

MONROE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

October 21, 2024

- In-Person and Virtual Meeting
- Minutes recorded by Erika Nodal, Executive Assistant, Monroe County Parks & Beaches
- Meeting called to order 6:05 p.m.
- Salute to Flag

Board Members in-person and via Zoom attendance:

Darcy Wadsworth, Chairperson
Jim Boilini
Margaret Smith

Media Present:

No Media Present

Monroe County was represented by:

John Allen - Director, Parks and Beaches
Nathalia Archer - Assistant County Attorney
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
Cary Vick - Acting Director, Project Management

Public Attendees:

None

Meeting Minutes:

The Board approved the meeting via Zoom/CMT methods (Resolution 397-2020) and in-person. Jim Boilini made a motion to approve, and Margaret Smith seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

Agenda Changes / Approval of Agenda

New Business:

- **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes of July 22, 2024:** Jim Boilini made a motion to approve, and Margaret Smith seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was approved.

Project Management Updates:

- **Blue Heron Pickleball Courts:** Cary Vick reports advertising the project and there were three bidders, and the apparent low bidder was selected and approved during the last board meeting. We issued a final notice to them today, and if there is no response, we will proceed with the second-lowest bidder.
- **Bernstein Park:** Cary Vick report, we are continuing to finalize the design plan through ongoing meetings. We have a hard deadline of December 31st to complete the construction documents, and we remain on track to meet this goal. While we have some funding available for the upgrades, we may need

to advertise the project with bid alternates. The highest priority and base bid will focus on replacing the turf. Additional upgrades, such as expanding the storage shed and improving the irrigation system, may be included as alternates. Construction documents will be ready by the end of the year, along with secured funding for the project.

- **Bay Point Park:** Cary Vick reports conducted some preliminary engineering and surveying, which raised concerns about potential flooding impacts on the park caused by the raised parking lot at Baby's Coffee. The new owner has reached out to the county, and we have a meeting planned to discuss the situation and explore solutions. Margaret asked for clarification on the issue, and Cary Vick reported that there is a Monroe County Road alleyway separating Baby's Coffee from the park. The previous owner of Baby's Coffee added significant fill to raise the parking lot, which has contributed to flooding issues during heavy rain and high tides, rendering the courts unusable at times. The primary goal is to keep the park active for the community. While there aren't many clear solutions currently, this meeting presents an opportunity to collaborate with the landowner and explore all available options to achieve a positive outcome for the community.
- **Rowell's Waterfront:** Cary Vick reports last we met; we were working on redesigning the improvements for what we call Rowell's Phase II. We applied for a HUD Community Development Block Grant and received an agreement for approximately \$2.9 million. However, when we put the project out to bid, the lowest bid came in at nearly \$4 million. As a result, we have been in the process of redesigning the project. Complicating matters, the original designer decided to exit the Florida market and was not cooperative. It was mutually decided to terminate their contract, which was approved last month. We are now working with a new company, Land Design, to handle the redesign. The contractor has agreed to a lower amount based on the redesign, and we hope to submit revisions for permitting and approve the revised plan soon. With funding already in place, we are focused on keeping the project moving forward. Additionally, TDC-funded improvements including tiki huts have been put on hold until Phase II is underway. Jim Boilini asked for clarification on the design/construction changes. He understands the community met several times with the County to come up with the design and he wants to know if this will go back out to the public since the original plans will change. Cary Vick explains the basis is still there and that the change mainly focuses on phasing out the overall project. Cary Vick reports that when the initial Rowell's updates were advertised there would be a second restroom facility and that's one of the changes, removing that additional restroom due to funding. John Allen explains that before he joined the County, there was a conceptual drawing that included a playground, splashpad, and dog park. He notes that the County will engage with the community again to understand their needs and determine how to incorporate these additional upgrades, as well as explore options for moving forward, potentially using capital funding. Cary Vick appreciates the clarification and emphasizes the importance of reaching back out to the community, noting that gathering their input is something that will be done.
- **Higgs Beach:** Cary Vick reports that all issues with the playground have been addressed. The team has completed as many repairs under warranty as possible, and the remaining repairs will be funded through construction with FEMA reimbursement. Additionally, Cary Vick highlights ongoing problems with the seawall, which continue to deteriorate. Consultants are currently reviewing a complete replacement of the Higgs Beach seawall. This initial phase will focus on a short section between West Martello and the area behind the restrooms, necessary to protect both the beach and the new restroom facilities. Darcy Wadsworth inquires whether the project will go out to bid by the end of the year. Cary Vick responds that there is a good chance but cannot confirm this with certainty.
- **Key Largo Pickleball Courts:** Cary Vick reports that the courts are essentially complete, with only a minor last-minute issue: the contractor was unable to source the originally selected bike rack. As a result, the bike rack will be removed from the contract, and the County will procure it separately. Jim Boilini

commends Cary Vick, noting that the courts look fantastic and are well-equipped with ample parking and bleachers.

