

BEACH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MINUTES

February 26, 2025 - 9:00 A.M.

PRESENT: Dan Rothenberger, Chair
John Stevens, Vice Chair
John Kurzman, Member
Natalie Looney, Member

ABSENT: Brad Panek, Member

STAFF PRESENT: Ayako Ruckdeschel, Code Enforcement Officer
Ariana Wilson-Romo, Admin-City Clerk's Office
Nancy Stuparich, Vose Law Firm – Via Teams
Becky Vose, Vose Law Firm – Via Teams

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

1. Approval of the Agenda –

Member Kurzman asked to add two discussion items, item 4.d – Procedure For Getting Information Between Meetings, and item 4.e – Zero Tolerance Policy.

Vice Chair Stevens moved, and Member Kurzman seconded the approval of the February 26, 2025, agenda as amended; the motion passed 4-0.

2. Audience Comments –

No audience comments.

3. Action Items

a. Approval of Meeting Minutes November 13, 2024

Vice Chair Stevens moved, and Member Looney seconded the approval of the November 13, 2024 minutes as presented; the motion passed unanimously.

4. Items for Discussion

a. 2025 Beach Stewardship Goals Plan

Ms. Ruckdeschel informed the Committee she prepared 6 goals and an implementation plan based on the comments she received from the Board Members. The document is made part of the record. She reminded the Committee that this was not a permanent document, and they could add/remove any items as they saw fit. She reviewed the following goals and objectives:

1. *Keeping The Committee Informed On Matters Relating To Its Charter*

Action steps:

- Regular staff updates
- Public meeting agendas
- Information sharing

Resources Needed:

- Staff time
- Attorney time
- City Commission review/approval

2. *Development Of A Holistic Beach Strategy And Plan For Restoration, Renourishment, Preservation, And Protection Of The Dunes/Beaches*

Action steps:

- Assessment of current conditions
- Stakeholder engagement
- Implementation plan
- Monitoring and reporting

Resources Needed:

- Staff & industry experts
- Attorney time
- City Commission review/approval
- Staff to implement

3. *Beach Ordinance*

Action steps:

- Review & discussion
- Consultation with experts
- Present recommendations

Resources Needed:

- Staff & industry experts
- Attorney time
- City Commission review/approval
- Staff to implement

4. *Complete The Sea Turtle Ordinance (Adopting The Florida State Model Ordinance For St. Pete Beach)*

Action steps:

- Review of State model
- Public consultation
- Implementation

Resources Needed:

- Staff & industry experts
- Attorney time
- City Commission review/approval
- Staff to implement

5. *Public Beach Access*

Action steps:

- Mapping and analysis
- Strategic enhancement
- Public engagement

Resources Needed:

- Staff & attorney time
- City Commission review/approval
- Staff to implement

6. *Further Education Opportunities For Residents And Visitors Regarding Wildlife, Dunes, And Beach Protection*

Action steps:

- Public awareness campaigns
- Collaboration with local organizations

- Outreach materials

Resources Needed:

- Staff time
- Commission review/approval
- Staff to implement

Ms. Ruckdeschel listed steps to take in Quarters 1-3 of 2025. She noted additional meetings would need to take place to achieve these goals. She also noted that her position with the City has changed and she is no longer Beach Manager.

Member Kurzman complimented Ms. Ruckdeschel on her summarization and for putting this together for the Committee. He discussed how this Committee does not have authority and only makes recommendations to the City Commission. He stressed how difficult it has been that the Commission has not sought this Committee's approval or input on any matter related to the beach. He questioned how much further this Committee can be effective in a non-authoritative manner.

Vice Chair Stevens noted that the powers and duties of the Beach Stewardship Committee are very limited. Discussion ensued regarding making changes to the charter.

The Committee expressed interest in scheduling a workshop, to review all goals further. The Committee thanked Ms. Ruckdeschel for putting this packet together.

b. Beach Ordinance

Chair Rothenberger opened the floor to public comment.

The following individuals expressed sentiments about the Beach Ordinance and the hardships their businesses may face if the ordinance passes a second reading. Most comments focused on the removal of equipment and setbacks.

- Joe Smith – CEO of 1754 Properties
- Travis Johnson – Tradewinds
- Ed Sheeds – Post Card Inn
- Shawn Kwiatkowski – Bellwether & Beachcomber
- Krystn Simmons – Post Card Inn
- Parker Harvey – Don CeSar
- Rob Czyszczon – Plaza Beach Resorts
- Brad Cochran, Sirata Beach Resort

Discussion ensued regarding a chair model for hotels to use, tint on windows, and previous comments submitted to the City Commission.

Member Kurzman moved to request the City Commission table the Beach Ordinance until a town hall can be scheduled.

The motion died for a lack of second.

Member Looney discussed some hardships that they have faced as a committee. She stated this felt rushed; however, she is aware that this Committee has been working on this Ordinance for a couple of years.

Member Kurzman noted a plethora of mistakes still in the draft ordinance, including some specifics that he pointed out to the former legal team. He discussed how previous edits have altered the document and how cutting and pasting has changed the chapters.

Vice Chair Stevens reminded the board members of the challenges the City has faced such as administrative changes, legal department changes, new city management, back-to-back hurricanes, etc. He noted that they may have gotten into the wording instead of the intent of the Ordinance. He hopes the City Commission grants the community more of an opportunity to be heard.

Member Kurzman touched on the Code Enforcement Ordinance that is also being prepared for a second reading, which would allow Code Enforcement to enforce beach rules.

Vice Chair Stevens moved, and Member Kurzman seconded to advise the City Commission to consider an additional round of public feedback before the second reading of Ordinance 2025-02 (Beach Ordinance); the motion passed 4-0.

c. Beach Quarterly Report, 1 Oct. – 31 Dec. 2024

The report was published in the meeting packet. Ms. Ruckdeschel gave a brief overview.

d. ADDED – Procedure For Getting Information Between Meetings

This was not discussed formally.

e. ADDED - Zero Tolerance Policy

Member Kurzman stated he had some discussions with the Pinellas County Sheriffs and was informed that they were asked to enforce the Code, however, the Beach Stewardship Committee was not informed of this policy or the forthcoming changes. Ms. Ruckdeschel reminded the Committee that a lot of initiatives are engaged or driven by the City Commission who then give direction to the City Manager who implements those initiatives.

Vice Chair Stevens stated he is not a fan of this zero-tolerance policy; however he has noticed a positive impact with visitors following the rules. He does agree the policy is harsh, however is in support of this enforcement.

Member Looney commented on the FDOT sign that was placed at the Bayway Bridge, and how it can feel negative to residents and visitors. She stressed how important it is to educate the general public of why these rules are being enforced and stated the City may receive better compliance.

Vice Chair Stevens reminded everyone that every beach public access point has a sign that lists what is prohibited on the beach and these signs have been there for years.

Chair Rothenberger requested the Clerk's Office communicate with Commissioner Marriott regarding Member Panek's absence.

5. Adjournment – Next meeting will be May 21, 2025.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:48 AM.

These minutes were approved at the May 21, 2025, Beach Stewardship Committee meeting.