

MONROE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

January 27, 2025

- In-Person and Virtual Meeting
- Minutes recorded by Erika Nodal, Executive Assistant, Monroe County Parks & Beaches
- Meeting called to order 6:00 p.m.
- Salute to Flag

Board Members in-person and via Zoom attendance:

Darcy Wadsworth, Chairperson
Jim Boilini
Steve Miller
Matthew Babich

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
Naomi Pagidas, Community Center Specialist, 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. Steve Miller made a motion to approve and Jim Boilini seconded the motion. Motion was approved.

Agenda Changes / Approval of Agenda

Darcy Wadsworth inquired if there were any changes to the agenda, while Matthew Babich shared that he could not attend the previous meeting due to a medical emergency.

- **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes of October 21, 2024:** Steve Miller made a motion to approve, and Jim Boilini seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was approved.

Project Management Updates:

- **Blue Heron Pickleball Courts:** Cary Vick reported we are approaching completion, with the project originally scheduled to be finished in January. Good progress was made in December, so it should be ready soon. Matt Babich inquired about the court placement, and John Allen provided details on where

they will be located. Steve Miller asked about the expected completion, and Cary Vick shared that it was originally set for the end of January, but there have been a few delays.

- **Bernstein Park:** Cary Vick reported that the construction drawings for Bernstein Park have been completed and should be submitted for permitting soon. He stated that natural grass will be replaced with better grass, including completely new sod and new grading to improve depth and drainage. New benches, shades and upgrades to the fencing will also be included. Additionally, he notes that funds have been allocated in FY25, and once the permits are approved, we will be moving forward with the bidding process.
- **Bay Point Park:** Cary Vick reported there are no updates on Bay Point Park at the moment. We are currently seeking additional funding to make the necessary upgrades.
- **Rowell's Waterfront Park:** Cary Vick reported that we had to rescope the project to fit our budget. The revised plans have been submitted for permitting, and the permit has been approved. We are now awaiting approval from Florida Commerce, which oversees HUD. We have a HUD grant for Rowell's Waterfront Park and are waiting for approval, as well as for all required public notices to comply with the grant. We are making progress and getting closer to moving forward.
- **Higgs Beach:** Cary reported that the playground on the oceanside has been completed and is now open. Matthew Babich attended the opening of the park and mentioned that it was a big success with many kids present.
- **Key Largo Pickleball Courts:** Cary Vick reported that this project is now complete.
- **Big Pine Key Park Amphitheater:** Cary Vick reported that comments from permitting have been addressed. The contractors are building the foundation, and we have some drainage work to complete, but we are making progress. Steve Miller asked if we expect completion by summer, and Cary Vick responded that it should be done by early summer, if not sooner. Matt Babich asked for clarification on the location, and John Allen confirmed.
- **Jacobs Aquatic Center:** Cary Vick reported that the relining of the lap pool at Jacobs Aquatic Center was completed in December.

Parks and Beaches Director Update:

- **Welcome Matthew Sexton:** John Allen would like to begin by welcoming our new advisory board member, Matthew Sexton.
- **Project and Repairs:** John Allen shared that a major project currently underway is the replacement of the backstops at Key Largo Park, which were in need of repairs. John Allen also mentioned that additional fence repairs are coming soon to Harry Harris Park. He highlighted new games added at Palm Villa Park, such as concrete cornhole, and shared that more games have been purchased and will soon be installed at Watson Field for the children. Additionally, he talked about the fields being prepped for baseball season, noting that they don't get much of a break, but when they do, it's beneficial for their upkeep. Another upcoming project is the installation of double gates at the Higgs Beach pickleball courts to improve access. This should be completed soon, and we will follow up with the fence contractor this week for a confirmed date. Darcy Wadsworth inquired about the golf netting at Blue Heron Park, and John confirmed that it has been installed and is ready for use. He also stated that once the courts at this park are complete, he is confident the park will see plenty of activity.
- **Keys Kids Swim:** John Allen shared that a scheduled meeting is set for tomorrow night with all those involved in the program including StandGuard Aquatics. During the meeting, we will discuss the program further. The dates have been set for April 28 to May 9 at Jacobs Aquatic's Center, and efforts

are still underway to finalize Plantation Key School at Founders Park to help expand the program and benefit more children at no cost.

