

**MONROE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES**

January 29, 2024

- In-Person and Virtual Meeting
- Minutes recorded by Erika Nodal, Executive Assistant, Monroe County Parks & Beaches
- Meeting called to order 6:06 p.m.
- Salute to Flag

Board Members in-person and via Zoom attendance:

Darcy Wadsworth, Chairperson

Dr. Jim Boilini

Margaret Smith

Matthew Babich

Steve Miller

Media Present:

No Media Present.

Monroe County was represented by:

John Allen - Director, Parks and Beaches

Nathalia Archer - Assistant County Attorney

Suzi Rubio - Senior Project and Budget Manager, Parks and Beaches

Kirrin Peart - Sr. Recreation Team Leader, Parks and Beaches

Mike Pickenbrock - Recreation Team Leader, Parks and Beaches

Naomi Pagidas - Community Center Specialist, Parks and Beaches

Jethon Williams - IT Media Manager

Public Attendees: None

Meeting Minutes:

The Board approved the meeting via Zoom/CMT methods (Resolution 397-2020) and in-person.

Steve Miller made a motion to approve, and Jim Boilini seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

- **Agenda Changes / Approval of Agenda**

New Business: Committee to request budget information.

- **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes of October 16, 2023:** The Board had no changes to the October 16, 2023, meeting minutes. Matt Babich made a motion to approve, and Jim Boilini seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was approved.

Director Updates:

- **Big Pine Key Community Park Playground:** The playground has been open to the public as of this past weekend, January 27th, with huge success. The playground is a lot of fun and was a great surprise to the community. We received design ideas from multiple school kids, and they were happy that they had received the tall slides. The new rubber surface and sunshades are great additions as well. We encourage you to stop by if you haven't. Matt Babich reported that he just visited the park on his way to the meeting, stating he met with local mothers who were very impressed with the outcome of the playground. Steve Miller reported that the grand opening date couldn't have been better, considering it was the day of the opening baseball ceremony.
- **Bay Point Park:** Our department meets with the engineer several times monthly to develop the best remodeling options. Matt Babich asked if a curb would help the basketball courts. John Allen stated that a curb isn't an option because it would interfere with the courts, as the basketball goal is right in that area. The engineer will develop ideas to make this park more user-friendly after rain events. The community uses this park quite often, and all agree this is a beautiful park that needs updates.
- **Pine Channel Nature Park:** Trees have recently been replanted, and a new walking path was created. Trees outline this path, and it's more uniform. It looks fantastic. The repairs were funded by the Tourist Development Council.
- **Blue Heron Big Pine Key:** We have received the final drawings for the pickleball courts, which are currently in the permit process. These plans include three additional pickleball courts and parking spaces. The playground and fitness area are on separate plans, but these renovations will also happen soon. At our next meeting at the beginning of April; we should have an update.
- **Harry Harris Park:** New lighting at the ballfields is in the permit process. The new lights will be LED. We want to add a new playground near the baseball fields for children to enjoy while siblings play sports. The playground has no start date yet, but we will have an update soon. Fencing at the ballfield has been closed, making it much safer.
- **Rowell's Waterfront Park:** Closing time should be coming soon for Phase II of construction. Phase II includes multipurpose fields, a new walking trail, additional restrooms, and parking. We would love to add a dog park and have discussed it through the years.
- **Volunteer Fire Department Park:** The next in line for fitness court is coming very soon.
- **Old Settlers Park:** The new playground installation coming soon.
- **Big Pine Community Park:** A new golf cage is coming soon which will allow for hitting golf balls in the batting cages when there's no baseball.
- **Key Largo Park:** Artificial turf was installed at the batting cages, and it looks great. Fencing at the ballfield has been closed, making it much safer. Dr. Boilini acknowledges

that the Key Largo Community Park ballfields look as good as he's ever seen them. The improvements are remarkable.

