

**MINUTES**  
**Town of Fort Myers Beach**  
**Cultural and Environmental Learning**  
**Center Advisory Board "CELCAB"**  
Town Hall Chambers – 2731 Oak Street  
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931  
**Thursday, November 21, 2024**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Chair Hill.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**III. ROLL CALL – not recorded**

Members present: Kerrie Henderson, Barbara Hill, Patrick McKeown, Betty Simpson, Cherie Smith, Ellen Vaughan and Becky Werner.

Town Staff: Director Culture, Parks & Recreation Jeff Hauge and Museum Manager Adam Knight.

Council Liaison: Jim Atterholt

**IV. COMMITTEE REORGANIZATION AND APPOINTMENTS**

**MOTION:** CELCAB Member Werner nominated Barbara Hill as Chair, seconded by CELCAB Member Smith.

**VOTE:** The motion carried unanimously.

**MOTION:** CELCAB Member McKeown nominated Cherie Smith as Vice Chair, seconded by CELCAB Member Henderson.

**VOTE:** The motion carried unanimously.

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

**VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – August 22, 2024**

Clarification: ~~Brianna Baraseo~~ Museum Registrar Breanna Vaccaro was grouping the artifacts by excavation and collection. He indicated that the records ended in 2014 when ~~Teresa Theresa Schober~~ left and asked members to contact him to fill in some gaps between 2013 and 2015.

**MOTION:** CELCAB Member Henderson moved to approve the amended minutes, seconded by CELCAB Member Smith.

**VOTE:** The motion carried unanimously.

**VII. STAFF REPORT**

CELCAB Member Simpson and Liaison Atterholt arrived during the report.

Museum Manager Knight summarized his earlier report and listed his recent accolades. Regarding marketing, the Mound House ads will run on the Fort Myers Beach tram from November 2024 to April 2025. Digital ads will run through a collaboration with the Visitor & Convention Bureau and target potential visitors in the Midwest and Northeast. A separate direct mailing campaign will continue in December 2024 and run through March 2025 to an estimated 20,000 households in southwest Florida.

Due to hurricanes Helene and Milton, the Mound House was closed on September 27, 2024, and October 7-18, 2024. Helene resulted in 32 inches of storm surge and damaged landscape lighting and electrical outlets in the underground exhibit. Hurricane Milton resulted in 51 inches and damaged more of the landscaping, the entire electrical system and key facilities of the underground exhibit. The museum and grounds reopened on October 19, 2024; however, the underground exhibit remains closed. A structural engineer inspected the site on November 20, 2024, and was reviewing the long-term safety of the exhibit. The gutters have been ordered and installation is being scheduled. Ceiling repairs to the living and museum store from thunderstorms will occur next month. Since the drop-down ceiling tiles were painted cardboard, the repairs will be minimal and both projects will be reimbursed by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The new landscape lighting and repairs to the observation pier lighting were approved by the town and will be scheduled soon.

There were 53 visitors in October, surpassing the number last year. Two community conversation events were held and the collaborative event with the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida screening and popup art show drew 62 visitors. So far in November, 522 people have visited the Mound House.

Museum Manager Knight stated that the staff strongly recommended that the underground exhibit be closed permanently. Damage from the hurricanes has caused extensive damage to the site and risked Seminole ancestral burials located near the exhibit. The recommendation to close the site was made in consultation with the Seminole and Miccosukee tribes, although they remained neutral. Museum Manager Knight read a list of people who staff contacted regarding the issue. Regarding collection preservation, staff planned to repurpose the Digging Deeper exhibit in the bathroom to a collection storage. The living room would remain intact and the bathtub would be covered instead of removed.

Chair Hill stated that the ordinance change regarding how CELCAB operates and the collection management policy draft will be tabled until the December meeting.

## **VIII. NEW BUSINESS – UNDERGROUND EXHIBIT AREA SUSTAINABILITY**

Museum Manager Knight stated that there were known reinterred Seminole ancestors at the site. Several CELCAB Members agreed that the Mound House would not survive without the underground exhibit. CELCAB Member Vaughan felt it was unfortunate that all those people were consulted and a decision was reached without informing CELCAB members. Museum Manager Knight stated he had not reached a conclusion and that this was only a recommendation. He indicated that he was following Chair Hill's advice to seek out experts so he could present a full scope of opinions and research to CELCAB. Discussion was held regarding the remains, the ethics and the law. Director Hauge indicated that the conversation started after the last hurricane uncovered more remains and they inquired about a proper burial. Chair Hill explained why the Mound House was referred to as a museum.