- **Big Pine Key Park Amphitheater:** Cary Vick reports the Big Pine Amphitheater project is progressing, with additional foundation designs recently approved and permitted. The contractor has completed this stage, and visible progress should begin soon. Once construction starts, it is expected to move quickly. Cary Vick explains that the amphitheater is a pre-designed kit purchased as a complete package.
- **Jacobs Aquatic Center:** Jim Boilini inquired about the progress of the pool lining project. John Allen reported that the project is set to begin this Friday. Cary Vick added that the project has been assigned and will commence with draining the pool on Friday, followed by the liner replacement shortly thereafter. Jim Boilini inquired about the contract, if it was split between two entities. Cary Vick clarified that two separate companies are involved and are coordinating with each other. John Allen also noted that once the project begins, a section of the park will be closed temporarily.

Parks and Beaches Director Update:

- **Pickleball and Higgs Beach Hurricane Damages:** John Allen echoes some of Cary Vick's earlier remarks, highlighting the popularity of pickleball. He notes that Bay Point Park courts are consistently full, with many people reaching out with inquiries. John Allen expresses his appreciation for the sport's growth and is pleased that the facilities are able to meet the demand. Darcy Wadsworth asks where the pickleball players play at Bay Point Park? John Allen reports they play on the tennis courts as the basketball courts flood quite often. John Allen reports the courts at Bay Point Park need attention. He reports the surge and wave action from the last two storms, despite their distance, were surprisingly powerful. The water rose above the courts at Higgs Beach and came very close to the new restrooms. He emphasizes the urgency of making repairs and expresses gratitude for Cary's efforts in addressing these issues.

In-House Projects

- **Bay Point Park:** Scott Atkins reported the addition of two heavy-duty portable nets, bringing the total to four portable nets. He also noted that some recent sidewalk repairs have been completed.
- **Higgs Beach:** Scott Atkins reports repairing the Higgs dog park entrance at the opening gate suggesting the entire fencing should be replaced with FEMA funding in the near future. Scott Atkins reports the volleyball post and nets were recently completely refurbished making them look brand new.
- **Blue Heron Park:** Scott Atkins reports a golf driving range cage will be completed soon. We already have the netting and were waiting on this upcoming storm to pass prior to installing.
- **Big Pine Park Dugouts:** Scott Atkins reports new benches and helmet storage recently installed for the upcoming baseball season.
- **Harry Harris Park:** Scott Atkins reports that staff recently replaced the picnic tables under the shelters. He also mentions that in the near future, they plan to add two synthetic game mounds, which will be beneficial for both age groups.
- **Key Largo Park:** Scott Atkins reports that new dog waste stations and a new leg press fitness equipment will be installed soon. Additionally, the safety fence top protectors need to be replaced, and the panels at the hockey rink will also be repaired.
- **Athletic Fields:** Scott Atkins reports that after the soccer season ends, we plan to aerate and overseed all athletic fields to alleviate compaction and prepare the grass for the baseball seasons. Jim Boilini

noted that he recently received community requests to add lighting at the Key Largo Park batting cages, as they become unusable after 5 PM due to darkness. He suggested installing a solar light as a solution.

- **Additional Upcoming Projects:** John Allen reported that upcoming in-house projects include repairing or replacing a section of fencing at Harry Harris that recently fell and addressing repairs needed for the shelter at Key Largo Park. He emphasized the significant effort required to maintain the parks and expressed gratitude to the staff for their outstanding work in keeping them in excellent condition.

Parks and Beaches Audit

- **2023 Summer Camp:** John Allen mentioned that a recent audit by the Clerk of Courts brought forward several recommendations, one of which was transitioning to a cashless system. This has already been implemented, with credit card terminals now in place to facilitate payments. He also reported plans to implement a user-friendly management system to streamline camp registrations and property use.
- **Harry Harris Tollbooth:** John Allen reported that the tollbooth transitioned to a cashless system in response to the recent audit, which has now been successfully implemented. Additionally, cameras were installed—one inside the booth and one outside—to support audit recommendations and improve park security. He also mentioned exploring a parking application to simplify processes for both staff and the community.
- **Taxes:** John Allen reported that the implementation of tax charges has been successfully put into place as of this past weekend. John Allen thanked Nathalia Archer and Erika Nodal for their assistance in implementing these changes. He reports and wants the community to know we are moving forward and making the necessary changes to improve and enhance our overall operations.

