

BEACH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 15, 2024 - 9:00 A.M.

PRESENT: Dan Rothenberger, Chair
John Kurzman, Vice Chair
Jon Stevens, Member

EXCUSED: Michael Welch, Member
Brad Panek, Member

STAFF PRESENT: Ayako Ruckdeschel, Beach Manager
Ariana Wilson, Admin. Assistant – Clerk’s Office
Jennifer McMahon, Chief Operating Officer
Brandon Berry, Senior Planner

Chair Rothenberger called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

1. Presentations

a. Dune Savers Project – Deborah Rothenberger

Mrs. Rothenberger gave a presentation regarding a Dune Savers Project she started solely based on volunteers. This presentation is made part of the record. Volunteers meet once a week for one hour and help identify and remove invasive plants. She reviewed some of Florida's native plants as well as some coastal native plants and their importance in conjunction with the dunes and wildlife. She encouraged members of the public to research the types of plants prior to planting them as most people are unaware that they are installing invasive vegetation. She reviewed what the public can do to help save the dunes and stated that with the help of City staff, she was able to get some information for the public posted on the City's website. She hopes in the future the City can approve an Ordinance with a list of invasive plants that are strictly forbidden.

Member Stevens thanked Mr. and Mrs. Rothenberger for the time and dedication they have given this project. He stated he sees members of the public in the dunes consistently and questioned if they’ve looked into installing a barrier or fence to deter them. Discussion regarding sign language ensued.

b. Beach Ambassador Program – Lisa Reich, Coastal Wildlife Advocacy Group

Ms. Reich gave a short background on her history with St. Pete Beach and some of the organizations she’s worked with over the years. She is dedicated to coastal wildlife conservation by making positive impacts through advocacy and education. She gave a presentation which is made part of the record. The Beach Ambassador Program's mission is to advocate, to educate, and to keep people informed. Volunteers can be found at multiple beach access points or on the beach filling in holes, following “Clean, Dark, Flat” initiatives, picking up trash, and interacting with the public. She stated they frequently get questions and use these opportunities to provide information or brochures regarding local businesses, beach etiquette, and wildlife. They make notes of any beach conditions or violations they may need assistance with and work closely with St. Pete Beach staff, Code Enforcement, or local law enforcement.

Vice Chair Kurzman questioned approaching people and what the ‘protocols’ are when it comes to styrofoam, straws, digging holes, trash, and beach chairs with hotels. Ms. Reich

informed him Volunteer Beach Ambassadors must have a positive attitude and treat every situation with a positive approach. If they ever need assistance they reach out to the proper authorities.

Member Stevens pointed out that this program is very similar to Sea Turtle Trackers and he is aware of the relationship the City has with them. He asked if they had tried to work together to have a bigger group of volunteers present on the beach. Ms. Reich stated she has reached out to them to see how they could work together but has not received a response yet.

Discussion ensued on physical handouts, QR codes, and community outreach.

2. Approval of the Agenda –

With the absence of two Committee members, the Committee decided to continue item 4. b to the following meeting.

Vice Chair Kurzman moved, and Member Stevens seconded the approval of the May 15, 2024 agenda with the change; the motion passed unanimously.

3. Audience Comments – **None**

4. Action Items

a. Approval of Minutes 2/21/2024

Member Stevens moved, and Vice Chair Kurzman seconded the approval of the February 21, 2024 minutes as presented; the motion passed unanimously.

b. Election of Committee Officers 2024-25

Member Stevens moved and Vice Chair Kurzman seconded continuing the Election of Officers to the August 21, 2024 meeting; the motion carried unanimously by a voice vote.

5. Items for Discussion

a. Beach Stewardship receiving information related to their responsibilities

Ms. McMahon was present and stated at the last meeting the board showed interest in creating a Resolution similar to what the Historic Preservation Board did. From what she understood, the Committee would like to review any beach-related items prior to those items going to the City Commission for approval. This was discussed at last night's City Commission meeting and there will be a survey going out for availability to schedule a workshop with the City Commission.

Vice Chair Kurzman stated this may be too involved of a process as he does not want to block the flow of information to the City Commission. He would like the Committee to be notified of beach-related items.

Ms. McMahon stated this may be an internal issue given that Ms. Ruckdeschel is often also unaware of beach-related items that go to the City Commission. She reminded the Committee

that their appointee should be reaching out to them for input on agenda items they may have an interest in. Ms. McMahon stated she would send an email to Directors and ask them that if they have any beach-related items they inform Ms. Ruckdeschel so she can inform the Committee as their liaison.

b. Beach deeds and public rights to the beach

Vice Chair Kurzman stated this was an item he requested be placed on the agenda. He requested beach deeds and surveys and compared the information to the Pinellas County Property Appraiser. He has discovered some are missing and is curious to see what the City would do with that information.

c. Fees and permits for businesses and construction on the beach

Vice Chair Kurzman stated this was an item he requested be placed on the agenda. He made a public record request to get access to all the Business Tax Receipts from the County Park to Upham Beach. He thinks the City should increase the fees since the larger hotels pay a \$60 flat rate for an entire year for their Business Tax Receipt. This then allows them to rent cabanas and chairs for a higher profit. He would like the City to increase these fees to protect the beach and make sure it survives.

Member Stevens stated he does not think this is something that should fall under the purview of this committee.

Resident Linda Borgia made a public comment and presented some photos which are made part of the record. She stated there have recently been a lot of events on the beach that she has discovered were unpermitted. These visitors bring alcohol, glass, tiki torches, fireworks, and tents. She has contacted Ms. Ruckdeschel on more than one occasion.

