

BEACH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

February 25, 2026 - 9:00 A.M.

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

STAFF PRESENT: Brian Peckins, Assistant Public Services Director; Ralf Brookes, City Attorney; Ginny Bodkin, Deputy City Clerk

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

1. Approval of the Agenda -

Vice Chair Kurzman asked to add the five discussion items he previously sent in an email – Florida law Customary Use action plan, posts and signs on the beach, beach access points, and dune fencing (5a.-5e.). Member Thompson asked to add a discussion item on construction on the water side of the Sirata (5f.).

Motion: Vice Chair Kurzman moved and Member Thompson seconded to approve the amended February 25, 2026 agenda; the motion carried 5-0.

2. Audience Comments – No one came forward to comment.

3. Action Items -

a. **Approval of Minutes – November 19, 2025**

Motion: Member Looney moved and Member Rothenberger seconded to approve the November 19, 2025 minutes as presented. The motion carried 5-0.

4. Presentations -

a. **Beach Activity Report 2025 Quarter 4**

Brian Peckins, Assistant Public Services Director, summarized the weddings, special events, and future special events from October through December, 2025, which had been included in the meeting packet. He reported that Keep Pinellas Beautiful held nine events, using 177 volunteers who put in 328 volunteer hours and removed 424 total pounds of trash. He also reviewed the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office violations for the same period (also included in the packet).

b. **Beach Capital Improvement Projects Update**

Mr. Peckins reported that Pinellas County is coordinating a dune planting project along Pass-a-Grille from 1st to 17th Avenues with EarthBalance as the contractor. Work will occur on weekdays only from sunrise to sunset, with equipment allowed to remain onsite overnight. Plant species will be finalized onsite based on actual dune conditions, with planting began around February 11th and will last 1-2 weeks depending on weather.

Mr. Peckins also reported that the dune walkover replacement project began on February 4, 2026, and will include the walkovers at 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 51st, and 52nd Avenues. Each walkover should take 1-2 weeks to complete. 2nd Avenue is completed.

Member Thompspon requested that in the future, walkover projects come to this committee for design involvement and input prior to work beginning. Mr. Peckins acknowledged the request and suggested that the members do site visits on the current project and provide feedback to Public Services. Treading has already been suggested by a resident. Chair Stevens added that the City Manager's Weekly Operational Reports contain helpful, current updates. They are available on the city's website [Government-Departments-City Manager-Operational Weekly Reports].

5. Items for Discussion –

a. **Florida Law Customary Use Action Plan (Added)**

City Attorney Ralf Brookes reported that the First District Court of Appeal issued a recent ruling related to customary use; the decision and an accompanying article were previously forwarded to the Clerk for distribution to the committee and are part of the meeting record. He summarized what he had spoken about two meetings ago regarding statutory framework in Florida and explained that customary use does not require action from the city to become the law; it already is the law. Nothing the City has done abrogates any rights under customary use doctrine. A more comprehensive presentation on the customary use doctrine will be provided at the next meeting.

Vice Chair Kurzman spoke about rights to the public beach and the distinction between 'wet sand' and 'dry sand.' He discussed the mean high-water line (MHWL) determination, and that the apparent line may differ from the calculated legal boundary. He referenced a 2019 City Commission meeting in which the former City Attorney indicated there was historical support for the beach having always been public, but that the city had missed the opportunity to adopt a comprehensive customary use ordinance after changes in state law. He noted the city instead adopted a more limited ordinance allowing customary use as an affirmative defense. He opined that this is a time to strengthen local ordinances related to customary use.

Vice Chair Kurzman also recalled that in August 2024 the City Commission discussed holding a joint meeting with the Beach Stewardship Committee to develop a plan for customary use but delayed action due to pending cases and later shifting priorities following a hurricane; he proposed moving that forward.

b. **Posts and Signs on Beach (Added)**

Vice Chair Kurzman raised concerns about the installation of 4x4 posts observed on the beach south of the Silver Sands. The posts may be intended to delineate alcohol-permitted areas associated with nearby hotels, which could function as a de facto exclusion of the general public from portions of the beach. It was noted that the stated purpose of alcohol control may not reflect the practical effect of the installations. Also, the location of certain posts may not correspond with the landward cabana or alcohol zones and may conflict with the natural beach conditions or public access expectations.

