

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

**April 01, 2024**

- In-Person and Virtual Meeting
- Minutes recorded by Erika Nodal, Executive Assistant, Monroe County Parks & Beaches
- Meeting called to order 6:07 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  
Scott Atkins - Operations Manager, Parks and Beaches  
Dawn DeBrule – Recreation Event Specialist, Parks and Beaches  
Kirrin Peart - Sr. Recreation Team Leader, Parks and Beaches  
Mike Piekenbrock - Recreation Team Leader, Parks and Beaches  
Jethon Williams - IT Media Manager

**Public Attendees:**

Denise Downing

**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:** Jacob's Aquatic Center Pool Management

- **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes of January 29, 2024:** Matthew Babich had a correction request. A name change was requested and will be corrected. Steve Miller made a motion to approve, and Matthew Babich seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was approved.
- **Election of Officers:** Amended agenda for election of officer's chair and vice chair. Steve Miller nominated Darcy Wadsworth as chair, and Margaret Smith seconded. All were in favor. Jim Boilini nominated Steve Miller as vice chair, and Darcy Wadsworth seconded. All were in favor.

## **Director Updates:**

- **Introduction of Scott Atkins as the new Operations Manager:** John Allen introduced Scott Atkins as the new Parks and Beaches Operations Manager. Scott comes to us from Pensacola Blue Wahoos, where he was in charge of the fields. His turf experience and knowledge will be helpful to us. Scott introduced himself and mentioned he's originally from Virginia and that he's a huge baseball fan with lots of turf experience. He reported he's excited to be on board and appreciates the department being nice and welcoming. Jim Boilini asked what Scott's responsibilities would be in his role. Scott explained that he would manage operations key-wide and is now meeting all staff and becoming familiar with their day-to-day operations.
- **Volunteer Fire Department Park:** Steve Miller asked about the recent project at the Volunteer Fire Department Park. John stated that the new fitness court is amazing, and he's used it a couple of times. Overall, it gets a lot of use. Matt Babich said he went there today to see it and thought it was nice; he also reported playing corn hole while there.
- **Bay Point Park:** John reported that Bay Point is another project that project management has been working on with the engineers. We are trying to figure out how to best fix the flooding issues. Suzi Rubio reported that this project will be a multi-departmental project due to the flooding also affecting neighboring properties and roads. She also explained that we currently only have engineering and design in the funding plan and can move forward once we have a better idea of engineering. Steve Miller asked about the problem with the basketball courts there. John reported that half of the court is closed due to the coffee shop runoff and sand affecting it.
- **Blue Heron Big Pine Key:** Blue Heron Park is still in the permitting process, as we had to wait for additional plans to permit the playground. Both the courts and playground plans have been submitted for permitting. Steve Miller asked about the building at Blue Heron, and Suzi Rubio mentioned we are not updating it. The plans include parking, courts, and a new playground. Steve Miller clarified that he is asking how the building is doing and if it's useable. John Allen reported that the building is in use and another department currently uses it as office space. Matt Babich asked when we thought this project would start. John stated he can't guess the dates at the moment, but he understands the need for this and will provide an update as soon as he has it.
- **Higgs Seawall Repairs:** Suzi Rubio reported that the seawall at Higgs Beach fell during a storm and has been temporarily repaired. This is a project management project, and they are waiting on the final reports to proceed. Steve Miller asked if there's any information about The City of Key West taking over Higgs Beach. John Allen reported we have been moving forward with projects and repairs and he doesn't have information on that, but he would share if he received it.
- **Higgs Beach New Restrooms:** Suzi Rubio reported that the restroom project is overseen by project management and is on track to be completed by mid-June.
- **Rowell's Waterfront Park:** Suzi Rubio reports that Phases II and III are still pending. As previously discussed, the bids received for Phase II were higher than expected, and Project Management Director, Kevin Wilson, and the project manager in charge are trying to devise a plan to mitigate that, possibly cost adjusting or changing plans. Steve Miller asked how things are going with the neighbors there; John Allen reported he communicates with the neighbors often and has yet to have complaints about any issues. The only ongoing complaints are that dog owners are allowing their dogs off leash, and staff is doing their best to enforce that.

- **Harry Harris Playground:** The new playground broke ground today. It's going to be good for the children. It is near the ballfield. Suzi Rubio reported that the company estimates it will be complete in about six weeks. She mentioned that this playground will also have the pour-and-play rubber surface installed.
- **Old Settlers Park:** John Allen reported that the new playground should open soon. We are waiting on the final documents from the contractor. This playground looks fantastic, with a couple of new slides. It has natural mulch, which keeps the natural feel of the playground. James Boilini asked about the butterfly garden and whether we were making any changes there. John Allen stated that we've received input from the community in the past, and they seem to like it as it is now. With Scott Atkins on board, we hope to maintain this area better.
- **Higgs Beach Courts:** We hope to open the courts on April 8th at 8:30 a.m., and we are setting two of the tennis courts as multipurpose courts; they should be done this week. The color looks good, and the fence is nice, and we are excited about it.
- **Higgs Beach Playground:** We had work done on the playground; additional parts are needed, and unfortunately, the needed parts are now being made. The company states they will have a proposal ready for us tomorrow. The shade sails are set to be replaced this Friday, and we are looking forward to that also.
- **Big Pine Key Community Park:** Steve Miller asked about the bandshell, and Suzi Rubio reported that project management is handling it. It's currently in permitting and may not have to go out for RFP. Also, we have a couple of light poles that should be installed soon on the multipurpose field. James Boilini asked about the LED lighting and whether it will be countywide. John Allen explained that this will be park by park right now. The next one he would like to see complete is Key Largo Park.

