

MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
Bay Oaks Recreational Campus
2731 Oak Street
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair Thomas.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

Members present: Ron Benak, Dan Blanchette, Jim Bougoulas, Keran Farrell, James Knickle and Dawn Thomas.
Excused: Heidi Jungwirth
Staff Liaison: Tom Yozzo
Council Liaison: Dan Allers

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Christy Hennessy commented that she had an e-bike that helped her get over the bridge. She indicated that many e-bikes rode on the sidewalks at the same speed as regular bikes. She noted that riding on the road was unsafe and suggested that e-bikes be allowed on the sidewalk.

Carol Jacobi rode a regular bike on the sidewalk because she could not pedal fast enough to keep up with the traffic, which was dangerous. She commented that she got off her bike when encountering pedestrians on the sidewalk. She suggested that bike markings be highlighted and weeds be removed from sidewalks. She felt there was a way to utilize sidewalks for e-bikes and pedestrians.

Les Gorsuch, owner of Fox E-bikes on Old San Carlos, suggested that speed be regulated for e-bikes on sidewalks.

Seely Gorsuch commented that two people rented their bikes to visit Lover's Key and loved it. She suggested that PSC members watch "Not Just Bikes" on YouTube to discover how to combine cars, pedestrians and bikes. She would like to see the town be more bike-friendly.

Marianne Sheely, resident, used a tricycle e-bike and said it was dangerous for her to ride on the sidewalk because her bike only goes 12 mph at top speed. She asked that people be allowed to ride on the sidewalk or the beach so people on the south end could safely get downtown.

Jerry Foley commented that riding his e-bike in the bike lane was dangerous. He described dedicated bike lanes in Virginia and Key West. He suggested that the sidewalk on the beach side be pedestrian only and the sidewalk on the other side be strictly for bikes.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – March 19, 2024

MOTION: PSC Member Knickle moved to approve the minutes; seconded by PSC Member Bougoulas.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

VI. STAFF REPORT AND UPDATES

Captain Lalor stated that there were no significant issues during the spring break period and they were back to normal operations.

Fire Chief Worth stated that there were no trends. He commented there were two or three vehicle versus pedestrians and bikes incidents, but they were not serious. There were a couple of reports of cut feet on the beach and he wondered whether public safety announcements would help.

Staff liaison Yozzo reported that no bikes on the sidewalks were being enforced and there had not been many accidents. He stated that law enforcement was educating people and felt that the east/west sidewalk should be explored. He agreed that cut feet were the biggest issue on the beach.

Liaison Allers reported that the town council brought up revisiting the bike ordinance. He discussed education before enforcement and commented that he noticed more pedestrians using the sidewalk on the bay side than the beachside. He encouraged PSC members to discuss allowing bikes on the sidewalk and the beach and the east/west idea. He requested a report of bike, pedestrian and car accidents from Captain Lalor.

Chair Thomas referred to a pedestrian and bicycle master plan presentation created before the hurricane and noted there was a lot of good data included. Liaison Yozo stated that the town was waiting to hear back from the group that created the plan to present new data points. Chair Thomas questioned whether the town ever discussed creating a boardwalk for bikes. Liaison Allers responded that working with homeowners would be challenging and he noted there were no water stations or places to secure bikes up and down Estero Blvd. He mentioned using bright green paint and rumble strips for bike lanes. He suggested researching other municipalities and added that the county supported whatever the town needed to do. He felt that prohibiting bikes on the beach, whether they had a motor or not, was a wasted opportunity.

PSC Member Knickle suggested enlarging the sidewalks to help with safety and noted the town needed a plan to make the boulevard safe up and down the island. Chair Thomas encouraged PSC members to read the master plan presentation and come up with ideas. PSC Member Benak agreed that e-bikes should be allowed on the beach. Discussion was held regarding creating a boardwalk.

VII. HURRICANE RESPONSE PLAN

PSC Member Bougoulas reported that he met with Public Information Officer (PIO) Nicole regarding the code red system and they were working through a pilot. An online communication to educate guests and residents to sign up for the code red system will be

active in May. He indicated that they would work with rental property owners about providing renter information.

VIII. PUBLIC SAFETY CAMPAIGN AND MESSAGING

A. ELECTRIC BIKE MESSAGING

Liaison Allers felt they should hold off on messaging and PSC members agreed.

B. CROSSWALK MESSAGING

Staff liaison Yozzo reported that the crosswalk message will resume in the summer. PSC Member Benak questioned whether lights could be added to alert about upcoming dangerous crosswalk areas. He will meet with Captain Lalor after the meeting. PSC Member Farrell asked about adding warning signs in the middle lane that pop back up after vehicles run over them. Liaison Allers noted he would contact Commissioner Sandelli since they discussed the topic earlier.

C. FDOT ROUNDABOUT MESSAGING

Chair Thomas stated that FDOT was scheduled to present at their May 21, 2024 meeting.

IX. MEMBER ITEMS AND REPORTS

PSC Member Bougoulas read a draft of a survey regarding public safety that is being created for the public to fill out. PSC members provided input.

PSC Member Blanchette questioned the status of community policing and Chair Thomas suggested asking Liaison Allers for an update and noted that not many people were back yet.

PSC Member Farrell suggested lobbying the town council at the next M&P to rescind e-bikes on the sidewalk and set a speed limit. He brought up splitting the sidewalk where bikes ride near the curb. He discussed privacy issues with a boardwalk on the beach. PSC Member Benak shared a confrontation story with a car and agreed with allowing bikes on the beach and using common sense. Chair Thomas will present their ideas to the town council.

Captain Lalor described an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) program that blasted emergency information and said he would present the information at next month's meeting. The meeting at the EOC was scheduled for May 7, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. He questioned whether commercial properties on Estero Blvd. would consider a five-foot easement where the county could pay to widen the sidewalk. Chair Thomas added the idea to her list.

Chair Thomas was glad that the town council was moving forward with removing derelict structures. Staff liaison Yozzo provided an update on sending out notices of violations.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Jacobi suggested that the PSC partner with Beach Talk Radio for a public safety segment. Chair Thomas will contact Ed Ryan. PSC Member Bougoulas suggested they also talk to Mr. Ryan about promoting the survey.

Ms. Gorsuch noted that another video regarding streets and roads was informative.

XI. SET NEXT MEETING AGENDA – May 21, 2024

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: PSC Member Farrell moved to adjourn; seconded by PSC Member Bougoulas.

VOTE: The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:23 a.m.

Adopted May 21, 2024 with/without changes. Motion by Heidi Jungwirth
(DATE)

Vote: 6-0 Signature: Dawn Gumas

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