The Committee questioned what the process is for such occasions and how to enforce it further. Ms. Ruckdeschel stated that she is contacted frequently with these situations and if it is something she can enforce she will but oftentimes she will contact the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office for assistance.

d. Sargassum threat at St. Pete Beach

Vice Chair Kurzman stated he has heard it costs millions of dollars to remove sargassum. He questioned if the City had a plan in place if the sargassum affected St. Pete Beach. Ms. Ruckdeschel stated sargassum affects the East Coast, however there is always the potential threat. If this were to affect our beaches, the City would not clean it up unless it became overbearing. Sargassum provides nutrients for birds and other wildlife so it would not be picked up. She stated even when it comes to beach cleanups, the only items that are picked up are trash. Anything of a natural state is left behind.

e. Beach Ordinance status update, changes from the current ordinance with highlights on new changes since the last review – Matthew McConnell and Jennifer McMahon

This item was skipped since neither Ms. McMahon nor Attorney McConnell were present.

f. Smoking, alcohol consumption and fishing (specific to sharks) on the beach – Jennifer McMahon

Ms. Ruckdeschel spoke about some shark fishing occurring in Pass-a-Grille. She stated it's a specific group of individuals who cut up Rays and use them as bait for sharks. They often

leave the remains on the beach. The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office was contacted and handled the situation.

Chair Rothenberger stated he's heard about this and unfortunately, those who are shark fishing are permitted through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission with certain conditions.

Vice Chair Kurzman questioned if they had a fishing permit or a Business Tax Receipt. Ms. Ruckdeschel stated she does not issue any fishing permits, however the new beach ordinance addresses some of these concerns.

g. Commercial Operations on the Beach

Ms. Ruckdeschel stated this was an item that Member Welch requested be placed on the agenda. He was unable to attend today's meeting but she believed this was related to the Hotel Zamora not having beach access nor owning beachfront property, however, giving out beach cabanas to their visitors.

h. Report on beach re-nourishment activities – Mike Clarke

Ms. Ruckdeschel provided an update on behalf of Public Works Director, Mike Clarke. She reviewed a handout which is made part of the record. Mr. Clarke provided a link to the Pinellas County website where all re-nourishment updates can be found. During phase 1 the beach will be closed from 1st to 8th Ave. including the fishing pier. During phase 2, the phase 1 beach and the fishing pier will be reopened and the beach from 8th to 22nd will be closed. Given that is it turtle and shorebird season, specific protection measures will be followed during the project. The County Commission will hear and vote on the approval of the cost of phase 2 full nourishment on May 21st. Pending the Army Corps of Engineers permit approval, a full nourishment will be approved with an anticipated completion in September or October.

i. Update on new approved walkovers, report on construction progress until completion, any new projects or work on the beach – Mike Clarke

Ms. Ruckdeschel provided an update on behalf of Mr. Clarke. Dune walkovers on 4th, 6th, and 7th are currently on hold until the nourishment is completed. There are no other projects planned for the beach at this time.

j. Awareness of our beach rules (Know the Code) – in collaboration with the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber, a 'Protect the Beach' campaign produced the Enjoy the Beaches cards distributed to all local businesses

Member Stevens stated this was an item he requested be placed on the agenda. He took a ride with Ms. Ruckdeschel and noticed the general public being unaware of codes. He questioned how to get more awareness across to members of the public and found out that the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce created a 'Protect the Beach' campaign where they've outlined some ways that you can protect the beach during your visit. They created a small postcard-size handout that can be found in multiple locations throughout the City with this information. The handout is made part of the record.

Ms. Ruckdeschel stated she has attended multiple hotelier meetings to remind them what is allowed and what is not. Signs are posted in multiple locations on the beach, however, some of the violators are misinformed or are simply residents who do not care. This handout is a great tool to use on the beach since it has QR code you scan for more information.

k. CUP approvals concerning the beach/CCC line; authority for decision making, requirements for dune restoration and responsibility for long term management/maintenance of these requirements – Brandon Berry

Member Stevens questioned what the process is after a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) approval with regards to improving the dunes system. Brandon Berry, Senior Planner was present and spoke about dune maintenance. There is a reference in the Comprehensive Plan for new developments having to restore the dunes or install a dune where there isn't one present. Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) is the main form of contact for any of the hotels. They have administrative requirements for those dunes, and once the dune is approved and FDEP has signed on the development, it goes into a maintenance phase. It is entirely handled by the State not the City.

Discussion regarding recent CUP approvals, Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL), and conceptual plans took place.

Mr. Berry reminded the Committee that nothing has been designed or permitted. Everything is at a conceptual stage at this time. If FDEP allows any designs to move forward a conceptual plan would be brought forward to the City Commission.

Resident, Cindy Perry commented on a meeting at Treasure Island today called 'Elevate Treasure Island'. She stated today's meeting is geared towards engineers and contractors and they will speak about Sea Level Rise and prepping the City for the future. She stated this meeting is being recorded and will be viewable online later.

l. Pinellas County Sea oats giveaway; how to promote this to the property owners

Member Stevens announced that Pinellas County will give you native plants and native plant material to place within your dunes be it public or private at no cost. They make sure these are plants that will grow deep and across to keep sand in place. You just have to show them where you plan to put them, they'll come and make sure it's appropriate and then they will deliver it to you.

m. Beach quarterly Report – 1 Jan to 31 March 2024

The Committee reviewed the quarterly report as provided by Ms. Ruckdeschel in the agenda packet.

6. Adjournment – Next meeting will be August 21, 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 AM.

These minutes were approved the August 21, 2024, Beach Stewardship Committee meeting.