Director Hauge stated it was expensive to repair all the damage after floods and the exhibit was starting to shift. He added that attendance remained the same despite the exhibit being closed for the majority of the last two years. He indicated the town had spent about \$450,000.00 on repairs

after Ian. To replace the electrical and AV system this time would cost about \$200,000.00 - \$250,000.00. CELCAB Member Vaughan suggested not replacing the electrical component and having visitors use flashlights to see the exhibit in its natural state. She supported hiring forensic anthropologists to determine whether the remains were settlers from the 1800s. Museum Manager Knight replied that they could not disturb human remains because it was a felony in Florida. CELCAB Member Werner questioned the ethics of letting people walk on top of the mound. Museum Manager Knight stated it was like digging up a casket versus walking in the cemetery. He discussed the values that go into tribal law and tribal affiliation. CELCAB Member Smith indicated that she was told that the remains were people who had been on the mound at some time and they were white. Museum Manager Knight responded that the Seminole Tribe has proven cultural affiliation to these ancestors. CELCAB Member Smith felt they were blowing it out of proportion and should keep it natural, reinforce it with structure and use flashlights. She thought it would be a grave mistake to close it. CELCAB Member Werner questioned whether Susan Grace had additional information and a consensus was reached to allow her to comment.

Ms. Grace reviewed her and her husband's affiliation with the Mound House. She noted that Dr. Theresa Schober and Bill Grace served on a committee with representatives from the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes and others. Human remains were discovered in the fill surrounding the swimming pool. Dr. Schober reburied the remains in 2011 or 2012 and Mr. Grace was present. She noted that Dr. Schober would be in town in December and January and would like to address CELCAB and clarify things. Ms. Grace stated that Dr. Schober did not recommend closing the underground exhibit. Museum Manager Knight noted that based on the poster presentation, it said the underground would eventually have to be closed due to sea level rise. Ms. Grace indicated that since they did not know where other human remains were buried, the whole site was a burial ground and should be closed based on Museum Manager Knight's premise. Ms. Grace wondered if the bones recently found could be Mr. Grace's ancestors or the Gilbert's children. CELCAB Member Simpson noted the conversation broke her heart and she was unsure they were on the right page, which bothered her.

CELCAB Member McKeown supported keeping the exhibit in a natural state and using flashlights. Chair Hill suggested that researching new technology for the exhibit in a less invasive way might be the best solution. She supported additional studies and hearing what the town attorney has to say.

Discussion was held regarding the cost of continued repairs. Museum Manager Knight reiterated that the number of people visiting has not dropped since the underground exhibit was closed. He discussed diversifying the Mound House experience and ways to install additional exhibits. He stated that he did not want the underground exhibit to close. Director Hauge agreed and indicated they had to figure out a way to make it work without spending a lot of taxpayers' money. Museum Manager Knight commented on continued erosion with each storm. CELCAB Member Smith suggested that the Friends of the Mound House could hold a fundraiser.

**MOTION:** CELCAB Member McKeown moved to table the discussion and have a forensic anthropologist examine the remains, do some research, explore the financial issues, stabilization and look for ways to keep it open, seconded by CELCAB Member Werner.

**VOTE:** The motion carried unanimously.

Liaison Atterholt noted that Deputy Clerk Jason Freeman was in discussions with two Land Trusts and grant opportunities to purchase the Strandview property. CELCAB Member Henderson questioned what happened to the \$13 million. Director Hauge replied that the funds should be

allocated around January. He added that the R2P2 report will be presented soon. The restroom trailers at Newton Park were almost ready to open. CELCAB Member Smith asked about adding something for autistic children. Chair Hill replied that their mission was to have a passive park. Director Hauge commented that they discussed installing fitness stations at beach accesses. Liaison Atterholt left the meeting.

## **IX. OLD BUSINESS – COLLECTION STORAGE**

Chair Hill noted that the Collection Storage Plan was emailed to members. Museum Manager Knight reviewed the handout and the collection of artifacts. He included photos of the collection storage and the workspace for the museum registrar. There was no cell or internet service in the space, it could not be secured, there was no temperature control and the light automatically went off every five minutes. The artifacts were in the original grab bags from excavation and several had deteriorated. The original data markers written on the bags have faded away on many items. Museum Manager Knight stated the collection was in poor condition and in danger. The new plan was to build temporary shelving on top of the bathtub. The sink, kiosks and two magnifying stations will be removed. The sink and one of the kiosks will be temporarily stored and the other kiosk will be updated with educational components. The magnifying stations will be moved to the ancient peoples' exhibit. He referred to the diagram in the packet and discussed the highlights and opportunities of storing the collection in the bathroom. He stated it would be less than \$3,000.00 for the project.

