

MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL
RESOURCES TASK FORCE
Town Hall Council Chambers
2731 Oak Street
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Wednesday, April 10, 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

Council Liaison: John King

IV. Approve The Agenda

MOTION: MERTF Member Nusbaum moved to approve the agenda, seconded by MERTF Member Althoff.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

V. Approve Previous Meeting Minutes – March 13, 2024

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

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

VI. Public Comment – no public comment.

VII. Current Items

A. Resiliency Panel Event Debrief

MERTF Member Larkin discussed the town's four vegetation plans and proposed adding more plants to the options. Regarding wash-out channels and zig-zag paths, she supported looking at beach access walkways in a zig-zag pattern through vegetation. She hoped that property owners would be notified that they could plant the dunes as soon as they received sand.

MERTF Member Spalletta noted that most of the damage from Ian was from the surge as the water was leaving. The weak spots on the island had to be addressed and they needed guidance on which plants would be most successful and where to source them.

Chair Johnson questioned whether the town had a resiliency plan and how they provided storm protection for infrastructure and personal property in the future. He asked what the plan was if grant funds for renourishment dried up and how the concept of sand resiliency played into the Lee Resilient Plan.

MERTF Member Howell agreed that the variety of plants needed to be expanded. He asked how the beach would change between the dunes and how the wildlife bounced back from the dredging in the gulf.

MERTF Member Nusbaum thought the town should concentrate on the weak spots that eroded on the beach. He noted that the wide beach at the south end drew people there for many events throughout the year and was a solid economic driver. If dunes are added to that area of the beach, it would have an economic impact on the island. He did not receive an answer regarding adding seawalls on the south end.

Dr. Jeannine Richards offered her assistance regarding plants.

Dr. Chris Daly was glad resiliency was being discussed and offered to meet with MERTF whenever needed.

MERTF Member Nusbaum questioned using gray (seawalls) and green (plants) to armor the coastline. Dr. Mike Savarese noted there was ambiguity with seawalls and they had unintended consequences, but they did provide an effective barrier for everything behind them during the hurricane. However, during normal conditions, seawalls caused extensive beach erosion. A hybrid design of dunes and seawalls was the best of both worlds. MERTF Member Nusbaum questioned their opinion about a seawall 900 feet from the mean high-water mark across an expansive beach. Dr. Daly discussed a permeable structure to help dissipate the waves and adding riprap to help reduce scouring in front of the seawall. He indicated a buffer zone was critical for seawalls closer to the beach. For wide beaches, seawalls between the buildings would be effective.

Dr. Savarese suggested analyzing how gray/green infrastructure could accommodate Fort Myers Beach's resiliency needs. MERTF Member Althoff asked how high the seawall or riprap should be. Dr. Savarese replied that the panel was uncomfortable answering the question because they were not coastal engineers. He believed that gray/green infrastructure held promise for the beach, but implementing it was a job for experts. He added that there were numerous ways to construct a hybrid structure.

Dr. Daly explained the effects of wave energy, preventing inundation and limiting erosion during a flood. He encouraged looking at targeted areas and determining what was feasible in specific locations. Dr. Savarese noted that hardened structures were needed to slow down the returning surge but would not prevent inundation of seawater in extreme events. He suggested contacting Jennifer Jurado from the Southeast Florida Climate Control Compact to discuss their seawall projects and noted there were lessons to be learned from other communities.

Dr. Savarese suggested that MERTF have a conversation with Sanibel regarding pathway designs because they were experimenting with different designs.

Dr. Richards stated that the Naples Botanical Garden had an effort underway to develop a pipeline to source plant material in the next couple of years and the future. The Garden has resources to help find and source plant material for the beach. MERTF Member Spalletta indicated that railroad vines were all over the beach and she questioned whether they should propagate the vines. Dr. Richards thought that would be fine. Discussion was held regarding constraints with communities propagating their own dune vegetation due to the volume of plants needed.

Dr. Savarese recommended that the town consider how well their needs were being met by what the county was doing and consider complementing what the county was doing on a county-wide vulnerability assessment. He described Naples' adaptation planning that would be revealed on May 15, 2024. Discussion was held regarding vulnerability assessments and any relationship with FEMA's insurance rating.

MERTF Member Rusk addressed recreation on the south end and how those events were affected by dunes and vegetation. MERTF Member Nusbaum talked about adding dunes and vegetation to recreational areas on the beach where it accreted. He indicated that the dunes grew and took away some recreation.

