

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

Tuesday, January 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, Heidi Jungwirth, James Knickle and Dawn Thomas.

Council Liaison: Dan Allers

Staff Liaison: Jason Freeman

**IV. PUBLIC COMMENT – no public comment.**

**V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – November 28, 2023**

**MOTION:** PSC Member Benak moved to approve the minutes; seconded by PSC Member Farrell.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

**VI. STAFF REPORT AND UPDATES**

Fire Chief Wirth reviewed a report he distributed and noted that calls were usually 21% fire and almost 80% medical, which was typical across the industry. He indicated that the call volume was down about 50% and more calls were incidents relating to electrical hazards and construction. The new fire station on Estero Blvd. was being designed and completion was expected in about two years. The old fire station property would be listed for sale. He discussed the proposed mergers pulled by the representative. He indicated that a voluntary feasibility study to merge the Fort Myers Beach and Iona McGregor fire departments was in the works and would probably take a year or two to complete. PSC Member Knickle noted that the issue of merging fire districts had not gone away, but the fire department was working through the issue and it would ultimately come before the voters.

Chief Wirth stated that traumatic injury calls could be filtered out from the total EMS calls and there was a category for vehicles versus mopeds, bicycles, or pedestrians. Injury versus illness could be filtered out as well.

Lieutenant Chitwood reported that they were planning for spring break and major events within the next few months, such as the Shrimp Festival and Fourth of July. No crimes were trending, and traffic enforcement was focusing on pedestrian issues, which were increasing with more

visitors. PSC Member Knickle thanked Lt. Chitwood for increasing enforcement activities for people using the center lane for passing. Chair Thomas noticed an abundance of people crossing the road wherever they wanted, especially between Lani Kai and Margaritaville. She described dangerous areas with vehicles and pedestrians at Times Square, at the base of the bridge and the light at Margaritaville. She questioned whether the lights could be timed differently to help alleviate some of the problems or add barriers to guide people where to cross the road. Liaison Allers stated the light at Times Square did not work and the pedestrian crossing at the base of the bridge did not work. Lee County gave the Town a timeline of four to six months to have the lights operational. He noted that officers would help control traffic at those two locations and Liaison Allers thought another officer at Crescent would be beneficial. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) indicated the lights would be timed once fixed. Staff would be sent to training to obtain a license to direct traffic. Liaison Allers said he would talk to Commissioner Sandelli about installing guardrails or barriers to funnel pedestrians to crosswalks. He added that most of the issue comes down to personal responsibility.

Chair Thomas brought up adding a second overhead crosswalk and Liaison Allers commented that it was discussed and those involved were open to the concept.

PSC Member Blanchette brought up people coming out of Times Square and turning left onto the bridge. Lt. Chitwood was aware of the situation and will ensure the officers focus more on the area. Chair Thomas questioned whether the road signs to direct people off the island could be reinstalled. PSC Member Bougoulas thanked officers for a safe New Year's Eve.

## **VII. SIDEWALK PROJECT**

PSC Member Jungwirth will have the information by the end of the week and will forward it to Liaison Freeman for distribution.

## **VIII. PUBLIC SAFETY CAMPAIGN AND MESSAGING**

Chair Thomas noted that Communications Coordinator Dexter resigned. Liaison Freeman remarked that the position would be filled and staff was assisting in the meantime.

## **IX. BICYCLING UPDATES**

Chair Thomas noted that she had not noticed any issues since crowds were not on the beach yet. PSC Member Benak pointed out that he saw people riding in every direction and thought more signage would help. The painting pilot project on the north end was done before the hurricane and liaison Allers will follow up with Commissioner Sandelli about starting that back up. PSC Member Farrell suggested sending messages out regarding bicyclists riding with traffic on the sidewalks and slowing down. PSC Member Jungwirth commented that there were Wrong-Way signs before Ian.

## **X. MEMBER ITEMS AND REPORTS**

PSC Member Knickle indicated a lot of crosswalk signs were missing. Liaison Allers responded that Commissioner Sandelli was aware of the issue.

PSC Member Farrell suggested that crosswalk signs that sprung up and down when fire trucks ran over them be added to the center line to make people aware of where to cross.

PSC Member Jungwirth will forward the sidewalk project information to liaison Freeman this week.

Chair Thomas contacted the Let's Go Fort Myers Beach group to attend PSC's meeting to work together, but she had not heard back. She read that the group had a liaison with the town council and questioned where the PSC stood and the role of Let's Go Fort Myers Beach. Liaison Allers suggested that Chair Thomas contact Council Member Woodson, who was the liaison.

PSC Member Benak questioned whether PSC was interested in a tour of the Emergency Operating Center (EOC) to understand how the center worked during significant weather events. Lt. Chitwood offered to coordinate a visit but suggested they wait because the center was in the middle of a construction project.

PSC Member Bougoulas brought up his idea from the November meeting regarding a two-way communication system with people who stayed before a hurricane. He indicated that he would meet with the town manager if he agreed. He will follow up with Liaison Freeman. PSC Member Bougoulas noted that a trailer with a magnet could be hooked up to beach patrol vehicles to sift the sand for metal debris.

Liaison Allers stated people were climbing in buildings that were not secure and questioned whether the PSC would tackle the issue of educating people. He questioned adding emergency information to rentals and hotels before the next hurricane season.

#### XI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chief Worth indicated that if the entire group wanted to tour the EOC, it would have to be noticed because at least one commissioner wished to attend.

#### XII. SET NEXT MEETING AGENDA – February 27, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

**MOTION:** Chair Thomas moved to change the meeting to Tuesday, February 27, 2024; seconded by PSC Member Blanchette.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

#### XIII. ADJOURNMENT

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

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:04 a.m.

Adopted 2/27/2024 with/without changes. Motion by Jim Bougoulas  
(DATE) Secinded by  
Keran Farrel

Vote: 6-0 Signature: Amy Baker, Town Clerk

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