



Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources Advisory Board Minutes of the Meeting on April 17, 2025

PARK BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Tex Carter, Mr. Miles Croom,
Mr. Ermal Gigolaj, Ms. Cynthia Grizzle
Ms. Kim Hukari, Mr. Steven Ochsner,
Ms. Julie Vayne, Ms. Heather Vernillo

PARKS & CONSERVATION RESOURCES STAFF:

Mr. Paul Cozzie, Director
Mr. Spencer Curtis, Deputy Director
Dr. Steve Harper, Park Services, Operations Manager
Mr. Jp Gellermann, UF/IFAS Extension
Maria White, Assistant County Attorney
Ms. Deann Baker, Administrative Support Specialist II

A regular Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources (PCR) Advisory Board meeting was held at the Pinellas County Extension Building at 12520 Ulmerton Rd. Largo, FL 33774 on April 17, 2025.

I. Open Meeting/Introductions

- Cynthia Grizzle, PCR Advisory Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.
- Introductions were made. Kim Hukari introduced herself as the newest member of the Advisory Board, appointed by Commissioner Scherer.

II. Approval of Minutes – November 21, 2024

- A motion was made by Tex Carter and was seconded by Julie Vayne approving the minutes with no corrections from the meeting held on November 21, 2024.

III. Citizens to be Heard

None

IV. Chair and Vice Chair Elections

- Elections were held, and voting took place, with Cynthia Grizzle unanimously elected Chair and Heather Vernillo elected as Vice Chair.

V. Old Business

a. ARPA Playground Update

- Communications created a video for the opening of the Ridgecrest playground, which was played for the board.
- PCR received 4.5 million dollars in ARPA funds to replace playgrounds throughout the parks. We've completed and opened the playground at Ridgecrest Park. The second playground at Walsingham Park has been completed and is scheduled to open next month. A new playground is expected to be built at Fred Howard Park within the next few months. A new playground is also planned for Ray Neri Park, with an opening scheduled for late summer or early fall.

- A replacement playground is also intended for Philippe Park, with construction set to begin in the fall. The Wall Springs playground is also on the list for replacement.
- b. Fort De Soto Park - After Hurricanes Helene and Milton
- Spencer Curtis spoke about the slides showing the damage done to the campground and the day use room. The North Beach restrooms were also damaged. Floors have been patched, and much of the block was saved; however, it is likely unusable. All the limestone that was submerged is now deteriorating. We're working with a contractor to identify a suitable sealant that will prevent further deterioration.
 - Restrooms and pump stations have been cleared out and are usable. Sewer lines were pumped out due to the sand intrusion. No restrooms require an interior rebuild. Sails that covered the North Beach playground were removed. Repairs were completed, and the playground is now open to the public. This playground will be replaced in the future. Tree loss was significant at Arrowhead, by the north tip. The campground lost numerous large trees. Any salvageable trees were saved. Saltwater intrusion is now killing more trees. Several trees at the boat ramp will need to be removed soon.
 - We've worked through the debris and removal at all parks in concert with Public Works. FEMA reimburses this work, and funds will be recovered.
 - The dog park fence was damaged and down, but was propped up, allowing citizens to use it. A contractor is on site now to complete the repairs. Shelter grills were also damaged.
 - Part of the east tip was damaged and will be repaired by the contractor. PCR is working with Stantec, the consultant assisting with the design plan. They're working on a design for the loop at the end and road stabilization.
 - Mangroves are beginning to grow along the shoreline. The public is now driving out there to check things out. We will allow this growth to continue and establish itself, which will help protect this area from future storms. We will create areas on either side for the public to view the water and the skyway.
 - The seawall by the Gulf pier was damaged before the storms and is now significantly damaged. It has reached its useful life. Rebar is failing, and the sidewalk around it is buckling. After FEMA's assessment, the FEMA crew that was out agreed that a full replacement is the best approach. All debris in the public use areas has been cleaned up.
 - The gangways were destroyed. The Army Corps of Engineers just approved our permit. The height of the pilings will be increased, and floating docks will be installed to mitigate issues moving forward.
 - No new sea turtle nests have been noticed. The season starts in May.
 - A research grant was approved for USF to install cameras in some of the coastal parks
 - Efforts are ongoing. There are 20 projects to be completed within the next 18 to 24 months at Ft. De Soto and a few other regional parks.
 - Sustainability moving forward, next steps:
 - Currently talking with the same group that's doing the community effort to put back the money that was put forth for the CDBDRF disaster recovery fund. Public meetings are being held. One that would help local governments would be in the planning and infrastructure phase.
 - PCR will update our Master Plan. Instead of building new parks, we will focus on maintaining our existing ones and creating a sustainable plan. We will assess which parts of the current parks need improvements.
 - Minimal structures will require elevation.
 - Some trees were chipped and sent out of the area and repurposed where we could.

