

MONROE COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

November 10, 2025

- In-Person and Virtual Meeting
- Meeting location Marathon Government Center
- 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
Matthew Babich
Jim Boilini
Matthew Sexton

Media Present:

Monroe County Television (MCTV)

Monroe County was represented by:

John Allen - Director, Parks and Beaches
Dawn DeBrule – Special Events Event Specialist
Jethon Williams - IT Media Manager
Cary Vick - Acting Director, Project Management
Kevin G. Wilson – Assistant County Administrator
Ana Walter – Assistant County Attorney
Mike Piekenbrock – Recreation Team Leader
Erika Nodal – Executive Assistant

Public Attendees:

Meeting Minutes:

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

Agenda Changes / Approval of Agenda

Darcy Wadsworth asked whether there were any changes to the agenda, and Erika Nodal noted the addition of a discussion on the proposed 2026 meeting dates.

- **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes of August 18, 2025:** James Boilini made a motion to approve with location added, and Matthew Sexton seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was approved.

Project Management Updates:

- **Rowell’s Waterfront Park:** John Allen reported that Phase II is currently under construction, which includes adding lighting, the fields, and parking. At the last meeting, Cary Vick provided an update.

- **Jacobs Aquatic Center:** John Allen reported that the activity pool was approved for funding by TDC. He mentioned that the equipment will go to the BOCC for approval this week, after which work on an RFP for installation will begin. Darcy Wadsworth asked if the project is expected to be completed by spring, and John responded that he does not have the exact schedule for completion.
- **Harry Harris Park:** John Allen reported that TDC has approved funding for the beachside playground and the resurfacing of the basketball courts at this location. He stated that these will be excellent new features.
- **Big Pine Community Park:** John Allen reported that the skatepark replacement has been approved for TDC funding and expressed enthusiasm for this update. Matthew Babich asked what the updates include, and John explained that it will be a total replacement and that they are currently exploring options to stay within budget
- **Watson Field:** John Allen reported that the baseball lights will be replaced and that this project is approved for TDC funding. He explained that it will be a total replacement. Matthew Babich asked if softball is also played at this field, and John confirmed that it is.
- **Bernstein Park:** John Allen reported that Bernstein will be receiving new turf and that he will provide an update once a confirmed project date is available. He noted that this project has been discussed extensively in the past. He added that more durable turf will be installed, and that drainage and irrigation systems will also be updated.
- **Higgs Beach:** John Allen reported that pavilion repairs have been approved for TDC funding. He noted that the structures are sound and that the project will include beautification, making the pavilions look much nicer. Matthew Sexton suggested adding an additional ramp to improve access for entering and exiting the pavilion.
- **Blue Heron Park:** Matthew Babich complimented the appearance of the new pickleball courts and noted that this is a great location, especially since it includes a nearby playground for children.
- **Key Largo Park:** Jim Boilini inquired about the tennis courts at Key Largo Park. John Allen explained that several courts were resurfaced this year and stated that, if the budget allows, he would like to include repairs to two additional courts in the FY26 budget.

Parks and Beaches Director Update:

- **Gaga Pit:** John Allen reported the new addition of a gaga pit at Big Pine Park, noting that kids love the game. Since its installation, many children come out daily to play, and there are plans to add gaga pits at other locations in the Upper Keys. Darcy Wadsworth agreed that it's really popular with the kids.
- **Higgs Beach Volleyball:** John Allen reported that the beach volleyball courts are due for replacement and that plans are underway to do so soon. Matthew Babich asked about the type of sand to be used, and Matthew Sexton mentioned that the correct sand is silica sand
- **Other Park Updates:** John Allen discussed additional park updates, including the installation of concrete trash cans at all beaches and boat ramps to better control trash, as well as new tables and benches at multiple locations.
- **Events and Programs:** Mike Piekenbrock reported that the inaugural tree lighting event will take place this month at Big Pine Park. The Lower Keys Rotary donated a 14-foot tree. The event is scheduled for Friday, November 21, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., with the tree lighting occurring at 7:00 p.m. Mike also stated that a two-day winter camp will be hosted at Big Pine Key on December 22 and 23. Other programs available to the public at no cost include line dancing and aikido at Big Pine Park. John Allen

