

MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES TASK FORCE
The Mound House – 451 Connecticut St.
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Wednesday, November 8, 2023

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 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 Project Manager Chadd Chustz

IV. Approve The Agenda

MERTF Member Larkin requested that vegetation and canal dredging be added for discussion. She demonstrated how difficult it was to find the list of invasive plants on the website. Chair Johnson said the initiative list to discuss and to reach a consensus for prioritization.

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to approve the amended agenda; second by MERTF Member Spalletta.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

V. Approve Previous Meeting Minutes – October 11, 2023

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to table the minutes until next month; second by MERTF Member Nusbaum.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

VI. Public Comment – no public comment.

VII. Current Items

A. Vegetation

MERTF Member Larkin requested that her list of invasive plants be posted directly to the website where people could quickly find it. She noted that commercial businesses were adding invasive plants to their property. Discussion was held regarding adding an advisory to social media and informing people who submitted landscape plans that native plant options were available for consideration. MERTF Member Larkin cautioned against planting Royal Palms due to their size. MERTF Member Nusbaum indicated that the

Royal Palms at his condo did very well in the hurricane and he thought they were stunning trees. MERTF Member Althoff added that they did very well at his condo, too. Discussion was held regarding what type of palms should be planted and where. MERTF Member Rusk suggested using the same palms planted in Bayside Park. Projects Manager Chustz described the Tree USA Foundation grant and stated that he would have the tree survey results by the next meeting. He noted that the palms lost would be replaced with the same species for continuity.

MOTION: MERTF Member Larkin moved that the Royal Palms be replaced from Bowditch Point to Times Square and use Sabal Palms to fill in the spaces between the existing Coconut Palms on Old San Carlos Blvd.; second by Chair Johnson.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

B. Canal Dredging

Chair Johnson stated that dredging was in MERTF's charter. Projects Manager Chustz noted that funding had to be obtained before they could move forward.

C. Initiative List

Items were reviewed, deleted and added.

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to advise the Town Council of their initiative list; second by MERTF Member Spalletta.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

D. Beach School Cooperation

MERTF Member Rusk distributed a pamphlet regarding Sanibel's sea school for ideas to develop a program with the beach school. MERTF Member Spalletta suggested that they speak with the teachers first. She distributed and discussed information concerning the activity book. MERTF Member Nusbaum suggested that offering the sea school program would be a tremendous enticement to bolster enrollment at the beach school. MERTF Member Rusk stated that their budget of approximately \$10,000.00 was still available. She will investigate costs for printing the activity book and a consensus was reached to find honorarium funds for the FGCU student, Macy Knoll, who will illustrate the book. She will contact the Town Manager regarding compensation and be the point person for scheduling a meeting with the principal. Projects Manager Chustz suggested they work with the educational coordinator, Ashley, who was already working with the school.

E. Beach Sand Projects – to be discussed at the next meeting.

Staff report: Sand was being put on the beach and the renourishment project was pushed back to January. Funding was received to add more sand to the natural beach project and bids were going out soon. Discussion was held regarding where the sand was being added, the three different sand projects, the equitable allocation of state sand and residents who did or did not sign easements. MERTF Member Althoff read MERTF's responsibilities.

VIII. Members' Items and Reports

MERTF Member Larkin reported that a business created a pictograph of hundreds of native plants, which was available at every MERTF pop-up event.

MERTF Member Rusk stated that the pop-up at the Farmer's Market was highly successful, with hundreds of visitors. She suggested that fees for active non-profits on the island holding fundraising events at the Mound House be waived for 2023 and 2024.

MERTF Member Howell will resume naturalist activities on the beach next week.

MERTF Member Spalletta reported that dogs ran on the beach without leashes and chased the birds.

MERTF Member Nusbaum indicated that the Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) delayed releasing the nesting bird guidelines until October 1, 2024. Reasons cited included time to recruit and train monitors and engage with property owners in hurricane-impacted areas. He noted that the FWC discontinued funding for removing sand spurs and was looking for solutions before the guidelines were released.

MERTF Member Althoff wanted to make sure beachfront owners get to choose which part of the 25% of their dune was not planted.

Chair Johnson brought up intensity and density and MERTF Member Nusbaum commented that the Council and LPA were discussing the issue. He questioned who was responsible for replacing the swim buoys.

IX. Public Comment – no public comment.

X. MERTF Award

Chair Johnson did not receive the information from MERTF Member Rusk for the award last month, so he will submit it this month.

XI. Set Agenda for Next Meeting – add staff report and priorities.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: MERTF Member Nusbaum moved to adjourn; second by MERTF Member Larkin.

VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 p.m.

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