VI. New Business

a. FY26 Budget Update

- PCR has submitted our FY26 budget & will meet with the County Administrator on April 29. It will then go to the Board for the Budget Information Sessions.
- A flat budget was submitted. Only specific increases and costs are allowed, such as insurance costs and fleet costs, which are out of PCR's control.
- Decision packages (requests above and beyond the budget) have been submitted for 2 of the new regional parks. 2 additional staff members have been requested for both Ray Neri Park and Dansville Park to assist in maintaining the facilities.
- The county collects money through a tree bank fund. A decision package was submitted requesting a full-time Arborist on staff to assist in reforesting our parks. We lost over 1,100 trees, with another 800 damaged. Maintaining the county's tree canopy is a priority.
- Cynthia – discussion with the City of St. Petersburg to do a pre- and post-storm tree canopy study using aerial imagery and AI to train the software. This helps understand the percentage of the tree canopy that is on private land and what is on public land. She will share information with the county.
- Multiple commissioners have brought up using tourist development taxes and how they could be used to assist with park items.

b. Tierra Verde Community Park

- In January, we received a 30-day notice that the association would no longer be operating and maintaining the facility. The transition phase has begun for the county to assume maintenance responsibilities. This will impact the services provided at Ft. De Soto Park, as we're having to send rangers from there to address issues. The irrigation is very broken down. We're turning on the electricity again, so the restrooms have lights.
- This community park was not built by the county. The community association initially sought to develop a park by requesting the county's land, but later decided they no longer wanted to maintain it. This is an unexpected expense that affects our budget.

c. Environmental Lands Acquisition Update

- The West Klosterman (WK) purchase was made on April 10 by the Pinellas County School Board and the West Klosterman Preservation Group (WKPG), who raised \$1.5M towards the purchase, and was matched by the county. It's now part of the Mariners Point Management area.
 - Tex thanked the group for their support. The group began five years ago with just a few people, and by January 14th, it had grown to over 3,000 individuals who had made personal donations. It's a good model that shows cooperation with the county, the school board, and the people, who tell Pinellas County what is essential to them.
 - This acquisition was agreed upon by Commissioner Scott, Commissioner Egger's and the County Administrator.
 - Encroachment issues have been identified and are being addressed
 - Possible future preserve projects with the county and WKPG
 - Invasive species were found and will be addressed

- Engage groups in the schools to work on clean-up projects at the site
- Classified as a management area; therefore, there's no public access.
- Stauffer property: property 72 acres located at upper Anclote Rd. – cleaned up, but it's not a parcel to establish a park; however, a north county boat ramp could be a possibility. An appraisal is being obtained from Construction and Property Management. We're on the list for the "right of first refusal".
- The land acquisition fund was set up in Penny IV at \$15 million. Funds were amplified through collaboration with WKPG, the City of Dunedin, the Sierra Club, and private donors, making it possible to acquire the Gladys Douglas property with the support of the City of Dunedin. We had a \$3.5 million commitment, which returned \$2.7 million in the form of a legislative line item, comprising \$1.5 million, and another \$1.2 million through the Florida Communities Trust program. We're halfway through the Penny this year, and we have an \$8.7 million balance. This money will help us purchase some highly ranked properties when they become available.

VII. Parks and Conservation Resources Director's Report

- a. Brooker Creek/Weedon Island Ed Center Updates – recently executed a \$2.7M contract with Exhibit Concepts for the fabrication of the new exhibits at Weedon Island and Brooker Creek Ed Centers
- b. Ray Neri Park - under construction with the grand opening in early fall. Dansville Park, located off Wilcox Road, is currently under construction, with a grand opening scheduled for late summer or early fall. A joint project we're doing with the City of Largo and the Pinellas County School Board is the High Point Elementary complex, which is under construction. This is a little more intensive project with a projected grand opening scheduled for summer 2026. The Cross Bayou athletic complex is part of the Unincorporated Seminole Sports District, which the Unincorporated Seminole Sports Association runs. This is a design-build project. Final documents are being prepared for submission of the final bid. It will not be open to play until January of 2027.

VIII. Other Business

- The Sugar Sand Festival on Clearwater Beach will be held on April 25. Volunteers are needed for the clean-up after the festival. Additionally, on the 25th, there will be Arbor Day plantings at Bay Vista Park. Sign up to help on the Keep Pinellas Beautiful website.
- Heritage Village has a car show this weekend.
- The grand opening of the Turner Bungalow Exhibit will be held ON May 17 at 2:00 p.m., also at Heritage Village.

With no further business, a motion was made by Julie Vayne to adjourn, and was seconded by Heather Vernillo. The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

The next meeting of the PCR Advisory Board is scheduled for July 17, 2025