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**MINUTES
FORT MYERS BEACH
MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES TASK FORCE**

The Mound House
451 Connecticut St.
Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931
Wednesday, June 14, 2023

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Chair Johnson.

II. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

Members present: Wendy DeGaetano, Greg Fossum, Robert Howell, Steve Johnson, Rose Larkin, Jennifer Rusk and Mary Rose Spalletta.
Staff: Environmental Services Project Manager Chadd Chustz
Council Liaison: Bill Veach

IV. Approve The Agenda

MOTION: MERTF Member Spalletta moved to approve the agenda; second by Chair Johnson.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

V. Approve Previous Meeting Minutes – May 10, 2023

September 14, 2022, and April 12, 2023 minutes were approved on May 10, 2023.

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to approve the amended minutes; second by MERTF Member Spalletta.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

VI. Public Comment – no public comment.

VII. Current Items

A. Rebuild Right

- 1. Bayside Park

Items discussed at the last meeting were coconut palms, artificial grass and uplighting. Liaison Veach revealed that the hurricane destroyed the wiring for the underground

lighting. MERTF Member Rusk was told that the park had to be rebuilt exactly as it was and Liaison Veach confirmed that FEMA would not pay for anything new. MERTF Member Rusk reiterated that The Town should follow the lighting ordinance and not replace the uplighting. Project Manager Chustz indicated that he had yet to see a permit application. Discussion was held concerning uplighting, colored lights, white LEDs for half the year and adhering to the Town's light ordinance.

MERTF Member Larkin discussed the dangers of plastic artificial grass to wildlife and the environment. Chair Johnson mentioned that the designers might be able to provide options. MERTF Member Larkin indicated that coconut palms were not supposed to be within 10 feet of a body of water. MERTF Member Howell suggested planting Sabal palms if the coconut palms were gone.

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to advise Town Council at their next meeting that the Bayside Park renovation plans address uplighting, which does not meet the municipal lighting ordinance and to provide shields or come up with a different design effect; the dual lights were not consistent with the town resolution for an all-amber resolution, search for alternatives to the plastic artificial turf and look for a native option for the coconut palms that were in the original design; second by MERTF Member Fossum.

AMENDMENT: If it is allowable by FEMA and if not, The Town should provide alternatives subsequent to FEMA; second by MERTF Member Fossum.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

2. Beach Accesses

Project Manager Chustz reported that FEMA evaluated accesses and received complaints regarding ADA access over the berm. He discussed scours and resiliency options, including planting vegetation, installing a walkover structure and pushing the berm out to overlap to provide on-grade side access. A survey had to be completed before any work started. Discussion was held regarding mobi mats and accessing the beach with the berm in place. MERTF Member Rusk brought up replacing the six signs. Liaison Veach indicated that if the signs were destroyed, FEMA would replace them. Chair Johnson suggested they table the discussion while they come up with ideas for the accesses.

3. Vegetation on Town Properties

Chair Johnson suggested that they identify what areas to focus on. MERTF Member Larkin emailed a native vegetation PowerPoint to MERTF members and noted that the Local Planning Agency (LPA) and other groups discussed vegetation on the beach. She suggested that all groups consolidate efforts. Chair Johnson commented that the LPA was not going to discuss vegetation, according to Planner Sarah Propst. MERTF Member Rusk spoke to a woman from Keep Lee County Beautiful and she wanted to

work with The Town to plant vegetation. MERTF Member Howell compared the surviving landscape on Sanibel with the devastated landscape on Fort Myers Beach. He suggested using Sanibel as an example of how to plant correctly with native species. MERTF Member Rusk suggested that the Garden Club and Lee County Master Gardeners help advise with planting. MERTF Member Larkin will speak with them. MERTF Member Fossum brought up construction equipment and noted that the plants would be destroyed if they plant too soon. Liaison Veach agreed and stated they needed to finish the vegetation plan before planting anything.

The parking strip was one area to plant, but MERTF Member Fossum noted that mailboxes made it hard to plant in some areas. MERTF Member Larkin remarked that you could walk and drive on native ground cover Sunshine Mimosas. MERTF Member Rusk suggested adding plants to large pots around Times Square. Liaison Veach discussed the hazard mitigation grant and obtaining a beach access at Times Square so The Town could receive Tourist Development Council (TDC) funds.

MOTION: MERTF Member Howell moved to download MERTF Member Larkin's PowerPoint to The Town's website; second by MERTF Member Rusk.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

B. Shoreline Spotlight Article

MERTF Member DeGaetano will forward her article to Project Manager Chustz. MERTF Member Spalletta was scheduled for the following month.

