

BEACH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE WORKSHOP MINUTES

March 20, 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

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

1. Items for Discussion –

a. **Review of Beach Stewardship Goal Plan FY2025-26**

Ms. Ruckdeschel thanked committee members for being present and stated that they would be reviewing the goals plan that she had drafted based on members' wants and needs. This is made part of the record. Discussion ensued regarding the board's liaison. Vice Chair Stevens noted that the City has restructured the Public Services Department to now include all beach services. He requested Ms. Ruckdeschel get in contact with Camden Mills, Public Services Director, to see if he has a timeline in which he plans to take over as the board liaison.

Chair Stevens stated he would like to review their goals and align them with the City Commission's top three priorities, which are internal operations, resiliency, and infrastructure.

The Committee Members reviewed the goals plan section by section.

1) Keeping the Committee Informed on Matters Relating to its Charter

Board members discussed some hardships they've faced with beach matters not being communicated to this Committee. They stressed that the City Commission should be consulting this Committee before making major decisions that affect the beach. Board members expressed interest in being informed on any beach matter prior to it going to the City Commission and they requested they be alerted as soon as staff is made aware of any beach matters.

Vice Chair Stevens stressed that there should be a standard so that everyone knows when to contact the Beach Stewardship Committee. He gave an example of a request for bid that was advertised in January for Dune Walkovers. Discussion ensued on standards for different projects and where those standards come from.

The Committee would like to receive notification of beach matters on a quicker basis whether that is by sharing agendas as they're posted, sharing newsletters and any information as it comes up. They would also like to expand their page on the City's website to include additional resources and information sharing.

2) Development of a Holistic Beach Strategy and Plan for Restoration, Renourishment, Preservation and Protection of the Dunes/Beaches

Board members discussed the critical need for beach renourishment and the role of dune systems. Member Kurzman clarified that while dunes serve as a protective measure for the beach, they are not directly related to the renourishment process.

Ms. Ruckdeschel reviewed the action steps listed and asked board members who they would like to do an assessment of the current conditions of the beach. Board members expressed they felt a lot of the assessments have already been completed by staff and the County due to the hurricane recovery. However, they would like to see more regularly scheduled assessments done.

Ms. Ruckdeschel stated she could invite some stakeholders such as representatives from Sea Turtle Trackers, Audubon Society etc. to provide insights on potential improvements for the beach and to share additional resources that could benefit the City.

Vice Chair Stevens raised concerns regarding the need for funding, leading to further discussion on the involvement of the Army Corps of Engineers and the status of easements.

3) Beach Ordinance

Vice Chair Stevens expressed some hardships with having the beach ordinance as a goal given that it is currently undergoing a second reading with the City Commission.

Member Kurzman stated he disagreed and would like to break the ordinance down by sections and topics such as alcohol, chairs, vehicles and bikes, animals, etc. He emphasized that this approach would allow for a fresh start and greater board involvement in the ordinance's development.

Member Looney echoed Vice Chair Stevens's comments and stated they already requested the City Commission pause the beach ordinance to allow for public input and they granted that request.

Board members concluded and agreed that they should be reviewing the beach ordinance regularly and make recommendations as needed to the City Commission. Additionally, they expressed interest in reviewing any ordinances related to the beach. Member Kurzman further suggested that ordinance language be shared with the public between readings to ensure a clearer and more transparent review process.

4) Complete the Sea Turtle Lighting Ordinance (Adopting the Florida State Model Ordinance for St. Pete Beach)

Vice Chair Stevens reminded the Committee that during last summer's workshop on the beach ordinance, they decided that wildlife turtle lighting would be addressed through a separate ordinance. He stated the Committee was directed to work on this and there a model ordinance available. However, due to staffing changes and storm recovery efforts, progress has stalled. Staff needs to review the model ordinance and compare it with the beach ordinance.

Member Kurzman suggested that Code Enforcement conduct a nighttime review of the beach to assess deficiencies in the current ordinance, particularly regarding the continued presence of white lights.

Ms. Ruckdeschel clarified that the ordinance Member Kurzman is referring to is outdated and includes parameters that are not current. The new state model the city was given is up to date and needs to be adopted. She noted that Code Enforcement does a preseason and mid-season survey. Sea Turtle Trackers also do surveys on their own and report any findings to Code Enforcement. Any properties that are not in compliance receive a notice of violation.

Chair Rothenberger questioned how much time is given to properties to become compliant. Ms. Ruckdeschel stated that with a notice of violation, properties are given a ten-day minimum to begin corrective action. She noted that there have been chain supply issues. Vice Chair Stevens shared it took his condominium 9 months to receive the proper lighting and then additional time for installation.

Member Kurzman stated he would like to hear from some researchers who have studied western-facing beaches to inform the Committee on how the moon can affect lighting. Board members did not share the same sentiments as Member Kurzman.

Member Looney requested Ms. Ruckdeschel reach out to Legal for a status update.

5) Public Beach Access

Member Kurzman stated he was previously provided a map of public beach access points and it does not reflect the same information as the map that Ms. Ruckdeschel provided. Both maps are made part of the record.

Vice Chair Stevens shared that he believes this committee should be reviewing all public access points to ensure they are clear, open, and safe to the public.

Member Kurzman would like the Committee to identify all current beach access points. Board discussion ensued on easements and deeds and whether this discussion would be a better fit for the planning board.

Ms. Ruckdeschel suggested having Senior Planner Brandon Berry share information and input with this Committee.

Member Kurzman would like this to include resident access as well.

6) Further Education Opportunities for Residents and Visitors Regarding Wildlife, Dunes, and Beach Protection

Member Looney shared she would like to see more education opportunities given to the public. She stated there are organizations that want to educate the public but need the space to do so and it would be nice if the Beach Stewardship Committee could initiate some of these education opportunities. Ms. Ruckdeschel suggested collaborating with the Library for a week focused on wildlife. The Committee agreed.

Chair Rothenberger mentioned that The Florida Institute of Oceanography hosts monthly programs with over 300 people in attendance. He suggested reaching out to some local centers such as USF Marine Center, Eckerd College, etc. He also suggested having people who directly work on the dunes come to inform the public as well.

Ms. Ruckdeschel reminded the Committee that in the past they partnered with the Tampa Bay Chamber of Commerce to educate the public about turtles and lighting and they produced a small card that could be handed out with a demo of appropriate beach lighting. These are currently available at City Hall. Member Looney added that many hotels host events regularly but they are not being widely communicated.

Vice Chair Stevens asked Ms. Ruckdeschel to share the draft goal plans with the discussed changes as it is available. He suggested removing the dates from the timeline section as it is no longer applicable. Committee members agreed. Ms. Ruckdeschel will make the necessary adjustments and will share the reworked document with the board members prior to sharing it with the City Commission.

Board Members suggested the City Manager look at the resource needs and then provide input to the Committee.

Ms. Ruckdeschel inquired whether the Committee had any feedback regarding the guest speaker from a few months ago who discussed resiliency and underwater artificial reefs. She asked whether the Beach Stewardship Committee views this as a long-term solution for beach resiliency. Board members expressed interest in exploring the concept further but acknowledged funding constraints.

The Committee agreed to maintain their regularly scheduled meetings and will call for special meetings as necessary.

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

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:14 AM.

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