

MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES TASK FORCE
Bay Oaks Recreation Center
2731 Oak Street
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Wednesday, February 14, 2024

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 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: Environmental Projects Manager Chadd Chustz.

IV. Approve The Agenda

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to shift the three items under Members' Items to Current Items; seconded by MERTF Member Spalletta.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

V. Approve Previous Meeting Minutes – January 10, 2024

MOTION: MERTF Member Nusbaum moved to approve the minutes; seconded by MERTF Member Althoff.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

VI. Public Comment

Kelly Hardin, resident, commented that adding sand at the sound end of the beach did not harm nesting birds. She noted that the snowy plovers seemed to prefer drier sand. She indicated that those who did not live on the gulf should not be telling them what to do. She reiterated that they supported protecting the birds and have been working with the Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for years.

Brian Cichon, resident, had a problem with the birds and was upset that people were making decisions about his property who do not live on the beach. He wanted to protect his investment.

Carlia Cichon, resident, noted that they were new to the beach and had to get educated regarding the rules and regulations.

Joann Knobloch, resident, stated there were no birds 18 years ago and there was a nice sandy beach. Now, there were weeds, and the beach was a mess most of the year. She commented that fences were everywhere and birds were dive-bombing people. She asked why they did not go to Lover's Key. She said they could not enjoy their beach property anymore. She demanded to know

who was responsible for the sand and designating it as a critical wildlife area without input from owners.

Linda & Larry Wenstrup, residents, stated that they all wanted the beach back. She noted the bird situation started small before Ian. Mr. Wenstrup stated that the birds were from Lover's Key and not natural to the area. He discussed spraying herbicides and the runoff going into the water. Ms. Wenstrup indicated that the bird patch had grown, but they had to walk around them. She stated the birds cannot take up the whole beach because their property values would decrease. Mr. Wenstrup asked who authorized the bird colony and why were they accommodating them?

Ed McCabe, resident, commented that they worked with the FWC. He noted that the beach was pristine years and the birds were attracted to it. He supported renourishing the beach and indicated that their beach needed to be cleaned up. He volunteered with the FWC and the property in front of Carlos Point was the largest property in Florida, where birds migrated over 3,000 miles. He stated that the wildlife was part of the beauty and there was a delicate balance.

Jim Dutton, resident, supported adding sand so he could access the beach other than at low tide. MERTF Member Nusbaum read an email from resident Sharon Engstrom, who had worked with FWC for 20 years as a Castle Beach liaison. She noted that the birds used their beach for six months out of the year because she believed they were good stewards of the environment. She explained the reasons for roping off areas for the birds and described collaboration with different entities.

Chair Johnson stated that some owners had an agreement with the FWC and MERTF only advised the town council. Anything happening down there was agreed upon with the property owners and other entities. He defined the word pristine. MERTF Member Howell stated there was a lot of misinformation out there and MERTF was trying to find avenues for everyone.

MERTF Members Nusbaum and Althoff discussed regulations by FWC and they were trying to find a balance between the birds and people.

VII. Presentation: Sea Turtle Conservation

Projects Manager Chustz utilized PowerPoint for his presentation. Slides included Town Lighting Review Policy, Town Codes & Lighting Standards, Sea Turtle Conservation Code, When is a Lighting Review Required, What is a Lighting Review Reviewing, Why Do We Need Lighting Reviews, What Happens When We Do Not Review Lighting, Existing Lights Reviewed, What is TFMB Policy, Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Lighting and Options. Projects Manager Chustz favored using FWC guidelines. Chair Johnson felt that following the town's lighting ordinance would diminish many of the problems. Projects Manager Chustz noted it depended on the interpretation of the code. Chair Johnson suggested that there would not be sky glow if everyone complied with the ordinance. Projects Manager Chustz agreed and asked where they start and stop with long wave. MERTF Member Nusbaum brought up the glow from the lights at the ball field and Projects Manager Chustz replied that the lights would be replaced.

Projects Manager Chustz questioned whether they accepted dark sky or lighting standards code only in multi-family and commercial properties outside the map's red zone. The discussion will continue at the next meeting. MERTF Members Nusbaum and Althoff would like to hear from other property owners.

