

**MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE RESOURCES TASK FORCE
Town Hall
2525 Estero Boulevard
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931**

Wednesday, February 12, 2020

I. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Chair Veach. Members present: Greg Fossum, Greg Holmes, Steve Johnson, Jennifer Rusk, Mary Rose Spalletta and Bill Veach.

Staff: Environmental Services Coordinator Chadd Chustz.

Council Liaison: Rexann Hosafros

New MRTF Members Fossum and Rusk introduced themselves.

MOTION: MRTF Member Spalletta nominated MRTF Member Johnson for Vice Chair; second by MRTF Member Holmes.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

II. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – January 8, 2020

MOTION: Chair Veach moved to approve the minutes; second by MRFT Member Spalletta.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Susan Morris, resident, requested help with reinstating the local ordinance that stated the south end of Fort Myers Beach was a No Wake Zone. She noted that Town Council would have to make the request to the state. She described the dangerous traffic in the area of the Fish Tale Marina and noted that public safety was at risk from the speeding boats. Ms. Morris discussed the damage and danger to the mini-reefs, mangroves, dolphins and manatees. She indicated they started a petition to lower the boat speed and she appreciated any advice or help MRTF could provide. Liaison Hosafros explained why the previous signs were removed.

Tim Hormitige (sp), resident, measured the channel and noted it was 350 to 360 feet between the docks on the south side and the channel markers.

V. CURRENT ITEMS

A. Reusable Bags

MRTF Member Johnson noted there were still three spaces available for sponsors. MRTF Member Spalletta will follow up next week. MRTF Member Johnson explained the reusable bag program to new members. Coordinator Chustz stated that the Town would hold off contacting Publix until the rezoning issue was resolved.

B. Fertilizer Ordinance Update

The second hearing will be on February 18, 2020.

C. Water Quality

Guest Speaker, Ray Judah utilized slides for a presentation on water quality. He discussed the sugar fields, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program, Lake Okeechobee watershed and releases, water budget analysis, 2.3 million-acre feet of water in Lake Okeechobee, the lack of water storage in C43 and C44, using rivers as relief valves, spending money on the dike instead of building a spillway, the previous deal with the sugar companies that was blocked by a new governor and restoring the historic flow from Lake Okeechobee to the southern end of the ecosystem. He explained that Plan 6 was proposed by the Corps of Engineers in the 1990s but US Sugar influenced them to scrap the plan in 1999. He discussed acquiring 50,000 acres, which was 15% of the entire land inventory of the sugar industry. He noted that C43 and the new reservoir were inadequate to store and treat the runoff from the Lake. Mr. Judah explained why they needed to acquire the land and stated that Plan 6 included proper storage and filtration before allowing the water to flow south. He mentioned abating the excessively polluted releases from the Lake. He indicated that funds from Amendment 1 were available to purchase the land. He requested that MRTF bring Plan 6 up to Town Council.

MRTF Member Spalletta clarified that the US Sugar land was not for sale. Mr. Judah replied that the government could condemn the land and use eminent domain powers; however, that option did not seem feasible in the current political landscape. He explained that last year Colonel Reynolds utilized pulse releases in the winter to avoid big toxic releases in the summer. This year the Corps decided to reserve water in the Lake for irrigation for the sugar companies in case of a drought. He suggested that cities and counties work with the east coast to get the Corps' attention and return to pulse releases. He discussed back pumping toxic water into the Lake.

Chair Veach questioned whether there were adequate storage and filtering in Plan 6.

Mr. Judah replied that they had to purchase the land and build a spillway for the storage capacity to store and filter the water. He commented that the water current on the east coast helped to wash nutrients offshore.

MRTF Member Johnson questioned whether they were changing the release regulations. Mr. Judah replied that it had to be revised, but he questioned the outcome because of who was at the helm locally, statewide and federally.

Chair Veach questioned how the entire watershed would be filtered through the 50,000 acres. Mr. Judah mentioned dynamic storage. He noted that sugar had no storage or treatment on their land and they back pumped their water into the Lake despite issues with the dike and water quality. Chair Veach questioned whether they could do something with the water conservation areas to make them more efficient. Mr. Judah replied that they could be manually harvested and the material reused.

D. Street Lighting

Chair Veach indicated that he needed more information before discussing with Council.

