



Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources Advisory Board Minutes of the Meeting on October 19, 2023

PARK BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Bryan Beckman, Mr. Miles Croom
Ms. Peg Cummings, Ms. Cynthia Grizzle,
Mr. Steven Ochsner, Julie Vayne
Ms. Heather Vernillo

PARKS & CONSERVATION RESOURCES STAFF:

Mr. Paul Cozzie, Director
Mr. Spencer Curtis, North County Operations Mgr.
Mr. Lyle Fowler, South County Operations Mgr.
Dr. Steve Harper, Resource and Asset Mgr.
Cody Ward, Assistant County Atty.
Ms. Deann Baker, Administrative Support Spec.

A regular meeting of the Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources (PCR) Advisory Board was held at the Pinellas County Extension Building, located at 12520 Ulmerton Rd. Largo, FL 33774 on October 19, 2023.

I. Open Meeting/Introductions

- Introductions were made by all present.
- This will be Vice Chair Peg Cummings last Advisory Board meeting as her term has expired.

II. Approval of Minutes – April 20, 2023

- A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the meeting held on April 20, 2023.

III. Citizens to be heard

- None present.

IV. Old Business

- None

V. New Business

- a) **Beach Smoking Signs** – The Chapter 90 Ordinance was updated, addressing no smoking, or vaping on the 3 county beaches, Ft. De Soto, Fred Howard, and Sand Key. P&CR worked with the Communications Department designing the 8 no smoking signs.

These signs will be posted in the parks soon. The fine for noncompliance is \$118. Keep Pinellas Beautiful tracks the various trash picked up and they've reported cigarette butts as being the most picked up item. The City of Clearwater has also adopted a no smoking ban for their parks and beaches.

b) **Seminole MSTU** – The Seminole Junior Warhawks, Cross Bayou Athletic Association and the Seminole Youth Athletic Association have asked the Board to establish a Municipal Services Taxing Unit or MSTU, to provide recreation in a specific area of the Unincorporated Seminole area. The 3 sports complexes reside within the designated boundaries.

- Based on the preliminary estimates, a ¼ mil MSTU for the average assessed value of a home with the Save our Homes exemptions would be approximately \$49 per year, per homeowner. The BCC has the option to choose up to ¼ mil and may start with less. The total amount of funding that the ¼ mil will produce in the area reflects a population of approximately 46,000 – 48,000 people. It would raise approximately \$820,000 per year, which is similar to what the East Lake Sports Associations MSTU covers. This is scheduled to go to the board in December.
- We're working with the Communications Department to spread the word to the public in the area. The County's role in upgrading these facilities is going to be a multi-year project. We're beginning the upgrades with the Cross Bayou Athletic Associations complex, which will begin in the Fall of 2024. The other facilities could be 3 – 6 years out. The goal is to make sure the fields are safe, usable and that they have what is needed to operate. The fields will be used by the 3 organizations, but will also be available to be rented out for tournaments. The County owns the property at all 3 facilities.
- Julie – Is there a timeframe for when the Penny for Pinellas will be used to address the Capital Improvements? \$16M - \$18M has been set aside for the project. Cross Bayou is under design and will be addressed first. It's going out for bid now and will cost around \$10M. The Seminole Junior Warhawks property will be next on the agenda.
- As part of the MSTU, there would be the formation of a new district from what is now called the Greater Seminole Recreation District. The new district would be comprised of 1 representative from each of the 3 complexes along with 4 citizen members from within the MSTU district that aren't affiliated with any of the 3 other sports organizations. Once the district has been formed and the MSTU has been approved, they'll put together their own by-laws, budget and Operations Plan which will go before the BCC to be approved. If the BCC approves the MSTU in December, it will make it to the FY25 tax rolls, and the funding will be available to these groups in January of 2025 at the earliest. The county maintains the financial oversight and all spending comes from the District itself.

c) **Beach Safety Work Session** –BOCC session on 10/26. PCR has had difficulty with fully staffing.

- Options for the Beach Safety program:
 - Continue the program as it exists today.
 - Modify the program by posting lifeguards at the busiest locations like Fort De Soto.
 - Cancel the Beach Safety program and use the flag system for dangers.
 - Make it a full time program.
- Current budget is \$450K. If all 3 of the county beaches were fully staffed, the cost would be \$1.2M.
- The County is currently funded for a part time lifeguard program.

d) Sustainability and Resiliency Action Plan – This includes 56 initiatives for sustainability and resiliency that were broken into 6 focus areas. Empowered citizens, economic vitality, resilient infrastructure, healthy ecosystems, vibrant neighborhoods, and safe and secure communities. All departments in the county have a role in the Sustainability and Resiliency Action Plan. P&CR's areas are covered under the healthy ecosystems.

