

**MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
Town Hall
2525 Estero Boulevard
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Tuesday, January 18, 2022
SPECIAL MEETING**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair Thomas.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

PSC Members present: Liaison Dan Allers, Suzanne Bahan, Heidi Jungwirth, Jim Knickle and Dawn Thomas.

Others present: Beach Baptist Member Forrest Critser, Beach Baptist Pastor Rev. Shawn Critser, Beach Baptist Pastor Asst. Mallie Marie Critser, Chapel by the Sea Office Administrator Denise Armstrong, Lee County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Mark Bonora, Lee County Sheriff's Office Community Response Coordinator Destiny Unswort, Lee County Human & Veteran Services Homeless Impact Program Manager Mark Tesoro

Staff: Administrative Officer Randy Paniagua

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT – no public comment.

VI. OVERVIEW OF THE CHURCH PROGRAMS OFFERED

Chair Thomas indicated their goal was to have an educational meeting regarding services provided on the island.

Pastor Shawn stated that Beach Baptist and Chapel by the Sea were the only two churches directly involved with the community. He noted their programs were not targeted at a specific population and preferred to use the term houseless rather than transient or homeless. Pastor Shawn described programs to help children at Beach Elementary and other community-based programs.

Denise Armstrong noted she would forward a list of the churches involved in the ministerial association and all the activities offered. She indicated that Chapel by the Sea provided a wide range of services to every community member, not only the houseless population.

Pastor Shawn described the process to help people navigate the system and stated 12 people currently received services. He explained the importance of creating relationships.

Liaison Allers questioned what happened when people slept on benches. Lieutenant Bonora replied that Lee County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) officers told them to move and noted people sleeping on benches was not a typical complaint. Denise stated that adding dividers on the benches on Estero Blvd. helped solve the problem. Liaison Allers indicated he received complaints concerning three benches in particular.

Pastor Shawn described how many resources were used to help one person.

Liaison Allers questioned whether anyone offered job-related services. Pastor Shawn replied affirmatively but added that Beach Baptist could not help those who refused assistance. He stated that many people were the working homeless because it was so difficult to find affordable housing.

VII. DATA

A. Share Facts and Demographics – Church Representative

Pastor Shawn stated that 70% of the students enrolled at the elementary school were considered need-based children and they were not making a dent in the needs. He noted the program had to be expanded.

Denise described the programs offered by Chapel by the Sea and indicated they did not keep a breakdown of statistics.

B. Share Database Information & Tracking

Pastor Shawn displayed a list of Community Interactions and Incidents and explained how they used the information.

Mark Tesoro from Lee County stated they had a confidential Connect list to follow the course of treatment for people. He indicated that Beach Baptist worked closely with Lieutenant Bonora and he described programs to help people who did not have a place to sleep. He noted the needs were multi-faceted and agreed that relationships were vital. Denise described shelter opportunities during severe weather events. Pastor Critser discussed the difference in mentalities between Lee County and the beach.

Pastor Shawn explained that staffing issues affected housing. He stated that Beach Baptist needed help with people who were just there to cause trouble.

VIII. COMMUNICATION – see above discussions.

A. Current Church to Church Communication

B. LCSO

IX. PUBLIC REPORTING – EMAIL INFORMATION FOR TRACKING

Chair Thomas questioned who to call and Lieutenant Bonora replied 911. Pastor Shawn stated he distributed cards with several phone numbers for assistance.

Destiny Unswort who worked in Community Outreach Centers across the county, stated that the most common facility LCSO referred people to was the Salvation Army. Mark Tesoro added that Covid was causing severe staffing issues which affected the availability of shelters.

Pastor Shawn relayed a story of a man who consistently called or sent hateful emails because he did not like homeless people.

X. INITIATIVES TO KEEP THE PUBLIC INFORMED

Liaison Allers discussed PSC helping to make people feel safe. Mark Tesoro stated that, statistically, the person sleeping on the bench was more likely to be a victim of crime, but scared people did not think of that. Pastor Shawn discussed an island-wide watch instead of a neighborhood watch.

Chair Thomas discussed providing education and communicating with the community. Beach Baptist Member Forrest Critser described how B.A.S.E. helped to monitor the situation. He felt

that it would help if the community knew there were only 12 regular houseless people on the beach. Pastor Shawn stated that if the town could raise \$5,000, he would create a homeless shelter in one of his buildings. Denise added that there was not anywhere for the homeless to congregate during bad weather. She questioned whether there was a place the homeless could use now. Liaison Allers asked about spending money on people who refused to take advantage of current services. Pastor Shawn replied that the programs were hard to get into. Denise questioned whether the goal was to get them to stay off the benches and described how Fort Myers addressed the situation. Chair Thomas suggested focusing on what the PSC could do to help and meet again in six months. PSC Member Jungwirth added that PSC needed to work with the Outreach Center and Pastor Shawn to create a neighborhood watch program. PSC Member Jungwirth stressed that educational outreach would go a long way to help the community understand the situation.

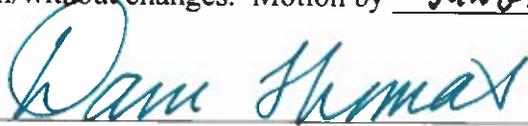
XI. PUBLIC COMMENT – no public comment.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: PSC Member Jungwirth moved to adjourn; second by PSC Member Knickle.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

Adopted 2-8-22 with/without changes. Motion by JUNGWIRTH
(DATE)

Vote: _____ Signature: 

- End of document