

BEACH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

May 20, 2026 - 9:00 A.M.

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

STAFF PRESENT: Gina Messenger, Management Analyst, Public Services; 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 requested additional elements be added to discussion items 5a, b and c and asked to add items on the beach ordinance next steps, dune fencing, beach revenue, adding items to the agenda, how the Committee gets informed of events, and requesting beach maintenance ride-alongs.

Motion: Vice Chair Kurzman moved to approve the May 20, 2026 agenda as amended. The motion died for lack of a second.

Motion: Member Thompson moved to add a discussion item regarding beach equipment clearing and evacuation prior to a storm and Member Rothenberger seconded.

Member Looney requested to add an item to discuss status of the beach ordinance.

Motion: Member Thompson amended his motion to include beach ordinance and general comment items to the agenda. Member Looney seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

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

3. Action Items -

a. Approval of Minutes – February 25, 2025

Vice Chair Kurzman clarified that item 4e should state a lack of markings and slats as a potential alternative to ropes.

Motion: Member Thompson moved and Member Rothenberger seconded to approve the February 25, 2026 minutes as amended. The motion carried 5-0.

b. Election of Committee Officers 2026-27

Motion: Member Rothenberger moved and Member Thompson seconded to retain Jon Stevens as Committee Chair for 2026-27; the motion carried 5-0.

Motion: Member Rothenberger moved and Vice Chair Kurzman seconded to appoint Bill Thompson as Committee Vice Chair for 2026-27; the motion carried 5-0.

4. Presentations -

Public Services Management Analyst Gina messenger introduced herself; she was attending for Public Services Director Camden Mills who was unable to attend.

a. Beach Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Update

Ms. Messenger reported that following an inspection and recommendation by Pinellas County, a project for the Upham Beach south jetty has been added to the CIP and the City will be applying for grants. She can supply copies of the County's report upon request. Warning signs for hazards have been installed at the jetty.

The dune walkover project is nearly complete; work is being finalized at the 52nd Avenue walkover and should be done in a few weeks with FDEP guidance. Ms. Messenger also advised the members that maintenance ride-alongs could be accommodated by contacting Mr. Mills.

b. Beach Activity Report 2026 Quarter 1

Ms. Messenger reviewed highlights of the report including the Sunshine State Outdoor Volleyball Association tournament and the MindTravel Silent Concert series.

5. Items for Discussion –

a. Events on the Beach

Chair Stevens asked that this item be included due to the confusion and lack of communication during Country Thunder event discussions. He asked that staff bring a formal presentation to the next meeting about beach event process, criteria, and approval for the Committee to consider. The members requested that the Committee be informed of future events including events where permits (including DEP permits) have been applied for so they can add input as, per ordinance, their duties state that "The committee shall evaluate information relating to the preservation and maintenance of the public beaches in St. Pete Beach and make recommendations to the city commission." Ms. Messenger noted the request. Vice Chair Thompson requested a report on what is planned for the fireworks this year (i.e., signage on bridge for black skimmers, etc.) and cleanup. Chair Stevens agreed; it could be an email from staff this year and future years, prior to the events.

Motion: Chair Stevens moved and Vice Chair Thompson seconded to request that Staff communicate plans for proactive planning and procedures for the 4th of July season activities to the Beach Stewardship Committee members via email; the motion carried 5-0.

The City Attorney cautioned that members do not 'reply all' to emails and act individually.

Vice Chair Thompson commented that the parking lot at Upham Beach floods chronically after rainstorms making event parking difficult. Ms. Messenger will report to the Public Services Director and added that there is currently a stormwater project underway where every single outfall is being assessed and stormwater pipes are being cleaned and examined.

b. Signs on the Beach

Chair Stevens asked City Attorney Brookes for an update on what issues have recently occurred with private owner signage. Member Kurzman commented that no one had sent any communication to the Beach Stewardship Committee. The Attorney informed the members of the Community Meeting on the Sign Ordinance on June 3rd at 6 PM and encouraged them to attend for input and discussion.

Attorney Brookes reported that recently a local hotel had placed rebar posts in wet sand to mark the location of the mean high-water line based on a survey. The rebar was hazardous with no lights in the evening. Subsequently, an emergency ordinance was adopted to prohibit such posts and poles in the water or at the water line. The posts that were there were voluntarily removed during the 7-day grace period. The Community Meeting on June 3rd will allow staff and management to receive input before proceeding with the regular ordinance.

Discussion followed on beach signage, property boundaries, and enforcement issues. Member Kurzman raised concerns about whether certain beachfront property claims extended to the mean high-water line and suggested the signs may reflect broader ownership and access disputes. The City Attorney responded that ownership questions can vary by parcel, making case-by-case title review necessary, while the ordinance should provide general rules on signage and related enforcement. Additional discussion addressed possible ordinance revisions, including references to the visible high-water line, preservation zone inconsistencies, and whether some sign-like installations could also implicate fence regulations.

A brief discussion on Business Tax Receipts followed. Attorney Brookes explained that BTRs are occupational licenses; charging hotels and businesses a per-chair permit fee would be a different charge that the Commission would have to consider.

c. Public Beach Access Point Signage

Chair Stevens discussed standardizing public beach access signage to improve wayfinding, identify nearby access points during emergencies, and encourage trash disposal at access locations. Members also discussed continuing signage improvements along the island, including Pass-a-Grille. The City Attorney and committee discussed the need to distinguish deeded or otherwise established public access points from unresolved access claims, noting that signage should not be interpreted as a determination that no other public access exists. Staff advised that public access questions are reviewed case by case, including title research and 1987 access requirements when redevelopment occurs.

d. Clearing Beach Equipment Pre-Storm (Added)

Ms. Messenger reported that during impending storm periods, the maintenance team picks up and removes trash cans, barrels, and anything in rights of way. The team is out every morning and notifies owners of what must be removed.

e. Beach Ordinance Status (Added)

City Attorney Brookes reported that Senior Planner Brandon Berry is in the process of preparing the ordinances to move forward. Chair Stevens requested that the Clerk have Mr. Berry email the Committee on status and proposed timeline.

f. General Discussion Items (Added)

Member Kurzman referenced prior discussion about compiling a list of specific access point addresses and using historical maps and planning records to verify legal status. He noted having obtained a 1987 county map and asked about the next step and whether staff research was underway. Attorney Brookes responded that staff are working with Mr. Mills on the issue and would bring the matter back to the next meeting.

Regarding swimmer safety, Member Kurzman raised concerns about swimmers becoming entangled in active fishing lines and suggested considering ordinance language or guidance requiring anglers to avoid casting near swimmers and to reel in lines when swimmers are nearby. Members discussed the issue as a public safety concern and noted that state law may limit the City's ability to regulate fishing generally unless a posted swimming area is involved. Staff indicated the matter could be raised with the Sheriff to clarify enforcement options, while the committee agreed the goal is to improve safety and provide clear expectations for beach users.

6. Adjournment – Next meeting is scheduled for August 19, 2026.

There being no further business, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 10:50 AM.

These minutes were approved at the August 19, 2026, Beach Stewardship Committee meeting.