

MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL
RESOURCES TASK FORCE
Town Hall Council Chambers
2731 Oak Street
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Thursday, May 1, 2025

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chair Nusbaum.

II. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

Members present: Bill Althoff, Sharon Hegstrom, David Nusbaum, Ed Rood and Leo Sand.
Excused: Robert Howell and Jennifer Rusk.
Staff: Environmental Projects Manager Chadd Chustz
Council Liaison: John King

MOTION: MERTF Member Sand moved to excuse MERTF Members Howell and Rusk, seconded by MERTF Member Althoff.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

IV. Approve The Agenda

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

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

V. Approve Previous Meeting Minutes – April 10, 2025

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

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

VI. Public Comment – no public comment.

VII. Current Items

A. Invasive, Exotic Vegetation in the Environmentally Critical Zone

Chair Nusbaum asked whether they could get a permit to allow vehicles on the beach to help owners remove Australian Pines. Manager Chustz replied that they did it in the past outside sea turtle or bird nesting season. He noted it would take 30 days or less to secure a permit. Chair Nusbaum pointed out that the Red Coconut and old Junkanoo properties were a nursery for Australian Pines. Manager Chustz suggested they contact the property

owners to get permission to remove the trees. According to the code, commercial and multi-family property owners were required to maintain their property, including invasive and exotic vegetation, in perpetuity. He mentioned recruiting high school kids to help remove exotics later in the year.

MOTION: MERTF Member Rood moved to recommend that the council instruct the application for the permits to remove stage one invasive species and look into notifying the private property owners, seconded by MERTF Member Althoff.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

B. Mulholland Award

Manager Chustz noted that the award was presented to someone who went above and beyond to help the environment. Chair Nusbaum read the background of the award.

MOTION: Chair Nusbaum moved that applications for the nominations be sent to Communications Coordinator Nicole Berzin so the community can choose their nominees and MERTF will review the applications, seconded by MERTF Member Sand.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

C. Shorebird and Sea Turtle Nesting Season

Manager Chustz reviewed the dos and don'ts regarding sea turtles and lights. He stated the outdoor lights had to be 560 or greater NM (nanometers). He indicated blackout curtains and storm shutters blocked interior lights the best. He added that motion detectors for interior lights were encouraged. He described the blue film to indicate whether a light was acceptable. Manager Chustz said that it was not a foolproof indicator, but it was good and a good educational tool. He will check with Turtle Time about availability. He will start monitoring the beach tonight to look for lights and invited members to join him. Chair Nusbaum received a report from Biologist Breanna Frankel from the Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC), who said only a third of the Least Tern colony has returned to the south end so far; however, she expected 200-300 to show up soon. Only 10% of the Black Skimmer colony has returned and they have not started nesting yet. She addressed the concerns of property owners on the south end who felt the size of the nesting area was too large. Ms. Frankel indicated they would try to shrink it throughout the season if possible. The birds spread out because fewer people were on the beach, but that may not happen next year.

VIII. Members' Items

MERTF Member Althoff stated that he needed to finish up with the FWC about compacting. Manager Chustz explained the compaction process and indicated that he may not get an answer from the state. He stated the town did not have the compaction equipment. Liaison King indicated he spoke to town staff and management to research details. A discussion was held about compaction and under compaction issues with sea turtle nests.

MERTF Member Hegstrom apologized for presenting Bill Perry in a negative light. He did a beautiful job on the beach.

Chair Nusbaum stated that Manager Chustz did a tremendous job on the renourishment project. He described how he put the beach back together. He thanked him on behalf of MERTF. Manager Chustz replied that it took a team and he appreciated the sentiment. No items from other members.

IX. Staff Update

Manager Chustz reported that the renourishment project was on the south end and stated they had to revert to trucking sand. He thanked property owners for offering their properties to stage beach projects. He received positive feedback from FDEP (Florida Department of Emergency Protection) and the FWC. He expected the permit to be extended. He added that the contractor, Ahtna, was paying millions for the trucked sand. The project will move to the central segment around mid-May and he described project details. He added that he would contact Communications Coordinator Berzin about releasing a public service announcement regarding a beach closure.

MERTF Member Sand noted a tree stump or something by Red Coconut was stuck in the water and visible at low tide. Manager Chustz will investigate.

The waterway debris project contract expired yesterday, but he will ask the town council for a few more days because they were still pulling stuff out. He said budgeted funds remained in the contract. Harbormaster Ludwig was preparing a canal-by-canal status report to discuss the situation with FEMA and the town council. An ITB (Invitation to Bid) will be sent out for the dune planting on May 8, 2025.

X. Public Comment

Michael Thornton, resident, said his HOA president asked Congressman Donalds about federal funding for canal dredging. His office representative responded that the project was not eligible for FEMA funding and the town would have to make a formal appropriations request for federal funding. Mr. Thornton will check with his friend about forwarding the letter to Manager Chustz.

XI. MERTF Award

MERTF members wanted to nominate Manager Chustz. Manager Chustz wanted to nominate MERTF members, but thanked the Friends of Little Estero Island for funding the FWC signs and thanked MERTF Member Rood for his contribution.

MOTION: Chair Nusbaum nominated the Friends of Little Estero Island, seconded by MERTF Member Hegstrom.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

XII. Set Agenda for Next Meeting – June 11, 2025

Add beach renourishment and hazardous material collection.

XIII. Adjournment

MOTION: MERTF Member Hegstrom moved to adjourn, seconded by MERTF Member Rood.

VOTE: The motion carried unanimously.

Adopted on June 11, 2025 with/**without** changes. Motion by member Rood, seconded by member Althoff.

Vote Unanimous

Signature: 