VIII. Current Items

A. Beach Sand Projects

Chair Johnson noted that the people who presented at the Mound House regarding beach resilience offered to discuss the topic with a panel. February 29, 2024, was an option to meet. Chair Johnson read topics of discussion that MERTF Member Spalletta distributed at the last meeting. Discussion was held regarding beach resilience. A consensus was reached to invite the panel to meet at a location to be determined. Projects Manager Chustz shared positive statistics regarding the emergency berm for sea turtles and vegetation. He stated that there was no FEMA requirement to plant vegetation on the berm for those who did not sign the easement.

Chair Johnson discussed the truck haul project cost versus the renourishment plan for taxpayers. Projects Manager Chustz explained the reasoning behind the truck haul project. MERTF Member Althoff lived on the beach and supported additional sand no matter where it came from.

B. Activity Book

MERTF Member Rusk presented the first five pages to review. MERTF Members reviewed the pages and shared corrections and comments.

C. Shrimp Parade

Chair Johnson indicated that Bill Veach's empty trailer was available. MERTF Member Howell offered his boat but needed a flatbed trailer to haul it. He also volunteered to use his kayak trailer. Chair Johnson noted that he would be on the Mosquito District's float but would be happy to help MERTF before the parade. MERTF Member Rusk said she would not mind watching the parade this year rather than participating. MERTF Members agreed to sit out the parade this year.

D. Adopt a Right of Way – discuss next month.

E. Sewer Lines – discuss next month.

IX. Members' Items

MERTF Member Rusk stated that the pop-up tent was back at the Farmer's Market and the schedule was posted on the town's website.

MERTF Member Howell reported that he responded to a distressed manatee on the beach last week and thanked everyone who assisted in the rescue. He encouraged the community to contact him for questions.

MERTF Member Larkin commented that the Florida Native Plant Society was giving away native plants at the pop-up events.

MERTF Member Althoff shared information from the FWC website regarding conservation goals. He reviewed new guidelines to protect imperiled birds that will be implemented in October 2024. He reported a successful hatch of snowy plovers mid-island and described steps the local government can take to help all the birds. MERTF Member Spalletta reported that 59 of 71 nests on the beach hatched and they had a success rate of 81%.

MERTF Member Nusbaum noted that the location of sea turtle nests used to be notated on the website after the turtle season. He brought up adding sand to areas that had a lower success rate. MERTF Member Spalletta indicated that she would get more statistics.

Chair Johnson said he would contact the FWC to install signs in the CWA to keep golf carts away from the area.

MERTF Member Spalletta sent letters to counties in Florida regarding renourishment and replanting. She received 11 replies with helpful information and she will forward the list to Projects Manager Chustz.

MERTF Member Nusbaum thanked Julie Wraithmell from the Audubon Society, Eddie Rood and Kurt Kroemer for reaching a compromise.

X. Staff Report

Projects Manager Chustz read a letter from Coastal Engineer's Michael Poff addressing questions from MERTF regarding Carlos Point Beach.

XI. Public Comment

Eddie Rood discussed MERTF's conversations regarding funding for the FEMA berm and the renourishment project and he noted they benefitted every taxpayer on the island and protected everyone. Some property owners would refuse to add plantings to the dunes and there was nothing anyone could do about it. He suggested discussing these issues at length at every meeting seemed to be a waste of time. Mr. Perry was talking about not raking the beach since Ian. He will start raking again when the FWC gives him the green light.

XII. MERTF Award

MERTF Member Rusk brought up Kim, who redid the original mural in the library. MERTF Member Howell mentioned people who assisted with the manatee rescue. A consensus was reached to award the Murphie to everyone involved with the manatee rescue.

XIII. Set Agenda for Next Meeting – add sea turtle conservation and a forum debrief concerning activities on the 29th. Everything else stays the same.

XIV. Adjournment

MOTION: MERTF Member Rusk moved to adjourn; seconded by MERTF Member Althoff.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:33 p.m.

Adopted 7/10/24 with/without changes. Motion by Spalletta / 2nd Althoff
(DATE)

Vote: 6-0 Signature: [Signature]

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