



Beaches and Shores Advisory Committee

Murdock Administration Building, 18500 Murdock Circle,
Building B, Room B-106, Port Charlotte, FL 33948

<u>BOARD MEMEBERS</u>	<u>DISTRICT</u>
Stas Matias, Chair	District 4
Wendy Lang, Vice Chair	District 5
Lawrence Benjamin	District 1
Robert Hancik	District 2
Ralph Lombardo	District 5
Hank Killion	Member-at-Large
Robert Wibbeler	Member-at-Large

MINUTES

MAY 1, 2025, at 9:00 A.M.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Stas Matias, Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Lawrence Benjamin led those in attendance for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL / DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Per Melissa Mason calling roll, it was determined that a quorum was present.

Committee Members Present:

Stas Matias
Wendy Lang
Lawrence Benjamin
Robert Hancik
Hank Killion
Robert Wibbeler

Committee Members Absent:

Ralph Lombardo

County Staff Present:

Brandon Moody - Water Quality, Manager
Matt Logan - Coastal Public Works, Project Manager
Jamie Scudera - Parks and Natural Resources, Project Manager

Shaun Cullinan, Planning and Zoning Official
Melissa Mason / Diedre Wint, Recording Secretary

Guest Speakers:

Sean Doherty – Tourism Development, Director
Tina Powell – Parks and Natural Resources, Manager

Guests:

Damian Ochab, SMSKA
DeWayne Nodine, Coastal Public Works
Nancy Semon – Gulf Shore Business / WINK

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Approval of the Revised Minutes from [March 6th, 2025](#)
Motion moved by **Member Killion**: Seconded by **Hancik**: Motion carried unanimously.
- b. Approval of the Minutes from [April 3rd, 2025](#)
Motion moved by **Member Killion**: Seconded by **Benjamin**: Motion carried unanimously.

5. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

- a. Item 8 (Correspondence and Communication) moved up to Item 7 to accommodate speaker's time sensitivity.
- b. Tourism Update from Guest Speaker – **Sean Doherty, Tourism Director**

Sean Doherty, states that through February, tourism development taxes are flat; expects March numbers to be returned next week. He explains that Sunseeker Resort has been doing better in their second year than was the case in their first year. About 60K rooms has been reserved so far for 2025 and rooms booked into 2027. Sunseeker Resort was expected to sell its majority stake around the summer, which could be beneficial if the purchase goes to a high brand entity.

In FY2021 – FY2024, there were approximately 200 sport events hosted with 27 cancelled due to hurricanes Ian, Helene and Milton generating revenues over \$150M of economic impact. The current fiscal year there has been 50 hosted events with the revenue impact not currently unavailable.

The Tourism Department has proactively ventured into international markets for several years and has hired international representation firms in the United Kingdom, Germany and England to represent the county. The goal he stated is to educate tour operators, travel agents and the media outlets with first-hand experience in Charlotte county to be effective in marketing products to their clientele in their respective countries. The results have been above satisfactory.

The Tourism Department has concerns about a proposed bill on the House side to divert Tour Development Tax to offset property taxes. This he stated, could potentially impact the visitation market and subsequently reduce tourism from generating dollars given Tourism Development Tax, which is an investment from visitors. Last fiscal year generated over \$1 Billion economic impact for Charlotte County from tourism.

Chair Matias highlights concern that members have on the lack of parking at beach locations and lack of parking. Members express residents' concerns of the traffic impact the proposed Buc-ee's location will have on road access and tourism. **Mr. Doherty** states that internal discussions of having a partnership with the new business where visitor guides are available can enhance tourism promotion.

Vice Chair Lang asks if the Visitor Center on Jones Loop was still open. **Mr. Doherty** states that it is closed through the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce; however, the Department of Tourism has a small Visitors Center where brochures are distributed to visitors. **Sean Doherty** mentioned that the Tourism Department has the end sight goal of expansion to secure a standalone building in a central location for better visibility from the roads and to improve foot traffic.

Vice Chair Lang asks for the average dollar amount for Sunseeker Resort that was funded by FEMA for hotel stays for displaced residents. **Sean Doherty** states that data is not available, but that as previously stated, in mid-January there were approximately 10,000 displaced residents that had booked rooms at Sunseeker Resort.

Vice Chair Lang asks for the budget amount of the international tourism market; in which that data is not available with **Mr. Doherty**. **Vice Chair Lang** inquires of the particular focus of marketing practices within the international tourism given the sustained damages to beaches, waterways and parks in Charlotte county. **Sean Doherty** states there are other areas of outdoor recreation activities, such as eco tours, fishing charters, boat cruises, paddleboarding, kayaking, for tourists. The effects of international marketing for tourism can expect to be seen by next summer.

Member Killion queries about restarting the pickleball tournaments in Charlotte County, in which **Mr. Doherty** explains that Tourism remains hosting local tournaments with various organizations, just not the APP Tournament.

