

MONROE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

March 31, 2025

- In-Person and Virtual Meeting
- Minutes recorded by Erika Nodal, Executive Assistant, Monroe County Parks & Beaches
- Meeting called to order 6:01 p.m.
- Salute to Flag

Board Members in-person and via Zoom attendance:

Darcy Wadsworth, Chairperson
Jim Boilini
Steve Miller
Matthew Babich
Matthew Sexton

Media Present:

No Media Present

Monroe County was represented by:

John Allen - Director, Parks and Beaches
Ana Walter - Assistant County Attorney
Pedro Mercado - Senior Assistant County Attorney
Dawn DeBrule – Recreation Event Specialist, Parks and Beaches
Tammy Acevedo – Budget and Contract Specialist
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, no changes.

- **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes of January 27, 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 this should have been completed by now; however, we anticipate it will be finished very soon.

- **Bernstein Park:** Cary Vick reported that the project is still in the permitting phase, with recent comments received from the building department. Progress is moving along well. Matt Babich asked if anyone present had reviewed the plans or knew what they entailed. Cary explained that the first priority is upgrading the natural turf, which includes addressing drainage issues, improving irrigation, and making minor landscape enhancements, as well as adding shade screens and fencing. Steve Miller mentioned that the "I Love Stock Island" event typically takes place in June and asked whether construction would likely be underway at that time. Cary Vick responded that he does not believe construction will commence until after June and requested the event schedule so he can confirm this soon.
- **Rowell's Waterfront Park:** Cary Vick reported that this is an ongoing project and that we are getting closer to the construction phase, although a contractor has not yet been selected. Since this is a grant-funded project, adjustments to the scope were necessary, requiring plan revisions and resubmission to the building department. He noted that he expects to have much better news by the next advisory board meeting.
- **Higgs Beach:** Cary Vick reported that the playground was recently completed and that planning is underway for additional Hurricane Ian repairs, which are currently in the design phase. He will provide an update once the plans are finalized. Cary Vick reports we are getting estimates from engineers and trying to allocate funding for the seawall repairs.
- **Big Pine Key Park Amphitheater:** Cary Vick reported that the Big Pine Park Amphitheater has made significant progress, and since today's meeting is being held there, he recommends taking a moment to check it out. He noted that a change order was issued to add additional lighting to improve overall illumination. While the lead time for the lighting is still uncertain, he expects the amphitheater to be completed within the next few weeks.

Jacobs Aquatic Center: Cary Vick reported that John Allen received an updated quote for the repairs and replacement of the Pirate Ship activity pool. Although TDC funding was awarded for the upgrade this year, the updated estimate is significantly higher than anticipated. The recommended approach is to request additional funding for FY26 and, if possible, roll over the current year's funding to support the project.

- **Key Largo Pickleball Courts:** Darcy Wadsworth inquired about the courts and their level of usage. Cary Vick responded that the courts are heavily used and everything is going well.
- **Bay Point Park:** Matt Babich inquired about Bay Point and whether there were any updates. Cary Vick reported that there are no updates at the moment but noted that the area needs more attention. He also mentioned that the new owner of Baby's Coffee has some plans. Additionally, Cary Vick stated that changes are needed to the alleyway, including improvements to stormwater drainage.
- **Parks and Beaches Director Update:**
- **Welcome Assistant County Attorney, Ana Walter:** John Allen introduced Ana Walter and expressed that he's very happy to have her on board. He mentioned that she has jumped right in, actively assisting us. John added that Pedro Mercado has also joined in to assist, and he appreciates both of their efforts. Pedro Mercado stated that he has been working with the county for 21 years and has been helping Ana get up to speed with county procedures.
- **Welcome Matthew Sexton:** John Allen also welcomed Matt Sexton to the Parks and Beaches Advisory Board, expressing his happiness to have him here and volunteering his time. He mentioned that he's heard many positive things about Matthew from the community.

- **Project and Repairs:** John Allen reported that at Bernstein Park, repair parts for the playground have recently been ordered, and the repairs will be carried out in-house. Matt Babich asked about repainting the rubber surfaces in certain areas. John Allen explained that these surfaces can't simply be painted over, but they do wear out over-time especially in high-use spots like under the swings. John Allen reported that the beachside playground at Harry Harris Park is older, with one of the two areas in need of replacement. He mentioned that quotes have been requested, and they hope to move forward with the replacement in the near future. We are currently obtaining quotes for the installation of tiki huts at several locations, including Blue Heron Park, Big Pine Park, and Higgs Beach. We're always looking for ways to add more shade and make our spaces more comfortable for everyone. Additionally, Parks is considering adding shaded seating areas near the bocce court and tennis courts to further improve the visitor experience. John Allen also noted that new pickleball nets have been added at Higgs Beach. We're also in the process of replacing outdated water fountains and installing new ones at locations that currently don't have them.
- **Keys Kids Swim Final Dates:** John Allen reported that Key Largo School will be using Jacobs Aquatic Center for swim lessons from April 28 to May 9. This year, we are expanding the program to include Plantation Key School, which will hold lessons at Founders Park from May 12 to May 23. This marks the third year these schools have participated in the program. This marks the third year of the program.
- **Spring/Summer Camp Review:** John Allen reports that we recently held spring camp at Big Pine Park, which went great. The staff did an excellent job, and it was the first time we used our county van for field trips. John also mentioned that there will be open positions for summer camp soon, so if you know anyone interested, please send them our way.
- **Capital List/Budget:** John Allen reports that we are currently working on the budget and have recently submitted a 10-year capital improvement plan. This plan has been shared with the advisory board committee for their recommendations. It's important to note that the plan serves as a guide and is not a guarantee. John expects to have more updates as budget meetings progress. Matt Babich asked when the new budget will take effect. Tammy Acevedo responded that the fiscal year runs from October 1st to September 30th. Matt also inquired about the cost of a playground, and John Allen estimated that the Big Pine Playground costs around \$500,000. Darcy Wadsworth noted that this playground and park see a lot of use, hosting many youth athletic sports. Darcy also asked if Big Pine Park is the busiest or most used park, to which John Allen responded that he believes Key Largo Park gets slightly more usage. Matt Sexton asked about the level of usage at the skate park on Big Pine Key. John Allen said both the Big Pine Key and Key Largo skate parks get a lot of action. Matthew Sexton said skate parks are important to him and thinks his young son will really enjoy them. John Allen also mentioned future plans to renovate the skate park.

Old Business:

Airport Property: Pedro Mercado explained that the missile site will be developed as a passive recreation area. The mitigation process hasn't started yet, but the city has already removed the junk, and we're hoping to begin mitigation soon. We successfully dismantled the beacon and are working on transferring the site from federal to county control so we can build a field there. The current plan is to have walking trails at the missile site and a sports field where the old beacon was located.

Interlocal Agreement with Sugarloaf Key

New Business:

Scout Key: Steve Miller inquired about Scout Key. There's a house on the property that could be demolished, and a beautiful beach nearby that isn't being utilized. The advisory board recommends the County explore the beach as a potential revenue source.

Public Speaker:

None

Additional Public Comments:

No comments

Board Comments:

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