- Bryan Beckman works across the county in his role with the Sierra Club, interfacing with the cities on their sustainability plans. In most cities, they have an advisory board assigned to the plan. In Dunedin, they have a Dream plan that is very important to the city. They communicate the plan with the citizens and track the plan. There's an Environmental Advisory Board assigned to the plan and the team presents status on the plan quarterly.
- P&CR will be tracking various performance measures, such as land acquisitions, which is part of the departments Work Plan. We completed the purchase agreement for the Grey Oaks property (site of a former Bald Eagles nest), which has been on our land acquisition list. This is roughly 9 acres and will be incorporated in the Brooker Creek Preserve. P&CR is also looking at the Whitesell property and we're working with the W. Klosterman Preservation Group to acquire the property on West Klosterman road.
- Bryan spoke about the BCC meeting where the Commissioners agreed as a legislative priority, their support of the current fertilizer bans. The state law that went into effect on 7/1/23 stated that there should be no more restrictions on fertilizers. This was listed as a legislative priority to retain our ability to have the fertilizer bans.
- Goal2: We will restore and sustain thriving, connected native plant and wildlife habitats. P&CR continues to work with our partners to continue restoration work in the preserves and management areas, dune restorations, tree plantings and the living shoreline project with Public Works.
- ***ACTION: Deann will send out the Resilient Pinellas Action Plan to the Advisory Board.***

VI. Bee City USA Report

- James Stevenson jstevenson@pinellas.gov is the head of P&CR's working group for Bee City USA. James is working with the Bee City USA initiative. This is an initiative of the West Coast based Xerces Society for Invertebrate conservation. They are promoting the conservation of this extremely important group using citizen science and engagement.
- P&CR is a new member and part of a greater initiative to preserve the 3,600 species of native bees in the country. Florida has 300 species and 29 of them are endangered and only found in Florida. These are not honeybees!
- The agreements that have been made are: Establish a Committee (Advisory Board), Creating and enhancing pollinator habitat for the bees to thrive in, reducing pesticides using pollinator friendly pest management, encouraging the incorporation of pollinator friendly practices through various awareness events, and publicly acknowledge Bee City USA affiliation with signs and an online presence.
- On October 7th, a free pollinator festival was held at Brooker Creek. This was open to the public, information was provided, pollinator houses were built and donated, and a native plant sale was held. Vendors that only grew native plants were in attendance. There was an enclosed tent with insects the public could interact with. The UF/IFAS Extension and Mosquito Control provided educational information.

- James shared packets of wildflower seeds with each Advisory Board member. These packets were also distributed at the pollinator festival, where they shared 500 packets with 2 oz. of seeds in each, which equates to 1,300 sq. ft. of pollinator habitat if all the seeds are sown. The Advisory Board will also be calculated into the total as pollinator habitat creators!
- Bee City USA signs designed to match the “Adopt A Tree” initiative will be installed at parks soon. The QR code will point to our website. In addition, at the main entrances to the county at all major roads, there will be signs indicating Pinellas County is designated as a Bee City USA.
- 2 Entomology interns from Eckerd College were invited to create a project in each of our parks. Any person visiting our parks using a simple app on their phone can record the presence of native pollinators, which feeds to a larger database that can distill and record the diversity and the density of pollinators in our parks. This will inform us if there’s an area with a lack of pollinators, and what we might do to increase the habitat for them.
- James had a few copies of the Roadside Best Management Practices. It’s no longer in print. This information will be shared with the decision makers. Understanding the reasoning behind not mowing is key with mowing crews. The Pinellas Trail is a great example of how we can eliminate the need for mowing.
- Those involved with the Bee City USA initiative include the P&CR staff, UF/IFAS Extension, Brooker Creek & Weedon Island Ed Centers.
- A successful Bio-Blitz was held at Eagle Lake Park. A team of volunteers along with staff attended. The community signed up and went to identify native pollinators. There were 700 species recorded in just a few hours.

VII. Parks and Conservation Resources Director’s Report

- Paul requested we skip the Director’s Report due to the tour. An update will be provided at the January 18 meeting. At that time, there will be more information on the FY25 budget, land acquisition updates, such as approval of the contract for purchasing the Grey Oaks property, status on the boundary survey on what they’re willing to sell to the county for the Whitesell property, and we’re working with the W. Klosterman Preservation group for the W. Klosterman property. The Preservation group is committed to raising \$1.5 Million, and the BCC has agreed to provide \$1.5 Million of the \$3 Million funding. Acquisition could occur in 6 months.

VIII. Other Business

- John Thomas, President of the Florida Botanical Gardens Foundation gave everyone a tour of the Majeed Children’s Discovery Garden, opening on November 4.

With no further business, the group adjourned to the gardens for the tour.

The next meeting of the PCR Advisory Board is scheduled for January 18, 2024