are problems associated with any of these options. There's the difficulty of nighttime evacuation and the fact that we may have a lot of rain. Then there is the other consideration of waiting and doing mandatory in the morning when we could have a situation where people leave the island and then can't get back on, and we need to clear this.

Dick Roosa, Marsha Segal-George said, told her to make sure we took minutes of this conference. The Declaration of a State of Emergency is what was put together last year when we went through Georges. The Emergency Resolution does most of the same kinds of things, except that we have to make some modifications because this was under the assumption that there would already be an executive order issued by the Governor and we don't have that.

Mayor Ray Murphy said he does not see a down side in declaring an emergency evacuation. Vice Mayor Mulholland said that he agreed with him because there would be a risk if we did nothing.

Town Manager Segal-George advised that one of the things that comes with a declaration of a state of emergency is in regards to limiting vehicles on and off the Island.

John Gucciardo said the concern during the 1:00 p.m. conference call was that tomorrow there was the possibility of evacuation.

Mayor Ray Murphy made a motion to declare a state of emergency.

Discussion:

Anita Cereceda said she thought it was a wise idea if for no other reason than control of the bridges. Also, as things arise, if it's necessary to take action quickly, we would be able to.

**MOTION:** Made by Ray Murphy and seconded by Anita Cereceda to declare a state of emergency under Section 3 of Ordinance 99-6. Passed unanimously.

Mayor Murphy read the Emergency Resolution:

This is an Emergency Resolution of the Town of Fort Myers Beach, Florida Resolution 99-6:

WHEREAS, the National Hurricane Center recognizes the danger to coastal residents from Hurricane Irene by posting a hurricane watch/warrant for Lee County, and

WHEREAS, Lee County has issued an order recognizing the danger from Hurricane Irene to this area, and

WHEREAS, forecasting specific to Lee County indicates a strong likelihood of impact on this area, and

WHEREAS, Hurricane Irene has the potential to cause extensive damage to public utilities, public buildings, public communication systems, public streets and roads, public train systems, commercial and residential buildings and areas, and

WHEREAS, Chapter 252 Florida Statute provides authority for the Town of Fort Myers Beach to declare a state of local emergency and to waive the procedures and formalities otherwise required of a political subdivision by law pertaining to 1) performance of public work, taking whatever action is necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the community; 2) entering into contracts; 3) incurring obligations; 4) employment of permanent and temporary workers; 5) utilization of volunteer workers; 6) rental of equipment; 7) acquisition and distribution with or without conservation of supplies, materials or utilities, and 8) appropriation and expenditure of public funds, and

WHEREAS, the Town of Fort Myers Beach pursuant to its home rule powers has adopted certain emergency procedures in its code of ordinances, specifically Chapter 64 of the Town of Fort Myers Beach Code of Ordinances,

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved that Section 1, based upon the foregoing findings that a state of local emergency exists effective immediately within the Town of Fort Myers Beach; Section 2: The Town, through the undersigned, hereby exercises its authority and waives the procedures and formalities required by law of a political subdivision as provided

in Section 252.3A, paragraph 6, paragraph e, Florida statutes and the Town charter and implements local emergency procedures contained in 64, Sections 3-64, Section 9 of the Town of Fort Myers Beach Code of Ordinances; Section 3: This resolution is an emergency measure necessary for public safety; Section 4: This resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption and continue for the duration of the threat of Hurricane Irene.

The foregoing resolution was adopted by a quorum of the Town Council after reasonable notice.

**MOTION:** Made by Anita Cereceda and seconded by John Mulholland that we accept this resolution. Passed unanimously.

### **III. CHOICES FOR EVACUATION**

These will be presented to us by the Staff and by the Fire District as choices of either a mandatory evacuation this evening, or a recommended or advised evacuation for those in low-lying areas of the Island and those with special needs, or a mandatory evacuation in the morning, or a combination thereof. Mayor Murphy said his personal feeling is that if we can get the word out on a recommended advisory for this evening, it will give us a little time to see what comes from the EOC with regards to what's going to happen after 5:00 and 6:00 this evening. We can get as many people as we can to evacuate now: i.e., retirees, snowbirds that are already coming back now; and if it gets worse, then we can always employ the mandatory one tomorrow morning.