- **Key Largo Pickleball Installation:** A contractor has been selected, and the installation should begin soon. The preconstruction meeting happens tomorrow, we will discuss commencement dates. Ten new pickleball courts are to be installed. It's a growing sport, and we are making a commitment countywide. Margie Smith asks if there will be some groundbreaking for this as it's a trendy sport with much interest. John Allen replied that this wasn't planned but is something the department would consider as we have so many great players in the county.
- **Bernstein Park:** We currently have an engineer reviewing plans for the re-sod project.
- **In-house Projects:** Our maintenance and facilities staff have done a great job with in-house projects, including netting, painting, and more to make a huge impact at our parks and facilities.

School Break Camps:

- **Winter Break Camp:** The camp was a great success. The staff did an excellent job of keeping the kids entertained with field trips. We received good feedback from the community and intend to extend it for summer. We will provide flyers with more information soon.

Sports:

- **Youth Sports:** Youth organizations are starting to play against each other keys-wide; we have terrific volunteers. It's great to see the friendly competition. Traveling to compete and seeing so much growth, including baseball, flag football, and more, is phenomenal. John Allen reported that he spoke to the organizer of the lacrosse to try to incorporate this sport in Big Pine Key. It's nice to see the children participating and enjoying different sports.

Dog Parks/Run:

- **Harry Harris:** With the current fencing at Harry Harris Park, we had a small area where we incorporated a dog run. This area will allow dogs to run around and play. There will be specific rules for this area to keep it safe for dogs and dog handlers, also making it available to all.

Jacob's Pool Management:

- **Jacob's Pool Management:** John Allen reported that we had a selection committee complete, and we are recommending one of the bidders scheduled to go to the BOCC meeting this coming Wednesday. We are also waiting on the state for approval. Dr. Boilini stated that he's excited about the change and believes this can be a smooth

transition that will benefit the community. It's a positive change for the community and a way to implement new programs. John Allen thanked Dr. Boilini and the Upper Keys pool Management for years of service and dedication.

Park Closure Ordinance:

- **Request to Advertise:** Adjusting Park hours to be more uniform and accommodate the community, including Bay Point Park, Blue Heron Park, Harry Harris Park, Peace Park, Big Pine Key Park, and all courts and fields. Matthew Babich asked who enforces the park hours, and John Allen responded that the park staff and sheriff's office do this as needed. Darcy Wadsworth recommended that Big Pine Community Park stay open till 9:30 p.m. Dr. Boilini made the motion to keep both Big Pine Community Park and Key Largo Community Park open until 9:30. Steve Miller seconded.

Higgs Beach Playground:

- **Playground Repair Update:** The procurement process has been completed, agreement signed with the contractor, and we've received some of the replacement equipment. We receive a lot of community inquiries regarding this park. We are still missing some equipment that should arrive soon. We will be sure to update our website and social media accounts. Steve Miller inquired about our plans to keep both playgrounds open at Higgs Beach. John Allen explained he intends to keep both playgrounds open as long as it's safe for the community.

Higgs Beach Pickleball and Tennis Court:

- **Repairs Update:** Construction is scheduled to start on February 15. The repairs are expected to take 30 days. These will be significant improvements for the community's enjoyment. John Allen reported that new water fountains have been installed, and additional repairs and improvements are happening at Higgs Beach, like the seawall repair that the Project Management department oversees. Bathrooms are under construction and moving along as well.

Pickleball and Tennis:

- **Implementing Rules:** John Allen stated that he would like to bring up rules he would like to implement and recommend adding to the ordinance, most likely at our next meeting. Matthew Babich reported that tennis is now second place to pickleball on the tracking app for Apple Watch.

Finalized 2024 proposed board meeting dates:

- Dates were discussed; everyone agreed to April 1st at Plantation Key, July 22nd at Key West, and October 21st at Big Pine Key.

New Business:

- **Advisory Board:** Matthew Babich asked if there's a way the Advisory Committee Members can request financial statements or budgeted finances versus actual. John Allen stated that we would be happy to bring capital items to the committee's next meeting to get their input. Suzi reported that she did not have that prepared tonight, but she handles budgets, including TDC, and can prepare something for the committee to see budget information at our next meeting.

Public Speaker:

- **Additional Public Comments:**

No comments.

- **Board Comments:**

No comments.

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Steve Miller and seconded by Matthew Babich. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.