He described the amber lights on Sanibel and noted there were more products available than what FPL offered. MRTF Member Spalletta questioned hiring a lighting expert for research. MRTF Member Johnson replied that a company offered to conduct a free photometric evaluation, but Council declined the offer. Chair Veach suggested using shorter poles with amber lights. Discussion was held concerning the strength of lights and illuminating crosswalks. MRTF Member Johnson stated that amber lights were not a safety issue. MRTF Member Rusk commented that residents, businesses and tourists were required to use amber lights and the Town should lead by example. MRTF Member Spalletta replied that it was a cost issue. MRTF Member Johnson indicated that FPL admitted the LED lights were not turtle-friendly. He briefly discussed how lights were measured and noted it was sophisticated. Discussion was held regarding crosswalks in other municipalities. Chair Veach indicated he would attend a Public Safety Committee (PSC) meeting for their input and speak to Council. MRTF Member Johnson read the scope of his draft.

MOTION: Chair Veach moved that their consensus on street lighting was to encourage Council to look beyond FPL's narrow offerings for a solution that was safe for people, endangered species, legal, cost-effective and enhanced by other safety measures; second by MRTF Member Spalletta.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

E. MRTF Issued Certifications for Pollinator Neighborhoods – remove from agenda.

F. Manatees

MRTF Member Holmes stated that he provided links to download free signs. He did not understand the 25-mph speed limit in canals. Coordinator Chustz clarified that the Fish & Wildlife Conservation (FWC) changed the speed limits. MRTF Member Johnson stated when the signs were removed, boaters sped around the area. Consensus was reached to move forward with lowering the speed limit. Liaison Hosafros suggested that they determine whether other areas of the island would benefit from a speed limit change before presenting to Council. She explained that she was told that the wrong signs were put up to begin with so the FWC took them down.

MRTF Member Fossum questioned the data proving that mangroves were being harmed by speeding boaters. MRTF Member Holmes brought up manatee deaths. Chair Veach commented that the area was very congested and public safety was compromised. MRTF Member Fossum stated that boats were responsible for any damage they caused. MRTF Members discussed the difficulty of getting the numbers off speeding boats to report them. Discussion was held regarding speed limits and channel markers in different areas. MRTF Member Holmes suggested inviting someone to a meeting to discuss the speed limit zones and how to change them. Chair Veach noted he would recommend that Council petition the FWC and MRTF would look into details about what happened. He suggested that boating members conduct research regarding jurisdictions and why the signs were removed.

G. Good Citizen Award aka the "Murphie"

MRTF Member Spalletta nominated Andrea Uhlig (sp) from Germany. The turtle mural was banked.

VI. MEMBER ITEMS AND REPORTS

MRTF Member Rusk questioned the status of delineating rights-of-way between public access and property owners. Liaison Hosafros replied that Council voted to move forward. MRTF Member Spalletta discussed the proposed dune walkover at the south end of the island. She stated that MRTF was against the request due to the harm caused to wildlife by encroachment. Chair Veach discussed the Coastal Construction Conservation Line (CCCL). He stated that what they wanted to construct was a boardwalk, not a dune walkover. He offered to speak on behalf of MRTF at the Council meeting. Liaison Hosafros stated that a rehearing was scheduled for February 18, 2020. Chair Veach discussed other issues involved with their request and setting a precedent. MRTF Member Spalletta discussed predators. MRTF Member Holmes suggested using the Audubon's view to state their concerns.

MOTION: MRTF Member Johnson moved to allow Chair Veach to approach Council with a recommendation starting with "We support the Audubon Society..." and allow him to complete the statement; second by MRTF Member Spalletta.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

MRTF Member Spalletta stated that she would not be at the next meeting.

MRTF Member Johnson suggested that they start thinking about using the old bridge material for a reef and to provide a fishing platform on the new bridge.

MRTF Member Johnson distributed a list of sponsors. Chair Veach noted he still had bags available.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENT – no public comment.

VIII. SET AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

Combine boating speeds and manatees.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Chair Veach moved to adjourn the meeting; second by MRFT Member Johnson.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:13 p.m.

Adopted 3-11-20 with/without changes. Motion by VEACH
(DATE)

Vote: _____ Signature: 

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