Update on Recreation Programs:

- **Special Events and Recreation:** John Allen commended the tremendous job Dawn DeBrule has done in organizing our special events. Additionally, he highlighted the vibrant activity at our parks today, including Friendship Park and Key Largo Park, where many youths are actively participating in soccer, flag football, and basketball. He also noted the success of the haunted house event at Big Pine Park this past weekend, which was a huge hit. Plans are being discussed to expand this event to another park, in the future. John Allen also mentioned the possibility of extending our summer camp programs to cover the entire summer at multiple locations. He has expressed interest in creating more in-house programs and hopes to provide additional updates at the next meeting. Lastly, John shared positive feedback on the JOY Center at the Plantation Key Community Center, which hosts classes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Having personally attended a few classes while in the area, he encourages everyone to stop by and enjoy the offerings.

2025 Budget:

- **Budget:** John Allen shared that a list of purchases and projects for the next fiscal year is underway. He expressed gratitude for the support from the commissioners and advisory board members, as well as for the overall budget, which helps address the needs of the community.

2025 Staffing:

- **Staffing:** John Allen shared that we are seeking temporary staff for summer camps, as some recreation staff members will be leaving for college. He encouraged anyone who knows a teacher or college student interested in these positions to refer them to the team. Margaret Smith inquired about the locations for the summer camps, and John Allen confirmed that they will be held at Plantation Key Community Center, Big Pine Key Park, and Bernstein Park. John also expressed a desire to extend the summer camps to run throughout the entire summer. Margaret Smith agreed, noting that longer camp durations

are highly beneficial to the community, especially since some camps only last a week. Margaret Smith appreciated the efforts. John Allen reported that the Parks and Beaches Department recently acquired a new van to support transportation needs for camps and field trips. Jim Boilini inquired whether the van was a County vehicle or designated specifically for the Parks and Beaches Department. John clarified that while all assets belong to the County, the van is allocated for use by the Parks and Beaches Department.

Thank you to Margaret Smith for her Term of Service:

- **Margaret Smith:** John Allen expressed heartfelt gratitude for Margaret Smith's term of service, thanking her for her invaluable advocacy for parks and beaches. Margaret Smith shared that she joined the board when her children were younger and believes having someone with younger children on the board would greatly benefit the department. She has recommended a candidate to take her place. Margaret Smith also reflected on her time with the board, expressing appreciation for the significant progress made in recent years. Jim Boilini expressed his thanks, stating he will miss Margaret contributions as she brought a fresh, younger perspective to the board. Darcy Wadsworth also shared her gratitude, adding that she believes Margaret will continue to drive progress within the county in other capacities.

2025 Proposed Board Meeting Dates:

- **Proposed Dates:** Erika Nodal presented the proposed 2025 meeting dates as follows: January 27th in Marathon, March 24th in Big Pine Key, July 21st in Key West, and October 20th in Key Largo. She asked the board if they had reviewed the dates and were in agreement. Jim Boilini noted that he would be out of the country on July 21st. Darcy Wadsworth suggested approving the January date and tentatively approving the others until the new board member is in place, with final approval at the next board meeting. Erika agreed that this was a good idea.

Public Speaker:

None

Additional Public Comments:

No comments

Board Comments:

Margaret Smith expressed her gratitude to Jim Boilini for his efforts in ensuring the community has a pool to enjoy in Key Largo, mentioning that her children love visiting the Jacobs Aquatic Center. Darcy Wadsworth inquired about the Bocce courts in Key West, and John Allen clarified that these courts are managed by the City of Key West, not Monroe County Parks and Beaches. Darcy also mentioned hearing that the hockey rink in Key West is closing down. John confirmed this, adding that he recently received a verbal request to use the hockey rink at Big Pine Park. He expressed strong support for the idea, noting that the rink currently sees little use and could provide a great opportunity for local kids in the neighborhood to get involved in hockey. John Allen also highlighted the potential for somehow incorporating lacrosse in the middle keys, where it's not available compared to the upper and lower keys. He sees this as a great opportunity to introduce the sport to the area. Margaret Smith then asked about soccer programs in the Key Largo area for younger children. John responded that there is T-ball available in Key Largo, and Monroe Premier uses Harry Harris Park for soccer. While he wasn't certain of the exact age groups, he believed it included 4- to 5-year-olds. Lastly, Darcy Wadsworth expressed her gratitude to the Parks and Beaches Department for their support in allowing the Rotary Club to organize the haunted house at Big Pine Key Community Park. She shared that the event was a great success, attracting many donations, which enable the Rotary Club to give back to the community. Darcy Wadsworth also highlighted the strong collaboration

between the Parks and Beaches Department, the Sheriff's Office, and Monroe County Fire Department, emphasizing her satisfaction with the turnout. Dary Wadsworth expressed her excitement for the haunted house next year which is already on the calendar.

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Darcy Wadsworth and seconded by Jim Boilini. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.