

## BEACH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 21, 2025 - 9:00 A.M.

**PRESENT:** Jon Stevens, Vice Chair/Chair  
John Kurzman, Member/Vice Chair  
Natalie Looney, Member  
Bill Thompson, Member

**ABSENT:** Dan Rothenberger, Member

**STAFF PRESENT:** Ayako Ruckdeschel, Code Enforcement Officer  
Ralf Brookes, City Attorney  
Ginny Bodkin, Deputy City Clerk  
Peyt Dewar, Code Enforcement Manager

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

1. Approval of the Agenda –

Member Kurzman requested to add discussion items on how new legislation might affect the beaches or the beach ordinance and beach closure information.

**Motion:**       **The amended agenda was approved by a voice vote.**

2.       Audience Comments –

Kathleen Etxegoien of 106 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue inquired about the status of seawall and crossovers at 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. Vice Chair Stevens requested that staff have a report on the status of the seawall and RFP for the crossovers at the next meeting.

3. Action Items

a. Approval of Meeting Minutes February 26 and March 20, 2025

Member Kurzman indicated he had not yet reviewed the March 20<sup>th</sup> workshop minutes.

**Motion:**       **Member Looney moved, and Member Kurzman seconded the approval of the February 26, 2025 regular meeting minutes; the motion passed 3-0 with Member Thompson abstaining.**

Later in the meeting, Member Kurzman indicated he actually had read all of the minutes and was ready to vote. Attorney Brookes suggested voting again on both minutes with no abstentions.

**Motion:**       **Member Kurzman moved and Member Looney seconded to approve the and March 20, 2025 Workshop minutes as presented; the motion passed unanimously.**

**Motion:**       **Member Looney moved and Member Kurzman seconded to approve the and February 26, 2025 meeting minutes as presented; the motion passed unanimously.**

b. Election of Committee Officers for 2025-26 FY

Vice Chair Stevens explained that Chair Rothenberger indicated to the Clerk that he would not be able to serve for the coming year and had no objection to a vote without him present.

**Motion: Member Thompson moved to appoint Jon Stevens as Committee Chair and John Kurzman as Vice Chair for 2025-2026. Member Looney seconded and the motion carried 4-0.**

#### 4. Items for Discussion

##### a. Update from Pinellas Co. regarding emergency beach renourishment/dune

Zach Westfall of Pinellas County Coastal Management appeared via Zoom. He reported that the dune at Pass-a-Grille that had washed away from Hurricane Helene has been rebuilt with overwash sand from the street. A scope of work with a survey has been prepared for planting and the project will be going out to bid, combined with other beach projects; they are working as quickly as they can. Multiple varieties of plants will be included. They are also waiting for permits from the State; he will advise when the planting may begin.

Member Thompsom inquired about a planting project near the Upham Beach/Paradise Grill area. Mr. Westfall mentioned that an application can be submitted for a sea oat giveaway.

Mr. Westfall answered an inquiry about the Army Corps of Engineers beach renourishment progress by explaining that County Administration is still in talks with them. He added that it has been a 13 year stalemate, but the 2024 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) did pass, which says the Corp should act as previously to refill, but they are waiting for a guidance document. The County is doing what they can in the meantime.

Mr. Westfall reported that the County's permit to fill is for the beaches south of 22<sup>nd</sup>. He added that County engineers identified the need and created a dune near Starlight Tower after Idalia, but the amount of space makes it difficult to build a dune, but they are still looking at it. If approved, funding would come from the tourist development ("bed") tax as well as the state's "local government" funding. There may also be appropriations, but the state budget is not yet passed. yet. Chair Stevens added that volunteers are allowed to place plantings with local funding and field permits from the County CCCL.

Finally, Mr. Westfall reminded everyone that it is turtle nesting season; with dunes and vegetation gone, please share the word to have lights off, amber, and shielded and watch for hatchlings.

##### b. Update regarding the new staff liaison to the Beach Stewardship Committee

Code Enforcement Officer Ayako Ruckdeschel reported that Public Services has hired a Deputy Director, Brian Pekins, who will be starting on June 16<sup>th</sup> and will be the new staff liaison to this committee.

##### c. Budget request for needs affecting the beach

Code Enforcement Manager Peyt Dewar stated that discussions for beach resources have already taken place, but he encouraged communications with the Commission that resources

are needed for enforcement. When asked, he stated that the greatest need is for two beach access vehicles; they are currently borrowing Gators from the Parks Department. The City has been conducting beach inspections since 2016.

When asked, Mr. Dewar reported that the current top three beach compliance concerns are turtle friendly lighting (he exhibited the lens that the officers use), driving to observe for reported cases of urinating and other bodily functions on the beach (in conjunction with the Sheriff's Department), and ensuring that alcohol is not being used outside of controlled areas. Dune violations are not as common.

A proactive education campaign was suggested. Mr. Dewar mentioned the code enforcement officers do proactively communicate with beach front properties as part of their responsibilities. Chair Stevens explained that he will follow up on Code Enforcement's wish list with the City Manager.