Councilman Reynolds said that he's not sure that we need to run from rain. Where we may gain a foot or 15 inches in some of the low spots that are notorious for that, he thinks that's probably about as much depth as we'll get on the Island no matter how much rain we get. He doubts very seriously according to what he's heard here and also on broadcasts from weather stations, that there will be a situation that will be damaging or dangerous for residents. He doesn't know how the rains are going to hurt the people, and the winds are going to be minimal.

Vice Mayor Mulholland sees 10-15 inches of rain posing a major threat to moving about this island. It would be more than we've ever received in a short period.

Councilwoman Anita Cereceda said that before she came here, the weather channel was saying 15-20 inches of rain. But she thinks that what is more important is to tell people as best we can that what exactly we're leery of. She doesn't think it's wise for us to say that a hurricane of force 1 is coming to the Island and that we're calling for an evacuation. It would be better to say that 15 inches of rain is going to fall on an already saturated area; the roads are going to flood and will be impassable; the recommendation is for evacuation, however, and these are the precautions that you should be taking now: Your car should be filled with gas; you should have water and whatever medication you need. If you live in a low-lying area, the recommendation is to leave. If you don't, these are the things you need to have and be doing right now.

Anita Cereceda said she gets leery of crying wolf, and at this point she would tend to agree with Garr Reynolds that any kind of mandatory evacuation will fall on deaf ears. But she also agrees that no matter whether we have a mandatory or only recommended evacuation, the people who are going to heed that advice are going to go either way.

### **III. PRESENTATION BY DEPUTY CHIEF MORAN**

Deputy Chief Moran said that a couple of concerns that they do have are 1) They don't have the normal time frames to evacuate the Island. We're looking at 24-30 hours and during this time period we are going to be inundated by rain. It's not a good idea to evacuate at night, but unfortunately we don't have much of a choice. They'd like to see as many people as possible leaving the Island tonight, especially the special needs people. We're looking at 15-20 inches of rain, and if Hurricane Irene strikes north of us, we're now looking at a storm surge on top of that. They're not so much worried about the damaging winds, because if the winds are minimal, the effects of the winds will be minimal. Our problem is going to be rising water in low-lying areas. The FPL is not going to drop power to the Island. We're going to have rising water in houses and people will still have electricity but not the ability or the forethought to shut all the power off, and that now becomes a major problem. 2) The impassability of roads is going to be a major problem for us. In Section 3 on page 5 of the ordinance, it allows you to restrict the amount of vehicles

coming on the Island. That is one of the things that they discussed earlier today with Sgt. Powell. The deputy said that even if we don't go to mandatory evacuation, if they restrict people coming to the Island that don't work here or live here it will help our cause. Whether or not we evacuate, that is one thing that we should seriously look at.

Councilman Reynolds said he liked recommendations rather than a demand situation.

Remarked was that we would like to get out with the mandatory evacuation, because this may be upgraded at any time so that the people who leave for work tomorrow know that there is the possibility that they may not be able to return. We'd be caused a lot of problems with people trying to get back on the Island. It would also cause problems with the shelters, because they wouldn't be ready to give these people water and blankets -- things they would normally take with them. That's another concern they have about waiting until 8:00 or 9:00 tomorrow to do that.

Mayor Murphy said that one good thing is that the schools will be closed tomorrow anyhow. He said that it sounds to him like the direction is to go with the recommended evacuation this evening, which may or may not be upgraded to a mandatory evacuation by tomorrow morning.

John Gucciardo said that one of the things they did during Hurricane Harvey was a press release type thing that went to the media and also was on our voice mail and was on our Web page. We'll try to put in there the potential damage from rain and rising waters. We'll also put in that we recommend evacuation and that special needs people need to act. We'll control with John Wilson that the Teco Arena will be available as an evacuation site.

Mr. Gucciardo said that the third point was that people need to stay alert for situations as they develop.