- **School Break Camps:** John Allen reported that we are currently in the planning stages for the spring break camp at Big Pine Park. Additionally, efforts are underway to expand the summer camp program to more weeks and multiple locations. He also shared that Special Olympics recently reached out and expressed interest in hosting a camp at Bernstein Park, which is something we are discussing. John commended our recreation team for doing a great job with planning and mentioned that we are looking to hire more staff for the summer, with openings expected to be available soon.
- **Big Pine Park Amphitheater:** John Allen reported that the amphitheater is progressing well, and once he knows the opening details, he plans to organize something for the community. He mentioned that he's been in discussions with Steve Miller about putting this event together. He stated that the community can truly benefit from the amphitheater for local events, emphasizing that it's intended to serve the community at no cost.
- **Capital Items:** John Allen reported that he will be sharing a capital items list, which is essentially a big "dream" list. While he understands that not all items may be attainable, many are essential, such as the Big Pine Skate Park and the one at Key Largo Park. Some items are new additions that would greatly benefit the community, while others are upgrades that are much needed. He also requested the board members input, asking them to let him know of any other items not on his list that they might consider essential.
- **Staff Openings:** John Allen reported that the operations manager position is currently vacant as Scott Atkins recently resigned due to relocating from the Keys. He also mentioned that there will be other available positions to assist with school break camps and events. Matt Babich inquired about staffing and how many different areas we cover, and John responded that we staff both the upper and lower Keys, taking care of all the parks and beaches.
- **Thank you, Nathalia Archer:** John Allen stated, "Last but not least, I want to take a moment to thank Nathalia Archer, who has been our attorney for Parks and Beaches for some time. We truly appreciate all her efforts and everything she's done for our department." Nathalia Archer expressed that it has been a pleasure to serve as the department's counsel. She also mentioned that there will be an item on the agenda for the next BOCC meeting on February 19th regarding Wisteria Island, noting that one of the board members had inquired about this in the past.
- **Confirming the 2025 Board Meeting Dates:** These meetings are typically scheduled quarterly on the third Monday, with some exceptions. The proposed dates for 2025 are March 24th at Big Pine, July 21st at Key West, and October 20th at Key Largo. All dates are agreed upon and approved.

Old Business:

Steve Miller inquired about the navigational tower at Higgs Beach, noting its removal and asking if there are any future plans for the area. Nathalia Archer clarified that a few years ago, the county entered into an agreement with the City of Key West to acquire the Hawk missile site, a park located near the airport. The airport required the property for mitigation purposes related to renovations. The agreement outlines the addition of a multi-purpose field, either at Higgs Beach or the Hawk missile site. However, the Hawk missile site isn't ideal for this purpose, as it must remain designated for passive recreation, making Higgs Beach the preferred location. Additionally, we had to go through a process to gain approval from the United States, as the land is owned by the Navy.

Interlocal Agreement with Sugarloaf Key School: John Allen reported that we are in the process of renewing the interlocal agreement with Sugarloaf Key School, as the current one will expire in April. He

mentioned that he recently met with the principal, and there will be some minor updates to the agreement, which is 20 years old.

Geiger Key Boat Ramp and Boca Chica Beach: John Allen reported that we recently renewed the lease/license for Geiger Key Boat Ramp and Boca Chica Beach. Matthew Babich asked about the possibility of installing a porta potty at Boca Chica Beach. John Allen responded that we could inquire with the Navy and that he will follow up.

New Business:

None

Public Speaker:

None

Additional Public Comments:

No comments

Board Comments:

Higgs Beach Pickleball Courts: Matthew Babich added one more comment, expressing his gratitude to the board for their decision on the number of pickleball courts. He stated that the Higgs Beach courts are excellent, and the number of courts is perfect, as they are being well utilized.

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Darcy Wadsworth and seconded by Jim Boilini. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.