Chair Matias queries about the tourism stats of previous years into the current year. **Mr. Doherty** reiterates that through February, tourism development taxes are flat; expects March numbers to be returned next week. A research data firm will provide the Q2 report mid-June. PureFlorida.com has previous quarterly reports available. **Chair Matias** asks if there are digital advertisements for Charlotte County, in which **Mr. Doherty** explains that more attention was being placed on outside markets.

Vice Chair Lang asks about the venues of the event mentioned and if local events not sponsored by the county are advertised. **Mr. Doherty** states depending on if it will attract outside tourism requiring hotel stays.

Member Wibbeler requested an update on fishing piers and if here received any negative feedback from the community, in which, **Sean Doherty** states that no complaints were received to date. In promoting the county as a fishing destination, the focus in on offshore fishing and to present realistic activities for visitors.

Chair Matias allows questions from the public for **Sean Doherty**. **Mr. Damian Ochab** has inquiries about the Tourism Departments efforts in resolving parking with local entities, in which, parking conditions have worsened due to the closed beaches. **Mr. Doherty** implies that resolutions are still in the making. **Mr. Ochab** asks about the status of future boat racing. **Mr. Doherty** that research studies are conducted every three years within the Tourism Department for the economic impact of the event. There will be a meeting to determine if the event will be held or not by Tuesday, July 1, 2025.

County Staff Matt Logan asks if the House bill to redistribute funds will reduce funding for beach management. **Mr. Doherty** states that since it comes from the TDT fund, that is a possibility.

6. CITIZEN INPUT AGENDA ITEMS

- a. None.

7. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Vote to cancel July 3, 2025, and August 7, 2025, BSAC meetings

A **Motion** to cancel the meetings was moved by **Member Killion**, seconded by **Wibbeler**. After a discussion on member availability, the number of required meetings per year for the Board and the impact on staff. A vote was held. Yes (3) No (2) – **Approved** to cancel said meetings.

8. OLD BUSINESS

a. WATER QUALITY

Brandon Moody, Water Quality Manager provides updates on

- i. Water Level Gauges – purposed for water level monitoring has been installed at Gasparilla Island and Punta Gorda Bridges with Tom Adams Bridge scheduled for the following day. Surveys will be conducted once installations are complete and thereafter there will be a public portal available. Agency remains pursuing state appropriations for U.S. geological survey gauges. The request was submitted to NOAA for a tide gauge to federal elected officials.

Mr. Moody answers questions brought to him from the members providing precise direction of where the gauges are located and with the announcement that signage will be placed to

indicate the locations. **Member Benjamin** inquiries about the effectiveness of weather stems vs. water level gauges, in which, **Mr. Moody** explains the features and that state emergency management has the weather stem stations. **Chair Lang** asks if there will be public service announcements during storm events when the gauges indicated there is a water crisis. **Mr. Moody** states that there will be messaging system features once the public portal is launched.

b. PUBLIC WORKS

Matt Logan, Public Works provides updates on

- i. Stump Pass State Park – was completed less than a month
- ii. Don Pedro Island State Park – operations have begun on the northern tip of the island with success.
- iii. Sand Screening Operation – returning over washed sand on Don Pedro Island; South Beach, however, operations were halted due to the early arrival of first two (2) sea turtles nesting in project areas. May 1, 2025, is the official start of Sea Turtle Season. Hurricane recovery operation will conclude on today for this portion.
- iv. Manasota Key Beach Project – getting a bid out this year with November being the deadline; waiting for the state’s recovery funds and remains working with FEMA project funding.

Mr. Logan answers questions brought to him from the members about impending projects, including placing markers in specified areas, which are in discussion at present. **Mr. Logan** introduces **DeWayne Nodine, Public Works Project Manager** who oversees the navigational sector and the MSBU Project Report.

c. PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES

- i. **Tina Powell, Parks and Natural Resources Manager** presents a comprehensive memo to the Committee with an overview of the FEMA Evaluation Process that the agency uses after a storm event:
 - a. Site inspection – immediately done to determine damages.
 - b. FEMA Site Visits – agency solely determines schedule with each visit unique in timeline approach.
 - c. Description Dimension Damage – initial opportunity for county damage negotiations
 - d. Scoping – next phase of negotiation process of damage assessment, which can defer back to the DDD step if not satisfactory
 - e. Costs – biggest challenge due to delays; currently working on Hurricane Ian approvals
 - f. Final Reviews
 - g. Obligation by FEMA – can begin construction
 - h. Construction – conducts project w/fiscal ensuring monies are available

Ms. Powell answers questions presented to her from the members about how long the process takes, in which she confirms that Hurricane Charlie FEMA approvals concluded three (3) years ago. **Member Hancik** asks what defines a storm, in which **Ms. Powell** clarifies as storm when it is declared by the federal government during the site inspection step. Her agency only inspects Parks and Natural Resources facilities.

- ii. Coastal Facilities Damages - provides updates on current conditions of all fishing pier and boat ramp projects, (Community Services Boat Ramp and Fishing Pier Projects Report was provided).