Town Manager Segal-George asked when do we limit access to the Island. John Gucciardo said that if we go mandatory tomorrow, limiting access will be the second part of that. We'll coordinate with the sheriff's office. He explained what the plan would be for tomorrow unless there's direction otherwise. It is his understanding that the County typically closes down. He doesn't know if officially Town Hall should be closed or not, but his guess is that we will not be doing a whole lot of business. Mr. Mulholland said he would hope that we could cover the phones just to tell people what is going on.

Marsha Segal-George asked if we could pull the trigger on our rooms at the Holiday Inn.

**MOTION:** Made by Anita Cereceda and seconded by John Mulholland that we make a recommended evacuation of low-lying areas and of special needs people at the current time and wait for any further action. Passed unanimously.

Mayor Murphy asked if we don't go to a mandatory tomorrow and stay under a recommended advisory, is there any consideration to restricting access to the Beach. Marsha Segal-George said if tomorrow morning we're still in the same boat we're in right now, then we should do it. This was concurred by councilmembers and the procedure for doing so was discussed. Councilman Reynolds suggested that we add to our recommendation that traffic would not be allowed on the Island tomorrow morning. People who are going to work need to know that they will not be allowed back on the Island tomorrow. Anita Cereceda stated that there are a lot of people who work on the Island. The majority of businesses on the Island employ people who live off the Island. Businesses are not going to close, and their employees who are scheduled for tomorrow are going to be expected to come to work. She was told that if businesses are going to remain open, then they should rethink that position. Mrs. Segal-George said that if in the morning everything is still on course and we're going to take a direct hit or very close, they shouldn't be talking about opening their businesses.

Councilman Reynolds said it seemed to him that we should act in unison with Wilson and their declaration if what we do is going to affect the County. And if they're not going to declare a mandatory evacuation, he's not so sure that we can declare it. John Gucciardo said that the declaration of a mandatory evacuation will come from the EOC. What we're deciding here is whether or not our policies are going to be consistent with the options of the other cities.

Remarked was that the Council should declare (an evacuation) tomorrow morning rather than waiting on the Town Manager to decide. Mrs. Segal-George said that she just thinks that if we go into tomorrow morning with the hurricane on the same track that they're saying it's going to

be on right now, she doesn't think that we have any choice.

John Gucciardo said that if it's a mandatory evacuation, that choice is clear. The gray area comes in if they don't go mandatory but we still have concerns about people being on the Beach and the sheriff has concerns about his ability to keep us safe and protected. That's really the issue.

Mrs. Segal-George noted that school is out tomorrow, which means that every high school kid who has a car is going to be trying to come to the Beach tomorrow. John Gucciardo said that we can add some language to the press release tonight that there is a strong possibility that access to the Island is going to be limited tomorrow. Dan Hughes said that we will have to define "limited;" that if we do restrict access, he thinks we have to be quite definite as to who has access and who doesn't.

Marsha Segal-George said how about if we just leave it to tomorrow morning, and then if we have a situation, everyone will be polled regarding a decision on access to the Island.

John Gucciardo said that part of the emergency declaration is that the Town Manager does have the ability to make certain calls of her own. The press release that we will issue this evening will indicate along with the fact that we're talking about rain as opposed to wind as being the threat, that if there is a recommended evacuation, special needs people need to act; that it may in fact go to mandatory in the morning, and that there is a strong likelihood that access to the Island will be limited in the morning. Marsha Segal-George added that the recommended evacuation is because of flooding and intense rain.

Dan Hughes said he had tried to call here when he got the message to come to this meeting, but couldn't get through. He was told that the phones had been put on hold during the first 15 minutes of this meeting. When we leave, we go on the answering machine which will give the latest update.

John Gucciardo distributed a list of home phone numbers and cell numbers to everyone.

Councilwoman Cereceda asked if an announcement would be placed on the answering machine and updated regularly. She was told yes. She asked if the message could include phone numbers that people who are nervous could call. She wouldn't mind anyone calling her.

The 5:00 p.m. advisory from the National Weather Service indicated that a hurricane warning has been issued from Florida City to Boca Grande.

#### **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lorraine Calhoun  
Transcribing Secretary