MERTF Member Rusk asked how to protect the beach without dunes and vegetation while allowing recreational activities and businesses on the beach. MERTF Member Nusbaum responded that it depended on the location of the beach.

Chair Johnson recommended that the town amend the plant selection to include more diversity in the managed beach plan. MERTF Member Nusbaum recommended that the town look at ordinances prohibiting building seawalls facing the gulf. Dr. Savarese cautioned that homeowners building seawalls affected neighboring property and suggested that experts be consulted. MERTF Member Spalletta stated that they needed a vulnerability assessment first.

Discussion was held regarding the difference between the Resilient Lee report and a vulnerability assessment. Chair Johnson recommended that the town look at the Resilient Lee report to determine whether the needs of the beach were met, whether the county's vulnerability assessment addressed the beach and whether the beach should conduct its own vulnerability assessment. Dr. Savarese will forward the Resilient Lee report to Chair Johnson.

Chair Johnson recommended that they ask the town council to reconsider approving variances that encroach into the Environmentally Critical (EC) zone. MERTF Member Nusbaum disagreed because he did not believe they should discourage any property from being able to build back the way they were. MERTF Members Spalletta, Howell, Rusk and Larkin disagreed and felt they should be building back better. MERTF Member Althoff stated that it was the town's purview whether to grant variances, not MERTFS. Discussion ensued.

Chair Johnson asked whether the SWFL Regional Resiliency Compact was still active. Dr. Savarese replied that the name was changed to SWFL Regional Resiliency Coalition and explained why it was dormant.

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to provide recommendations regarding plant selection, investigate gulf front seawalls and direct staff to investigate and pursue the vulnerability assessment if the Resilient Lee report did not meet the town's needs, seconded by MERTF Member Howell.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to recommend to the town council to follow the purpose of the comp plan and the land development code and discourage supporting variances for any and all construction in the EC zone, seconded by MERTF Member Spalletta.

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

B. Activity Book

MERTF Member Rusk distributed the packet with revisions. MERTF Member Larkin suggested removing the space for a name to prevent sibling rivalry and MERTF Member Rusk responded that each child would receive their own book. MERTF Member Rusk reviewed the changes and new pages. She indicated that Panther Printer will charge \$812.00 for 500 copies, \$1,228.00 for 1,000, \$2,000.00 for 2,500, \$3,208.00 for 5,000 and delivery fees are \$45.00.

MOTION: MERTF Member Nusbaum moved to authorize MERTF Member Rusk to make the changes and go to press, seconded by MERTF Member Althoff.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: MERTF Member Nusbaum moved to authorize MERTF Member Rusk to increase the order to 10,000 and negotiate the best price, seconded by Chair Johnson.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

VIII. Members' Items

MERTF Member Larkin noted that Earth Day was April 22, 2024, Mote Marine Lab had a benefit yesterday and today and the Right to Clean Water group did not get on the November ballot. They asked people to sign petitions for the 2026 election. She noted that the vegetation by the wavy wall in Times Square looked great.

Chair Johnson indicated that the town council discussed changes to the sea turtle lighting regulations, but he felt they mixed it up with the municipal lighting and felt there was no clarity with what they were trying to do.

MERTF Member Howell invited everyone to provide feedback on the mini-nature center at the Pink Shell. He noted there were a lot of dogs on the beach chasing birds.

MERTF Member Rusk thanked MERTF and the town for getting the activity book out. She echoed the problem of dogs on the beach and people not picking up after them.

No items from other members.

IX. Staff Update – no update.

X. Public Comment – no public comment.

XI. MERTF Award

MERTF Member Nusbaum nominated Beach Talk Radio and the hundreds of people who donated towards the two debris bucket stands that were installed so people could take a bucket to pick up trash and return the bucket to the stands. Beach Talk Radio had previously received the MERTF Award in 2023.

MERTF Member Rusk nominated Nan and her leashed dog Gus for walking on the beach and discussing the importance of the sand dunes and vegetation. She stressed the reasons for keeping dogs on a leash.

Most MERTF members agreed to give the award to Nan and Gus.

XII. Set Agenda for Next Meeting

Beach resilience, mangrove protection and beach raking.

XIII. Adjournment

MOTION: MERTF Member Spalletta moved to adjourn, seconded by MERTF Member Nusbaum.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:11 p.m.

Adopted: June 12, 2024 **with**/without changes.
(DATE)

Motion by MERTF Member, Spalletta. Seconded by: MERTF Member, Larkin.

Vote: 7-0 Signature:  _____

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