Ms. Powell answers questions presented to her from the members. **Vice Chair Lang** asks about shuttle services, in which **Ms. Powell** explains that transit is working with real estate services. **Vice Chair Lang** asks if the previous approved projects from the Army Corp will have to repeat approval process, in which **Ms. Powell** explains that there will be a need to do so if there are additional damages from the storms with new codes and requirements. The Army Corp permits that the agency has at current are the Riverside Boat Ramp, the shoreline damages from Hurricane Ian at Live Oak Point and Ainger Creek Park rebuild. **Member Hancik** asks if the committee can conduct an assessment on the status of each project permit and submit a letter to the County Commissioners to prefund the completion of the prioritized projects of heavy public usage. **Ms. Powell** explains that prefunding would not expedite the process due to the Army Corp's criteria. **Member Wibbeler** acknowledges the agencies efforts of restoration and inquires if the features of the rebuilding will be like the previous design. **Ms. Powell** explains the footprints will be the same with enhanced features for the hazardous conditions. **Member Benjamin** states that in other areas that permitting is allowing an additional two feet from the sea wall. **Ms. Powell** acknowledges that design feature is a part of the hazardous mitigation to study how many feet will be effective. **Member Benjamin** asks if there have been assessments of the structural elements from the catastrophic damage. **Ms. Powell** explains that as the design process is in works there will be additional assessments and that all the sub-structures on these facilities have been destroyed. **Member Benjamin** states that adjusting the alignment from the shoreline could be beneficial in expediting the design process. **Ms. Powell** explains that option may be limited due to the structures being in the water. **Chair Matias** asks who is responsible for the boardwalk and parking lot at Bayshore Live Oak Park at Sun Seekers Resort. **Ms. Powell** states that the Parks and Natural Resources is responsible for that project and is under the FEMA process; she highlights the spreadsheet of the projects that will be updated monthly with the report.

- iii. **Jamie Scudera, Natural Parks and Resources** provides updates Turtle Nesting Season and on Derelict Vessels and answers questions brought to her from the board members.
 - a. Two (2) sea turtle nests were located on Don Pedro Island State Park.
 - b. Turtle nesting season began on May 1, 2025, with monitors out on April 15, 2025
 - c. Shore River has seven (7) leaf turns
 - d. Two (2) sea turtle nests on Boca Grande

- e. Three (3) roving chicks on Stump Pass State Park
- f. 350 leaf turns with 139 nests on Palm Island mitigation site
- g. American oyster catcher nest was located on Bird Island
- h. Staff out today on Stump Pass State Park
- i. Derelict Vessel Report was provided for review

Member Hancik inquiries about abandoned vessels on docks, in which, **Ms. Scudera** explains that vessels attached to the sea wall docks are of another jurisdiction. **Chair Matias** highlights that the derelict vessels have decreased to five (5) open cases.

d. PROPOSED LETTER TO BCC REGARDING HOLD ON PIER RESTORATION EFFORTS

- ii. A **Motion** to discard the letter from the committee was moved by **Member Killion**: Seconded by **Vice Chair, Lang**. After a discussion and the agreement that **Tina Powell** answered all questions asked from the information within the proposed letter: **Motion** carried **unanimously**.

9. CORRESPONDENCE AND COMMUNICATION

- a. **Tourism Director Sean Doherty** – update on tourism efforts with a Q&A session
 - i. This item was heard earlier due to time sensitivity.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- a. **Damian Ochab, SMSKA** thanks the Natural Parks and Resources and Tourism staff for their availability to answer questions. He asks if the Englewood Beach House needs an Army Corp permit, in which **Tina Powell** states that it does and will need a full CCCL Permit from DEP. **Mr. Ochab** makes suggestions for leasing property for parking. **Mr. Ochab** asks **Shaun Cullinan, Planning and Zoning Official** acknowledges the county's emergency permitting process for repairs and restoration and asks if the US Army Corp has an emergency permitting process. **Ms. Powell** picks up the question that although they do, none of our projects qualify as they are considered recreational. **Mr. Ochab** states that he is asking for the Natural Parks and Resources to open two levels of parking on the east and west side of Manasota Keys along Beach Road. **Ms. Powell** explains that due to damage that repairs must be made, and bids are out to begin the restoration.

11. COMMENTS BY ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF OR CONSULTANTS

- a. None.

12. MEMBER COMMENTS

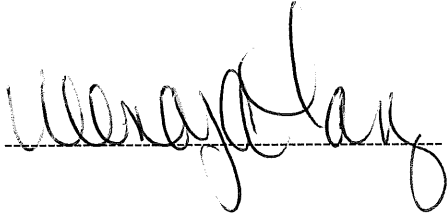
- a. **Chair Matias** explains that the role of an Advisory Committee is to bring issues heard within the community to the meetings and to advise the County Commissioners with ideas on resolution. Additionally, to remain positive in the advocacy of our beaches and shores to the community.

13. NEXT MEETING – Thursday, June 5, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

The Beaches and Shores Advisory Committee Regular Meeting will be held at:
Murdock Administration Center, Room B-106
18500 Murdock Circle
Port Charlotte, FL, 33948
***unless otherwise announced.

14. ADJOURNED

The meeting adjourned at 10:32 A.M.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W. A. Taylor", is written over a horizontal dashed line.