

**MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL
RESOURCES TASK FORCE
Town Hall Council Chambers
2731 Oak Street
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Wednesday, August 14, 2024**

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Town Clerk Baker.

II. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

Members present: Bill Althoff, Robert Howell, Rose Larkin, David Nusbaum (virtually) and Jennifer Rusk.

Excused: Steve Johnson

Staff: Environmental Projects Manager Chadd Chustz

Council Liaison: John King

MOTION: MERTF Member Althoff moved to allow MERTF Member Nusbaum to participate virtually due to unforeseen circumstances, seconded by MERTF Member Howell.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

Town Clerk Baker noted that MERTF Member Spalleta resigned and a new Vice Chair had to be nominated.

MOTION: MERTF Member Larkin moved to nominate MERTF Member Rusk, seconded by MERTF Member Howell.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

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 – July 10, 2024

Clarification: Panther Printing estimated that 10,000 coloring activity books cost \$5,280.80, including shipping.

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

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

VI. Public Comment – no public comment.

VII. Current Items

A. Sea Grant

Dr. Mike Savarese described the Sea Grant and reported that the team completed a survey in June of what the beach looked like with the berm in place. They flew over this morning to view the impact of Hurricane Debby. The data would help improve resilience and protection from future storms with interventions such as creating a set of dunes in a certain way and various ways of planting the dunes. Dr. Savarese asked what MERTF's top priorities were so they could be simulated. He noted that the berm lost a lot of sand and that vegetation would have helped it survive better; however, FEMA funds were not available for plants then. Projects Manager Chustz described how vegetation would be added. Dr. Savarese indicated his team made various recommendations for planting in the information package he provided and some applied to property owners.

MERTF Members suggested creating simulations for installing berms with vegetation, adding a second dune closer to the wave action, adding a boardwalk and simulating what Clearwater did, adding a seawall in the dune and exploring different widths and heights of dunes. Projects Manager Chustz will work with Dr. Savarese on various scenarios. Dr. Savarese described the simulations Sanibel and Naples were exploring.

MOTION: MERTF Member Larkin moved that MERTF members submit their recommendation to Projects Manager Chustz by Friday, August 23, 2024, seconded by MERTF Member Nusbaum.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

B. Community Foundation Donation

Vice Chair Rusk thanked the Foundation for their donation. MERTF Member Larkin noted she suggested purchasing a brochure holder for Town Hall. Vice Chair Rusk suggested checking with Donna Romilio or Culture, Parks & Recreation Director Jeff Hauge. She added that she needed a table stand for the pop-ups.

C. Activity Book

Vice Chair Rusk announced that the book was done and listed where it was available. She also shared pictures of the elementary school children enjoying the book and noted that almost 4,000 were distributed.

D. Chevron Decision

MERTF Member Nusbaum stated that he was interested in the town attorney's opinion on how the decision would impact the town. Liaison King replied that the attorney told him that the decision applied to federal agencies only and the town was not affected.

VIII. Members' Items

MERTF Member Nusbaum congratulated Vice Chair Rusk for her hard work on the activity book. MERTF Member Larkin indicated that the plants installed in the garden area by the wavy wall had been removed and replaced with fabric and rock because the grass was growing. She discovered that Director Hague was responsible for ripping out the landscaping without any authority to her knowledge. She stated that Beach Talk Radio followers raised the money for the garden and provided the volunteers and noted they probably were not very happy. MERTF Member Larkin added that removing the plants and replacing them with fabric and rock was an example of what not to do in that area. Liaison King read the response from Director Hauge about the out-of-control weeds and the staff being unable to weed every day. He also spoke to Kathy Turner, President of the Garden Club, since they were supposed to do the upkeep. It had been over a month since anyone was out there, so he put in the rock. Director Hauge entered the meeting and said he spoke to the Mayor and Town Manager before removing the plants. He noted that they received complaints about the way it looked. Vice Chair Rusk asked whether they could run environmental decisions by MERTF and Director Hauge responded that they would consider it, but sometimes staff had to make decisions. He stated that he offered reimbursement to those who requested it. MERTF Member Larkin noted that a disease or pest affected the gumbo limbo trees. The Lee County Extension Service was sending samples to a pathology lab in Gainesville. She encouraged residents to contact the extension service if their tree breaks off at the ground. MERTF Member Howell suggested asking the Communications Coordinator, Nicole Berzin, to provide information on the website.

MERTF Member Howell built bat houses and offered to install some at public beach accesses to reduce mosquito populations. He was advised to contact Director Hauge and the town council. His first science talk about dolphins will be in September and the information will be added to the website.

Vice Chair Rusk described how the Anna Maria Island Turtle Watch's book inspired their activity book. She noted she would meet with the new person in charge of the turtle watch next week since the previous person passed and they could not download their activity book. She reported that the Farmer's Market asked that the pop-up tent return. The dates of the pop-up are tentatively scheduled for September 6 and 20th. She will miss MERTF Member Spalletta and thanked her for her efforts, dedication to the island and kindness.

IX. Staff Update

Projects Manager Chustz reported that the beach renourishment project was up and running on the north end. Plantings were prioritized and property owners were being contacted to see if they still wanted to participate in the project. Cleanup from Debby was ongoing and staged at Newton Park before being hauled to the horticultural landfill.

X. Public Comment

President of the Garden Club, Kathy Turner, was too upset to deliver her comments, so Vice Chair Rusk read them.

XI. MERTF Award

Patty Smith and Don Davids are in the bank and Vice Chair Rusk added the Captain of the Dolphin tour at Salty Sams. MERTF Member Nusbaum renominated Chris and Ginger Weber from Mid Island Sports for being recognized by the FWC (Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission) as beach heroes in their newsletter.

Patty Smith will be the next recipient of the award and the others will be in the bank.

XII. Set Agenda for Next Meeting – September 11, 2024

Remove the Chevron Decision and add prop guards and school outreach.

XIII. Adjournment

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

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

Adopted 9-11-24 with/without changes. Motion by _____
(DATE)

Vote 5-0 Signature 

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