explained that the department is in the process of implementing the new RecTrac system, which will allow users to register and make reservations online, streamlining the process. He expressed excitement about this improvement. John spoke about forming a Youth Recreation Committee to expand programs, inspire future leaders, and seek their opinions and input on the future of parks and recreational programs.

- **Camp Wesumkee:** John Allen reported that he has met several times to discuss the Camp Wesumkee property and potential coordination with the Girl Scouts. He noted that there is currently no new information to report but will share updates when available.
- **Higgs Beach Transition:** John Allen reported that there have been many ongoing discussions on this matter and that he expects to have more information or clearer direction at the beginning of the year. Matthew Babich asked Jim Boilini if he was aware of how long the topic has been under discussion, and Jim Boilini responded that it has been ongoing for quite some time.

Old Business:

Bay Point Park: John Allen stated that the pickleball courts have been resurfaced and that options for additional repairs are being reviewed, with funding anticipated in the future.

New Business:

Parking Fees: John Allen reported that he is seeking recommendations as the department is nearing a decision and is currently reviewing several location options. He stated that the matter will be brought before the Board of County Commissioners and asked whether the focus should be limited to beaches and boat ramps. John noted that an agreement is in place with FWC for several ramps, under which FWC maintains those ramps and no fees would be charged. He provided comparative information regarding local beaches and ramps and discussed the potential implementation of drop-in/drop-out boat launching fees, beach parking fees, and trailer parking fees. John explained that the two ramps eligible for fees would be Mike Forster and Harry Harris Park.

Jim Boilini asked about the duration of the agreement with FWC, and John stated he would look into it. After reviewing the agreement, John confirmed that it is in place for a period of 20 years. Kevin Wilson asked the committee to consider the possibility of charging fees to all visitors, not just non-residents. Matthew Sexton and Jim Boilini expressed disagreement with charging fees to residents at any location. Matthew Babich and Dracy Wadsworth stated they had no issue as local residents paying parking fees. Matthew Babich asked if the fees would be directed back to the Parks and Beaches Department. Kevin Wilson stated that efforts are underway to ensure fees are returned to the facilities charging them.

Pickleball Policy: John Allen shared a proposed policy for pickleball tournaments, noting high public participation and many tournament requests. Under the new policy, non-profit organizations, who currently have fees waived, would be charged a discounted rate. The policy would limit tournaments to once per month and restrict court use depending on the season. Darcy Wadsworth asked how many facilities could host tournaments; John replied three. Jim Boilini asked about other sports reservations, and John explained that youth sports reserve fields through the Use of Property Policy. John Allen reports the pickleball policy would outline user requirements and help manage court usage, allowing only half the courts during peak months. Darcy asked whether organizations could request courts up to 12 months in advance and if there would be a limit on the number of tournaments per year. John responded that the current policy does not include a limit but agreed it was a good idea and stated he would add a maximum of two tournaments per year. The committee agreed that limiting tournaments to two per year per organization would be appropriate. Matthew Babich noted that the draft policy mentions that a site plan might be required and suggested making this a requirement for all requesters. John Allen liked the idea and states he will add these recommendations to his draft.

Community Center Rentals: John Allen reported that staff are reviewing current property use and will be holding a meeting next week. The goal is to adjust existing rules and develop a draft policy to better manage and clarify permitted uses. Darcy Wadsworth asked whether all reservations will be handled online with the new software, and John Allen confirmed that they will.

Guest Speakers:

Public Speakers:

Additional Public Comments:

No comments

Board Comments:

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Darcy Wadsworth and seconded by Matthew Babich. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.