### **Capital Budget Request:**

- **FY25 Request:** John Allen explained the focus for the coming year would be to repair some fencing, the backstop, Jacob's Aquatic updates, and boat ramps such as 4A and Harry Harris, and Skateparks. We are looking to request a TDC grant for some, like Jacob's Aquatic Pool, but if that's not the case, we will use a capital budget. John Allen also reported with the help of Suzi Rubio and Kevin Wilson that they are putting plans in place for capital dollars as playgrounds would need to be replaced approximately every ten years, resurfacing every seven years, and re-sodding about every seven years. Jim Boilini asked if state funding was available to help with the 4A boat ramp. Suzi Rubio explained there's a possibility of a partnership with FWC. A colleague informed her about it, and she forwarded it to our attorney for review before our department makes any decisions. John Allen reported a couple of other things we are looking to accomplish are the dog parks in the upper keys and Astro City Park due to its history. Matt Babich asked what the budget was, and Suzi Rubio reported that the Fiscal Year 2023 budget was 3.8 million dollars. Last year, an additional cost center was requested for recreation, so the budget went to slightly over 5 million dollars for fiscal year 2024. This does include salaries, camps, and operating expenses. John Allen reported he received a lot of support from Kevin Wilson, Roman Gastesi, and all the Commissioners and the community input has helped a lot.

## Camps

- **Upcoming Summer Camp:** Dates are tentative for four weeks at Big Pine Key Community Park, from June 3rd to July 26th—two weeks in Plantation Key and two weeks at Sugarloaf School Volleyball Camp in June. We have six weeks in total. Sign-ups for summer programs will begin sometime in May. Kirrin Peart explained we are just waiting to finalize a couple of documents and work on our staffing. Margaret Smith asked the maximum number of kids for camps, and Kirrin Peart reported 20 campers. John Allen asked if anyone knew of someone, such as a teacher, who would be interested in working summer camp as a camp supervisor. Kirrin Peart stated finalized dates will be sent via email soon.
- **Spring Camp Review:** John Allen reported that he was able to drop in at the Plantation Key Community Center for spring camp, and he thought it was amazing that all the kids were having fun! Kirrin Peart explained the spring camp operated in Plantation Key for three days: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. She described it as a huge success with the on-site field trips; Melody Tuschel, the Monroe County Recycling Coordinator, FWC, and Coral Restoration Foundation, made it enjoyable. Margaret Smith asked what the ages are for camp; Kirrin Peart reported the ages are six to thirteen, and she stated she notices 11-year-olds and up are very helpful and want to step into a leadership role and become someone the smaller kids look up to.
- **Recreation:** John Allen stated Kirrin, Mike, and Naomi are doing a fantastic job of creating programs at the community center such as art programs and men's yoga. He stated we have good ideas for this coming year. John Allen reported we now have Dawn DeBrule helping with our special events. Suzi Rubio introduced Dawn and reported Dawn has been a member of the community for many years and realized she has a skillset that will be beneficial to the department and assisting with larger scale events. Margaret Smith asked about what kind of events she's looking to set up, and Dawn responded she's looking to create any larger scale events and looking forward to discussing options with Nathalia.

## Keys Kids Swim

- **Keys Kids Swim:** John Allen reported that today was the start of Keys Kids Swim, and he's looking forward to teaching and working with the children. Only about 11% of the kindergarteners were able to pass the 5-foot swim test on day one, and we expect this number to increase by the end of two weeks. He knows the importance of the program and its expansion. Jim Boilini reported stopping by today and noticing the children encouraging others to swim, and it was great to watch on day one.

## New Business:

### Jacob's Aquatic Center Pool Management:

- **Jacob's Pool Management:** John Allen reported that Jacob's Aquatic Center has a new management company, Danielle and Matt Satterly, who have been there since March 8th. They have done a phenomenal job of starting up. John Allen thanked Jim Boilini for all the years of service dedicated to Jacob's Aquatic Center. With the new company taking over, they seem eager to do much for the community. Next year, they may be able to staff Keys Kids Swim. We look forward to the great things they expect to do for the community. Darcy Wadsworth asked about Keys Kids Swim and how we expect to expand. John Allen explained it all depends on staffing and donations received. John Allen reported this year the program seems to be running smoother due to the busses schedule. Kirrin Peart explained this year Key Largo School and Plantation Key School put in a grant request for the voucher program. So, although Plantation Key School kindergarteners did not receive the

swim lessons, they will receive vouchers for lessons after their field trip swim test. Jim Boilini reported that the Red Cross recommends 6-7 kids per instructor, but with this program, we keep it to three kids per instructor or four at most. Jim Boilini asked about the YMCA contract. John Allen reported we've decided to terminate the contract; StandGuard will plan to incorporate summer camp and afterschool programs moving forward.

- **Harry Harris:** Steve Miller asked about the upcoming Harry Harris meetings. Suzi Rubio explained that it is not an actual Parks and Beaches meeting; it's Rhonda Haag, the Chief Resilience Officer. Rhonda is the person who is doing all the canal restorations; she wants to put in a boardwalk at Harry Harris to help mitigate some of the effects of storm damage and make it a more resilient space.

**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 7:27 p.m.