

MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES TASK FORCE
The Mound House – 451 Connecticut St.
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Wednesday, December 13, 2023

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Chair Johnson.

II. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

Members present: Bill Althoff, Robert Howell, Steve Johnson, Rose Larkin, David Nusbaum, Jennifer Rusk and Mary Rose Spalletta.
Staff: Harbormaster Austin Gilchrist

IV. Approve The Agenda

Discussion was held regarding the agenda since some of the items were not discussed at the last meeting. Agenda items should include staff report, beach projects, chair update, prioritization of MERTF initiatives and beautification of right of ways. Chair Johnson suggested that the Friends of Little Estero presentation be postponed. MERTF Member Nusbaum suggested asking how long their presentation would be since they were already at the meeting.

MOTION: MERTF Member Spalletta moved to follow the agenda from last month, including staff report and prioritization of MERTF initiatives; second by MERTF Member Larkin.

Discussion was held regarding whether they should allow the presentation and change the agenda.

VOTE: Motion carried, 5-2, with MERTF Members Althoff and Nusbaum dissenting.

V. Approve Previous Meeting Minutes – October 11, 2023 and November 8, 2023

Add to Current Items: Liaison Veach recommended in the spirit of cooperation that Projects Manager Chustz work with the chair when distilling the list.

MOTION: MERTF Member Spalletta moved to approve the amended minutes of October 11, 2023; second by Chair Johnson.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

Clarification: The list of invasive plants was from the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council. Chair Johnson did not receive the information for the MERTF award from Projects Manager Chustz.

Add under canal dredging: The Town was to start radar scans to locate debris for removal from the canals.

MOTION: MERTF Member Nusbaum moved to approve the amended minutes; second by MERTF Member Spalletta.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

Chair Johnson repeated his request to receive the minutes in advance of the meetings rather than the day of. MERTF Member Howell requested that the agendas be printed out.

VI. Public Comment

Ed Rood, resident, stated a huge number of Australian Pines were taking over the south end of the island. He asked MERTF to ask the Town Council to allow Environmental Projects Manager Chadd Chustz to work with the Fish & Wildlife Conservation (FWC) to remove the trees. He discussed getting rid of the sand spurs and asked that MERTF also request permission for Manager Chustz to work with the FWC.

VII. Presentation: Friends of Little Estero – no presentation

VIII. Current Items

Staff report: Harbormaster Gilchrist reported that the berm project was expected to be done by January, the renourishment project and beach sand truck haul program were out to bid, MOBI mats were being permitted for beach accesses, exotic vegetation was being removed from environmentally critical zones and the Coastal Control Construction Line (CCCL) and the staff was categorizing invasive exotic plants on public accesses to add to a database for eradication. There were no harmful fecal readings or harmful algae blooms in the water. Marine Operations Staff continued to remove debris with the assistance of the side scans and have been collecting debris on the bay side for the last two weeks. Metal detection devices were obtained to start scanning areas between the shoal and the beachfront. He indicated staff were focusing on removing debris from the channels and the anchor areas in the Mooring Field would be cleared to add more systems. The dumpsters in the boat ramps will be removed today. Harbormaster Gilchrist revealed that staff were working on removing the Australian Pines in the south end. MERTF Member Larkin announced that trash would not be picked up unless it was in front of a residential building.

A. Beach Projects

Chair Johnson noted that since Projects Manager Chustz was out, it would be interesting to progress on the subject. He indicated that the presentation had not yet been updated on the Town's website. The beach projects referred to are the FEMA berm, state truck haul and the beach renourishment. Discussion was held concerning the berm, areas where sand was added and easements. MERTF Member Nusbaum suggested that Chair Johnson email questions about the projects and have Projects Manager Chustz respond in writing to be discussed at the next meeting. Chair Johnson agreed and noted topics with questions: the FEMA berm, easements, dune plants, filling scours in beach accesses and private property, and prioritization regarding the state truck haul. He referred to screenshots from the August 2023 presentation to the Town Council from Michael Poff at Coastal

Construction regarding easement responses. He will send what he has and request a copy of the presentation.