C. Council Report Update

Chair Johnson reviewed the meeting and stated that his list had no additions or deletions. Content for a school curriculum for the beach school was mentioned by the Council and could be added to their list. Council felt that vegetation was a high priority and a tree giveaway on Arbor Day was brought up. Liaison Veach suggested Regreen FMB as a brand. Discussion was held concerning green wall requirements.

Chair Johnson stated that a multi-family dock ordinance ~~was out of~~ ^{would be in} MERTF's scope. MERTF Member Howell reported that compressed plastic docks were being cut up and plastic shavings were getting into the water. Project Manager Chustz requested that MERTF Member Howell call him when he sees that activity.

Chair Johnson discussed the dune walkover and felt it was wrong that MERTF was not included in the discussions. He thought it was careless and irresponsible to allow the walkover to be built with the possibility that it might have to be ripped out based on the appeal decision. He stated that it was MERTF's responsibility to advise Council that issuing a permit before the conclusion of the appeal process was irresponsible.

MOTION: Chair Johnson moved to advise Council that it was irresponsible and unnecessary to issue a permit before exhausting the appeal process because it would create undue harm to build then remove a boardwalk through the environmentally

critical zone; no second.

Discussion was held regarding boardwalk issues and crafting motions.

MERTF voted unanimously against any private construction on Fort Myers Beach in the EC zone.

MOTION: MERTF Member Spalletta moved that MERTF advises that no permit be issued until all possible appeals have been exhausted due to the environmental damages caused by the private construction and subsequent removal on Fort Myers Beach; second by MERTF Member DeGaetano.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Members' Items and Reports

MERTF Member Fossum will not be at the July meeting.

MERTF Member Howell will not be at the July meeting. He would like to bring back propeller guards for rental boats. He brought up large construction firms destroying mangroves and just paying the fine. He questioned penalizing corporations instead of individuals. Chair Johnson agreed that mangroves were being destroyed but going after companies was not part of MERTF's scope. Project Manager Chustz discussed mangrove regulations and provided an update regarding the situation where mangroves were illegally removed at the beach theater.

MERTF Member Spalletta reported there were 38 turtle nests and indicated they were a little behind compared to two years ago. She noted that some of the turtles were nesting on top of the berm and some were moved due to construction. There were about 90 false crawls, which was very high and she thought it was because of visible lights.

MERTF Member Rusk wanted to wrap up the vegetation ordinances.

Project Manager Chustz confirmed that the lights were an issue for the turtles and noted that false crawls were a phenomenon on both coasts due to Ian.

MERTF Member Rusk questioned whether people were being alerted concerning debris on the beach. She brought up setting pop-up dates for the kids in summer camp and attending the Farmer's Market at Times Square. The pop-up dates are Wednesday, June 28, 2023, and Wednesday, July 19, 2023. MERTF Member Howell volunteered to help on June 28 and MERTF Member Spalletta volunteered for July 19. MERTF Member Rusk reported that they received \$5,000.00 from the Community Foundation and she was collaborating with Director Hauge to involve the summer camp kids in creating an activity book for the pop-up events.

Chair Johnson shared an email by Rebecca Schneider, SW Regional Species Conservation Biologist from the Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). She requested that MERTF partner with them to help with education and advocacy due to unreasonable resistance from the community concerning turtle nesting sites. Chair Johnson noted that the FWC was getting harassed and signs were being destroyed, especially in the south end. He described activities that were poisoning the minds of property owners. MERTF Member Rusk stated that people needed to be educated. MERTF Member Howell suggested that FWC invite property

owners to monitor and see the nests to try and change hearts and minds. Project Manager Chustz revealed that property owners in the area created a 501(c)(3) to support the FWC. The topic will be added to the next agenda.

IX. Public Comment – no public comment.

X. MERTF Award

MERTF Member Spalletta nominated the Community Foundation for raising and donating money. MERTF Member Rusk nominated a veterinarian who rescued animals right after the storm. The second nomination was Island Paradise Tours for donating their time to help the kayakers clean the bay. The Community Foundation and the vet went to the bank. MERTF Members voted to award Island Paradise Tours a MERTF Award.

XI. Set Agenda for Next Meeting

Add FWC.

MOTION: MERTF Member Howell moved to approve the pop-up dates for MERTF Member Rusk; second by Chair Johnson.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: MERTF Member Spalletta moved to adjourn; second by MERTF Member Larkin.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 p.m.

Adopted 9/13/2023 (DATE) (with) without changes. Motion by Mary Rose Spalletta
Vote: 6-0 Signature: [Signature]

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