

BEACH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MINUTES

August 16, 2023 - 9:00 A.M.

PRESENT: Dan Rothenberger, Chair
John Kurzman, Vice Chair
Karen Marriott, Member
Betty Rzewnicki, Member
Michael Welch, Member

STAFF PRESENT: Ayako Ruckdeschel, Beach Manager
Ginny Bodkin, Deputy City Clerk

Chair Rothenberger called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He introduced new Committee member Karen Marriott and thanked former Member Lenny Stamos for his many years of service to this Committee and the City.

1. Presentations

a. Sea Turtle Trackers Report

Theresa Arenholz of Sea Turtle Trackers appeared to provide an interim season update. Her presentation is part of the meeting record. She shared data on displaced nests and disorientations. She showed what current obstructions look like (picnic tables, beach chairs) and listed where the obstructions occurred. She explained how the hatchlings process light and become disoriented. She shared a list of 21 reported disorientations – date, location and description. Following the update, Ms. Arenholz shared information on sea turtle lighting ordinances throughout Florida; there is no ordinance for Pinellas County and St. Pete Beach's could use updating. She reported that Sea Turtle Trackers are working with the Tradewinds on lighting improvements.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Member Rzewnicki moved, and Member Welch seconded the approval of the agenda as presented; the motion passed unanimously.

3. Audience Comments –

Lisa Reich of 610 78th Avenue gave public comment regarding lighting and being proactive. She has started a non-profit, Coastal Wildlife Advocacy Group, and put a team together (working with Sea Turtle Conservancy) and conducted a lighting survey on St. Pete Beach and that found no buildings were 100% compliant with the City's marine turtle protection ordinance. Her organization is trying to educate and offer the residents assistance with becoming compliant. Pinellas County has the highest rates of turtle disorientation in Florida.

4. Action Items

a. Approval of Minutes 5/17/2023

Vice Chair Kurzman suggested clarifying 'only if a nest is found' at the end of 95-4(b).

Member Rzewnicki moved, and Member Welch seconded the approval of the May 17, 2023 minutes with the change; the motion passed unanimously.

5. Items for Discussion

a. Update on Beach Renourishment –

Beach Manager Ayako summarized the briefing that Kelly Hammer Levy, Public Works Director for Pinellas County gave to the City Commissioners at their 7/25/23 meeting; renourishment efforts are currently at a standstill and the County is trying to pursue this independently without the Army Corp of Engineers (USACE). She indicated that Mayor Petrila encouraged residents reach out to State Representatives and recommended watching the Commission meeting video. Member Rzewnicki added that there was discussion that night on what stopped the renourishment process.

Vice Chair Kurzman read from Ordinance 22-308(b)(c) that the Beach Stewardship Committee “reviews information related to the ongoing beach nourishment efforts throughout the city... [and evaluates] information relating to the preservation and maintenance of the public beaches”. He went on to report on some of the research that he conducted on his own:

- 2022 New Jersey environmentalists concerned that sand brought in by USACE benefitted only private landowners
- 2021 Panama City, FL completed a beach renourishment that “did not really all get done with the deeds”
- 2023 Vilano Beach, FL moved turtle nests to accommodate the renourishment
- 2020 Pawleys Island, SC agreed to condemn the last four easements for USACE to maintain the \$14 million renourishment. Property owners will be paid to condemn part of their property for the easement
- He opined that on the ramifications if the Silver Sands did not give permission to USACE
- 2021 Quogue, “initial construction of the project was 100% funded by the federal government” and required easements
- Sand Key has 461 easements within the Pinellas project area. He explained the traditional use of an erosion control between public and private land, and opined that the USACE proposes dunes for protection and therefore wants possibly unnecessary easements in preparation, creating a sticking point
- He explained the concept of erosion and accretion moving the high water/property line but that evulsion from storms does not and suggested considering this actuality on the beaches behind the hotels
- He spoke about required easement forms from 2006 vs 2018 and differences in public access
- He mentioned a 1974 Florida Attorney General opinion that all of the beaches are the state’s property and therefore the USACE does not have authority to work on our beaches but is there to assist – and outlines procedures he thought would be helpful

Following Vice Chair Kurzman’s report, Member Welch mentioned a Federal mandate a few years ago ‘to harden all the beaches’ and a recent vastly expensive renourishment on Fire Island NY and subsequent loss to an unnamed storm. He opined that there are contradictions in laws and mandates from Maine all the way down coast making it difficult to sort it all out – however, given an opportunity to receive sand, we should take it. Storms do not always qualify for renourishment.

b. “Pack in/Pack out Program”, Sarasota County -

In similar efforts to Sarasota County, Ms. Ruckdeschel pointed out St. Pete Beach's electronic signage on the Bayway and Pasadena Bridges to fill holes and leave only footprints.

Chair Rothenberger spoke about long term protections such as adequate garbage receptacles. Member Rzewnicki spoke about her observations on Lido Beach and their proactive efforts, such as handing out garbage bags to beachgoers and marked areas for setbacks to identify private/public for chair use. She mentioned wristbands in Sarasota and other steps.

Member Welch spoke about the importance of hotels and rentals educating their guests on what they can and cannot do.

Member Marriott mentioned population growth and the inevitable increase in beachgoers; adequate garbage receptacles need to be offered when exiting the beach. She suggested an adopt-a-beach program, similar to adopt a highway, where sponsors volunteer to keep their section of beach clean, perhaps for an incentive.

c. Evaluate a 'No Smoking' policy for the bay side of Pass-a-Grille -

Chair Rothenberger inquired whether the proposed beach ordinance will include no smoking on the Dog Beach, at Ercius Park, and along that sidewalk. Ms. Ruckdeschel suggested contacting the Legal Department.

d. Retailer Fireworks Sales -

Chair Rothenberger inquired if it would be beneficial to approach Publix to not sell fireworks in benefit of the beach. Ms. Ruckdeschel will follow up.

e. Beach Clean Ups -

Ms. Ruckdeschel updated the Committee that these fairly regularly scheduled clean ups are coordinated through 'Keep Pinellas Beautiful' and the City provides free parking passes for participants. It is an active program.

f. Dogs on Beach -

Member Rzewnicki requested the item and expressed her frustration. Discussion has already taken place with the City Commission, yet the problem continues. Emotional support dogs are not allowed on the beach; the issue is enforcement. She asked how this committee might spearhead a way to tackle this and be proactive, given the limitations of staff.

Member Welch suggested adding No Dogs on Beach to the electronic signage on the bridges. It was also suggested to continue to dissuade any pet friendly properties to make it clear that dogs are not allowed on the beach; it can be misleading to guests. More education and being vocal will help.

g. Coral Bleaching -

Member Rzewnicki had suggested this as an information/awareness item. She has observed some bleaching locally – it is not just south of our area. Sometimes the coral can recover.

h. Maximum Capacity at Beach -

Member Welch suggested that this is somewhat self-regulating; maximum capacity at hotels and public parking will dictate. An increase in hotel size and mass transit (SunRunner) were discussed in terms of the City's preparation with adequate bathrooms and other essential services. The difficulty in calculating maximum was discussed. Member Marriott opined that the increase in population in Pinellas overall has resulted in an increase in beach goers in general; it is not particular to St. Pete Beach. She opined that bad behavior is more of an issue than capacity. There was no resolution or action as a result of the discussion.

5. Adjournment – Next meeting will be November 15, 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:52 AM.

These minutes were approved at the November 15, 2023, Beach Stewardship Committee meeting.