Chair Update: Chair Johnson provided a copy of the Initiative Guidance Report to MERTF members that he prepared for the Town Council. Council members suggested that MERTF help facilitate the regreening of the right of way on Estero Blvd. Chair Johnson thought the Town received about \$800,000.00 for planting along Estero. He mentioned that the Garden Club offered to assist and the Town Council suggested that MERTF work with them. MERTF Member Nusbaum noted that the vice mayor alluded to residents adopting the right of way in front of their property to plant what they wanted within a framework. MERTF Member Larkin indicated that some people hesitated to plant until construction was completed. (Before MERTF Member Althoff had to leave the meeting, he stated his priorities were the beach sand projects, environmental critical zone, beach raking and boat props.)

B. Beautification of Right of Ways

Chair Johnson suggested the topic be called easement beautification plan and include a recommended list of Florida-friendly plants. Discussion was held regarding safety issues concerning the height of whatever was planted. MERTF Member Larkin suggested recommending wildflowers and ground cover. MERTF Member Nusbaum commented on presenting the landscaping plan to his HOA for their feedback. Chair Johnson wondered whether the Town would maintain the plants for residents who were not full-time and suggested that Public Works could attend a meeting to answer questions.

C. Prioritization of MERTF Initiatives

MERTF Member Larkin mentioned that some items could be combined under sand projects. Twelve items were prioritized, starting with beach projects, including beach renourishment easements, Beach School cooperation, town vegetation, including mangroves, mangrove protection in the EC zone, wastewater lines, beach obstructions, grooming compliance, private sand placement.

IX. Members' Items and Reports

MERTF Member Larkin noted that MERTF discussed herbicides and forming a group of citizens to remove sand spurs by hand at their June 2022 meeting. She stated that the historic beach site was cleaned up and planted by volunteers and the Garden Club cleaned up the garden at Bay Oaks and will be replanted. The Times Square area was mapped out for plants and Beach Talk Radio was raising money and gathering volunteers to complete the project in January. She noted the Town had to approve the vegetation plan. The Garden Club asked whether MERTF was interested in assisting with updating the book on trees. Chair Johnson said he would support the project. MERTF Member Spalletta commented that dogs were still running around off-leash and the owners avoided the officers. She reported three incidents over the last ten days and expressed frustration with the lack of enforcement.

MERTF Member Nusbaum met with FWC regarding communication issues and will prepare a list of property owners on the south end of the beach to facilitate contact. Becky Schneider from the FWC encouraged property owners to submit applications for a take permit to help alleviate communication issues last nesting season. MERTF Member Nusbaum will act as the point person

and provide feedback from the property owners. He noted several people were upset at the Audubon Society because of the lawsuit.

MERTF Member Rusk shared an update from Macy Knoll regarding the activity book. Her quote is between \$4,320.00 and \$6,750.00 and she would complete the project by May. MERTF Member Rusk noted the Town would budget the cost for her work and MERTF would cover the printing costs. Pop-up dates: January 5, 2024, January 19, February 2, February 16, March 1, March 15, and March 19.

X. Public Comment

Ed Rood, resident and administrator of Friends of Little Estero Island, commented that they absorbed the cost of the information panels and the Town will provide the posts and framework to mount the signs. He stated that the signs would be presented to the Town Council at their next meeting. He noted that he also met with Becky and they will organize the property owners and obtain contact information like MERTF Member Nusbaum's group.

XI. MERTF Award

MOTION: MERTF Member Larkin moved to nominate the Community Foundation and Patty Smith; seconded by MERTF Member Nusbaum.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

The January Spotlight article will be by MERTF Member Larkin; February by MERTF Member Althoff, and March by MERTF Member Spalletta.

XII. Set Agenda for Next Meeting

Staff report, adopt an easement, beach projects and compromised wastewater lines.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: MERTF Member Nusbaum moved to adjourn; second by MERTF Member Rusk.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:36 p.m.

Adopted 1/10/2024 with/without changes. Motion by Mary Rusk Spalletta
(DATE)

Vote: 5-0 Signature: 

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