Attorney Brookes requested that photographs and addresses of the observed posts be submitted in advance of the next meeting so staff can research their location and purpose, whether permits were

issued, and compliance with City and State requirements. It was noted that installation of a rope-and-post fence would require a state permit, and potentially a city permit. Questions were raised regarding whether single posts are permitted locally, the total number and locations of new posts, and their relationship to approved cabana/alcohol service areas. It was also noted that at least one post included a red reflector and that some observed posts did not appear consistent with established cabana zone boundaries.

Vice Chair Kurzman will provide photographs and location information to the Clerk, Attorney and staff to research permitting, regulatory requirements and compliance and report back at a future meeting.

c. City Revenue from Beach Services (Added)

Chair Stevens questioned whether it is in the committee's purview to discuss tax revenues. Attorney Brookes explained that there is a committee of staff that are looking at revenue sources in the event the House Bill and legislation pass that would increase the Homestead exemption by \$100,000 for each year for 10 years, which would have a huge fiscal impact on the city. The Attorney will incorporate the beach revenue discussion with staff, to make full use of all opportunities, keeping in mind the balance between commercial interests/hotels and residents/residential.

d. Beach Access Points (Added)

The committee discussed preserving public beach access points and that remains a time-sensitive priority. There were concerns that access locations historically used by the public are being lost and stressed the need to identify, document, and protect existing easements and prescriptive access rights, particularly in light of state law supporting lateral public beach access when such access has historically existed. Attorney Brookes suggested compiling a list of specific access point addresses as the next step so staff can verify their legal status with the City. The group also noted that some areas are legitimately private but believed others may have traditionally been public. To support this effort, staff will assist with contacting a former city planner who may have historical maps and planning records and who may help clarify how access points were originally established.

e. Fencing for Dunes (Added)

Vice Chair Kurzman commented on research he had done that supported the use of slatted sand fencing to both clearly delineate dunes for the public and naturally trap wind-blown sand to help build and stabilize dune systems. He noted that there are often no markings on the beach and suggested slat fencing as a low-profile, physics-based solution that could strengthen coastal protection. He also raised the idea of using partial slatted barriers near sea turtle nests to help block artificial light from inland sources without impeding hatchlings.

Other members agreed that established Florida Department of Environmental Protection guidelines already support rope-and-post barriers, sand fencing, and planting sea oats, all of which function like natural dune builders and should be pursued, potentially through grants. The discussion clarified that lighting affects both nesting mothers and hatchlings, so solutions must address both behaviors. Members also noted uncertainty about typical nesting locations and suggested consulting sea turtle experts for data.

f. Construction at Sirata (Added)

Member Thompson highlighted the increase in active and planned resort redevelopment projects along the beach—including new pools, walkovers, restaurants, demolitions, and long-term plans at the Sirata, TradeWinds, and PCI sites—and said the committee needs a clear, high-level status report to stay informed and respond to public questions. He requested early updates on projects, including permit conditions, location relative to the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL), and dune requirements, rather than learning about them after construction begins.

Members discussed the importance of city involvement in any construction on the sandy beach, not relying solely on state approval, and suggested inviting resort representatives to provide brief overviews. Potential opportunities—such as dune restoration, protective design features, and a future coordinated boardwalk between properties—were noted, along with concern over the loss of long-standing beach establishments and the need for projects that serve a broad public.

Member Thompson mentioned the remodeling of the Paradise Grill at Upham Beach and stressed the benefit of informing Beach Stewardship members in advance of such projects, so they are aware and prepared when residents make inquiries. He also inquired whether a project for additional parking at Upham was still under consideration and requested that it be on the next agenda.

Lastly, as the next meeting will occur after spring break, members discussed whether any advance preparation or coordination is needed. One concern was that past “zero-tolerance” signage felt unwelcoming, and members suggested balancing strong enforcement with maintaining a positive tourism image. They also discussed how other destinations adopt seasonal rules, increased patrols, parking management, and alcohol controls to handle spring break crowds. Environmental impacts were raised, particularly the overlap with shorebird nesting season and the potential need for rope-offs and protection measures. Members asked staff to check on city plans for enforcement and readiness. It was also noted that ongoing resort construction and closures may reduce typical spring break activity, creating uncertainty about expected crowd levels.

6. Adjournment – Next meeting is scheduled for May 20, 2026.

There being no further business, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 10:05 AM.

These minutes were approved at the May 20, 2026, Beach Stewardship Committee meeting.