Member Thompson suggested that the Friends of the Library could work with Code Enforcement to obtain additional lighting-lens cards to distribute to the public. Mr. Dewar added that Code Enforcement is available to make presentations to groups.

d. Continued enforcement on the beach for dogs/e-bikes/alcohol consumption

Ms. Ruckdeschel had distributed a list of ordinance violations created in conjunction with PCSO during their enhanced zero-tolerance campaign that took place February 16 – April 30<sup>th</sup>. The provided violations plus dune violation enforcement were discussed. Signs alone do not change behavior. The Committee would like to work with the City Manager on proactive campaigns.

Leslie Price of 6650 Sunset Way thanked the committee for their work and cautioned to keep turtle nesting areas quiet. She mentioned that at Upham Beach, the period after the hurricane was more destructive because it was not marked. She commented that bikes on the beach are a detriment to turtles in addition to lighting, including cell phone flashlights.

Justine Bragg of 5250 Gulf Blvd., representing the Bellwether Beach Resort, commented that there are now at least four closed resorts, which opens the beach to a less controlled atmosphere. She spoke about responsible alcohol use and stated that the Bellwether does use proactive signage and education and are in support of beach control.

Member Thompson inquired about the status of the remodel of the parking at the Upham Beach plaza area, which has been delayed for a few years due to issues with the coastal construction line; Ms. Ruckdeschel and Senior Planner Brandon Berry were not aware. Staff will check into it.

e. Status of Beach Ordinance and Lighting Ordinance

Senior Planner Brandon Berry reported that a community meeting for the beach ordinance will be forthcoming (likely in June); the new Senate Bill 180 may affect planning efforts, so city staff and attorney want to review prior to meeting. The committee will be advised of the date.

As to the State of Florida Model Sea Turtle Lighting Ordinance, there are some items in SB

180 that also pertain to development (rather than maintenance) and may affect whether that can go forward. The Bill is expansive in its restrictions; staff is reviewing ordinance by ordinance.

Vice Chair Kurzman expressed concerns with administrative inconsistencies with pieces of the beach ordinance and potential SB 180 effects. Mr. Berry explained development related items may be affected – “development permits”, which includes building permits and zoning approval would be within that scope - but not as much for maintenance related items, which are exempted.

JoLynn Lawson of Leilani Drive appeared and showed night-time beach condo and hotel lighting photos, which she recently took. She will email them to the Clerk as part of the meeting record. Ms. Ruckdeschel stated that Code Enforcement had addressed those lights as well.

Mr. Dewar added that the existing lighting ordinance is adequate enough for enforcement; the proposed State ordinance may create difficulty in enforcement due to the need to be on private property at night to read the lighting. He reiterated that Code Enforcement has been out enforcing at night during turtle season since 2016. Some violations were written up on Monday. Chair Stevens asked staff to communicate any changes they would like to recommend for better enforcement to the Committee so they could consider bringing forward to the City Commission.

f. Turtle Nest Activity

Ms. Ruckdeschel reported that as of this weekend, she counted eight nests north of the Don Cesar; Member Thompson added that there is one in front of the Sirata (which is marked). Ms. Ruckdeschel added that the black skimmer areas have been marked as well. Fireworks are banned on the beach and patrols increase near the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Posting signage that no fireworks are permitted near the 4<sup>th</sup> of July was suggested; Ms. Ruckdeschel will follow up.

g. Senate Bills related to Beaches (added)

City Attorney Ralf Brookes provided an update of Senate Bill 180; it passed both House and Senate and is awaiting the Governor’s signature; it may go into law without signature. Section 28 of the bill relates to Hurricanes Debby, Helene and Milton, which covers all Florida. No local government can adopt a moratorium, propose more restrictive or burdensome amendments to its Comp Plan or land development regulations or propose or adopt more restrictive or burdensome procedures concerning review, approval or issuance of a site plan development permit or order. This preemption is retroactive to August 1, 2024. If anyone thinks an ordinance is in violation, they would need to give the city 14 days to respond by repealing that section of the ordinance. The bill expires June 30, 2028 but the moratorium and preemption are until June of 2027. Another section creates a statute that will kick in any time there is a hurricane in the future that will extend deadlines for another year. Behavioral/maintenance ordinances would still be allowed. Staff is reviewing the beach ordinance in this regard.

In other legislation, the DEP beach renourishment program was funded for \$50 million but that is spread out across the state. One bill that did not pass said that Tourist Development Tax could not be used for beach renourishment.

h. Beach Closures and Notifications *(added)*

In light of recent bacteria/beach closure reports, Vice Chair Kurzman asked about postings regarding the health of beaches. Ms. Ruckdeschel referred to the County's website where that information is posted. Links from the City's website to those County postings will be added. Vice Chair Kurzman expressed frustration with the slow timing of the County's postings.

5. Adjournment – Next meeting will be August 20, 2025.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:08 AM.

*These minutes were approved at the August 20, 2025, Beach Stewardship Committee meeting.*