Chair Hill wondered whether this was the best utilization and suggested that an architect give their opinion. She pointed out that the windows were obscured and Museum Manager Knight replied that they had to be covered because of the light. Director Hauge indicated funds were available for the project and had to be used by the end of the calendar year. Chair Hill thought it was a good plan for the safety and accessibility of the collection. She brought up the earlier plan to store the collection at the new town hall. CELCAB Member Werner noted the windows would have to be sealed and the roof leaked in the bathroom. She questioned whether displaying the pipe and other items that were part of the burial ground had to be settled. Museum Manager Knight explained the steps required under federal law and noted that Museum Registrar Vaccaro filled out the required summary. It was determined that the pipe was the only artifact affected by the new law and Museum Manager Knight covered it until they were given direction. Director Hauge revealed that the room in the new town hall was smaller than the bathroom and the museum registrar would possess the only key for security.

Museum Manager Knight added that the town hall was two miles away from the Mound House and it removed the museum registrar from the team and removed the artifacts from visitors. He listed several other cons with that location. He was confident that the artifacts currently in storage would be appropriately housed in the bathroom. He described how the collection would be stored and protected. Chair Hill thought it was a great plan and would be an excellent educational opportunity.

**MOTION:** CELCAB Member McKeown moved to approve the storage plan, seconded by CELCAB Member Simpson.

CELCAB Member Werner explained why she did not support the location. Museum Manager Knight revealed that the Friends were not <sup>\*as amended at April 24, 2025 meeting</sup> paying \$2,000.00 a year for the ~~kiosk domain~~ web services <sup>\*as amended at the February 27, 2025 meeting</sup> and he found a website developer who offered to house it for free. He indicated they would like to close the Mound House for two weeks in December to implement the plan and repair the ceiling.

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

CELCAB Member McKeown questioned why Museum Manager Knight emailed CELCAB Member Vaughan telling him not to wear Mound House garb when speaking to the Southwest Florida Archeological Society instead of speaking to him. Museum Manager Knight explained why and apologized for being insensitive and said he would not do it again. CELCAB Member Vaughan stated that she and Museum Manager Knight would have conversations monthly and noted he was thrown into the situation. She talked about navigating relationships and compromises. Chair Hill noted that she attended Leadership Lee and the experience was valuable. She recommended that Museum Manager Knight or Director Hauge attend the conference if funds were available next year.

CELCAB Member Werner asked that Chair Hill grab the room at town hall for storage of items that were not on display at the Mound House. She suggested that more exhibits be added to the bathroom space. Director Hauge will check with the town manager.

CELCAB Member Vaughan stated that Rexanne found papers related to the Newton family. She questioned whether they thought giving them to Ellie Bunting for the Estero Island Historical Society would be appropriate. Director Hauge suggested exhibiting them at Newton Park and a consensus was reached to hold on to the documents. The Friends of the Mound House will participate in the Christmas tree event sponsored by the Woman's Club and the Putt and Pub event in January.

CELCAB Member Smith stated that a \$1,000.00 value would be placed on the Christmas tree with certificates and donations on the tree. She suggested better communication with more notice. She was not sure whether she was still a docent and questioned her role since the underground exhibit was closed. Museum Manager Knight said he sent three separate email blasts concerning the lecture series. He confirmed that she was always welcome to be a docent at the museum. He addressed the roles and responsibilities and noted they were all volunteers he managed; however, CELCAB members governed him.

CELCAB Member Simpson agreed with better communication.

CELCAB Member Henderson thought Museum Manager Knight did a good job and honesty was always the best policy.

Chair Hill noted she received all the newsletter information and it would have been her fault if she had not added it to her calendar. She added that they used to have a calendar distributed in advance.

## **XI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ms. Grace was proud of Fort Myers Beach for not closing down and they should not close the exhibit.

## **XII. SET NEXT MEETING AGENDA AND DATE**

Meetings will be on the fourth Thursday of the month at 1:00 p.m. He noted some dates conflicted with holidays and he will provide a master calendar. The December meeting will be canceled. Items to include in the next agenda are updating the 1998 ordinance, collection management policy draft, continue the underground exhibit discussion and Newton Park.

## **XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 4:22 p.m..

Adopted 2/27/2025 with/without changes. Motion by Cherie Smith  
(DATE)

Vote: all Signature: Sam Hill

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